

Comments on the Indian Social System concerning Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*.

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Abstract

Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar wrote *Annihilation of Caste* and published his own 1500 copies on 15th May, 1936. As *Hind Swaraj* defines Gandhi, in the way *Annihilation of Caste* defines Ambedkar. Dr Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* is a brilliant milestone in the history of Ambedkar's scholarly publications. A Hindu reformist group once invited Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar to deliver their presidential address and plan to eradicate the caste system.

Dr Ambedkar argued that the Vedas and Shastras sustained the immorality of Caste. Without annihilating Caste, there could be no reform or change, so Jatpat Todak Mandal withdrew their invitation. Dr Ambedkar published this text on his own. Here, Mahatma Gandhi responded to the provocation. Arundhati Roy says, 'to ignore Gandhi while writing about Dr Ambedkar is to do a disservice to Dr Ambedkar.' This creates many questions regarding caste, privilege, power, and political representation in Indian society.

Caste is absent in Gandhi's reverie. Later, Gandhi insisted that untouchability had troubled him since he was a boy. But he doesn't mention it in his *Hind Swaraj*. At the Round Table Conference, Gandhi and Dr Ambedkar clashed, both claiming that they were the real representatives of the Untouchables. Even after many weeks, Gandhi agreed to separate electorates for Muslims and Sikhs, but didn't agree with Dr. Ambedkar's argument for a separate electorate for Untouchables.

Keywords: caste, untouchability, dalit, annihilation, equality, justice, society.

Introduction:

“Untouchability is now officially 'abolished' in India. Contemporary Indian laws, as well as the Constitution, prohibit discrimination against untouchables. But nearly 16 per cent of India's population, or about 100,000,000 people, are untouchables; and any gains in their situation have been sparse and uneven.” (5, Freeman). The Aryans intruded on India; they brought casteism with them 3500 years ago. They are divided into Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras, known as the Chaturvarna.

The indigenous native Indians are the Dalits and the Tribals. They were segregated as Untouchables until the middle of the 19th century. Due to Western education and the work of great reformers like Kabir, Saint Raidas, Periyar, Mahatma Phule, and Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, society became conscious of such burning issues. After independence, Untouchability was constitutionally abolished, but social attitudes did not change suddenly. Age-old prejudices are evident in society even today.

As stated on page 471 of the Oxford Sanskrit-English Dictionary, the term 'Dalit' means 'Dal'. This means burst, split, scattered, dispersed, broken, torn, destroyed, and crushed. 'Daridra' word is derived from Dalit and is used in all Indian languages. Dalit literature forms a distinct and important area of Indian Literature. Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is very popularly known as the architect of the Constitution of India and the father of Dalit Literature.

Dr Ambedkar was an Indian jurist, economist, politician, and social reformer. He inspired the Modern Buddhist Movement. He campaigned against social discrimination for the Untouchables. He struggled seriously for many years to eradicate untouchability and caste discrimination. He struggled for the rights of the Dalits, Tribals, Women, religious minorities, poor people, farmers, labourers, and other backward classes.

Dalit Literature is an autonomous intellectual tradition that exposes the pitfalls of casteist Indian Society. He wrote a brilliant work, *Annihilation of Caste*. It is his prepared speech, which he couldn't deliver at a conference. Dr Ambedkar wrote this powerful speech for a meeting of a group of liberal Hindu Caste reformers in

Lahore, British India. Conference organizers cancelled the invitation given to Dr Ambedkar, so he determined to end the social stratification and hierarchy.

Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar self-published *Annihilation of Caste* in 1936 and denounced the Caste System in India. He questions the restrictions on inter-caste relationships and opines that the caste system prevails due to endogamy. Dr Bhimrao Ramji Sakpal (Bharat Ratna) was born on 14th April 1891 in a Mahar Untouchable Dalit family in Mhow Cantonment. His father and grandfather served in the British army. Ambedkar was given the name Bhimrao Ramji Ambavadekar by his parents.

Dr Ambedkar, one of India's most radical thinkers, transformed the political and social landscape in the fight against British Colonialism. As a brilliant, prolific writer, Dr Ambedkar drafted the Indian Constitution. He served as India's first Law Minister in the Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru's government. Babasaheb Ambedkar accepted a new faith, Buddhism, a few months before he died in 1956. He declared publicly that even if he was born a Hindu, he would not die as one.

