The Iconography of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: The Symbolic Means in Visual and Design Culture

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ABSTRACT

The Iconography of Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956) is a subject of significant scholarly interest, delving into various aspects of his life, work, and influence. Ambedkar's impact on society, particularly formerly untouchable communities, has been a focal point in understanding the dynamics of caste, politics, and community life in India. His writings on Buddhism, social democracy, and the role of education in fostering democratic values have been subjects of in-depth analysis. Scholars have explored themes such as sovereignty, caste, agonism, Buddhism, politics, and the context of social and cultural practices surrounding his life, experiences, and decisions through an analytical lens. Studies have also shed light on Ambedkar's iconography and its historical and political significance, tracing the evolution of his image and statues from a period predated by his current veneration. His iconography has been studied in the context of art, literature, and cultural productions, and it serves as a rich tapestry of historical, political, and sociocultural narratives. Still, his image and symbolism in contemporary society, reflected in multiple mediums and forms, have not been captured coherently. This study of selected contemporary creative works sheds light on symbolism, visual, and design culture, focusing on Ambedkar's iconography with a relevant literature review.

Keywords -Iconography , Symbolism , Visual Culture, Design Culture , Fine Arts .B. R. Ambedkar.

1.   Introduction

Visual culture as an academic discipline emerged in the 1990s, and its core idea is investigating the relationship between the viewer and the viewed (Julier, 2006, p. 64). According to Koh, cited in (Julier 2006, 70), "Design culture is located in communication." It is both something designers do and something around us created to serve a function. Iconography deals with the meaning of the visual image rather than its form and goes beyond the discipline of visual aesthetics. Born into the Mahar caste, one of the lowest social groups in India, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's (1891–1956) life and work has been instrumental in challenging oppressive caste practices (Blodgett-Ford, 2021). His Iconography holds significant symbolic meaning in visual and design culture, reflecting a complex interplay of historical, social, and political contexts.

Ambedkar's image as a champion of social justice and equality is deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness, with his ideas resonating strongly with marginalized communities (Lone, 2022)-their art practices and the visual culture they subscribed to. Mainly among the Dalits in various regions of India, there has been a noticeable increase in the presence of images and Sculptural installations related to Ambedkar, reflecting a growing assertion of Dalit identity and pride (Husain, 2023). His contributions

to the framing of the Indian Constitution underscore his pivotal role in shaping the legal and political landscape of the country (Tiwari, 2017). His vision extended beyond mere political activism; he firmly believed in the transformative power of education to instill values of unity, equality, fraternity, and patriotism among individuals, irrespective of their social backgrounds (Sangole, 2022). His emphasis on equality and inclusion in education has been a cornerstone of his envisioned societal transformation, advocating for a rethinking of educational systems to address issues of deprivation and inequality (Idika, 2023).

Ambedkar's interactions with Mahatma Gandhi, particularly during the Poona Pact of 1932, have been subjects of scholarly study, highlighting the complexities of their engagement (C. B. Kumar, 2024). In scholarship and democracy, his ideas resonate strongly, focusing on justice for the marginalized and education as a tool for fostering democracy (Zene, 2018). Ambedkar's contributions are not limited to social and political spheres but also extend to economic philosophy, where his ideas have left a lasting impact on our society (Bose, 2023). This shift in perception highlights the changing societal attitudes towards Ambedkar and the growing recognition of his contributions as a sociopolitical and religious reformer, particularly within India's Dalit community (Mukerji, 2020). The Visual and Design works that show evidence of such endeavors are discussed in the following sections. The iconic image of Ambedkar, often depicted as a Western-dressed gentleman pointing towards the future while carrying a book, has become a ubiquitous symbol in villages and cities across India, signifying his enduring influence and legacy (Zelliot, 2008).

