



Contextualising The Annihilation Of Caste: Challenging Caste Discrimination In India

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Abstract

The "Annihilation of Caste", an undelivered speech, was drafted by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in 1936. It has successfully reflected caste discrimination and untouchability in India. It has demonstrated that lower-class Hindus have suffered from immense social oppression by priests and upper-class Hindus in India. This speech demands that the Indian Caste System should be annihilated and restructured. Simultaneously, this book has criticised the Hindu religious books such as Vedas, Puranas, Shastras and many others. He has declared that the establishment of equality, liberty and fraternity is the only way to provide basic human rights to the Dalits. He has criticised practising Chaturvarna, which indicates the social deprivation of Hindu Dalits. Ambedkar has recommended that, denying the power of priests, ignoring all hind shastras, inter-dinner and inter-marriage could be effective in annihilating caste discrimination in Indian society. Besides that, he compared the Hindu religion to Sikhs, Islam and Christianity to portray the dominating power of priests in the Indian caste.

Keywords: Caste discrimination, Dalits, Priests, untouchability, Hindu Religions, Vedas, Inter-caste marriage, Chaturvarna

Introduction

The "Annihilation of Caste", drafted by Dr B.R. Ambedkar in 1936 is a popular undelivered speech that has made a perceptual and conceptual impact on caste discrimination. Highlighting the different concepts and dimensions of the speech is considered controversial for the "Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal (JPTM)" conference (Ramakrishnan and Pallavi, 2023). He talks about the atrocities faced by the untouchables and Dalits and simultaneously he criticised the Hindu social structure. This lecture demands that the caste system should be restructured, abolished and annihilated; Ambedkar demands the complete abolition of the caste system, which fundamentally opposes the ethnicity of equality, fraternity and liberty. He openly critiques the Hindu religious books and practices, which perpetuate and uphold caste discrimination. The speech has been explicated into three individual stages to annihilate -"to destroy", "to wipe out" or "to eliminate" the caste system (Gangwar, 2024). The organising committee of the JPTM felt that B.R. Ambedkar's criticism of Vedas and intentions to leave the Hindu fold was intolerable. They recommended removing the criticism of the Vedas, he answered that "he would not change a comma", thus the speech was undelivered to the world. Later, Ambedkar took the initiative to publish this speech for social reformation.

The notion of untouchability and caste

The speech sheds light on the Dalits' miserable situation from the very beginning. Under the Peshwas rules in the Maratha country, the Dalits or untouchables were not permitted to use public streets. If Hindu comes, lest the Dalits pollute the Hindus by their own shadow. In his speech, Ambedkar illustrated the categorisation by "The untouchable was required to have a black thread either on his wrist or around his neck, as a sign or a mark to prevent the Hindus from getting themselves polluted by his touch by mistake" (Chaudhary, 2022, p. 28).

Apart from Maratha country, practising untouchability has a mischievous effect on Pune, in his speech. Ambedkar portrayed the miserable situations of Dalits in India. Referring to this undelivered speech, the Dalits were bound to carry an earthen pot on his neck, for holding their spit, lest their spit falling on the ground make the Hindu caste filthy.

Considering the categorisation activities are inherently associated with humans and engulfing them as human rights. This speech has recognised that the caste system is the dominant factor, which reflects its influence on people's daily activities. The text starts with "Friends" as a formal way to address the un-gathered gathering and methods for expressing "sorry", to the Mondal members for inviting Ambedkar. He reacted with surprise and mild disapproval by expressing the belief that "the Mandal could have found someone better qualified than himself to preside on the occasion" (Chaudhary, 2022, p. 28). Simultaneously, he criticised the Hindus, by stating "Hindu society is a myth" (Chaudhary, 2022). In part 6.2, the speech has deliberately shown, that Hinduism is an abstract principle and has identified the lack of fellow-feeling and unity between Hinduism. Ambedkar has given examples of Islam and Sikhism to justify the universal brotherhood within the respective religions. He has shared that Hinduism is a bunch of rules and regulations. In this speech, he has shared "What is called religion by the Hindus is nothing but a multitude of commands and prohibitions" (Ambedkar, 1944, p. 137).

