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Ambedkar Beyond April 14: Equality in the Age of AI and Gen Z India

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ABSTRACT

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is widely commemorated through symbolic rituals, yet his radical paradigm of social justice remains underutilised as a critical framework for contemporary structural challenges. In 2026 India, rapid advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI), automated decision-making, and digital public infrastructure (DPI) have transformed socio-political and economic relations. However, stark disparities in digital infrastructure, algorithmic transparency, and literacy have codified new, technocratic layers of inequality that deeply impact India's Gen Z demographic. This study examines technological inequality through a structural reinterpretation of Ambedkar's philosophy of social justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. Utilising an analytical evaluation of institutional datasets spanning 2018-2025, we map rural-urban divides, pedagogical gaps, economic asymmetries in enterprise and agriculture, and localised algorithmic biases. The article argues that inclusive, democratised technological governance is not merely a policy preference but a constitutional imperative required to preserve human dignity in an increasingly automated state.

Keywords: Ambedkar; Artificial Intelligence; Digital Equality; Gen Z; Social Justice; India

INTRODUCTION

Historically, structural inequality within the Indian subcontinent has been understood through institutionalised caste hierarchies, socio-economic marginalisation, and stratified educational access. While these historical vulnerabilities persist, the contemporary era introduces an existential vector: technological inequality.

In modern India, the rapid expansion of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automated systems has fundamentally reconfigured access to capital, employment, pedagogical upward mobility, and civic franchise. As the "Gen Z" demographic enters the workforce and higher education, they navigate an ecosystem in which algorithmic architectures act as gatekeepers. Rather than democratizing access, the unchecked market deployment

of AI risks mechanising historical prejudices and codifying them under the veneer of mathematical neutrality.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's conceptualisation of equality was never static; it demanded a continuous, institutional deconstruction of power asymmetries. He famously warned that a political democracy built on top of deep-seated social and economic inequalities is inherently unstable. Applying this framework to the digital age reveals that a "Digital India" cannot achieve true democratic maturity if its core infrastructure exacerbates social stratification.

This study addresses this gap by investigating:

1. The structural cartography of the rural-urban digital divide utilising recent macroeconomic datasets.



2. The sectoral impacts of technological asymmetries within contemporary pedagogy, industrial capital accumulation, and agricultural labour.
3. The emergence of linguistic imperialism and algorithmic bias within localised AI modelling.
4. The normative application of Ambedkar’s tripartite framework *Educate, Organise, Agitate* toward an ethical, constitutional blueprint for AI governance.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopts a rigorous qualitative, analytical, and normative research design, shifting the paper from a descriptive report to a theoretical critique supported by secondary empirical datasets.

Data Sources

To validate our structural claims empirically, secondary quantitative and qualitative data were systematically aggregated from the following institutional bodies:

- **National Datasets:** Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), NITI Aayog, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+), Reserve Bank of India (RBI), and the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO).
- **Global Benchmarks:** UNESCO, World Bank, International Telecommunication Union (ITU), UNDP, OECD, and the International Labour Organisation (ILO).
- **Theoretical Foundations:** The foundational texts, legislative interventions, and speeches of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.

Methodological Framework

The methodology relies on a three-tiered analytical approach:

1. **Descriptive Empirical Mapping:** Extracting and synthesising quantitative indicators (e.g., internet penetration rates, institutional funding, language densities) to map digital disparities.
2. **Political Economy Analysis:** Interrogating how AI capital accumulation concentrates power within large enterprise sectors while marginalising small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and agrarian labour.
3. **Normative Ambedkarite Deconstruction:** Evaluating digital architecture against Ambedkar’s principles of *Constitutional Morality*, *Social Democracy*, and *Fraternity*.

RESULTS AND EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

The Structural Rural-Urban Digital Divide

An analysis of telecommunication infrastructure reveals that the digital economy is spatialized along historical urban-rural divides. Quantitative data compiled by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) indicates that while urban internet penetration has reached approximately 78%, rural connectivity lags significantly at roughly 48%.