Dr. Ambedkar's iconography of various aspects, including his image, personality, and ideology, signifies social aspirations that embody the struggles and transformation of marginalized communities in India. The visual and design culture surrounding his image is a powerful reminder of his enduring legacy and the ongoing quest for a more just and compassionate world. Over time, there has been a noticeable evolution in the representation of Ambedkar's image, transitioning from a period of relative obscurity to widespread veneration and idolization (Ankit, 2023). Ambedkar's image and symbolism reflect a multifaceted legacy encompassing social, political, economic, and educational dimensions. It is a subject of significant scholarly interest, delving into his life, work, and influence. Therefore, the second section of the article sheds light on scholarly works on his Contributions. The third section examines the symbolism and interpretation of Ambedkar's image. The fourth section covers a few examples of creative domains, including design. The fifth section reflects on a few cases from contemporary critical art practices. The sixth section concludes by analyzing its relation to society and culture.

2.   Scholarly research on Ambedkar's Works contribution

Research works have highlighted his vision for a more inclusive and just society, emphasizing the need for systemic changes to address deep-rooted inequalities and social injustices (Khiamniungan, 2023; Patil, 2022). These studies explored themes such as sovereignty, caste, agonism, Buddhism, politics, and the social-cultural context surrounding his conversion from Hinduism to Buddhism through an analytical lens and shedding light on the historical and political significance of Ambedkar's Iconography, tracing the evolution of his statues from a period predating his current veneration (Ankit, 2023; Awad, 2022; Kapila, 2019). Scholars have examined how his ideologies and actions have influenced the empowerment of marginalized groups, the struggle for equality, and the quest for social justice. Through his efforts in social reform, education, and legal advocacy, Ambedkar challenged

caste-based discrimination and elevated the status of oppressed communities (Singh, 2019; Thiranagama, 2019; Vajpeyi, 2016). Ambedkar's impact on society, particularly formerly untouchable communities, has been a focal point in understanding the dynamics of caste, politics, and community life in India.

Ambedkar's contributions to Indian society, especially in the realms of democracy, law, and social transformation, have been widely acknowledged. His role in shaping the Indian Constitution, advocating for minority rights, and challenging oppressive social structures has been a cornerstone of academic inquiry. Scholars have examined his views on democracy, constitutional morality, and the intersection of law and social justice, highlighting his enduring legacy as a champion of the marginalized and a visionary leader (A. Kumar, 2010; Nathi, 2018; Nisar, 2020; Ramesh, 2022; Zelliot, 2008). Through critical analysis of his portrayals in different forms of expression, researchers have sought to capture the essence of his message, the complexities of his persona, and the enduring impact of his legacy on diverse audiences (Husain, 2023; Momen, 2024; Schaaf et al., 2022). Additionally, the Iconography of Ambedkar has been studied in various forms in Art, literature, and cultural productions. His representations in various mediums reflect his historical significance and the ongoing resonance of his ideas in contemporary society, which serves as a rich fusion of historical, political, social, and cultural narratives.

3.   The Iconography of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in the Creative Domains

The evolving Iconography of Ambedkar serves as a testament to the enduring legacy of social reform and the ongoing struggle for equality in diverse artistic landscapes. Ambedkar relentlessly fought against all forms of discrimination in every possible way he could. Besides being the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, his vision of an egalitarian society has been the driving force for several welfare schemes and measures that eventually become a reality, be it a maternity benefit for women, the protection act of women and child labor, or medical care, compensation for injury, and insurance. The socio-religious reforms he envisaged in organizing workers to challenge the caste system and the discrimination in the workplace have led to solid labor laws, remunerative wages, legitimate working hours, housing, water supply, and education. Besides these roles, he was essential in introducing many Acts, Commissions, Constitutional bodies, Finance, electricity, and water management policies. Unfortunately, in public discourse, we observe his role as narrowly confined by some sections of society to aspects like the Constitution or championing the reservation system, undermining his immense contributions to society.

On the other hand, his admirers and followers, whose lives were significantly impacted by Dr. Ambdekar's efforts to establish human dignity and equality struggle, have created numerous statues of him and celebrated him in various forms as a gesture of reverence. The French anthropologist Nicolas Jaoul meticulously analyzes the symbolic significance of Ambedkar statues in Uttar Pradesh, shedding light on the complex interplay between Dalit politics, social change, and state dynamics (Jaoul, 2006). He states, "Although Ambedkar had warned his admirers (against) making a cult of his personality, a move had started in his home state of Maharashtra even before his death." Ambedkar's statues are the second largest after Mahatma Gandhi (The Father of the Nation) in the country, and their representations are as diverse as cultural variations across different regions (Jaoul, 2006).

