

## ANNIHILATION OF CASTE: AN UNDELIVERED SPEECH

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### ABSTRACT

*The research paper focuses on the critical edition of "Annihilation of Caste," a seminal work by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a prominent social reformer and political leader in India. The annotated edition provides a comprehensive analysis of the text, highlighting the historical context, key themes, and arguments presented by Ambedkar. The paper explores the significance of the work in the context of India's caste system, which has been a pervasive social issue for centuries. The study also examines the impact of the book on contemporary Indian society and its relevance to ongoing debates on social justice, equality, and human rights. Through a critical evaluation of the text, the paper sheds light on the enduring legacy of Ambedkar's ideas and their continued relevance in addressing social inequalities in India and beyond. Overall, the annotated critical edition of "Annihilation of Caste" provides a valuable resource for scholars, activists, and policymakers seeking to engage with the complex issues surrounding caste social justice and democracy in India.*

**Keywords:** Annihilation, Caste, Chaturvarnas, Hindu, Dalits.

### AMBEDKAR'S SPEECH ON THE ANNIHILATION OF CASTE

According to Rigveda, the caste system was based on Brahma's (the creator of the universe) divine manifestation which depicts that society has been divided into Chaturvarnas i.e. four varnas namely Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra, where, the above three is treated as superior to the latter. Ambedkar here says that this division of earlier was purely based upon the division of labor and for a long nobody dared to come together to do away with it and that's how it got culminated into the rigid caste system. From this text, Ambedkar is now showing us how the caste system had brought destruction to Indian society.

In the speech, Ambedkar said that he could be criticized to be appointed as the president of the conference because according to the Shastri injunction, a Brahman should be the guru for three

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varnas. The Shastras do not permit a Hindu to accept anyone as his Guru just because he is knowledgeable.

### **SOCIAL REFORM V. POLITICAL REFORM**

At first, the major debate Ambedkar highlights is social reform versus political reform. He said that without social efficiency there can be no progress in society. It was seen that Hindu society was not in its state of efficiency because of the mischief caused by evil customs and ceaseless efforts were made to eradicate these evils to work and have some progress. In this way, the Social Conference was created with the birth of the National Congress. The national congress was made for the political reorganization of India while the social conference was made for the social reformation of society. For some time, these worked as the two wings of one common activity but soon divided into two different parties i.e. political reform party and the social reform party along with the creation of hostility between them on the issue that whether social reform should precede political reform. The consequences led to diminishing social conferences for the reasons that they had more critics than supporters for the socialists and it stood to reform Hindu families instead of Hindu society. Here, by reform of Hindu families mean widow remarriage, abolition of child marriage etc. while social reform means the abolition of the caste system. The person who organized the social conference was saddened by the fact that the person who attended it was very less while the number of educated Hindus who attended the Congress and those who even just sympathized with it, was very large in number. They bemoaned the fact that most of these educated Hindus supported political reform but were unconcerned with social change. Therefore, this is the reason why the social conference was lost.

### **QUESTIONED THE POLITICALLY MINDED HINDUS**

Ambedkar also draws attention to the politically minded Hindus and the manner they treated Dalits. He gave some examples like under the rule of Peshwa in the Maratha region, Untouchables were not allowed to walk on public streets if a Hindu is walking as they can pollute him with their shadow, and they were required to wear black thread so Hindus cannot be polluted by their mistakenly touch, they even required to tie broom in their waist to clean the road after their walk as well as an earthen pot to be hung by them to not spit on the road which can pollute the Hindus. He also mentioned the recent case that happened on April 1, 1936, where an untouchable returned from a pilgrimage, and he granted religious peace to his

fellow untouchables. The items served also included Ghee. The Hindus arrived in their hundreds with lathis in their hand, spoiled the food, and beat those untouchables. They fled to protect their life. Ghee is an item for the wealthy. However, no one would think of ghee consumption to be a sign of high status in society.