Arundhati Roy is a great Indian writer and winner of many awards, including the Booker Prize. She has written 'The Doctor and the Saint' as an introduction to *Annihilation of Caste*. S. Anand is the founder-publisher of Navayana and is the co-author of *Bhimayana*, a graphic biography of Ambedkar. A Hindu reformist group invited Dr Ambedkar to deliver a presidential address and chart a path to end Caste Discrimination in 1936. The invitation for Dr Ambedkar was withdrawn, so he published the text on his own.

Mahatma Gandhi responded to this provocation. Arundhati Roy admits that she can not ignore Mahatma Gandhi when she writes about Dr Ambedkar; it is a disservice to Dr Ambedkar himself. The issues are political representation, caste, privilege, and power in Indian Society. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar's present work, *Annihilation of Caste*, is a masterpiece in Dalit Literature. This is his undelivered speech. 'Jatpat Todak Mandal' is a group of revolutionary people. They wanted to bring revolution and change the mindset of an unjust society.

This organization wanted to improve Indian society and abolish the social evils prevailing at that time. They invited Dr Ambedkar as a chief guest for the Annual

Conference in 1936. He sent a written script to Lahore, British India. This Mandal asked Dr Ambedkar to edit his speech, but he disagreed. So, 'Jatpat Todak Mandal' cancelled this convention. Dr Ambedkar published his speech using his own money. Babasaheb worries about the host, as they will be answerable as to why they didn't get a better person in Lahore than Dr Ambedkar. Why does the host have to invite a speaker from Mumbai and not a local from Lahore? Dr Ambedkar openly admits here about his criticizing the Hindu Religion and Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhiji considers Dr Ambedkar as a snake of the garden. People have a question about Dr Ambedkar as to why a Dalit is invited to the so-called high-caste Hindus' convention.

"The Mandal knows best the reasons which led it to travel to Bombay to select a president, to fix upon a man so repugnant to the Hindus, and to descend so low in the scale as to select an antyaja – an Untouchable – to address an audience of the savarnas". (Ambedkar 209). Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar's great work of art, *Annihilation of Caste*, openly and bluntly talks about the atrocities and torture faced by the Dalits and the Untouchables. It criticizes the Hindu religion and demands to abolish, destroyed, and annihilate caste discrimination.

'Jatpat Todak Mandal' found a few lines of his content objectionable towards the Hindu religion. Dr Ambedkar published 1500 copies of his speech on 15th May 1936. When Dr Ambedkar sent his speech to Lahore for printing and distribution to the organizers in advance, orthodox Hindu people would find it unbearable, but Dr Ambedkar responded very confidently and explicitly that he would not change even a comma in his speech. The committee feared violence by fanatics at the venue of 'Jatpat Todak Mandal'.

This means Caste destruction society wishes for the peaceful execution of the conference. This valuable text is published in bulk even today and sells out in no time. It is in demand and has become very popular. The title *Annihilation of Caste* is very significant. As we all know, to annihilate means to destroy, wipe out, or eliminate the caste hierarchy from its roots. The reason is Varna System is a social evil. It is an attack on social justice and a healthy society.

Babasaheb suggests the steps to change this unequal society. He guided the reform of Hinduism, so he criticized Gandhi and his religion for casteism. Even if a

Dalit is very intelligent, shastras do not allow him to be a teacher or a guru. Only Brahmins can teach the other three varnas. Scheduled Castes means Dalits, Scheduled Tribes means Adivasis, and Other Backward Classes means Shudras. Education was not allowed to all, but only to Brahmins and Rajputs.

According to the Rigveda, the Chaturvarna System was based on Brahma's divine manifestation. Brahma is considered the creator of the Universe as per the Hindu belief. Indian society is divided into four varnas called Chaturvarnas from the Vedic culture, based on labour. Brahminic ideology says about the hierarchy established on caste and an individual's birth. This four-varna system has Brahmins on the top, followed by Kshatriyas, then Vaishyas, and then at last the Shudras.

Brahmins are associated with priestly and scholarly works. Kshatriyas dealt with warriors and protected other varnas. Vaishyas looked over trade and commerce. Shudras were meant for the service of the upper three varnas. Dr Ambedkar says this division was purely based upon the division of labour. For a long time, nobody dared to come together to do away with it. Finally, it became a rigid caste system. It has brought destruction to Indian society. Dr Ambedkar's Annihilation of Caste is written into twenty-six parts.