Fig 1: The statues of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar images representing him in an immaculate three-piece suit

Fig 2: The statues of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar are painted in various metallic shades

Fig 3: Rituals of purification with milk (recreated collage with open-source images from the web)

After his death, he became a symbol of political solidarity. Struggling for dignified space in the social structure has almost become a central issue of all Dalit movements. The hand with its upraised index finger carries more specific significance in Indian classical arts. Perhaps Ambedkar has chosen this 'mudra' (teaching gesture) to mark every page of his great work, 'The Buddha and his Dhamma.' Within Navayana (neo-Buddhism), it has a generalized significance as a teaching gesture (Tartakov, 2000, p. 102). We can see the statues of Ambedkar in every locality of deprived people and revere the image of their salvation in their house alters. Even though they are from poor backgrounds, they enthusiastically contribute to installing Ambedkar statues in their neighborhoods and purify them with milk during anniversaries. Garlanded, painted them like precious metals.

Delving into the intricate interplay between the Iconography and its visual representation is critical. That offers a nuanced understanding of how the image has been constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed across various artistic mediums, thereby shedding light on the socio-political significance embedded within these visual narratives (Ali, 2018). Contemporary religious murals, often overlooked in art historical studies, offer a unique perspective on popular visual culture and Iconography (Sathish, 2014). These murals, rooted in religious traditions, serve as visual storytelling that transcends conventional art historical confines. Scholars uncover a rich tapestry of cultural expressions that challenge traditional notions of artistic canon and historical narratives by exploring the themes and motifs depicted in temple murals.

Theoretical frameworks on caste as a socio-psychological construct shed light on the intricate dynamics of identity formation and collective consciousness within society (Pal, 2024). The theoretical expositions on caste underscore the resilience of social groups in maintaining collective identities amidst perceived threats. These theoretical insights provide a lens to analyze the complexities of caste dynamics and the enduring legacy of social hierarchies in modern times. In contemporary Art, the fusion of music and visual expressions gives rise to new forms of artistic engagement and interpretation (Barrett, 2021). One can unravel the layers of meaning and cultural connotations associated with the iconic persona by studying the visual elements, symbolism, and artistic techniques employed in representing Ambedkar's personality. The visual analysis can be enriched by drawing insights from studies that explore the intersection of Art, politics, and identity.

Research on Dalit-Bahujan calendar art in North India provides a valuable framework for understanding how visual representations serve as a form of resistance and cultural assertion for marginalized communities (Kalyani, 2022). Within the context of Dalit visual Culture, one can discern how his image is utilized to challenge dominant narratives and empower subaltern voices through visual means (Gautam, n.d.). The aesthetics and politics of Dalit representation in Art are intricately intertwined, as seen in works like "Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability" (Rajendran, 2021) is another excellent example. This graphic novel is drawn in Parbhan Gond style by Durgabai Vyam and Subhash Vyam, and Srividya Natarajan and S. Anand, author of it, published by Navayana (Figure 7).

Fig 4: Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability (2011), (Right) a spread from the book

Weaving history with contemporary issues—the book's premise starts with a conversation between two youngsters at a bus stop. It touches upon many instances of Ambedkar's childhood, including a take on the reservation and caste-based discrimination. The visual style goes beyond mere illustration, offering a profound aesthetic response to identity and social exclusion challenges. These artistic endeavors depict the harsh realities of caste-based discrimination and serve as a form of resistance and cultural assertion. Adopting Gond art in graphic novels like Bhimayana presents a compelling case examining the fusion of traditional artistic forms with contemporary visual storytelling techniques (Jaoul, 2012). Through a visual analysis of such works, one can explore how folk art enriches the narrative's visual aesthetics and imbues it with cultural authenticity and symbolic resonance. Blending artistic traditions underscores the dynamic nature of visual representation and its capacity to convey complex narratives and historical legacies.

