



Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*: A Volte Face on the Socially Preserved Doctrine of Caste

Dr. Pallavi Thakur, Assistant Professor, SSHSS, Sharda University

Dr Rafrat Shakil, Assistant Professor, SSHSS, Sharda University

Abstract: In Indian society, caste inequality was first articulated by Dr. Ambedkar. He was of the opinion that caste can never be used as a foundation. Then again, he worked for the 'obliteration of rank' since he accepted that whatever is based on standing will make disparity inside (Hiwrale, 2020, p.79). *Annihilation of Caste* is a commentary on the restricting caste system that revered upper caste as supreme and repudiated lower caste as untouchables. It lays bare the atrocities inflicted by the upper castes on the subaltern and how caste prevents the conservative Hindus from forming a real society. It proclaims that social reform plays an instrumental role in bringing political and economic reform in a society. The speech not only underscores the limitations of caste system but also brings forth a solution to an all-pervasive epidemic of caste in India. The paper makes an attempt to examine the remedies suggested by Ambedkar to i) eradicate caste differences in the society ii) upgrade the Hindu priesthood and iii) develop an ideal Hindu society.

Key words: annihilation, caste, social reform, Hindu priesthood, equality

i) **Introduction:** Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, one of the most prominent figures in contemporary democratic India, wrote the essay *Annihilation of Caste*, which has been widely read, discussed, and applauded. "B. R. Ambedkar occupies an inevitable and compulsory place in anti-caste theorizing" (Pan, p.170). It addresses the issues of the existence of caste and ways of annihilating it. Ambedkar in his speech draws the history of Hindu religion which was a missionary religion in the past however with the passage of time it stopped being a religion of missionaries. He exemplifies his statement,

My answer is this: the Hindu religion ceased to be a missionary religion when the Caste System grew up among the Hindus. Caste is inconsistent with conversion. Inculcation of beliefs and dogmas is not the only problem that is involved in conversion. To find a place for the convert in the social life of the community is another, and a much more important, problem that arises in connection with conversion. That problem is where to place the convert, in what caste? It is a problem that arises in connection with conversion. That problem is where to place the convert, in what caste? It is a problem which must baffle every Hindu wishing to make aliens converts to his religion (2014, p.54)

The allegiance to a caste is exclusive and discriminatory. The caste system limits membership to those who were born into it. Because castes are autonomous, no one has the ability to compel one to welcome a stranger into its social structure. Hindu society is a built up of numerous castes, each of which is a closed corporation, hence there is no space for a convert. The caste system has therefore restricted Hindus' capacity to develop and integrate other religious groups. As long as Caste remains, Hinduism cannot become a missionary faith, and Shudhi will be both imbecile and pointless. Hence Ambedkar confirms that annihilation of caste is the only remedy to have social- endosmosis in Hindu society. He learned the concept of social end osmosis from John Dewey and believed that social democracy is essential to achieve political and economic equality. Ambedkar wrote that he owed so much to Prof. John Dewey, his teacher, who once said: As a society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is responsible not to conserve and transmit the entirety of its existing

achievements, but only those that make for a better society in the future. Every society gets encumbered with what is trivial, with dead wood from the past, and with things that are positively perverse (2014, p.79). Ambedkar propounds remedies to curb the problem of caste and establish equality in the Hindu society.

ii) Eradication of Caste differences:

According to Ambedkar the concept of a Hindu society does not exist. It is simply a collection of castes. All castes are conscious of their own existence. Its ability to survive is the only thing that keeps it alive. There is no caste federation at this time. A caste has no sense of kinship to other castes outside of Hindu-Muslim conflicts. Each caste makes an attempt to isolate and consider itself superior to others.

Each caste not only dines among itself and marries among itself, but each caste prescribes its own distinctive dress. What other explanation can there be of the innumerable styles of dress worn by the men and women of India, which so amuse the tourists? Indeed the ideal Hindu must be like a rat living in his own hole, refusing to have any contact with others. There is an utter lack among the Hindus of what the sociologists call "consciousness of kind." There is no Hindu consciousness of kind. In every Hindu the consciousness that exists is the consciousness of his caste. That is the reason why the Hindus cannot be said to form a society or a nation (p.50).

