

## CONTEMPORANEITY OF AMBEDKAR'S ANNIHILATION OF CASTE: A READING IN-BETWEEN AND BEYOND.

*Dr. Satya Prakash Prasad\**

### Abstract

*Present article endeavours to re-contextualise and assess the relevance of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's views on Caste System and his emphasis on the need of the holistic social reforms gaining prominence to any political or economic reforms. Efforts have been made in the article to link Ambedkar's thoughts on annihilation of caste with the lofty aspirations of the nation to reclaim its lost glory, the epithet of being the Vishwa-Guru. There is a pressing need to decouple the thoughts of Ambedkar from being read from a narrow perspective and have a limited meaning to this seminal text. The text is viewed from a deconstructive analysis and a close reading is being attempted to accentuate its contemporary relevance.*

**Key Words:** Caste, Varna-System, Ambedkar, deconstruction, close reading, Scientific temperament.

### Introduction

Caste is a deeply entrenched and contested aspect of contemporary Bharat culture. It is a hierarchical system of social stratification based on birth that distributes people to separate social groups known as "castes." Individuals are supposed to comply with the vocational and social expectations of their caste. There are several theories which are in vogue on the origin of Caste system in Bharat. Some academics think that the caste system in Bharat emerged as a way to organise and stratify Bharat society after the arrival of the Aryans in the

---

\* Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Sciences & Humanities, Faculty of Engineering & Technology, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi-110025, [sprasad@jmi.ac.in](mailto:sprasad@jmi.ac.in), 8512868414

second millennium BCE. Others assert that it evolved as a mechanism for the Hindu society to organise labour and govern social ties. Still, there is a considerable support for the Rig Veda's religious and biological theories on the origin of the Caste System. Despite its contentious roots, the caste system in Bharat is an ancient and fossilized form of social stratification that continues to influence aspects of Bharat culture even today. The caste system continues to be an essential and contested component of contemporary Bharat society. Numerous legal and social reform attempts have been launched to remove discrimination and advance equality for all members of society. Naturally, the individuals who assert that the caste system is an essential part of Hindu tradition and legacy have opposed these endeavours. The caste system has received widespread criticism for its role in creating discrimination and social inequality. It has been linked to several social and economic disadvantages, including lower levels of schooling and economic possibilities, as well as higher rates of poverty and illness. In addition, caste has been used to legitimise violence and discrimination against those deemed lower on the caste hierarchy. Despite these concerns, the caste system continues to have a significant impact on Bharat society today. It continues to affect social connections, marriage, career options, and access to education and other resources. It is a complex, multi-layered social system that has shaped Bharat's history and culture for millennia and continues to influence the lives of millions of people. In Bharat and around the world, the notion of the caste system has been a source of dispute and controversy for millennia.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was a distinguished Bharat lawyer, economist, politician, and social reformer who is best known for his advocacy for the rights and empowerment of the Dalit (previously "untouchable") group in Bharat. 'The chief Architect of Bharat Constitution' and also 'Master Craftsman of Modern Bharat' are the popular epithets that revere Ambedkar's contribution to Bharat. Throughout his career, one of Ambedkar's primary concerns was the caste system in Bharat, which is a social hierarchy based on employment, birth, and social standing. Ambedkar was born in a Dalit household and witnessed prejudice and persecution personally. He became an outspoken critic of the caste system, believing that it was a fundamentally flawed and repressive

institution that denied individuals the right to equality and dignity. In his writings and speeches, Ambedkar claimed that the caste system was not only a form of social injustice but also a significant impediment to Bharat's growth and advancement. He noted that the caste system contributed to widespread poverty and illiteracy as well as the persistence of discriminatory practises like untouchability. Ambedkar also maintained that the caste system in Bharat was a fundamental disability to the development of a more equal and democratic society. He stated that the caste system was founded on the notion that certain people are innately inferior to others, and that this notion has led to widespread discrimination and abuse of vulnerable populations. Ambedkar advocated the eradication of caste and the promotion of equal rights and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of caste or social standing, in order to solve these concerns. In addition, he sought to mobilise and empower the Dalit community to fight for their rights and to demand more representation and equality.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), Originally, a presidential speech prepared by him to be delivered in an annual conference Organised by *Jat Pat Todak Mandal* in Lahore in 1936. However, the conference couldn't be held owing to the potential unrest and indignation might have caused by Ambedkar's intended speech. However, the unrelenting Ambedkar went on to publish his speech which stirred a great deal of debate in socio-political firmament of the pre-independence Bharat. The book is a powerful critique of the caste system in Bharat and the hypocrisy of those who claim to uphold it. Through a deconstructive analysis, we can see how Ambedkar uncovers the underlying assumptions and power dynamics that sustain the caste system, and exposes the ways in which it is used to oppress and discriminate against marginalized communities.