According to the speech, the Vedas and the Smritis contain the Hindu religion and are the mass of sacrificial, social, political and sanitary rules and enactment. Ambedkar's primary aim in "Annihilation of Caste" is to criticise the books, ancient texts and shastras, that the Hindu religion devoted their mind to. Many critics can question that, if the Hindu religion cannot be accommodated as a coded religion, then how the textual destruction of the book can abolish untouchability? To answer this argument, the Hindu religion is not properly coded as other religions like Islam, Christianity and many others.

In contrast, the Manusmriti is strictly coded in discriminating against untouchability (Chaudhary, 2022, p. 33). It was one of the primary arguments of Ambedkar in the speech. The British played a crucial role in perpetuating caste and it was beneficial to the Brahmins. Critical analysis of the speech has revealed that the British thought, the Hindu view was the most pertinent view of Indian Society. The Manusmriti was accepted as the Hindu law book. In this speech, Ambedkar shared that, Hindu shastras were responsible for degrading their positions in the ancient period.

In part 4.1 of this speech, Ambedkar proclaimed that "not merely a division of labour but also labourers" (Ambedkar, 1944, p. 110). This statement proves the caste-based deprivation in India. Ambedkar recommended drastic social reformation, and rejection of traditional Hinduism to secure justice and equality in the Indian caste system. This writing shared the illustration of how Dalits were underprivileged in basic needs like education, freedom of occupations, restriction of civic facilities and they were not allowed to use village ponds, wells, temples, hospitals and many others. According to this lecture, the Dalits were subjected to stigmatised manual labour, and eventually, their virtual economic slavery, are the victims of social deprivation in India. Ambedkar realised that achieving social reformation was difficult, it demanded a large-scale redefinition of traditional thoughts against the untouchability in India. Ambedkar critically analyses this lecture, which can be read from social, ethnological and biological perspectives. The cast has been recognised as a social phenomenon in this undelivered speech. Besides that, Ambedkar has explained caste discrimination from biological and ethnological perspectives. In part 5.1, Ambedkar states that the human race is mixed in different ways. Moreover, he has made a revolutionary statement that "Caste has no scientific origin" (Chaudhary, 2022, p. 33p. 32).

"The Brahmin of Punjab is racial of the same stock as the Chamar of Punjab, and the Brahmin of Madras is of the same race as the Pariah of Madras" (Chaudhary, 2022, p. 33p. 32).

In contrast, many respected personalities like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi and even Raja Ram Mohan Roy had a soft apology for caste. Ambedkar has expressed, that social reformation was much more needed than political reformation, to accomplish the real essence of freedom in India.

"Ambedkar warned that the political democracy that India adopted would not last unless it was founded on social (the Annihilation of caste) and economic democracy (socialism)" (Chaudhary, 2022, p. 32)

According to him, without social reformation, political reform would not make any impact on improving the living standards and fulfilment of human rights. The social reformation was significantly difficult to accomplish and it required large-scale redefinition of traditional beliefs to raise consciousness in Indian society.

In part 17.1, the "Annihilation of Caste" has assumed that "Chaturvarnya" would be the most vicious system for the Shudras". The Brahmins accumulate knowledge, the Kshatriyas bear arms, the Vaishyas are involved in trade and the Shudras are involved in serving those three higher Varnas. The Chaturvarnya has been considered as the system of labour division in India. The theory of "Chaturvarna" indicates that the lower class of Hindus or Shudras were entirely unable to take action against "this wretched Caste System" (Songa and Bollavarapu, 2023, p. 82). Ambedkar has realised that there is no other degrading system in the society than the caste system. In Contrast, this speech has revealed that, during the Maurya period, the caste system was entirely abolished in Indian society. In this period, Shudras became the rulers of India.

Annihilating caste discrimination and untouchability

In part 14 of this lecture, Ambedkar offers that, instead of caste categorisation, the establishment of "liberty, equality and fraternity" would help to develop an ideal society. Besides it, he plays a pivotal role in destroying socially inspired notions, which carry the designation like "Brahmin", "Kshatriya", "Vaishya" and "Shudras" in Indian society. In Indian society, the Dalits were thousands of miles away from Human Rights. Ambedkar has stated that "Caste and Democracy are the two opposite poles of magnetism, without annihilating caste democracy could not exist" (Kumar, 2023, p. 112).