Thus, Ambedkar questions the powerful politically-minded Hindus, "Are you fit for political power, where a large number of the untouchables are unable to use public school? Public wells? Or use of public streets? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them to wear what ornaments they like or eat food they like?"<sup>1</sup> Ambedkar has many such questions but he thinks that these will be sufficient to make his argument. Then, he continues his argument and says the congressman followed the dogma of John Stuart Mill who famously quoted that "one country is not fit to rule another country". So by concluding his argument of social reform versus political reform, he says that Congress should also even admit that, "one class is not too fit to rule another class".

He says how can India by being a socialist state unable to fight the problems created by the prejudices that create the distinction of high and low. "Caste is the monster that crosses your path." You cannot have political reform, and you cannot have economic reform unless you kill this monster.<sup>2</sup> Thus, social reform is necessary for every other kind of reform in the country,

**Caste is not just a division of labor, it is a division of laborers:** He says Caste is still defended, in the name of the division of labor which is categorized as an essential feature of civilized society, therefore, nothing wrong with the caste system. Ambedkar criticized it on the basis that it is not merely a division of labor but also a division of labourers where laborers are graded one above another. Also, this division of labor is not based on choice but on the dogma of predestination.

**Caste cannot preserve a nonexistent racial purity:** The purpose of Caste was to maintain the purity of blood and race which in contemporary India exists nowhere. There is an admixture of alien blood not only among the warrior classes—the Rajputs and the Marathas—but also among the Brahmins who are under the happy delusion that they are free from all foreign elements."<sup>3</sup> Thus, Caste demarcates the social division of the same race.

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<sup>1</sup> *Annihilation of Caste*, p 170.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid* 178.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid* 180.

Caste is a negative thing that prohibits persons belonging to different castes from intermarrying. He proves that caste has no scientific origin. He criticized Hindu society which says caste has a eugenic origin which was denied by Ambedkar claiming Hindus possess a knowledge of heredity that even modern scientists do not possess. Caste, being not eugenic in origin meant that intermarriage and interdining between them is possible.

### **HINDU SOCIETY AS A MYTH**

He criticized Hindu society and called it a myth that doesn't exist as such. It is a collection of castes that on occasion, endeavours to distinguish itself from other castes. He argues that the caste system prevents common activity and therefore prevented Hindus from becoming a society. He cited examples of Sonars and Pathare Prabhu communities of Maharashtra who tried to imitate the customs, cultures, and traditions of Brahmins to raise their status in society. But Brahmins didn't like it and under the authority of Peshwas, they were successful in putting down their attempts. Ambedkar said the Hindu religion was a missionary but ceased as soon as the Caste system grew among them. Because the Law of Caste confines its membership to persons born in its Caste. Caste has the right to excommunicate if any of the members break its rules, he would make to be punished. He compares the caste system of non-Hindus with the Hindu Caste system where the latter's religion compels to segregate the caste while the prior do not.

Ambedkar also mentions his thoughts on an ideal society. According to him, the ideal society should be based on Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. He further goes on to mention that Arya Samajist made their ideal social organization based on Chaturvarna, based not on birth but on guna (worth). Ambedkar disagrees with it and criticizes this idea that if the division is done based on birth then why do they insist upon labeling men as Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. Even if they were not labeled they'll still be respected according to their work, or knowledge. This label highly impacted the minds of every Hindu on the notion that Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra as the hierarchal division of high and low, based on birth. He argues that the former chaturvarna was based on worth but how are you going to force those who have a superior status because of their birth, without consideration for their worth, to renounce it? For this, the caste system should be broken.

Ambedkar makes a valid point that there have been social revolutions in other countries of the world but why not in India? The reason he provides is that the weaker were given means to

revolt in Europe while in India they were even deprived of that also. Ambedkar also provided some solutions for it by abolishing the sub-castes, starting inter-caste dining, and encouraging inter-marriages between different castes. At last, he ended his note with the following words..... "In my opinion, it is only when Hindu society becomes a casteless society that it can hope to have strength enough to defend itself. Without such internal strength, Swaraj for Hindus may turn out to be only a step towards slavery. Goodbye, and good wishes for your success."<sup>4</sup>

### **AUTHOR'S OPINION**

The English Caste, which denotes race, breed, or ancestry, is originally derived from the Spanish and Portuguese word "casta." During their time of colonization in the New World, the Spanish used the term to refer to a "clan or lineage." But when the Portuguese arrived in India in 1498 and used it to describe hereditary Indian social groups known as "jati," they were the ones who first used casta in its modern sense. The word "Jati" derives from the root "Jana," which denotes taking birth. Caste is therefore related to birth.

