



Department of Philosophy
School of Humanities
Pondicherry University

ICPR National Seminar on
State and Freedom: Ambedkar's Perspective
27th –29th September, 2012

The Department of Philosophy of Pondicherry University would like to organize a three day national seminar on the theme of *State and Freedom: Ambedkar's Perspective* from **27-29 September 2012**.

Ambedkar has emerged as an important philosopher with the rise of dalit movement in contemporary times. There are several attempts to understand Ambedkar and his philosophy. Confusion prevails among scholars due to the existence of diverse, and sometimes, contradictory theoretical assessment of Ambedkar. Ambedkar's philosophy is essentially ethical and religious. For him, social precedes the political. Social morality is the central to his political philosophy. He is neither fierce individualist nor conservative communitarian. His conception of democracy internalizes the principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity in its true spirit.

Ambedkar offers resources while talking about interrogating traditions of dominant groups and also in evolving critical, rational and democratic traditions for oppressed communities. Especially the political philosophy of Ambedkar helps in renegotiating western political theory in the context of India in particular and as a theoretical back up in leading the struggles of the masses in general. Ambedkar negotiated with all grand political streams such as liberal, radical or conservative through his writings. At the same time he differentiates himself with these three dominant political traditions. Ideas of state and social freedom can be delineated from his writings and struggles afresh. On the one hand, he argues for equality and social freedom of oppressed social groups in caste dominated Hindu society, and on other hand he articulates the role of state as modernizer, liberator and equalizer especially by addressing the problems of social minorities.

Practice of Ambedkar opened up a conceptual space where state ought to have a strong presence in securing social freedom, particularly in the context of deprived castes. This conceptual space is not so obvious if one looks at it from the vantage point of political radical in the context of colonial state. These positions become all the more difficult to take as Indian nationalism posits an oppositional stance towards colonial state. It is interesting to capture the possibilities and limits

of this space as it constitutes central problematic of Ambedkarite Dalit perspective. This can be visited from several vantage points including post Ambedkarite Dalit perspective. After 1980s, it became essential to relate idea of social freedom in relation to state due to new experiences of dalit movement. Dalit movement had to negotiate complex dialectics of positive intervention of state against humiliating caste practices and actuality of state conniving with caste interests. In this context, the binaries of traditional anti-statist position require careful theoretical reconsideration in the light of writings of Ambedkar.

Though there are many attempts but one may find difficulty in locating him in dominant political traditions. Often this may lead to misunderstanding of the essence of Ambedkar. Ambedkar's thought demands new language to understand the complexity of his thought in its vividness. The seminar will address the conceptual intricacies involved in interpreting ideas and practices of state and freedom in the context of Indian society by being anchored in Ambedkar's writings.

Objectives:

- To conceptualize Ambedkar's philosophy and practice.
- To build a bridge between Ambedkar's philosophy and existing tradition of political theorizing, thereby both can be enriched.
- Normative presuppositions of state as a necessary precondition for securing equality and difficulties in realizing this objective in the context of caste society.
- To enrich the field of dalit studies philosophically.

Themes of the seminar:

- *Careers of liberalism in a colonial context*
- *Constitutional Debates and Emergence of Indian State*
- *Significance of positive social freedom in particular, and looking at liberal egalitarian position on freedom*
- *State and complexities of positive discrimination policies*
- *Limits of state intervention in the context of social change*
- *State, modernity and dalit politics*
- *Social experience of discrimination and dialectics of emancipation*
- *Ideas of State, Freedom and justice in the context of caste society*
- *Ambedkar, constitution and Liberalism*
- *Caste, Alternative religion and Liberation*
- *Caste violence and struggles for human dignity*
- *Ideas of Liberal economy And Egalitarian interventions*
- *Contextualization of political philosophy of Ambedkar- negotiating with Liberalism and Marxism*
- *Caste and gender*
- *Post-Ambedkarite dalit movements*
- *Ambedkarising Social studies*
- *Theoretical and methodological Challenges in pursuing Dalit Studies*

On behalf of the Department of Philosophy, Pondicherry University, I would like to invite you to take part in this seminar. I request you to send the abstract of your paper on or before **August 30, 2012** and full pledged paper by **September 25, 2012**. We are also planning to publish the proceedings of the seminar.

TA will be provided for participants and we will take care of local accommodation and hospitality. For any other details you may contact Dr. P. Kesava Kumar, Coordinator of the seminar, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy, Pondicherry University (**Contact numbers: 0413-2654493(O), 0413-2656250(R), 09159388715 (cell); email: pkesav@gmail.com, kesav.phil@pondiuni.edu.in**).

With regards

Dr. P. Kesava Kumar
Seminar Coordinator
Assistant Professor
Department of Philosophy
Pondicherry University
pkesav@gmail.com