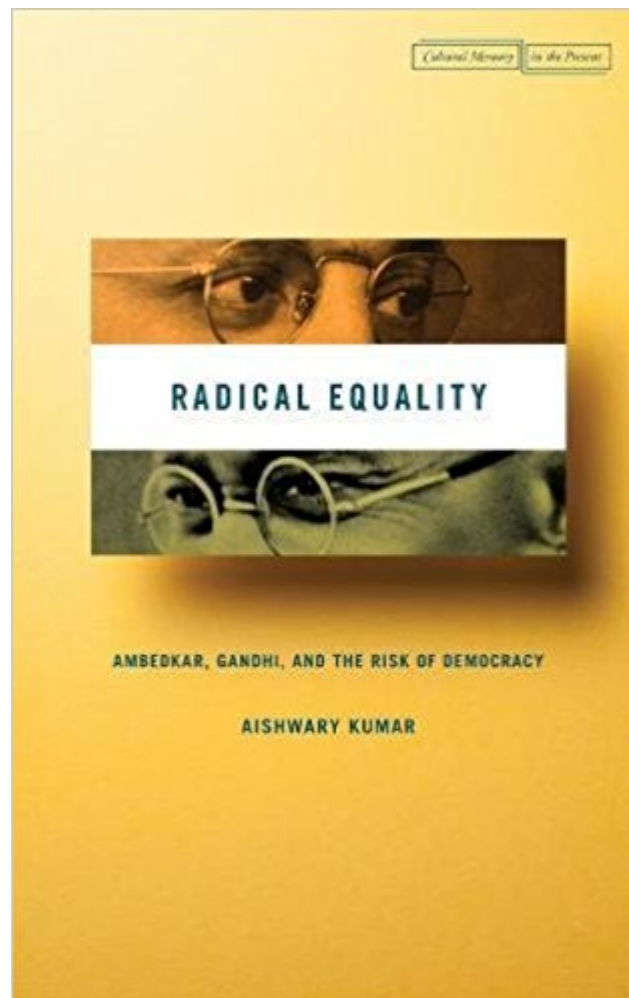


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Radical Equality: Ambedkar, Gandhi, And The Risk Of Democracy (Cultural Memory In The Present)



Synopsis

B.R. Ambedkar, the architect of India's constitution, and M.K. Gandhi, the Indian nationalist, two figures whose thought and legacies have most strongly shaped the contours of Indian democracy, are typically considered antagonists who held irreconcilable views on empire, politics, and society. As such, they are rarely studied together. This book reassesses their complex relationship, focusing on their shared commitment to equality and justice, which for them was inseparable from anticolonial struggles for sovereignty. Both men inherited the concept of equality from Western humanism, but their ideas mark a radical turn in humanist conceptions of politics. This study recovers the philosophical foundations of their thought in Indian and Western traditions, religious and secular alike. Attending to moments of difficulty in their conceptions of justice and their languages of nonviolence, it probes the nature of risk that radical democracy's desire for inclusion opens within modern political thought. In excavating Ambedkar and Gandhi's intellectual kinship, *Radical Equality* allows them to shed light on each other, even as it places them within a global constellation of moral and political visions. The story of their struggle against inequality, violence, and empire thus transcends national boundaries and unfolds within a universal history of citizenship and dissent.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Aishwary Kumar's intellectual history makes a novel and exciting contribution to the progressively expanding literature concerning Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar...Kumar has demonstrated the moments

