



B.R. Ambedkar's Annihilation Of Caste: A Comprehensive Analysis

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Abstract: The review article deals with the concept of “Annihilation of caste” propounded by one of the prominent legal luminaries of India Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Being born in a low caste family and belonging from the Mahar community of Maharashtra, Ambedkar’s life was replete with various atrocities and encumbrances. He is acclaimed for his manifold contributions in various domains such as framing the constitution, economic thoughts, crusade for the Dalits and mostly his seminal discourse with Mahatma Gandhi. The article has mainly delved into 5 major facets of his thought. First facet is concerned with the backdrop that was concomitant to his denigration towards the caste system, the various atrocities that he had to go through. Second, his vehement critique of the caste system, third his contemplations towards eugenics with regard to caste system, the fourth facet is concerned with his thoughts towards Hinduism in perpetuating the existence of caste system and lastly the panacea envisaged by him in annihilating the caste system.

Keywords- annihilation, caste, Mahar, atrocities, critique, Hinduism, legacy, vestige, panacea

I. Introduction

B.R. Ambedkar’s “Annihilation of caste” was an undelivered speech that he had written in 1936 to deliver in the annual conference of Jat-Pat-Todak-Mandal, a Hindu reformist group. Due to its incendiary nature and polemic content, the organizing committee recommended Ambedkar to dilute some points to which he responded that “he would not change a comma”. Ambedkar later published this speech in May 1936. He has castigated the Vedas and Hindu religious scripture in his speech. Ambedkar’s writings offer a profound critique of the caste system and its deep rooted socioeconomic and psychological impacts (Gangwar, 2024). His seminal work “Annihilation of Caste” is cardinal for understanding his critique of caste system. Writer of Republic of Caste, Anand Teltumbde has commented on Annihilation of caste by saying that “What the Communist Manifesto is to the capitalist world, Annihilation of caste is to India”. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, commonly known as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar who was a distinguished Indian jurist, economist, politician, and social reformer was a crusader for eradicating caste discrimination and promoting social justice.

II. Ambedkar’s ordeal as a Dalit

Since his early age, Ambedkar had a bitter taste of discriminatory treatment due to his caste (McLaughlan, 2022). He and his brother had to carry gunny bags while sitting in the classroom because they were not permitted to sit on classroom chairs. They were denied drinking water facilities, and excluded from games and intermixing with other children. Even teachers were reluctant to check their notebook due to fear of getting

polluted. Despite of his foreign education, he had to face insults while at work due to his low caste genesis. He even suffered the ignominy of having document files thrown by peons at his face. Another major experience in his life was the humiliating experience of not being served with drinking water during official functions. At the officer's club, he had to sit in a corner maintaining his distance from the other members belonging to higher castes. He also had difficulties in searching a rented house, as he was not allotted government bungalow. He stayed in an inn owned by Parsis (members of Zoroastrian religion). One morning, as he was getting ready to go to work, dozen Parsis, all wielding sticks, rushed up to his room screaming that he had polluted the inn and insisted on his immediate departure. He begged them to let him stay for a week longer since he hoped to get his government bungalow by then. Ambedkar in frustration left for Bombay by the 9 pm train after staying in garden during the day.

III. B.R. Ambedkar's Critique of caste

The basic contention of Ambedkar in the Annihilation of Caste is that caste system is a pernicious institution of the Indian society which rather than offering any benefit has become the cause of irreparable loss and suffering especially to the untouchables and, therefore, needs to be annihilated (Chakraborty & Pandey, 2009). He begins by exposing the immanent nature of the caste system which has been found to be grounded in flawed notions of division of labour along with the gradation of labourers. He controverts that the caste system is not merely division of labor but division of laborers into watertight compartments (Gangwar, 2024). Based on the overtly ridiculous notions like biological purity, caste remains an irrelevant factor in so far as the economic efficiency is concerned. Rather than being a unifying force, the system of caste has been divisive and excluded the aboriginal tribes from within its fold and also created schism amongst various sub-caste groups as well. Thus, For Ambedkar, the caste system is like a stain on the Hindu religion and instead of acting as the fulcrum to hold it in the highest of spirit and impeccable ethics, it negates the idea of an ideal society based on the triad virtues of liberty, equality and fraternity. Ambedkar delves into the very root cause of the problem by revealing the hidden pernicious motivations behind the idea of Chaturvarnya, as the foundation of the caste system. Even from the practical point of view, Chaturvarnya seems to be flawed by a number of difficulties like explaining and establishing the basic difference between caste and the principle underlying varna; ignoring the uniqueness and ingenuity of each individual by including everyone under the division of four classes; negating of the idea of a penal system to deal with all the people equally; and finally ignoring the position of the women in such a system. Ambedkar, therefore, asserts that even if Chaturvarnya would become a practicable system, it is bound to be the most cruel one (Chakraborty & Pandey, 2009).

IV. Eugenics

Ambedkar repudiates the contention that the caste system is rooted in eugenics or hereditary principles. He also denounces the pretention that caste promotes judicious mating or racial improvement, pointing out that the caste system is merely a negative mechanism that interdicts intermarriage between castes without any positive selection process for suitable matches within a caste. If caste were truly eugenic in temperament, sub-castes would also have to be eugenic, which is illogical since sub-castes are subdivisions of the same race and cannot represent distinct racial differences. The stricture on inter-dining is also ascribed as unscientific, as it has no bearing on hereditary improvement or deterioration. Reiterating to such factors, Ambedkar asserts that the caste system lacks a scientific basis and regards its attempt to justify it through eugenics as flawed, as even modern science does not fully understand the laws of heredity. This shows that the caste system does not embody the eugenics of modern scientists. It is a social system which embodies the arrogance and selfishness of a perverse section of the Hindus who were superior enough in social status to set it in fashion, and who had the authority to force it on their inferiors (Ambedkar, 1936).