There are many Indians, though, whose sense of patriotism keeps them from realising that they are just an unorganised group of people and not a nation. They asserted that despite their seeming diversity, Hindus are connected by their radically dissimilar behaviours, convictions, and modes of thought. This is due to the fact that these parallels span the whole Indian subcontinent. There are similarities between the behaviours, customs, and ideologies. Yet, it is incorrect to assume that Hindus constitute a separate community. To do so would be to misinterpret what the fundamental components of a society are. Just as a man does not stop being a part of his society by living far from other men, neither do men become a society by living close to one another. Ambedkar critically evaluates the suggestions offered by the social reformers to eradicate caste system and proposes several ways "which will serve as a solvent of caste"(p.67),

- **Abolition of Sub-castes:** Ambedkar did not support this viewpoint of the social reformers since there is no assurance that the elimination of sub-castes will inevitably result in the elimination of castes, even if we assume the fusion of sub-castes is possible. On the other hand, it's possible that the process will come to an end once subcastes are abolished. If so, eliminating subcastes will simply serve to strengthen castes, give them more power, and make them more damaging.
- **Initiate Inter-caste Dinning:** Many social reformers proposed that inter-caste dinning would dissolve the rigid walls of caste. Ambedkar eulogises their sincere proposition however concludes that, "the separatist feeling—the feeling of being aliens—created by Caste will not vanish. Ambedkar thought this was insufficient because many castes permit it, but it hasn't abolished the spirit or consciousness of caste.
- **Encourage Inter-caste Marriage:** Ambedkar "advocates intercaste marriage as one of the solutions to the problem. But he stresses that the belief in the _Shastra's 'is the root cause of maintaining castes'(Maske, 2020, p.208). Ambedkar contends that only the joining of blood can provide the sense of kinship, and that unless this sense of kinship takes precedence, the sense of alienation brought on by caste will persist. He exemplifies,

I am convinced that the real remedy is intermarriage. Fusion of blood can alone create the feeling of being kith and kin, and unless this feeling of kinship, of being marriage. Fusion of blood can alone create the feeling of being kith and kin, and

unless this feeling of kinship, of being kindred, becomes paramount, the separatist feeling—the feeling of being aliens—created by Caste will not vanish. Among the Hindus, inter-marriage must necessarily be a factor of greater force in social life than it need be in the life of the non-Hindus. Where society is already well-knit by other ties, marriage is an ordinary incident of life. But where society is cut asunder, marriage as a binding force becomes a matter of urgent necessity. The real remedy for breaking Caste is intermarriage. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of Caste (p.67).

Ambedkar acknowledges the value of inter-caste unions in the abolition of caste. Despite taking place in India, they move rather slowly. All castes and communities must advocate for, support, and encourage inter-caste unions on a personal, societal, and national basis. The government might offer incentives for these unions.

However Ambedkar also comments on why Hindus do not appreciate the idea of inter-caste dining and inter-caste marriage. He explains that instead of opposing inter-caste marriages out of a desire to preserve the sacredness and purity of their blood, Hindus oppose them out of a fear of losing their social and political control over people from other castes. Ambedkar provided a searing critique of the "enlightened high caste social reformers who did not have the courage to agitate against caste" (Ghose, 2003, p.95). He elucidates,

There can be only one answer to this question, and it is that inter-dining and inter-marriage are repugnant to the beliefs and dogmas which the Hindus regard as sacred. Caste is not a physical object like a wall of bricks or a line of barbed wire which prevents the Hindus from commingling and which has, therefore, to be pulled down. Caste is a notion, it is a state of the mind. The destruction of Caste does not therefore mean the destruction of a physical barrier. It means a notional change (p.68).