of symbiosis in Gandhian and Ambedkarite thought, as much as their contradictions. Radical Equality thus deserves to be essential reading for anyone interested in questions of democracy, sovereignty and anticolonial nationalism in the twentieth century." (Oliver Godsmark *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*) "Kumar has written one of those unusual books that actually delivers more to readers than is suggested by the title. The book provides plethora of ideas which were rooted in the contemporary historical processes and were articulated dialectically in the course of India's nationalist history in which contrasting ideological views prospered. Radical Equality stands out because (a) it has reconfirmed, once again, that the concept-driven historicising makes historical narratives far clearer than mere description and (b) it has also demonstrated persuasively that BR Ambedkar was not merely a Dalit messiah but was also a powerful voice that created a space for constitutionalism and republican values in India." (Bidyut Chakrabarty *The Pioneer*) "Radical Equality is an achievement. It rejects an all-too-common trend to read Gandhi and Ambedkar solely in oppositional terms, while equally rebuffing efforts to integrate the two as part of some unified theory of the modern Indian state. It captures the complexity of these two non-Western thinkers on their own terms: philosophically sophisticated and radically universal. It leaves the reader pondering the meanings of nonviolence, justice, and larger freedom, urgently relevant to the perilous times in which we live. And for that the book demands to be read." (Manu Bhagavan, *American Historical Review*) "The book is very timely and relevant. Recent times have witnessed an unprecedented surge of communal forces that are actively involved in shrinking the secular spaces of dissent and choking the voices of sanity and rationality. Thus, the need of the day is the synergising of the strengths of both Gandhi and Ambedkar and harnessing them in our collective struggle against all fundamentalist forces. It is heartening to note that the book under review succeeds in meeting that challenge." (H. S. Komalesha) "Kumar's patient and probing reading of the works of Gandhi and Ambedkar – developed against the established consensus in the literature and with an eye to questions of liberalism and democracy – adds a new and distinctive voice to a growing, exciting corpus on these two thinkers. This is a welcome development for both South Asian Studies and for the study of modern political thought globally considered." (Dipesh Chakrabarty) "A highly important and original contribution to the study of global intellectual history, Kumar's book convincingly shows that Gandhi and Ambedkar, as the most important nonwestern thinkers of the twentieth century, must be considered together in the making of modern political thought in South Asia and beyond. Beautifully written and carefully argued." (Vinayak Chaturvedi, University of California Irvine)

Aishwary Kumar is Assistant Professor of History at Stanford University.

This book got me on the first page. By far one of the most eloquent and deeply considered looks at why democracy (in India, but really anywhere) remains so powerful and yet unjust, spiritual and yet disenchanted. Absolutely recommended for anyone looking to think deeply about political religion in global debates about citizenship. Or even for those just wanting a more sustained examination of Indian political history. Ambedkar's leveraging of Madhyamaka Buddhism to argue for the annihilation of caste, and Gandhi's spiritualization of touch make this a remarkable read about the interplay of force and justice. One of a kind and truly a tour de force!

I've never had such a difficult time writing a review of a book. To really do this book justice, I feel as though I ought to write a review of every sub-section. This book completely transformed my understanding of politics and what it means to be political. It reshaped my conceptions of equality, freedom, sacrifice, death, force, resistance, democracy, caste, etc. I'm currently reading this book for the third time, and each time I return to the book, I find a different paragraph or sentence to become obsessed with. Right now, I'm engrossed by this paragraph on page six, where Kumar writes, "For neither [Ambedkar nor Gandhi] simply poses questions about the efficacy of abstract ends such as freedom, to which nationalists of their time were so blindly committed. On the contrary, they both shift nationalism's obsessive interest in ends and seek to reformulate the means and force proper to justice. What kind of force -- routine, infinitesimal, even invisible -- constitutes a free and equal life? Could the people's commitment to civic duty and practical knowledge alone -- say, the art of spinning, spending time on cleaning up public spaces, or forging a weapon -- retrieve such life? What might the minutiae of practice -- which Gandhi often assembled under the term "sacrifice", thereby investing in routine activities the power to acquire a state indifferent to the inequities of everyday life -- prepare one for? Could death, at war or through self-sacrifice, be the ground of equality?" I've never thought carefully about how nationalists are always committed to abstract ends, or about what it means to reformulate the very means by which we seek justice. Could 'sacrifice' be a way to a free and equal life? Could death be the ground of equality? Very often, when I read this book, I wonder, in disbelief, why no one ever told me any of this before. Why is this the first time I'm encountering all of these ideas that help me see through the many lies, that are so ubiquitous, we mistake them for truth? This book is destined to be a classic in political thought and intellectual history that will shape our thought for decades to come. Even if you've never read rigorous academic work before, don't be intimidated by the density of this book. This is a book that everyone

can and should read, because it is about things that affect all our everyday lives so deeply and profoundly. This is the kind of book that is so meaningful that you will feel compelled to keep coming back to it for several years.

Radically reoriented my ideas about democracy and equality. Provided novel and fascinating insights into the divergences in the thought of Gandhi and Ambedkar. Beautifully written in clever and subtle syntax. More than just a book.

terrific book!

This is a political history book; it is not a book about Hinduism, a religion. It should not be under the category of Hinduism.

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