V. Hinduism in Ambedkar's call for annihilation of caste

The higher castes of Hindus have not only done nothing to help the humanitarian cause of civilizing the savages, but they have also purposefully kept the lower castes, who are still considered to be part of Hinduism, from advancing to the higher castes' cultural level. He makes reference to Hinduism by saying: 'The civilisation itself has not been a short-lived one. Its historic records date back to over four thousand years and even then, it had reached a stage of civilisation which has continued its unbroken, though at times slow and static, course until the present day. It has stood the stress and strain of more than four or five millenniums of spiritual thought and experience. Though peoples of different races and cultures have been pouring into India from the dawn of history, Hinduism has been able to maintain its supremacy and even the proselytising creeds backed by political power have not been able to coerce the large majority of Hindus to their views. The Hindu culture

possesses some vitality which seems to be denied to some other more forceful currents. It is no more necessary to dissect Hinduism than to open a tree to see whether the sap still runs (Roy, 2017). A priest may be mentally stupid, physically afflicted with a savage illness like gonorrhoea or syphilis, and morally bankrupt. However, he is qualified to perform solemn rituals, worship the Hindu god, and enter sanctum sanctorum of Hindu temple. Because it is sufficient for a priest to be born into a priestly caste, all of this is made possible among Hindus. The entire situation is abhorrent, and it stems from the fact that Hindu priests are exempt from both morality and the law. It acknowledges no obligations. It is only aware of prerogatives and rights. The priestly class must be brought under control by some such legislation (Ambedkar, 1936). This will prevent from doing mischief and from misguiding people. It will democratise it by throwing it open to everyone. It will certainly help to kill Brahminism and will also help to kill caste, which is nothing but Brahminism incarnate. Brahminism is the poison which has spoiled Hinduism. He also argues that the fundamental difference between Aryan Hinduism and Dravidian Hinduism is crucial, the former is hegemonic, but the latter is emancipatory (Roy, 2017).

VII. Panacea envisaged by Ambedkar for annihilating caste:

The crucial question of supreme importance of abolishing caste is addressed by B.R. Ambedkar. He talks about a view that exists in the reform of caste, which is abolishing sub-castes. This view is predicated by the supposition that there is a greater similarity in manners and status between sub-castes than there is between castes which is an erroneous supposition according to Ambedkar. Another plan of action for the abolition of caste according to Ambedkar is the intercaste dinners. There are many castes which allow inter-dining. But it is a common experience that inter-dining has not succeeded in killing the spirit of caste and the consciousness of caste. He is highly convinced of the remedy of abolition of caste system as intermarriage (Gangwar, 2024). 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 anti-social feeling, the feeling of being aliens created by caste will not erode. Among the Hindus, intermarriage 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 cohesive due to social ties, marriage is an ordinary incident of life. But where society is cut apart and divided, marriage as a binding force becomes a necessity according to the exigencies. The real remedy for breaking caste is intermarriage (Ambedkar, 1936). Nothing else can be panacea for the rigid caste system.

VIII. Conclusion

B.R. Ambedkar's life was profoundly shaped by the caste discrimination he experienced, which led him to critique the caste system in *Annihilation of Caste* and offer an alternative vision of society rooted in equality, justice, and human dignity. Ambedkar's early life was replete with intense discrimination and social ostracism due to his identity as a Dalit. From being denied basic rights like access to drinking water to being subjected to physical and emotional humiliation, his experiences of caste-based discrimination were constant and deeply formative. Ambedkar continued to face humiliation in professional and social spaces that augmented his disdain for the caste system. His bitter experiences led him to lead a life-long crusade against caste discrimination. His seminal work, *Annihilation of Caste*, has provided a scathing critique of the caste system. According to him, the caste system is a pernicious institution that has not led to any benefit but caused several irreparable loss to the lower castes. Ambedkar further says that it is the caste system that kills the ingenuity of each and every individual by including it into four classes. He attributes *chaturvarnya* as the foundation of the caste system. His vantage of caste system through eugenics and repudiating it as unscientific is an imperative facet without which the discussion of *Annihilation of Caste* remains incomplete. He was also the one to talk about legislation for the priests. Hinduism has perpetuated the existence of caste system. The higher castes have not allowed the people from lower castes to rise at upper castes cultural level. Brahminism is what that has diluted Hinduism. The Hindu priests despite of their mental state or being afflicted with various ailments are eligible to enter the sanctum sanctorum of temple. They acknowledge only prerogatives and rights and are not subject to any morality or law therefore they should be fettered with certain legislation. There are also several methods that was uniquely prescribed by B.R. Ambedkar. He cites about the method of abolishing castes by abolishing subcastes which is a bogus supposition as per his thought. The major panacea for caste system is the intercaste dining and inter marriage which will spread kith and kin among various castes His critique of Hinduism as a major enabler of caste oppression and his methods for the annihilation of caste, including legal reforms and social changes like intermarriage, continue to resonate today. While Ambedkar's legacy has influenced legal and social reform, the persistence of caste-based discrimination in contemporary India underscores the enduring relevance of his work and the unfinished task of achieving true social equality.

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