- **Eliminate the Faith in the Sanctity of the Shastras:** According to Ambedkar, it must be acknowledged that the Hindus do not observe caste because they are inhuman but deeply religious. He states that observing caste is not a mistake. Hindu religion, which follows the Shastra to understand the concept of caste, is, in his opinion, wrong. If this is true, then the enemies we face are not the Caste-observant people but the Shastras that have taught them this religion. It is pointless to criticize people for not intermarrying, interdining, or occasionally hosting intercaste dinners and celebrations of intercaste marriages. Ambedkar proclaims that eliminating the belief in the sanctity of the Shastras is the real solution,

All the same, it must be recognized that the Hindus observe Caste not because they are inhuman or wrong-headed. They observe Caste because they are deeply religious. People are not wrong in observing Caste. In my view, what is wrong is their religion, which has inculcated this notion of Caste. If this is correct, then obviously the enemy you must grapple with is not the people who observe Caste, but the Shastras which teach them this religion of Caste. Criticising and ridiculing people for not interdining or inter-marrying, or occasionally holding inter-caste dinners and celebrating inter-caste marriages, is a futile method of achieving the desired end. The real remedy is to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the Shastras (p.68).

- ii) **Upgrade the Hindu Priesthood:** According to Ambedkar true priesthood should be based on qualification rather heredity. Ambedkar proposes that the old rules of life that were practiced in the name of religion should be abolished (nullified), and that a religion based on principles should take their place. He regards the religion of principles as genuine and offers suggestions for reforming Hinduism.

- All Hindus ought to be able to agree on and recognize a single standard book for the Hindu religion. Naturally, this implies that the Vedas, Shastras, and Puranas—all of which are re-

garded as sacred and dogmatic in the Hindu religion—must by law, cease to be so, and preaching any religious or social doctrine from these works should be punished.

- Elimination of Hindu priesthood would be preferable. But since this seems impossible, the priesthood must at least stop being passed down through families as inheritane. Anyone who wants to be a priest must be eligible for it. It ought to be given by regulation that no Hindu will be considered as a priest except if he has qualified through an assessment recommended by the State, and should have a sanad (permission) from the government.
- It should be illegal for a person without a sanad to officiate as a priest, and if a ceremony is performed by a priest without a sanad, it should be considered illegal.
- A priest ought to be the worker of the State, and ought to be dependent upon the disciplinary activity of the State in the question of his ethics, convictions, and love, notwithstanding his being subject alongside different residents to the customary rule that everyone must follow.
- The number of priests should be limited by law according to the requirements of the State, as is done in the case of the I.C.S. (p.77).

This idea, according to Ambedkar, may seem extreme to some people. However, he does not consider this to be revolutionary. In India, every occupation is regulated. Engineers, doctors, and lawyers must first demonstrate their competence before they can be regulated. They should comply with both the common and criminal traditions that must be adhered to over the span of their vocations, as well as the remarkable moral norms set out by their different callings. The only occupation in which proficiency is not required is priesthood.. A Hindu priest's occupation is the only one exempt from all codes. According to Ambedkar, Hindus must establish a new theological foundation for their religion that is compatible with democracy, equality, and fraternity. He suggests that in order to create religious beliefs that are compatible with Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, we do not need to borrow ideas from outside sources to make such a change in Hinduism. The Upanishads could be used instead. Ambedkar isn't certain about whether Hindus could do it without totally remoulding them and eliminating a great deal of the mineral they contain by broad scratching and chipping. "This means a complete change in the fundamental notions of life. It means a complete change in the values of life. It means a complete change in outlook and in attitude towards men and things" (p.78).

It means conversion—but if you do not like the word, I will say it means new life. But a new life cannot enter a body that is dead. New life can enter only into a new body. The old body must die before a new body can come into existence and a new life can enter into it. To put it simply: the old must cease to be operative before the new can begin to enliven [=to live] and to pulsate. This is what I meant when I said you must discard the authority of the Shastras, and destroy the religion of the Shastras (p.78).