Through a meticulous analysis of the visual elements in Bhimayana, one can uncover how artistic choices contribute to the narrative's thematic depth and emotional resonance. The intersection of politics, literature, and visual representation converges in graphic novels that explore themes of solidarity and subaltern identities (Chaturvedi, 2020). The visual analysis of Ambedkar's Iconography necessitates a critical engagement with the evolving representations of his image over time. Ambedkar's

Iconography and its aesthetic and political dimensions can be further elucidated by examining the abstract line work in graphic representations of his life and struggle (Saha, 2022).

Likewise, 'The Boy Who Asked Why' Story by Sowmya Rajendran, Pictures Satwik Gade, is a stunning account of Dr. Ambedkar and his painful childhood incidents that raise relevant questions (Figure 5). The author's approach in this work is candid and touches upon several unjust practices that affected Ambedkar's life. The images playfully capture the essence of those questions that affected the innocent mind of childhood.

Fig 5: 'The Boy Who Asked Why (2015), (Right), a spread from the book by Tulika Books.

The content covers the significant incidents of Dr. Ambedkar and his struggles with a question to the reader. The third example of the picture book that captures Ambedkar's love for books is 'B. R. Ambedkar: A Life in Books by Yogesh Maitreya, Illustrations by Nidhin Shobhana (Figure 6). The book brilliantly communicates how books were the only companions that Ambedkar grew up with in the absence of many friends. He was drawn to various books that offered salvation since childhood. He could get answers to many questions he had in his mind, making the books his best companion and teacher.
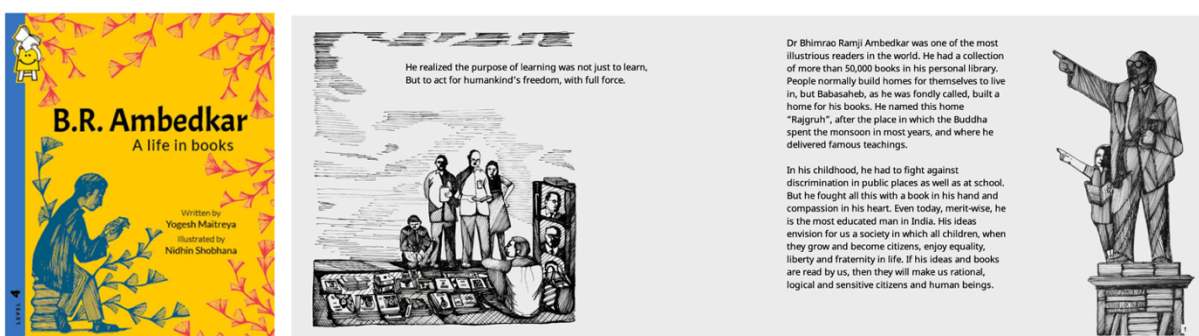

Fig 6: 'B. R. Ambedkar: A Life in Books, (Right) a spread from the book by Pratham Books

Other creative works of Yogesh Maitreya cover stories like 'Flowers on the Grave of Caste' and essays on language, literature, and cinema, such as 'Of Oppressors Body and Mind.' The Meaning and Loving and Hurt featured 32 portraits of Dr. Ambedkar, some of the relevant visual design works to mention. Through graphic narratives, Ambedkar's political philosophy and advocacy for social reform are

brought to life, resonating with audiences across diverse backgrounds. Political cartoons on platforms like Facebook have become effective tools for communicating sociopolitical scenarios in India, resonating with the population and contributing to political discourse (Chakraborty & Chowdhury, 2021).

Dalit cinema emerges as a potent tool for challenging caste hierarchies and amplifying Dalit voices in mainstream narratives (Herrero, 2021). Through visual storytelling and cinematic expressions, Dalit filmmakers strive to dignify Dalit subjectivities, critique social norms, and inspire sociocultural change. The cinematic medium becomes a platform for reclaiming narratives, challenging stereotypes, and fostering dialogue on caste identity and representation. The rich tapestry of Tamil cinema further enriches the discourse on caste identity and representation in filmmaking (Shweta, 2022). Tamil cinema, known for its diverse narratives and nuanced character portrayals, offers a platform for exploring Dalit experiences and outlooks. Through cinematic storytelling, issues of caste discrimination, social justice, and identity politics are brought to the forefront, engaging audiences in critical reflections on societal norms. Contemporary art draws inspiration from historical avant-garde practices, emphasizing discursive meaning and social processes. The interplay between music and visual Art challenges traditional boundaries, inviting audiences to engage with Art in multifaceted ways that transcend conventional mediums.