Ambedkar puts his weight around the priority of effecting social reforms before initiating political reform in any modern society. He graphically describes the incidents of past as well as of present days in which caste-based atrocities against the untouchables were inflicted by the caste Hindus. He does it by furnishing material and hard-hitting facts. He then directs a volley of soul-searching questions to the caste Hindus, "Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow a large class of your own countrymen like the

untouchables to use public schools? Are you fit for political power even though class of your own countrymen like the untouchables to use public schools? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them the use of public wells? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them the use of public streets? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them to wear what apparel or ornaments they like? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them to eat any food they like? (1936) These questions are still relevant and the response if any, needs to be searched for. The caste identity is so clamped against individual's existence that the religious unification of the castes is seemingly impossible even after more than 75 years of Bharat's political freedom. The frequency of caste-based atrocities has rather increased than being curbed in. NCRB data released in 2021 bears the testimony of the fact. It is pertinent to note that annihilation of caste is not only essential for the welfare the Dalits but also for the caste Hindus as the chasm that has over the time, created is posing a serious threat to national integrity and harmony. Relying on the historical events veering around the establishment of political power, Ambedkar firmly believes, "political revolutions have always been preceded by social and religious revolutions". He says that Puritanism led to the creation of political liberty in England. The new world was created by Puritans. The American War of Independence was won by the religious movement Puritanism, and Puritanism was a religious movement. Equally applicable to the Muslim Empire. Before the Arabs became a political force, they underwent a complete theological revolution initiated by Mohammed. The same conclusion is supported by Bharat History as well. The religious and social revolutions of Buddha preceded Chandragupta's political revolution. The religious and social reforms brought forth by the saints of Maharashtra predated the political revolution led by Shivaji. Guru Nanak spearheaded the religious and social revolution prior to the Sikhs' political revolution. Adding further illustrations is unnecessary. These arguments are sufficient to demonstrate that the liberation of the mind and soul is a prerequisite for the political growth of the people.

Dr. Ambedkar casts aspersions on the Socialists and Marxists economic theory for forging an egalitarian society and charges them that they are unmindful of

social dynamics and their idealism will fetch no result. Ambedkar argued that the caste system was not just a social construct, but also had economic roots, as it was used to justify the exploitation of lower castes for the benefit of the upper castes. He believed that the only way to truly dismantle this system was through a socialist revolution that would redistribute wealth and power from the upper castes to the lower castes, and eliminate the exploitation and oppression of the lower castes.

Ambedkar believed that the socialist annihilation of caste would require the abolition of private property and the creation of a classless society, where all people were equal and had equal access to resources and opportunities. He also believed that this process would require the implementation of progressive policies such as affirmative action and reservations for lower castes in education and employment, as well as the protection of the rights of lower castes through strong laws and policies.

One of the key themes in Ambedkar's analysis is the idea that the caste system is not based on any inherent qualities or abilities, but rather on the social and economic power of those who benefit from it. He argues that the caste system is essentially a system of class exploitation, with the upper castes using their social and economic dominance to oppress and exploit the lower castes. This is evident in the way that the caste system is used to justify and reinforce discrimination and segregation, with those in the lower castes being denied access to education, employment, and other opportunities.

In addition to exposing the hypocrisy of those who claim to uphold the caste system, Ambedkar also deconstructs the myth of the "essential" nature of caste. He shows that the idea of inherent differences between castes is a product of social and cultural conditioning, and that these differences are not based on any inherent biological or genetic differences. This undermines the idea that the caste system is a natural or divinely ordained system, and instead reveals it as a social construct that is used to justify discrimination and oppression.

Finally, Ambedkar's Annihilation of Caste also highlights the ways in which the caste system is used to maintain social and political power, with those in

the upper castes using their social and economic dominance to maintain their control over society. This is evident in the way that the caste system is used to justify and reinforce discriminatory laws and policies, and in the ways in which the upper castes use their power and influence to maintain their dominance over the lower castes.

Overall, Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* is a powerful critique of the caste system in Bharat, exposing the hypocrisy and power dynamics that sustain it, and highlighting the ways in which it is used to oppress and discriminate against marginalized communities. Through a deconstructive analysis, we can see how Ambedkar uncovers the underlying assumptions and power dynamics that sustain the caste system, and exposes the ways in which it is used to perpetuate

Ambedkar argued that the caste system was a social evil and needed to be condemned outright. He believed that it was essential to speak out against the system in order to challenge its dominance and create a sense of outrage among people. He believed that the lower castes needed to unite and work together in order to challenge the dominance of the upper castes. He argued that the lower castes needed to stand together and fight for their rights and dignity. He was of the opinion that education was an important tool in the fight against the caste system. He argued that people needed to be educated about the evils of the caste system and the ways in which it was used to oppress and discriminate against people. Ambedkar argued that the caste system could only be dismantled if people were given equal opportunities and treated equally, regardless of their caste. He believed that this would help to create a level playing field and ensure that everyone had an equal chance to succeed. One way to challenge the caste system was to encourage inter-caste marriages. He argued that these marriages would help to blur the lines between the different castes and create a more cohesive society

