

DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR'S VIEWS ON ANNIHILATION OF CASTE

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Abstract

In The Annihilation of Caste, Ambedkar, probably for the first time, raised many profound questions with respect to caste. First, he rejected the defines of caste on the basis of division of labour and argued that it was not merely a division of labour but a division of labourers. Ambedkar gave illustrations in this speech on how dalits were deprived of education and freedom of occupation and were subjected to stigmatized manual labour, all resulting in their virtual economic slavery, how they were segregated and deprived of basic rights such as drinking water even from public wells, and above all how they were made victims of Social persecutions Ambedkar (1936) argues that the worst feature of the caste system is „anti-social spirit“ in the following words, Caste does not result in economic efficiency. Caste cannot improve, and has not improved, the race. Caste has however done one thing. It has completely disorganized and demoralized the Hindus. The Hindus often complain of the isolation and exclusiveness of a gang or a clique and blame them for anti-social spirit. But they conveniently forget that this anti-social spirit is the worst feature of their own Caste System. One caste enjoys singing a hymn of hate against another caste as much as the Germans enjoyed singing their hymn of hate against the English during the last war. Unlike a club, the membership of a caste is not open to all and sundry. The law of Caste confines its membership to persons born in the caste. Castes are autonomous, and there is no authority anywhere to compel a caste to admit a new-comer to its social life. Hindu Society being a collection of castes, and each caste being a closed corporation, there is no place for a convert. Thus it is the caste which has prevented the Hindus from expanding and from absorbing other religious communities. So long as Caste remains, Hindu religion cannot be made a Missionary religion

Keywords: Annihilation, Caste.



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Introduction

It is an undelivered speech written in 1936 by B. R. Ambedkar. The speech was prepared as the presidential address for the annual conference of a Hindu reformist group Jat-Pat Todak Mandal, on the illeffects of caste in Hindu society. Ambedkar sent the manuscript of his speech titled „The Annihilation of Caste“. However, the organising committee felt that his critique of the Vedas and his desire to leave the Hindu fold, intolerable. Hence, the organization recommended Ambedkar to delete his criticism of Vedas, to which he replied that “he would not change a comma”. The speech thus remained undelivered. Ambedkar subsequently published it in May 1936. This speech was viewed as the manifesto for the social emancipation. Annihilation of Caste is the title of a speech prepared by Dr. Ambedkar for the Jat•Pat Todak Mandal, an organisation of caste•Hindu social reformers. However, they found its radical contents “unbearable,” and asked him to alter the speech to protect Hindu sentiments. To begin with, Ambedkar frequently thought of ways to eradicate the caste system. Because Ambedkar himself was a victim of „untouchability“, he wanted to get rid of caste hierarchies, completely. For his time, a thought such as this must have been revolutionary and path breaking. Moreover, he claimed that even Brahmins with good intentions could not help liberate the Dalits. Ambedkar’s experience with such people, which he outlines in his undelivered speech, “Annihilation of Caste“, led him to assert that Brahmins would not be able to go against the Vedas and would therefore advocate caste hierarchies in some way or the other. His observations and suggestions in “Annihilation of Caste” were politico legal ones. Unsurprisingly, his refusal to compromise his principles and convictions was emphatic, and the speech remained undelivered. Fortuitously, Dr. Ambedkar felt compelled to publish it himself, and today, it is undoubtedly his magnum opus, with immense scholarly value. However, it is also far more: an ideal, representing the extraordinary vision of an extraordinary man. In the liberating, revolutionary rage and incisive analysis that inform the text, we can locate Dr. Ambedkar’s breadth as an intellectual and reformer, and his vision for a casteless, egalitarian and democratic society. Against the backdrop of continuing caste atrocities, this essay is a humble attempt to discuss Dr. Ambedkar’s resonant exhortation to abolish caste. A real engagement with Dr. Ambedkar demands a thorough understanding of caste, a recognition that its poison continues to hinder national progress, and subsequently, a sincere and concerted effort to annihilate

it. Therefore, the present essay seeks not only to discuss Dr. Ambedkar's views, but also to lend them contemporary relevance, so that we may fulfil his most cherished endeavour: the annihilation of caste.

