

Caste(-less) Community and the Savarnas: Understanding Ambedkar

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Abstract

This paper aims to read Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* and a few of his other works in relevance with the idea which discusses the responsibility of the *savarnas* (upper caste people) in dismantling caste hierarchies. When we investigate Dalit history, their struggles have carved the road for movements towards establishing and fighting for the social justice. Ambedkar strongly states that the persistence of caste is at core as *savarna* problem which is sustained by their will. Dalits on the other hand have struggled historically and have driven the social movement to establish equality. *Savarnas* lack the willingness to enact sincere reform in building a society equal for all. Ambedkar has pointed out that the notion of caste is a "sickness" within the Hindu society. He countered it and provided a solution to it, which was his demand for "notional change" among the *savarnas*. This paper investigates the inadequacy of tokenistic reforms such as policy formation for the upliftment of the Dalits which forget to analyse its ground application, reducing the Dalits to mere votes, instead of inculcating the need for a deeper transformation of social consciousness. This paper will draw comparative insights from global struggles such as against racial oppression and contemporary debates on structural violence while establishing across borders solidarity. This paper also situates Ambedkar's critique within both a historical and the contemporary context. In doing so it aims to explore how caste annihilation is not simply a struggle limited to Dalit's lives rather it is a collective action, requiring the active participation and accountability of the privileged section of the society. Lastly this paper argues that the future of an equitable and caste-less India depends on the complete and radical reorientation of the *savarna* consciousness, without which Ambedkar's vision of justice, liberty and fraternity remains a distant dream.

Keywords: Ambedkar, caste, caste-less society, Dalit Studies, notional change, structural violence

1. Introduction: Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This paper reads B.R. Ambedkar's prose and the metaphors he chose, like caste as "sickness" (Ambedkar, 1936, p. 26), as "gutter" (Ambedkar, 1938) as mental slavery to understand why notional change remains the unrealised importance of anti-caste praxis. Rather than treating Ambedkar's texts as historical artifacts, this paper approaches them as living theory. By engaging in close readings of *Annihilation of Caste* and *Caste in India* the paper will trace how he located the root problems not in Dalit bodies but in the consciousness of the *savarnas* in the country. The method is important to show how the movement of caste takes from Ambedkar's language to its institutional afterlives by reading the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal controversy and Gandhi's *Harijan* discourse as case studies that reveal the limits of liberal reform. To build a bridge between the past and the present, this work brings Ambedkar into conversation with contemporary critical voices like Anupama Rao's framing of caste as structural violence, Isabel Wilkerson's account of unconscious bias, Nico Slate's excavation of how Indian elites defend caste through racial comparison. This shows how each of them extends Ambedkar's insight that caste operates beneath awareness, as a program running in the background of even liberal minds. This paper also draws on Dalit movement scholarship, from Dalit Panthers to T.M. Yesudasan and B. Krishnappa, to ground this analysis in the lived experience of those who have theorised caste through survival. The approach is not to apply theory onto Dalit lives but to let Dalit thoughts lead the critique.

The framework that emerges centers on Ambedkar's proposition that caste is a "notion, a state of mind." (Ambedkar, 1936, p. 68) This becomes the anchoring concept through which this paper reads three entrenched logics. They are firstly, "structural violence" (Rao, 2009, p. 94), following Rao this work will map caste not as prejudice but as a system woven into law and bureaucracy where we can see how even protective measures like reservations produce what she calls, "legal exceptionalism" (Rao, 2009, p. 242) and recognises that Dalits are trapped in perpetual marginality. Secondly, using Wilkerson's "Unconscious Bias" (Wilkerson, 2020, p. 178) work on implicit bias the paper theorises *savarna* consciousness as sedimented with automatic encodings of superiority that precede deliberate thought making it hard to feel neutral existence. And lastly, internal colonization, not the exact term which Ambedkar used, but which reflects his challenges to the Congress party. He questioned them regarding their approach to reform which intended to oppose British rule while practicing caste

rule within themselves. This helps to frame an understanding of *savarna* refusal as a postcolonial continuity where political freedom was achieved while social domination persists till the present. These strands point to a central claim that annihilating caste demands institutional transformation led by *savarna* moral awakening as consciousness change alone cannot dismantle caste logic which is embedded within them.