It is an admitted fact that Dr. Ambedkar's vision has been looked down from a narrow perspective of Dalit ideology and misrepresentations are often done to suit the divisive politics. Even, Mahatma Gandhi while advocating for Ambedkar's right to express his opinion, did not mince his words to indict him,

“In my opinion the profound mistake that Dr. Ambedkar has made in his address is to pick out the texts of doubtful authenticity and value and the state of degraded Hindus who are no fit specimens of the faith they, so woefully misrepresent. Judged by the standard applied by Dr. Ambedkar, every known living faith will probably fail.... In his able address, the learned Doctor has over-proved his case” (Harijan, July 11, 1936). However, Ambedkar did respond to the indictment of Mahatma Gandhi albeit scathingly in his 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the book published in 1937. The debate between two stalwarts yielded no much traction during the pre-independence days yet the same may be understood to be the precursor of social reforms that heralded in Bharat after the adoption of Bharat constitution. Arundhati Roy, a celebrated novelist and columnist took upon herself to bring the Saint and Doctor debate on the Centre Stage by writing a detailed introduction to her book, *The Doctor and The Saint Caste, Race, And Annihilation of Caste, The Debate Between B. R. Ambedkar and M. K. Gandhi* (2017) Roy contextualises the debate by estimating the political and ideological prowess of both Gandhi ji and Dr. Ambedkar. There is a likelihood that Roy has seasoned her introduction to this debate with certain ideologies which suits her socio-political activism yet she may be credited for bringing the relevance of the Ambedkar’s book, *Annihilation of Caste* in discussion.

In contemporary Bharat, when the political leadership and common mass are on the same page to transform the nation progressively and reclaim its celebrated status of *Vishwa Guru*, it becomes essential for the intellectuals of society to read and re-read the seminal discourse of Dr. Ambedkar as embedded in the ground-breaking thesis, *Annihilation of Caste*. It is extremely readerly text from the literary point of view and a deconstructive analysis of the text can lead to formation of a society based truly on the equality, liberty and fraternity. There is a requirement of scientific temperament in reading the works of Dr. Ambedkar as Francis Bacon says in essay, *Of Studies*, “Read not to contradict and confute, nor to believe and take for granted, nor to find Talk and Discourse but to weigh and consider” (288) Ambedkar's ideas on the annihilation of caste are still highly relevant in contemporary Bharat. Despite the constitutional provisions for equality and the prohibition of discrimination

on the basis of caste, the caste system remains deeply concretised in Bharat society. The caste system continues to discriminate against and marginalize certain groups, particularly Dalits (formerly known as "untouchables"). Additionally, Ambedkar's ideas on the annihilation of caste are relevant in addressing issues of economic inequality and social mobility. The caste system often serves as a barrier to economic and social mobility for those in lower castes, and the annihilation of caste would help to break down these barriers and allow for more equal opportunities for all. In fact, inclusivity and harmony in a society should be foundational essence of Bharat-ness, cutting across the religious dogmas will ensure a truly self-reliant, strong and prosperous nation.

## References

"A Vindication of Caste by Mahatma Gandhi." Appendix I [A Vindication of Caste by Mahatma Gandhi], [https://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/mmt/ambedkar/web/appendix\\_1.html](https://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/mmt/ambedkar/web/appendix_1.html).

"Bacon's Essays: Bacon, Francis, 1561-1626: Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming." Internet Archive, London: A. & C. Black, 1 Jan. 1970, <https://archive.org/details/baconessay00baco/page/278/mode/2up>.

"MSE: The Annihilation of Caste - Dr. B. R. Ambedkar." MSE | The Annihilation of Caste - Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, <https://ccnmtl.columbia.edu/projects/mmt/ambedkar/web/>.

"The Doctor and the Saint Caste, Race, and Annihilation of Caste, the Debate between B. R. Ambedkar and M. K. Gandhi by Arundhati Roy (Z Lib.org): Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming." Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/thedoctorandthesaintcasteraceandannihilationofcastethedebatebetweenb.r.ambedkara/page/n137/mode/2up>.

National Crime Records Bureau. "Crime/Atrocities Against Scheduled Castes (State/UT-wise) - 2018-2020." [https://ncrb.gov.in,ncrb.gov.in/sites/default/files/crime\\_in\\_Bharat\\_table\\_additional\\_table\\_chapter\\_reports/TABLE%207A.1.pdf](https://ncrb.gov.in,ncrb.gov.in/sites/default/files/crime_in_Bharat_table_additional_table_chapter_reports/TABLE%207A.1.pdf).