According to Rajendra Pandra and Gajula Kumar, "Ambedkar (1936) expressed his desire to convert himself from Hinduism to Buddhism in the concluding remarks as he believed that it would liberate Dalits from the oppression" (2015, p.474).

iii) Develop an Ideal Hindu Society: Ambedkar gives his concept of an ideal Hindu society. He propounds the rule of Fraternity, Liberty and Equality. "With a noble intention to make participation of major citizenry Dr. Ambedkar put forth a broader perspective than the generally perceived idea of political liberty, equality and fraternity"(Varshaa & Vezhaventhan, 2018, p.286).

- Fraternity: As per Dr Ambedkar an ideal society would be adaptable and have a lot of ways of illuminating different regions regarding change that are happening in one region. A perfect society is one in which changes are consciously communicated and accepted through various channels."In other words there must be social endosmosis"(p.57).

This is fraternity, which is only another name for democracy. Democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of joint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards one's fellow men (p.57).

- **Liberty:** In terms of the right to movement freedom and the right to life and body, few people oppose liberty. Liberty is not incompatible with the right to property, tools, and materials necessary for earning a living and maintaining a reasonable level of health. Why not give someone the opportunity to reap the benefits of an effective and efficient use of his power?

There is no objection to liberty in the sense of a right to property, tools, and materials, as being necessary for earning a living, to keep the body in a due state of health. Why not allow a person the liberty to benefit from an effective and competent use of a person's powers? The supporters of Caste who would allow liberty in the sense of a right to life, limb, and property, would not readily consent to liberty in this sense, inasmuch as it involves liberty to choose one's profession (p.57).

However, to oppose this kind of freedom is to maintain slavery. because slavery is more than just a service that has been made legal. It alludes to a social circumstance wherein certain individuals are constrained to acknowledge the rules that control their way of behaving by others. This condition persists even in situations where there is not actual, legal slavery. It happens when people are forced against their will to do certain prescribed jobs, like in the Caste System.

- **Equality:** "Although Ambedkar wrote on topics ranging from economics to politics to law, his main focus remained on gaining equality for the oppressed classes, particularly Dalits, or those considered as untouchables: outside or below the Hindu caste order" (Kumar, 2022, p.5). According to Ambedkar 'equality' is, without a doubt, the phrase from the slogan of the French Revolution that has sparked the most controversy. It may be necessary to acknowledge that the arguments against equality are valid because men are not created equal. Despite the fact that equality is a fiction, it must be acknowledged as the guiding principle.

A man's power is dependent upon (1) physical heredity; (2) social inheritance or endowment in the form of parental care, education, accumulation of scientific knowledge, everything which enables him to be more efficient than the savage; and finally, (3) on his own efforts. In all these three respects men are undoubtedly unequal. But the question is, shall we treat them as unequal because they are unequal? This is a question which the opponents of equality must answer (p.58).

Ambedkar exemplifies that men are obviously inconsistent in every one of the three of these areas. However, should we treat them differently just because they are different? According to him this question requires a response from those who oppose equality. Individualists may argue that it is justifiable to treat men differently because their efforts differ. He states that it might be desirable to offer everyone the strongest possible incentive to improve their skills.

It is obvious that those individuals also in whose favour there is birth, education, family name, business connections, and inherited wealth, would be selected in the race. But selection under such circumstances would not be a selection of the able. It would be the selection of the privileged. The reason, therefore, which requires that in the third respect [of those described in the paragraph above] we should treat men unequally, demands that in the first two respects we should treat men as equally as possible (p.58).

Conclusion: "It can be said that to protect the interest of minorities in general and depressed classes in particular, he envisaged a federal policy within the federal form of State. Social justice is the main aspect of his political philosophy, which he tried to build through humanism" (Bharti & Alok, 2020, p.2961). *Annihilation of Caste* is a volte face on the socially preserved doctrine of caste among Hindus. The speech gives a potent strategy to reform not only Hindu society but any society that discriminates people on the basis of caste, race, religion or gender. Abraham and Judith state the importance of Ambedkar's works, "Those who do not feel oppressed by tradition will benefit by it even more, as Ambedkar's book holds a clear mirror before those of us who are not aware of their own complicity with race, caste and gender discrimination" (2018, p.29).

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