4.   Contemporary Art Practice, Artist and the society

After the text edit has been completed, the paper is ready for the template. Duplicate the template file by using the Save As command. In this newly created file, highlight all of the contents and import your prepared text file. You are now ready to style your paper; use the scroll down window on the left of the MS Word Formatting toolbar.Ambedkar's profound insights on caste, democracy, and state action offer valuable resources for contemporary democratic theory and social activism (Ramesh, 2022). Exploring Ambedkar's iconography in contemporary Art unveils a complex tapestry of cultural expressions, political narratives, and social critiques. Through visual representations, literature, cinema, and performing arts, artists, and creators engage with identity, resistance, and social change themes. Through contemporary and traditional art practices, artists and writers have engaged with Ambedkar's legacy to address broader issues of representation, power dynamics, and the complexities of social hierarchies. For example, in the realm of performing arts, the 'visibilization' of caste through Bharatanatyam performances sheds light on the representation of Dalit figures like Nandanar (Ramaprasad, 2024). These artistic expressions celebrate Dalit cultural heritage and challenge traditional narratives within classical art forms. By incorporating Dalit narratives into mainstream cultural practices, artists redefine notions of inclusivity and diversity in the performing arts landscape.

Nevertheless, in Contemporary art practice, Artists express their concerns and communicate with society in diverse forms through traditional mediums like Stone, Bronze, or even drawing. Even though communication is the most critical aspect of such artwork, expression and agency are two factors that give voice to an artist's communication. Therefore, the artworks are conscious statements, and art-making is a socially responsible act rather than a mere communication exercise. Art is fundamentally expected to reflect, revolutionize, and transform society. So, art-making and sharing with society aids the multidimensional dialogues between the creator and the responder. In other words, the viewer becomes part of the meaning-making process. By delving into such expressions, we gain deeper

insights into the complexities of caste, representation, and empowerment in contemporary society. The following cases show the intricacy of the medium and the message.

4.1.   Case 1: 'The Fall' (2008)

The Fall is a sculptural Installation of Arun Mascarenhas in Black marble. The installation size is approximately 48" × 24" × 9." The tagline reads, "The moving, the pointing, the admonishing, the directing, and the… the finger has fallen, the body has lost its meaning."

Fig 7. The Fall (2008) Sculptural Installation of the Artist

The representation of the fallen index finger is the central idea of the sculptural Installation (Figure 8). The Installation's Size, medium, and display context are crucial. The size of the finger is about a meter, and it is installed in a manner with a few pieces of splintered stone due to the impact of the Fall. The display on the ground mimics the fallen finger from an enormous (imagined) statute subjected to vandalism. Contradictory of the display in a conventional gallery space, without a pedestal to elevate the form to the viewer's gaze.

When the viewer encounters the Installation, once they are convinced of the Artist's choice of display, they may be intrigued by the artist's intent. Identifying the subject as a pointing finger, one can relate the work's representation and subject to the most recognizable gesture of Dr. Ambedkar with a raised hand pointing the index finger to a distant future. The most significant part of the iconic statue is its directing finger, which is separated from the body, which evokes a feeling that the statue has lost value due to vandalism. It may provoke the viewer whether you are an observer outside the context set or an active insider responsible for harm. The fallen finger can serve as a metaphor for the Fall of moral values or the direction of society, which he denounced. It also could serve as a critical statement on the mindless ritualistic act of his followers, who do not understand his aim but indulge in meaningless practices. The medium black stone is also crucial to the idea, as it complements the notion of ostracizing the oppressed class the world over and allows the viewer to feel the breakage and its impact, adding several layers of interpretations around the work. The Installation's title and short tagline further direct the viewers to the layered meaning-making process. The Installation's visual statement may become metaphors for society's broken, alienated moral values, indulging in lesser critical aspects like the statue's size, painting them in gold, washing them with milk, and even celebrating his birth anniversary as a festival but not practicing his core ideals.

