

## Book Review

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**Luis Cabrera. *The Humble Cosmopolitan: Rights, Diversity and Trans-state Democracy*. Oxford University Press. 2020, 352 pp, ₹1643.0, ISBN: -13: 978-0190869519 (Paperback).**

Constitutionally, Indian citizens indiscriminately enjoy equal freedom, opportunity, treatment, citizenship rights, etc. However, the growing incidents of injustices against Dalits, women and other marginalised communities have been prolonged since (pre)independent India. Currently, India is experiencing the time of hyper-nationalism, strict citizenship rights, caste prejudices and religious fanaticism. Such a situation has resulted in the growing incidents of gross violation of the rights and representation of the marginalised communities, lower castes and women. Interestingly, such a situation of degradation and injustices against marginalised sections was well anticipated by Ambedkar and realised soon after the implementation of the Constitution of India. Consequently, he resigned from the parliament and embraced Buddhism. By (de)constructing the discourse on the individual, social and cosmopolitan aspects of rights; equality; freedom; and citizenship, Ambedkar has left enough methodological and conceptual inheritances, which become the central concern of the book, *The Humble Cosmopolitan* authored by Louis Cabrera.

Cabrera successfully foregrounds Ambedkar's perspective to explore the larger contradiction between the nationalist, statist versus transnational, cosmopolitan values and institutions. The purpose of this book rests with countering the nation state's view that considers cosmopolitan theory, value or institution as arrogant and a threat to the national interest, sovereignty and promoting the mandate of neo-imperialism. In fact, the book emerges as one of the most important works that seek to derive theoretical, conceptual and philosophical reflexes of Ambedkar. It significantly highlights Ambedkar's methodological inheritances relating to 'moral equality, individual rights, constitutional democracy' as well as the possibility of his immanent political humility and cosmopolitan praxis.

The work of the author is grounded in the larger discourse of normative thought on the questions of rights, equality, nation, democracy and citizenship in the contemporary world. Cabrera explores the 'global institutional citizenship' approach and attempts to argue for the case of 'individual cosmopolitanism' by merging the two variants of cosmopolitan normativity, that is, moral and institutional cosmopolitanism. Favouring the significance of the global

institutional mechanism, this book argues for the possibility of 'more formalised practices of democratic citizenship within the global political institutions' to protect the individual's rights without falling in the trap of neocolonialism/imperialism consistent with the statist's objections against it (pp. xii–xiii).

In order to meet the objective of this book, Cabrera foregrounds Ambedkar's perspectives and ideas, as well as contemporary forms and practices that highlight the aforementioned tension between nationalist–statist and (in favour of) cosmopolitan values and institutions. The cases selected in the book covers National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) from India, as well as protests and political controversies from Turkey and the UK. He foregrounds methodological cues from Ambedkar to conceptualise 'political humility' against the 'arrogance of caste', in order to support how cosmopolitan principles shall resolve the problems of 'illiberal, ethnonationalist politics resurgent in a range of states' (pp. 5–6). By applying the institutional global citizenship approach, this book demonstrates how 'cosmopolitanism can meet some longstanding arrogance objections' against it.

The book considers Ambedkar along with other figures such as Du Bois whose approach could be identified as the perfect agent of cosmopolitan political humility, 'advocating forms of democratic institutional cosmopolitanism', which centrally targets to value each individual's equal worth rather than society or any other units (pp. xiv–xv).

To conceptualise the idea of political humility as the cosmopolitan virtue, the author largely depends on Ambedkar's own evolving conceptions such as 'fraternity, fluid relations of social endosmosis and the Buddhist matiree', which were essential to establish democratic political institutions by recognising equal citizen standing (p. 9). Ambedkar's attempts from 1916 to 1956 pertaining to equal standing of individual in the name of 'fiction of equality', soul of democracy, cosmopolitan rights and change of religion have been well captured in the book.

The book frequently explores how democracy was very dear to Ambedkar, primarily social and economic democracy over political, which was a mechanism to implement his political humility. The prioritisation of the social and economic democracy by Ambedkar was nothing but seeking a cosmopolitan order in which equality of all sorts to be realised by individuals. Thus, Ambedkar's political humility ensuring 'equal worth of individual' becomes the central moral and methodological standing for Cabrera to develop his argument in favour of institutional cosmopolitanism in terms of cosmopolitan [human] rights rather international human rights.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part has five chapters that attempts to develop an approach to institutional cosmopolitanism to respond to the chief arrogance objections as well as advancing cosmopolitan aims for the protection of global rights. This part seeks to pragmatise between the super-state institutions and diversity of state by developing equal democratic citizenship within such institutions. Cabrera argues that Ambedkar's lifelong project was to counter the arrogance and selfishness of the caste system. The rejection of caste system was not some form of a competing moral claim for Ambedkar; rather, he considered it for 'an acknowledgment of the equal standing of others, openness to input and

challenge from them, and an intellectual modesty about the finality of one's own views or judgments' (p. 32). Thus, for Ambedkar, the 'equal standing' of individual was the most important moral value that defines his political humility.