Ambedkar and Annihilation of Caste

- ❖ Ambedkar has the deepest and in my view the most correct understanding of the subject and he has presented the evils of the caste system very well.
- ❖ He has correctly diagnosed the problem that the hindu society faces because of the caste system.
- ❖ His solution to the problem i.e. Annihilation of the Caste cannot be more correct. He understands that no matter how many programmes you run for the upliftment of the backward caste, true equality will not be achieved as long as the caste system lives.
- ❖ However I tend to agree less with the manner in which he has presented the solution. Even though he has explained in detail what he means by the different terms e.g. "destruction of religion", these are so powerful words that can cause most logical men to close their eyes to reasoning. Choosing a language as strong as this he gave an easy tool to the detractors to put his entire speech in bad light and that is exactly what Mahatma Gandhidid when he reviewed the speech in his periodical, "Harijan". Because of this it was easy for the Mahatma to overlook the entire content of the speech and focus on this aspect that asked for the destruction of religion. Even though Ambedkar wrote a reply to Mahatma but till that point it had become just a play of words.

Ambedkar's ViewPoint

1. Abolish the Caste System.
2. Ambedkar believed that the caste system derived its strength from the Vedas and Shashtras and hence asked for the destruction of the shashtras. A proposition so strong and it provided the ammunition to the detractors.
3. He wanted a strict legislation in place to make sure that caste could not be misused again. In my view Gandhi's methodology was incorrect. Assuming that he did somehow achieve what he wanted to what would he have really achieved? He would have just gone back to the beginning of Varna Vyavastha where the division was based on labour and everybody respected each other. Haven't we already been there? Haven't we already seen that degenerate into the ugly caste system? What guarantee is that after Gandhi's goal was achieved it would

never degenerate to its present levels? His belief in the eternal goodness of the upper caste is flawed.

The Caste System

- In India, the caste system was constitutionally abolished in 1950. However, it still continues to this day as a corruption of the original varna system. The varna system in ancient India focussed more on talent than heredity.
- Under this system, an untested student would be sent to a gurukul to figure out his/her true „worth“ in society. Here, „worth“ was generally synonymous to the profession one would be assigned to – priest, doctor, scientist (brahmin), merchant (vaishya), warrior (kshatriya) or the „workman“ (shudra).
- Apparently, the decisions were supposed to have been taken on the basis of years of observation by the teacher“s, and also on the basis of the performances of the students over the years. While not exactly foolproof, for a small, self-contained society, this system ensured that each person was ideally „assigned“ the „societal role“ which was most „appropriate“ to his/her talents.
- Somewhere down the years, this system changed into one based on professional heredity. Thus, in many places in India, a doctor“s son is still expected to „grow up“ to be a doctor.

What are the main problems we face due to Caste System

- The caste system resulted in lot of evils because of its rigid rules. Society was divided into strict compartments and those belonging to higher castes exploited the lower caste people. A person born in one caste was doomed to remain in it forever. The Shards and untouchables had to perform all the menial tasks. They could not do anything to make things better for themselves. Worse, they could not even think of anything better for their own children who remained slaves or bonded labourers.
- This rigidity affected all the sections of society. A Brahmin with the qualities of a warrior could not take up the profession of a Kshatriya and vice versa. As for a Shudra, even if one was intelligent and aspired to study there was no scope for him or her at all. They could not even touch a holy book or enter a temple.
- Thus, there was no freedom of choice for anyone. Initiative and enterprise was suppressed and the progress of the country was severely hampered. People could

not marry out of their caste or even eat with people belonging to lower castes as social mixing was severely restricted.

→ People remained confined to their own castes and were not exposed to different ideas and ways of thought. Thus, their thinking also became narrow and limited. This also led to separatism. People only thought of the welfare of their own castes and not that of the society as a whole.