4.2.   Case 2: 'The Annihilation of Cast (2015)

The drawing titled 'Annihilation of caste' by Arun Mascarenhas was a preliminary sketch first published on social media on the 124th birth anniversary of Ambedkar on Apr 14, 2015. (Figure 9). It was drawn at the request of a mentor, in a manner with an outstretched right arm projecting the copy of the essay titled 'Annihilation of caste' like a placard instead of a pointing finger gesture. It's a small drawing on paper measuring 8" ×10." The iconic posture of Dr. Ambedkar with the raised arm is the central idea of the drawing. The left hand still holds a copy of the Constitution. However, unlike other examples, the right arm in the drawing shows his critical essay as a placard. The drawing, through an unconventional posture, draws the attention of the viewer to the essay and the subject. The implicit statement that the drawing makes is the caste system and its ill effects on society, which is more crucial than the Constitution itself. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is recommending something more vital to society. It's a powerful visual statement that the piece of drawing invokes.

Fig 8. 'The Annihilation of Cast (2015)

The person admired as the architect of the Indian Constitution is now putting forth some other text that is more important. It is essential to give detailed incidents of the essay and its trailing arguments that

become a medium for both great personalities to exchange their view on society. The essay was a seminal work of Ambedkar, written basically as a speech on the caste system in India to be delivered at the annual conference of Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal (Society for the Abolition of Caste system), an anti-caste organization based in Lahore in 1936. Owing to the sharp differences with the organizers on omitting a few sections from the written speech planned to circulate after the speech, Ambedkar chose not to attend the conference but to publish his speech as a book. The core idea of the essay was on the sociology of religion, which is crucial in analyzing Indian society. Religion has often been regarded as a vital variable that gave direction to Indian society (Thapar, 2004). Dr. Ambedkar constantly criticized the Hindu caste system and its biased law books. He argued that inter-caste dining and inter-caste marriage were not sufficient to eradicate the caste system but that the fundamental method of breaking up the Caste System was to destroy the religious notions upon which caste is founded.

In response to Ambedkar's address on caste, Mahatma Gandhi commented in the same year in his article titled 'A Vindication of Caste.' In his weekly journal 'Harijan' in July 1936. Ambedkar promptly replied to Gandhi's comments in the second edition of his book, which was published in 1937 as 'Annihilation of Caste: With a Reply to Mahatma Gandhi.' He also published a third edition in 1944 that included another essay, 'Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development,' presented at a seminar in New York in 1916. Annihilation of Caste was translated into Tamil with the help of Periyar Ramaswamy Naikar, a famous Tamil social reformer and a ruthless critic of Brahmanism, and published in 1937. The Segments were continuously published in the rationalist Tamil magazine Kudi Arasu. In 2014, Nava Yana, a New Delhi-based publishing house, released an annotated edition, with an introduction by Arundhati Roy, entitled 'The Doctor and the Saint" ("Annihilation of Caste," 2024). In both cases above, his showing direction or admonishing blended with a contemporary message communicated through his familiar Iconography in society. As Dr. Ambedkar has rightly said, "Men are mortal, so are ideas. An idea needs propagation as much as a plant needs watering; otherwise, both will wither and die."

4.3.   Case 3: 'Dhamma Swaraj' (2018)

The Dharma Swaraj is Riyaz Komu's oil painting on Canvas (Figure 9). It's a triptych with three panels of 6'X4' canvases. It was part of the solo show' Holy Shiver' at Vadera Gallery, New Delhi, 2018. He has been a strong proponent of the idea that Art should speak of our time and considers them an archive of our times.Compelling visual language is reflected across artworks created in various mediums. Komu used diverse mediums to break the boundaries of genres like Sculpture and painting. He has been using the images of Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi in his expressions. Both personalities had the same goal of an independent nation. They contributed significantly in different roles, yet they had different ideologies still in dialogue, which is the work's central theme.