The second point in the conceptualisation of political humility engages with the promotion of the same. Through Ambedkar, Cabrera finds limitation of the democratic institutions, which is confined to the national boundaries. Herein, as shown in the fifth and sixth chapter the role of super-state institution can only act as neutral arbiter as the case of NCDHR has proved, which has attempted to raise the issues and challenges against equal standing of Dalits, at the international forums. Furthermore, the author highlights how the current system of sovereign states is structurally oriented to both vertical and horizontal political arrogance. The state acts as an arrogant agency due to its dismissal of right-based challenges posed either by NCDHR at the global forum or by individuals within the state. In the name of ultimate arbiter, domestic institutions violate the individual standing positions. Through such cases, Cabrera highlights how the need of cosmopolitan arbiter was also the concern of Ambedkar.

The second part of the book consists of four chapters that responds to discrete arrogance objections against such an approach from two ways, that is, through universalist normative theorists and by the actors in the Indian and European contexts. In this part, the claims of moral cosmopolitans such as Nussbaum and Caney are re-examined by Cabrera in the light of Ambedkar's 'soul of democracy', that is, social democracy. The scheme of social democracy, envisaged by Ambedkar, would provide more equal opportunities for individuals globally and help to conceptualise certain aspirational rights, which can be guaranteed through the idea of global citizenship (p. 15).

The remaining chapters respond to the charges levied by BJP against NCDHR's cosmopolitan claims as well as the arrogance claims lodged against the institution of the European Union. A significant analysis of the ideological guru of Hindutva—Golwalkar—who denies any other form of cosmopolitan endeavour than Hinduism has been highlighted. Golwalkar's ideological extension has been led by BJP that keeps lodging charges against NCDHR that it promotes moral parochialism or Western values. To respond to the charges of BJP and Golwalkar, Cabrera invokes Ambedkar, Kant along with moral cosmopolitan scholars such as Nussbaum, Caney and others to argue how the global outreach of NCDHR as well as the case of the UK and Turkey has no post-imperialist conspiracy; rather, it focuses on defending super-state institutional mechanisms, which promote egalitarian order and protect equal standings of individuals and their rights without obstructing national priorities.

Finally, this book, 'The humble Cosmopolitan' proves to be an interesting theoretical endeavour to engage and foreground Ambedkar's thoughts, concerning the high moral value of human/individual, by arguing in favour of institutional cosmopolitan values, rights and moral standards; however, it fails to consider the following:

The author is heavily dependent on NCDHR's global outreach in raising the awareness about the violation of Dalit's rights, which itself has a limitation in terms of concrete imagination of institutional cosmopolitanism at the functional

or practical level. As such, the book largely revolves around the negative connotation of the institutional global citizenship framework inferred from Ambedkar and raised by NCDHR and other European experiences, and less oriented to explore the enabling forces to realise cosmopolitan institutional mechanism. Herein, the author fails to give enough space to the ideas and methods that Ambedkar employed to make both Hindus and depressed classes be aware of the phenomenology of their own arrogance and servility, respectively, in order to end the caste inequality and exploitation. Moreover, the author also does not focus enough on Ambedkar's vision or method in his utmost defence to the modern state system for the protection of rights of the marginalised communities and how such efforts were aimed to serve itself as a 'simultaneous' alternative, if not the critique, of institutional cosmopolitanism.

Second, the author does not consider the central concern of Ambedkar, that is, the question of 'constitutional morality' whose lack has been leading to the violation of rights, equality and democratic norms in India by either higher caste individual/group or (state) institutions. Similarly, the role of 'constitutional morality' shall continue to be the most significant question for the global institutional citizenship formulations. The author quotes Ambedkar on both Hinduism and Buddhism, in order to show how high equal worth of individual was important for him, which puts a moral and theoretical question on the practices of higher caste Hindus who deny such equal status to the *Shudras* and untouchables. However, Cabrera fails to explore how Ambedkar wanted to ensure the realisation of theological/constitutional morality for the higher caste Hindus, if not the depressed classes.

Third, though the author deals with the question of *maitree* while responding to the varieties of arrogant claims, he fails to clearly premise it as the central value, the way Ambedkar did. By putting the idea of fraternity [and] or *maitree* as one of the values along with equality and democracy, the author could not go beyond the legality, and institutionalisation of cosmopolitan values that the idea of *maitree* itself inherently indicates. Thus, the book could not give enough attention on how *maitree* itself can transcend the institutional sphere of national and cosmopolitan domains.

Nonetheless, the attempt of the author to systematically explore the possibility of global institutional citizenship framework by foregrounding Ambedkar's thoughts as well as contemporary practices in India, the UK and Turkey that prove to be one of the most significant theoretical works to be considered for the scholars working in these areas.

## ORCID iD

Sanjeev Kumar  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5173-5160>

**Sanjeev Kumar**

*Shyama Prasad Mukherji College, University of Delhi, New Delhi, India*

*E-mail: sanjeev.spmcollege@gmail.com*