According to Ambedkar, Indian democracy should be free from any type of caste discrimination, slavery, and the presence of oppressed and suppressed groups in society. Another plan to abolish the caste system began with the "inter-caste dinner." However, the "intern-caste dinner" failed to destroy the consciousness of trust. Later, the inter-caste marriage system was able to annihilate caste discrimination and untouchability in India although facing much backlash in its onset it was a turning point for the change that society needed.

"The real remedy for breaking Caste is intermarriage. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of Caste" (Chaudhary, 2022, p. 48).

Ambedkar believes that intermarriage is the key method to abolish the caste hierarchy. However, inter-dine or inter-marriage is repugnant to the beliefs of the Hindu religion. Ambedkar believed that caste is the notion and the state of mind. Ambedkar called to destroy the cast, "destroy the belief in the sanctity of the shastras" (Chaudhary, 2022, p. 34).

Ambedkar was not only sharing the impractical solution to abolish caste discrimination in India. He has shown his awareness of the opposition he will receive. He has identified that the Brahmin community would never renounce the throne of their authority. Besides this, Brahmins are considered the most intellectual class in India. The rest of the people are bound to follow the Brahmins for their superiority.

In part 24.1, Ambedkar has declared five innovative reformation strategies to annihilate caste discrimination in India. Ambedkar declared that, firstly, there should be only one religious book and the Shastras, Puranas and Vedas should be excised from the Hindu religion. Secondly, the priestly class needs to be de-hierarchised and disinherited. Thirdly, the priestly class needs to be under the control of the state and they are accountable for holding a sanad to be the priest. In Quaternary, the priest group is bound to serve the state and

maintain equality with the state. Lastly, the number of priests should be limited according to the demand of the state, in the case of the "Indian Caste System" (I.C.S) (Songa and Bollavarapu, 2023, p. 82).

Ambedkar has openly criticised the cast of priests throughout the Annihilation of Caste. He has exclaimed that a priest may be foolish and physically he may suffer from any severe disease such as Gonorrhoea or Syphilis. However, he had the authority and was suitable for entering into the "sanctum sanctorum" of Hindu holy temples. According to the Hindu Caste category, being born in a priest caste is enough to accomplish superiority. Among all Hindu castes, the priest class recognises no responsibility. They only know how to achieve privileges and rights to control the entire Hindu religion. According to Ambedkar, denying a priest's superiority is essential to diminish the curse of caste discrimination and untouchability in Indian society. Moreover, in his undelivered speech, he recommended that the priest class should be under the control of Indian legislation. It will prevent them from mischief and misleading the lower caste Hindus in India. The inclusion of these three social reformation strategies could be advantageous to eradicating caste discrimination and untouchability in Indian society.

Conclusion

Analysing the profound meaning of this lecture has shared extensive knowledge on the origin of the democratic system. In Indian society, caste classification has had devastating effects on democracy. Establishing a caste structure was responsible for making a distinction between the higher class and the lower class. In the Hindu religion, the lower class or Dalits have suffered from the tyranny of priests and the higher class. The Varnashrama or cast structure has encouraged pride, greed, arrogance, untouchability, outrage, tyranny and others, which negatively affects the underprivileged civilisation in the Hindu religion.

Ambedkar has shared his consciousness regarding the devastating situation of caste discrimination and practising untouchability in Indian society, it was the principle obstacle to Indian democracy. He has exclaimed that social reformation is more important than political reformation to establish democracy in India. He has recommended that destroying socially inspired notions, inter-dinners, inter-marriages, denying the priest caste and religious books would help to prevent caste discrimination and untouchability in India. The establishment of equality, fraternity and liberty has ornamented Indian democracy which shall become the newer approach shaping the society envisioned by Dr. B.R Ambedkar that shall frame the future to come allowing unity in diversity with no prejudice. The idea that he birthed was the vision the country needed to say out loud and reach the notice of its audience and understand that shaping of new India would require total change in its mindset and accept how each made the nation over a community dictating a nation. The idea of liberty seeped with proper definition allowing the change of the molecular status that was previously the accepted framework and strictly unquestionable but now open to all for a logical debate. Ambedkar's lifelong thought was to change society with acceptance of the same for the greater deed that awaited the country's upliftment and how it would be a combined effort rather than an archaic dictate from the higher ups.

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