This macro-level disparity is further compounded by the NSSO household consumption surveys on digital access, which show that desktop or laptop ownership remains heavily concentrated within metropolitan, high-income households. Consequently, rural Gen Z individuals face a systemic deficit. While urban youth can utilise high-speed connectivity to engage with AI-driven software, advanced coding environments, and global digital networks, rural youth are constrained by unpredictable mobile networks and small screens. This is a contemporary manifestation of what Ambedkar classified as an unequal distribution of life opportunities.

Geographic Metric	Internet Penetration Rate (%)	Primary Mode of Access	Hardware Access Profile
Urban India	78%	High-speed Broadband / 5G	Multi-device (Smartphones, Laptops, PCs)
Rural India	48%	Mobile Data (Variable QoS)	Shared, Mobile-only Infrastructure

Pedagogical Stratification in Gen Z Education

The transition toward digital learning platforms and AI-assisted grading algorithms has magnified educational inequities. According to institutional data from the UDISE+ report, approximately 81% of urban educational centres possess stable internet connectivity and functional computer laboratories. Conversely, only 24% of rural schools have equivalent infrastructure.

The ASER reports confirm that this infrastructure deficit translates directly into learning loss and soft-skill deficiencies among rural students. When schools deploy AI software for personalised learning, the underlying data models are trained predominantly on urban, English-speaking demographics. Rural students, lacking access to continuous hardware platforms, are effectively excluded from these adaptive feedback loops, exacerbating performance gaps within higher education admissions and entry-level technology hiring markets.

Capital Concentration and AI Asymmetries in Industry



The deployment of Generative AI and automated processes within the corporate sector is shifting India's labour market dynamics. Reports by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) note that AI adoption is heavily concentrated within well-capitalised corporations, which deploy these tools to optimise predictive modelling, software engineering, and supply chain logistics.

In contrast, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), which employ the vast majority of the young domestic workforce, face significant barriers to adoption:

Institutional AI Deployment Barriers for MSMEs

- High Initial Capital Requirements
- Lack of Specialised Technical Infrastructure
- Inaccessibility to Affordable Cloud Computing Credits

According to the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), this technology gap restricts credit scoring optimisation and operational efficiency for smaller enterprises, concentrating market power and widening wealth distribution. For Gen Z workers entering the market, this polarisation means employment opportunities are increasingly bifurcated between a small, highly paid technocratic elite and a vast, precarious gig economy lacking labour protections.

Technological Exclusions within Agrarian Structures

The Ministry of Agriculture's Digital Agriculture Mission highlights the potential of AI for precision farming, predictive crop management, and market pricing algorithms. However, the real-world deployment of these tools reflects deep socio-economic inequalities.

Small and marginal farmers who own less than two hectares of land face overlapping barriers to adoption:

- **Linguistic Isolation:** Most advanced AdTech platforms function primarily in English or dominant regional languages, excluding localised dialects.
- **Data Exclusion:** Algorithmic forecasting models frequently lack localised soil and weather data, leading to inaccurate predictions for marginal geographical zones.
- **Financial Constraints:** The financial capital required to act on AI recommendations (such as purchasing micro-irrigation hardware or specialised fertilisers) remains out of reach without formal credit access.

As a result, large-scale agrarian landowners disproportionately capture the productivity gains of agricultural AI, driving down market prices and further squeezing the profit margins of marginalised farmers.

Linguistic Imperialism and Algorithmic Bias

A significant barrier to digital equity is the English-centric nature of the global and domestic AI ecosystem. Despite India's rich linguistic pluralism, data from MeitY indicates that the Large Language Models (LLMs) driving current generative applications draw over 80% of their training corpora from English-language sources.

This creates a structural dynamic of linguistic exclusion:

1. **Knowledge Asymmetry:** Young citizens who communicate primarily through non-scheduled or regional languages cannot fully leverage conversational AI tools for education or public service access.
2. **Societal Misrepresentation:** When localised translation layers are applied, they often fail to capture socio-cultural nuances, leading to systemic errors in machine processing.
3. **Automated Discrimination:** Automated recruitment screening, credit profiling, and digital policing systems train on historical datasets that contain systemic caste, gender, and regional biases. Because these algorithmic tools are proprietary and lack transparency, they frequently reproduce discriminatory outcomes under the guise of objective, data-driven decisions.