Social reform versus political reform is important. Efforts were made to eradicate the caste system, and for this Indian National Congress was born. It has many social conferences for the reformation of Indian society. Political reformers wanted freedom from the British. Social reformers wished for freedom from capitalism. These two bodies in the Indian National Congress couldn't sustain long and became hostile camps. The problem is, who would proceed with either political or social reform?

The social conference diminished because it has more critics than supporters. It stood to reform Hindu families instead of Hindu society. Social reforms focus on the elimination of caste inequality, where the high caste will not be angry for this action. High caste society was ready to abolish social evils like the widows' unfortunate condition, the dowry system, the sati system, etc., but not the caste system. Dr Ambedkar points out political-minded Hindus and their treatment of the Dalits.

Dr Ambedkar shows real-life examples to the political leaders. He mentions the inhuman treatment done to the Dalits by so-called high-caste Indians. He supports Dalits using public schools, wells, and streets. The Dalits were prohibited from wearing ornaments and eating food they liked. He questions the elite about the downtrodden and their social condition. The Times of India reported that weavers from Indore state can't wear dhotis and turbans. Women can wear neither gold nor silver. They can't use ornaments or family gowns.

Dr Ambedkar mentions here that John Stuart Mill famously said that one country is not fit for the rule of another country. Dr Ambedkar says from an Indian perspective that one caste is not fit to rule another caste. Freedom of mind or soul is necessary for political progress and the progress of the whole nation. Socialists, following Europeans, believe that wealth is important for the growth of human beings, but Dr Ambedkar believes this is a misconception. He opposes the argument that the social status of an individual becomes a source of power and authority.

Dr Ambedkar supports his argument by giving an example of M. K Gandhi or a priest who can influence common people. People bow to a magistrate for his status. Marxist ideology believes that proletariats the lowest class of people in ancient Rome, are common working people. Without revolution, proletariats can't come to power. All are to be treated equally. There should not be discrimination based on caste and creed. The mental attitude of the fellow countrymen towards the others of equality and fraternity is important.

Fraternity is the feeling of friendship and support between people in the same group, work, or interest. Dr Ambedkar's question about the discrimination of the rich and poor is not the only question, but also about all people in general. When proletariats are divided, no revolution is possible. Social reform is an important issue, problem, argument, or crux of casteism because caste can't be changed. Political and Economic reform is not possible without social reform.

Casteism is a monster and a stigma to Indian society, and must be killed. The dominant or privileged people believe, support, and defend casteism. He doesn't believe the Indian social system is a division of Labour, but the labourers. It is not spontaneous but is necessary for every civilized society. When a person has no

freedom to choose another profession, he is suffocated. The labourers are given the grade, so they have to strictly follow caste norms.

Labour division is not sudden or spontaneous as per aptitude, natural ability, or skill. Caste doesn't allow one to choose a profession. Interest is violated in the caste system. Dr Ambedkar calls it harmful, as the industry of occupation is never static. It undergoes rapid and sudden changes. The caste system doesn't allow Hindus to choose an occupation that does not belong to them according to the hierarchy. This does not permit readjustment of occupation. Caste causes unemployment.

Caste divisions are not made by choice, sentiment, interest, or preference. This depends on the dogma of predestination. Dr. Ambedkar argues that a person's efficiency and interest are important; otherwise, minds are not worked or used properly. Morally, it is unacceptable and undesirable. Casteism is a harmful institution because it subordinates man's natural power, inclination, or tendency. It is urgent to terminate the caste system. The divisions of labour, generated by casteism, are neither accepted nor desirable.

Dr Ambedkar calls Hindu society a myth. The word 'Hindu' is a foreign word given by the followers of Islam – Mahomedans, who used to stay at the bank of the Sindhu River to distinguish Muslims from Hindus. Hindu society is made up of Castes. We can see oneness in Hindu-Muslim riots. The word 'Hindu' has no origin in Sanskrit because the primitive age or the natives of India never felt the necessity to provide a common name for themselves. They have never thought of bringing people under one community, so Hindu society as a whole doesn't exist at all.