As the idea to engage with a historical role of the *savarnas* in building a caste-less society revolves around the mind, a quote a Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* flashes in front of the sight, where he quotes Mathew Arnold and towards the end poetically questions the consciousness of the Hindus and seeking a poetic justice it seems, as he states,

The Hindus in the words of Mathew Arnold are “wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born”. What are they to do? The Mahatma to whom they appeal for guidance does not believe in thinking and can therefore give no guidance which can be said to stand the test of experience. The intellectual classes to whom the masses look for guidance are either too dishonest or too indifferent to educate them in the right direction. We are indeed witness to a great tragedy. In the face of this tragedy all one can do is to lament and say— such be thy Leaders, O! Hindus. (Ambedkar, 1936, p. 96)

The quote reflects how Dr. B.R. Ambedkar depicts the existential predicament which the Hindus suffer from within the complex fabric of Indian civilisation by referring to Mathew Arnold's radical statement that they are “wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born.” By analysing this we can explore how the imagery captures the struggle between the caste system as an oppressive structure and the aspiration for a future grounded in equality and justice. Here we analyse how the “world dead” represents the deeply entrenched caste hierarchies which continues to dictate social interactions and opportunities. This showcases how caste traps countless individuals in a vicious cycle of discrimination and dehumanisation. We can see how in contrast, the “world powerless to be born” signifies the urge for a society where caste is abolished, a vision that remains elusive yet vital.

Ambedkar's observations reveal a critical gap in the leadership within the Hindu community. He describes a deep divide between the general public and the intellectual elite, also showing how the very public representatives, our leaders that the community turns to for delivery and direction frequently fall short of

offering the wisdom required for significant change. In addition to sustaining of the caste-based oppression, this lack of strategic and mindful leadership leaves barren the possibility of reforms and collective actions. Nico Slate can be traced in alliance with the argument as he criticises leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose and Rabindranath Tagore who frequently defended caste in international forums by drawing a positive comparison to racial injustice in the west. Slate describes how Gandhi downplayed the violence of untouchability by comparing it to Jim Crow laws and lynchings in the US, Bose saw it as an ancient attempt to harmonise difference and Tagore defended caste as a “frictionless alternative” to American racism.

These representative figures used race and caste comparison to protect the nation’s image. Voices from the margins have decoded this myth and call for more significant social change, insisting that rather than encourage self-criticism and internal decolonisation of Dalits within a caste society, building solidarity across oppressive lines is required. Ambedkar and Slate’s arguments demonstrate the strategic use of racial-caste parallels and the failure of visionary leadership. Slate depicts how leaders represent the entire India but fuel caste structures. Ambedkar states that the *savarnas* have an active participation in the struggle against caste discrimination. His emphasis was on the real ground actions and not mere hollow words of acknowledgment of the problem, which is insufficient. It is time for transformative change which requires concerted efforts and accountability by the *savarnas*.

When we observe closely, we can map that at the heart of Ambedkar’s critique lies his vision of a birth a caste-less society, one where dignity and equality are not just aspirational ideals documented for showcasing but a practical reality. He clearly states that the responsibility for dismantling caste hierarchies does not solely rest on marginalised communities but must be shared by all the societal members. Even if the margin gains the consciousness to assert its rights but if the center doesn’t let go of their oppressive order and privileges, the establishment of an equal society cannot meet its goal. For the *savarnas*, this marks for a moral rejuvenation when they confront and let go of their complicity in sustaining oppressive structures and commit to genuine reform that address the root causes of inequality.

This paper explores how Ambedkar’s expectations of *savarnas* in leading a social reform which would foster a caste-less society. This emphasizes the necessity of their collective responsibility and active engagement. By critically

evaluating his crucial work *Annihilation of Caste*, this paper seeks to show how *savarnas* can contribute to this transformative vision. In doing so, this work will explore how inspiration arises from a deeper understanding of Ambedkar's call for action and to highlight the roadmap towards a more just and equitable future for all the sections of the society.

Speaking in a general everyday phenomenon, if one needs to resolve any problem the first step in solving it, is to acknowledge its existence. Similar dynamics can be traced from this text. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar diagnoses the symptoms of illness within the *savarna* community. We can see how he mentions in the preface of the text, "I shall be satisfied if I make the Hindus realize that they are the sick men of India and that their sickness is causing danger to the health and happiness of other Indians" (Ambedkar, 1936, p. 26). Ambedkar viewed caste as a social malaise which is continuously poisoning the lives of human civilisation. The *savarnas*, who are the beneficiaries and upholders of this system, are central to its perpetuation. As Ambedkar termed *savarnas* as "sick men of India", he challenged the upper castes to step forward and confront their complicity in this existing system of inequality. For Ambedkar, this "sickness" stemmed from a moral blindness which reflects *savarnas*' failure to recognise the inhumanity and injustice caste inflicted on millions of people. This blindness, in turn weakened India's collective moral strength, preventing true sense of nation's unity and progress.