Hence the modern word caste was not originally an Indian concept, earlier, it was the concept of jati and varna in India. Jati was used to refer to the person having the genus of their parents considering him to be of the same jati. While the people were categorized of the same varna when they chose to pursue the same occupation because of possessing the ability required in that occupation. But it can be said that caste is a deteriorated form of varna which means when people started to engage themselves in the same activity as their father, for a continuous period, then, the child born in other families were already associated with their father's occupation and this started to be referred as of same caste. Thus, the children of priests, warriors, and traders were on profit while serious discrimination continued to be faced by the 'serving class' to date.

The speech, undelivered by Ambedkar, to a great extent is true in the sense that it cited the reality of the discrimination the lower caste has gone through because of the higher castes. The speech also highlighted the core point that "India has gone through a political revolution and an economic revolution, but, why didn't it go through a social revolution?" There have been social revolutions in other countries but not in India. Why?? Because the majority of those who control the lower caste in India take pleasure in oppressing them.

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<sup>4</sup> ibid 224.

I agree with Dr. Ambedkar when he says that caste has prevented Hindus from becoming a society. Society is a group of people that interact and share a common culture, values, activities, etc. As stated in the speech, festivals observed by the different castes among the Hindus are the same, yet this similarity has not bound them into one integral whole. The whole Hindu group has been divided into different subgroups trying to differentiate themselves from each other. To have similar things is totally different from possessing things in common. The real thing that unites men and creates a society out of them is making each person a sharer or participant in the common action so that he experiences it as his success and its failure as his failure. But unfortunately, Hindus lack it.

The Hindu religion also known as ‘Sanatan dharma’ never talked about the caste system, the caste system is only a distorted version of the “Varnashrama dharma”. According to Varnashrama dharma, four types of humans are found in every society and they have been categorized accordingly as Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. All had equal importance in a society with no discrimination among them. The fact that Ambedkar targeted politically-minded Hindus and questioned the existence of the Hindu society is reasoned clearly. The violence, discrimination, and inhumane behavior faced by the lower caste can not be defined in words. It can never be imagined or empathized with by people who have not gone through it. They should first put themselves in their shoes before being violent against the lower caste.

I tend to agree less, though, with the way he presented the solution.

Ambedkar went extensive for the solution, he called for the ‘destruction of religious scriptures’, these are very strong words that have the potential to agitate the Hindu religion without them thinking rationally. He demanded the demolition of the shastras because he believed that the caste system derived its strength from the Vedas and Shastras: A perspective that was so compelling that it gave the critics novel material to attack. He provided opponents with a simple method to invalidate the rest of his speech by using such inflammatory words.

So what can be done to reduce this discrimination?

I think that the person holding a ‘high position’ in society can help in reducing the caste difference. Like eating with them in the same dining, making them sit beside themselves, and treating them like the other public without making them feel that they belong to the lower caste. This can bring a kind of change in the mindset of people.

## CONCLUSION

In the speech, Ambedkar very strongly put forth his opinion on the Caste system and criticized the Hindu religion. Ambedkar thus criticized Gandhi, denounced the caste system, embraced Buddhism, and emerged as a true voice for the oppressed castes. Many Dalits and non-Dalit thinkers have found inspiration in Ambedkar's perspective on caste. Based on the principles of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity from the Age of Enlightenment, he created a critique of Indian society. Compared to many other Indian leaders and philosophers, he was more liberal, intelligent, and modern.

Since the "caste system" is still a significant societal issue in India, Ambedkar's commitment to its abolition is still relevant today. Ambedkar is one of India's biggest innovators and pioneers of social change. He is a brilliant scholar, a great social reformer, and a messiah for the oppressed. His emancipator ideas are still relevant to every desire for a just, contemporary, liberal, secular, compassionate, and democratic Indian society, and they serve as an inspiration to today's young for the sociopolitical transformation of the nation. His beliefs and ideas are important for achieving a caste-free Indian society and a society built on equality and liberty.