→ These caste prejudices still plague our society and even become influential factors at the time of elections. Politicians encourage and exploit these attitudes for their own gains. Discrimination against lower castes is widely prevalent and has kept a large percentage of our population backward. In this way, the development of our country has been hampered.

The Caste System Of Today And Possible Solutions To It

“Three Dalit youths were allegedly paraded naked by a panchayat for stealing a grass cutting machine at Sonta village, Muzaffarnagar“. “Two days before the last phase of Assembly elections in Bihar, three Dalits were killed and two others injured.” “32 booked for killing, counter case against 27 Dalits.” These are some newspaper reports which show that people from lower castes are still oppressed or even killed.

Today, the caste system still persists to an extent that inter-marriages between castes are still frowned upon. However, if we are to get rid of this evil, we would do well to remember that the Indian Constitution has illegalised the practice of „untouchability“ or discrimination against lower classes along socio-economic lines. Moreover, we should not pay undue importance to assertions or implications of comparative or hierarchial professional lineage (like „I am the son of a doctor“).

Perceptions and tenets of caste system influence our daily activities, even today. For example, we often prefer the right hand over the left hand (which is considered to be „lowly“) to perform various activities. Similarly, many of us consider foot-wears to be „unclean“. Therefore, we should „cleanse“ ourselves after we remove our footwear.

Ambedkar had suggested some methods to eradicate the caste system in India. He basically made three recommendations to eliminate the caste system:

- ♣ Brahmins must denounce the Shastras
- ♣ Intero-dining between castes
- ♣ Inter-caste marriage

The eradication of caste system in India is not as easy as it sounds. The caste system has become an inherent part of the lives and mentalities of many Indians. The Indian government has started schemes like Start-up India and Stand-Up India. The representation of people from schedule castes and scheduled tribes should be ensured in such schemes. Reforms like inter-caste marriages and community dining should be encouraged. Political processes must be free of corruption and nepotism. Infrastructure in deprived areas must be improved. Fast-track courts also have to be established to de-link cases of caste-based violence from the other cases of civil violence.

Difference between Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi's views

Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar, both had the best interest of the backward castes in mind, however, their means and final objective were somewhat contrasting. To call Dr. Ambedkar an extremist in comparison to Mahatma Gandhi, with reference to their approach to the issue of caste discrimination, would only be an over simplification of the distinction between their respective methodologies. While the Mahatma focused on upliftment of lower castes and abolishing untouchability, Dr. Ambedkar preached total obliteration of the caste system. Gandhiji sought to preserve the Varna vyavastha which he submitted was distinct from the caste system. However, this distinction was very faint and not easy to grasp. Contrary to this view was that of Dr. Ambedkar 's who was convinced that the potency of the caste system was attributed to the Vedas and Shashtras and therefore the the Vedas and Shastras must be destroyed since the caste system is impregnable and cannot be broken off from the Shastras. Gandhiji aimed at changing the mental attitude of the higher castes, thereby changing the way they treated the backward castes. Dr. Ambedkar was more focused on a strict legislation to ensure prohibition of inequality based on caste.

Conclusion

Thus, Ambedkar was critical of Gandhi, attacked caste system, converted to Buddhism, and became a true representative of the oppressed castes. Ambedkar's analysis of caste has been inspiring to many dalits and Non-dalit intellectuals. He developed a critique of Indian society based on the Enlightenment ideals of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. He was intellectual, liberal and more modern than many of the Indian thinkers and leaders. Ambedkar's passion for the eradication of caste system is still relevant as the „caste system“ is still a serious social problem in India. Ambedkar is India's one of the greatest original

thinkers and leaders for the Social Change. He is a scholar, outstanding social reformer and a Messiah for the downtrodden people. His emancipator ideals are still relevant to every dream of a just, modern, liberal, secular, humane, democratic Indian society and they are inspiring to the present day youth for the socio-political change in the country. His ideals and arguments are significant to achieve a casteless Indian society and a society which is based on Liberty, and Equality.

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