Fig 9: The triptych' Dhamma Swaraj,' image of the artist in the solo show, Holy Shiver, Vadera Gallery, New Delhi

In the intriguing triptych' Dhamma Swaraj,' he uses the iconic images of both leaders to juxtapose them to evoke a feeling of transition from one to another like a holographic image. It is the Artist's response to the changing ideologies of the state. It reflects the debates prevalent in the Indian socio-political space and our times. Fusing both words Dharma and Swaraj, which are associated with Ambedkar and Gandhi, respectively, brings semiotic and semantic dimensions together in the work through the title.

4.4   Case 4: 'Fourth World' (2019)

The artwork 'Fourth World' is a sculptural installation of Riyaz Komu in Bronze Cement Concrete. Installed permanently at Nirox Foundation Sculpture Garden, Johannesburg, South Africa. The Installation Dimensions is approximately 9'×20'×20.' As Menon puts it, it "brings together the politics of the word, history, and symbolism," in the Installation, the artist "is building a history of the present, compelling us to think about all its terrors, possibilities and betrayals" (Menon, 2019). The Installation at Sculpture Park in the 'Credle of Humankind' has four plinths of different heights aligned with the cardinal directions. The east and the west have statues of Dr. Ambedkar installed on opposite plinths, showing back to each other on unequal-sized plinths. The other two plinths that are of similar height are unoccupied (Figure 10).

However, unlike the previous examples, the statutes do not hold a copy of 'the Constitution of Inda,' not pointing to 'some distant future' or 'the temple of democracy.' But it is conversing, with both hands slightly raised, as if he is explaining something to the audience in the east and west directions in the world. The vacant plinths of the north and south are still open spaces for similar issues that have yet to be addressed or represented. The Installation's location and context are also vital because it is outside India. In India, his statues and images are deployed as political gestures and symbols of reverence. Socially sensitive subjects are often avoided in mainstream practices, expressed through symbolism and abstraction. The transnational space of the Installation opens a dialogue on unrealized equality, bringing together distant conversations of similar concerns.

Fig 10. 'The Fourth World' (Image courtesy Dilip M. Menon)

The Installation offers an intimate space to the viewer, invited for a dialogue on the future and the past that is forgotten. Ambedkar was treated as untouchable even after being the most educated in the country at his time, and he suffered indignities; his position and experiences are unique and valuable for the conversations he invokes. His writings reflect that the dialogue on inequality has to be part of the global conversation, where Dalits must be placed along with other deprived people and societies. In the Installation, Komu captured the essence of reaching beyond borders and narrow notions through the statue's exhortative gesture. Notably, the Installation does not have a book of the Constitution as a part of the statue. It's a statement that debunks the notion of confining him and his struggles to the history of legislation and debates around the clauses and schedules on reservations for attaining an equal society.

5.   Conclusion

In conclusion, the political landscape in India is deeply intertwined with symbolic representations, from statues and symbols to historical emblems and cultural icons. These symbols reflect power dynamics and historical narratives and serve as tools for asserting identity, negotiating relationships with the state, and shaping public discourse. Understanding the intricate web of social, Cultural, and political symbolism in Indian art and design or public art is essential for comprehending the complexities. Its social fabric and the evolving dynamics of power and depiction. Symbols in art and design domains are potent communication, expression, and cultural preservation tools. They convey resistance to cultural heritage and foster cross-cultural dialogue and innovation, shaping artistic expressions and societal narratives. Accepting the significance of symbols in art requires an appreciation of their cognitive, emotional, and cultural dimensions, underscoring the interplay between creativity, symbolism, and human experience.

As a part of design culture, public sculptures or public art have been used as statements and memorials. They allow deep analysis of complex, creative elements as an academic endeavor. Due to their instant connection with the viewer, they have an enormous impact that gradually transforms society. A simple yet strong communication requires a thought process rooted in the living and its relationships. Over the past few decades, our lifestyles have drastically altered; social media and digital modes of

communication have created further gaps in our attitudes toward our fellow cohabitants. Emotional exchanges occur at a distance and have become vivid and fast; a considerable part of communication is through visual symbols and gaze. We cannot overlook the complexity of our time; without studying and analyzing what surrounds us and how it impacts society, we seldom find meaning.

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