DISCUSSION: REINTERPRETING AMBEDKAR FOR THE DIGITAL PUBLIC SPHERE

Digital Capital and the Critique of Social Democracy

The empirical realities detailed above challenge the techno-optimist narrative that digital public infrastructure inherently democratizes society. Viewed through an Ambedkarite lens, digital technology within a capitalist market framework act as a new medium for accumulating social and economic power. Dr. Ambedkar maintained that social democracy is a foundational way of life that recognises liberty, equality, and fraternity as inseparable principles.

Liberty + Equality+ Fraternity = Social Democracy

If the deployment of AI enriches a technocratic elite while leaving marginalised rural populations digitally disenfranchised, it violates this balance. The digital divide is not merely an infrastructure shortfall; it is an impediment to social democracy that restricts equal participation in the modern public square.

Algorithmic Casteism and Constitutional Morality

The translation of historical human biases into automated code is a significant challenge for contemporary civil rights. When AI models assess creditworthiness, grade admissions essays, or screen resumes, they rely on proxy



variables (such as residential location, institutional pedigree, or linguistic patterns) that often correlate with historical privilege.

Ambedkar's principle of **Constitutional Morality** offers a framework to counter this automated bias. It demands that state institutions and private entities look beyond procedural legality to ensure substantive justice for protected classes. In the age of AI, constitutional morality requires making algorithms auditable, transparent, and legally accountable to prevent them from automating historical patterns of exclusion.

A Digital Framework: Educate, Organise, Agitate

Ambedkar's famous slogan provides an actionable framework for digital rights advocacy within Gen Z India:

Ambedkar's Paradigm for the Digital Age

1. Educate - Universal AI Literacy & Digital Rights
 2. Organise - Inclusive Open-Source DPI & Data Co-ops
 3. Agitate - Democratic Policy, Protest vs Bias
- **Educate:** Educational policy must evolve past basic digital literacy. True education in the 21st century requires critical algorithmic literacy. Gen Z must be equipped to understand data sovereignty, identify algorithmic bias, and utilise open-source AI tools to solve local problems.
 - **Organise:** Marginalised communities, developers, and policymakers must build decentralised digital platforms and open-source data cooperatives. By organising inclusive datasets that represent India's linguistic and cultural diversity, technologists can develop AI systems tailored to local social needs rather than purely extractive market incentives.
 - **Agitate:** Gen Z must utilise democratic channels to challenge algorithmic discrimination, predatory surveillance, and digital exclusion. This involves advocating for comprehensive data protection laws, demanding transparency from proprietary state algorithms, and opposing public policies that condition essential civil rights on faulty digital verification infrastructure.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY INTERVENTIONS

Technological inequality is a defining structural challenge for contemporary India. While artificial intelligence offers paths for economic development, its unmediated expansion risks formalising new mechanisms of exclusion that parallel older social hierarchies.

To bridge this divide and advance toward Ambedkar's vision of social democracy, the state and civil society should prioritise the following structural interventions:

1. **Universal Broadband Infrastructure:** Upgrade rural telecom access from volatile mobile connections to reliable, high-speed public broadband to ensure equitable access to AI tools.
2. **Pedagogical Democratisation:** Direct public investments to equip rural public schools with modern hardware and localised, open-access AI learning programs.
3. **Localisation of Computational Models:** Allocate state research funding toward building sovereign, open-source Large Language Models across all scheduled regional languages to remove English-centric access barriers.
4. **Mandatory Algorithmic Audits:** Establish independent regulatory frameworks to audit algorithmic systems used in public governance, hiring, and financial services for demographic bias.

By centring technological policy around constitutional morality, India can steer its digital transformation into an instrument for universal empowerment, dignity, and social justice.

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