It is only in the Hindu-Muslim riots that oneness operates. Otherwise, on all occasions, all castes are segregated. Dr Ambedkar criticizes by giving examples of rats in their homes or castes. People don't keep relationships with other castes either higher or lower. He calls this a "consciousness of kind". Every Hindu is aware and conscious of his caste and believes in its hierarchy. This fails to form a society, a nation, or a mass.

This doesn't constitute the society as a whole. Various primitive tribes have habits, customs, beliefs, and thoughts, yet they can't live in proximity. This is due to

distance, time, staying near, or juxtaposition. Society consists of people as they possess things in common. It exists through communication. Same caste have common emotions. If one succeeds, others should feel success and failure. Various primitive tribes have habits, customs, beliefs, and thoughts, yet they don't live in proximity due to time or distance.

Society exists by communication. People have common emotions. If one succeeds, others should feel successful and not a failure. Dr Ambedkar concludes that this Caste hierarchy prevents common activity. This prevented the Hindu people from building a society as a whole. Dr Ambedkar opines that caste kills the public spirit. It has destroyed public charity. Hindus' varna is their responsibility. He is ever loyal to his caste as per his birth. Caste decides all about his life. Morality is caste-bound. No sympathy or appreciation is for the deserving one. Others suffering are not responded to. Charity is associated with the Caste. A fellow caste man is appreciated and rewarded. Conversion is not possible in Hinduism like Christianity and Mohamedan. One person can't change their caste. It stops expanding and absorbing other religious communities. Dr Ambedkar refers to Swami Dayanand Saraswati's purification as both foolish and pointless to reconvert.

Shudhi is reconversion. The formation of an organization is important. Dr Ambedkar believes chances of a Casteless society. He mentions categories of social reforms. One is that he promotes a secular society. Second, Religion has to oppose these principles. Shastras are sanctioned by religion. The third is reforming the career of Indians. He opines that Hinduism holds an order, where Caste has a religious base. Dr Ambedkar writes, "The Hindu religion ceased to be a missionary religion when the caste system grew up among the Hindus. Caste is inconsistent with conversion". (254, Ambedkar). Dr Ambedkar believes that if we destroy the sanctions, there might be chances of people getting out of hatred towards the Dalits. He provides solutions or ways for a casteless society by abolishing sub-castes. Inter-caste dinners should be promoted, but caste consciousness remains.

Dr Ambedkar gives a remedy for equality, freedom, and a just society in inter-caste marriages. Fusion or blending can create Caste vanishing. No other remedy is there. There is no sympathy for the better one. Dr Ambedkar mentions Lord Rama beheading Shambuka here. "As a king, Rama was bound to maintain chaturvarnya. It

was his duty, therefore, to kill Shambuka, the Shudra who had transgressed his class and wanted to be a Brahmin. (269, Ambedkar).

The death penalty was necessary and compulsory. 'Jatpat Todak Mandal' took this line as an attack on Hindus. Dr Ambedkar adds that it may take ages to eradicate castes, as being away from the Vedas and Sashtras promotes the Casteism. This denies morality and creates discrimination. He adds Shruti/hearing, and Smriti means recollection. Hindu sacred literature is human memory, is Shruti. What is heard is distinct from the Vedas, a product of divine revelation.

Dr Ambedkar writes about Mahatma, "He condemned the cry for inter-dining, inter-drinking and intermarrying, and argued that restraints about inter-dining to a great extent helped the cultivation of will-power and the conservation of a certain social virtue" (348-349, Ambedkar). He believes that caste is harmful to spiritual and national growth. He questions, "What is the nature of the varna for which the Mahatma stands? (349, Ambedkar).

Further, he explains and argues, "What is the difference between caste and varna, as understood by the Mahatma? I find none. As defined by the Mahatma, varna becomes merely a different name for caste, for the simple reason that it is the same in essence – namely, pursuit of one's ancestral calling." (349, Ambedkar). Inter-caste marriages should be popularized, encouraged, and promoted at individual social and national levels by all Castes and Communities.

The government should take the initiative for such marriages, Dr Ambedkar advises that such light-minded revolutionary people should gather and work to eradicate casteism. He is not alive physically but is among us somewhere. We should fulfil his dream. It is a significant idea to establish a just and healthy Indian Society. Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar is a great, successful visionary and a warrior for social justice.

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