The role of *savarnas* therefore becomes crucial in Ambedkar's vision of a casteless society. He believed that the real change could not simply emerge from the oppressed. Let's draw a simple example of a free-flowing water body, a river, to reflect this. If we compare human society to a free-flowing river, which nurtures and enriches lives and nature, any resistance to the flow or its stagnation in a particular location, will take away its potential to nurture and rejuvenate lives within nature. Worst, it will stay decaying and stinky. This very act of restricting the flow of water is unnatural; it hinders the basic nature of rivers, which is meant to flow. Similar can be seen in the case of human society, we are born social animals. It's against our natural characteristics to be resisted and divided into airtight compartments of caste. It kills the basic nature of humans who are by nature supposed to be in interaction with each other. This barricading of humans in the caste order kills humanity within human society. It challenges the very idea of fraternity, one of the crucial elements to establish a space equal for all. Hence, it requires those in the positions of privilege to relinquish their selfish interests and challenge the foundations of caste-based

hierarchy. Ambedkar often questioned their superficial approaches to reform, which rather than uprooting the caste system, reinforce it. As he states, “The Social Conference was a body which mainly concerned itself with the reform of the high caste Hindu Family... They did not stand up for the reform of the Hindu society” (Ambedkar, 1936, p. 41- 42). A real transformation, as he argued, requires the upper- caste Hindus to undergo a deep moral reawakening, while recognising that the caste system is not only a Dalit problem but a national crisis which barren the ethical core of the country. This text reflects upon how Ambedkar persistently calls for liberal *savarnas* to take meaningful actions towards dismantling the caste system. Here we can draw a comparative lens to global struggles for equality such as Civil Right movements in the United States, where the participation of white allies was seen as important for breaking the structures of racial segregation. In the above context the privileged groups are not just a passive looker but an active participant in the system of oppression. For Ambedkar, as for figures like Martin Luther King Jr. the moral responsibility of the privileged communities is to dismantle the very systems that benefits them. In this comparative frame, the “sickness” of racism, like the “sickness” of caste, fester within those who uphold and benefit from these systems and the cure for this sickness lies in their own hands by challenging their own privileges.

Ambedkar’s vision of a true nation, united in true sense with equity to all, can be established through a caste-less society only, therefore it places responsibility on the *savarnas*. Their moral awakening is not a matter of choice but a necessity for the health of the entire nation. The “danger to the health and happiness of other Indians” arises from the fact that the caste system, which by implication and functionality fragments society into rigid hierarchies restricts the establishment of an equitable society. As Ambedkar states, without this moral awakening of the *savarnas*, India cannot even hope to achieve true democracy, justice or unity in the first place.

We can further trace how Ambedkar’s critique goes beyond social reform. It demands a transformation of consciousness among the *savarnas*. He challenges them to transcend their historically ingrained privileges and participate actively in undoing the caste hierarchies. It is the moral responsibility of the upper castes and therefore they cannot be a passive marker of privilege but have to participate in the transformative act of undoing caste. The *savarnas* must work towards creating an equitable social order where caste-based discrimination and privilege no longer exist in practice. Ambedkar’s plea for the realisation

of this “sickness”, at its core can be seen as a call for moral and social healing. By mapping the ways in which caste harms and impacts not just the oppressed but the entire nation, Ambedkar urges the *savarnas* to see and realise that the struggle for a casteless society is not merely a fight for Dalit rights but a fight for a collective moral and social welfare of India.

In this alignment of thought, one can see Ambedkar accepted the invitation to preside the conference of Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal against his will. The only hope he had behind his mind is that the *savarnas* are at least ready to address the issues within themselves and are making an initiation regarding a social reform as he said, “Yours is a cause of social reform. That causes has always made an appeal to me and it is because of this that I felt I ought not refuse an opportunity of helping the cause especially when you think that I can help it” (Ambedkar, 1936, p. 37).

Initially, the disease of caste was diagnosed by many anti-caste leaders and scholars like Iyothee Thass, Periyar, Phule over the different timeframes. Ambedkar named it as a disease, leading to the realisation of its deep-rooted presence within the affected community. This very diagnosis led to the call for its cure which could initially be seen in the efforts within the community itself as the initiation lead by Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal, framed in the language of social reform. However, we can see how over the time this social reform movement becomes overshadowed and lost by the rise of political reform, the thought which superseded this was the belief of the *savarnas* that political reform held greater significance. Hence, we can see how social reform became the discarded Indian *Kapas* fabric which none of the Gandhian and Nehruvian followers intended to cover themselves with. It can no longer be seen as a primary battle to be worth fighting for.

This shift then raised a critical need for revisiting the nature of this “sickness”. Can we see caste as a physical barrier that prevented Hindus from intermingling? As Ambedkar confronts this very question by illustrating that caste is not like bricks or barbed wire that physically restricts interaction. Instead, he explains, “Caste is not a physical object...Caste is a notion, it is a state of mind. The destruction of Caste does not therefore mean the destruction of physical barriers. It means a notional change” (Ambedkar, 1936, p. 68). We can trace how his emphasis on the notional change offers a profound insight into the nature of caste and provides the reason why it continues to persist in Indian society. Hence, we can say that unlike tangible structures such as walls or fences, caste should be

analysed as an abstract construct which exists in the collective consciousness and influences social relations, behaviour and one's own identity is constructed in relevance of it. This non-physical nature of caste makes it more challenging to dismantle and uproot as it resides in the deep ingrained consciousness and beliefs of the individuals. It produces an attitude of oppression which is invisible from open naked eyes unlike physical objects which are easy to detect. We can surely see the effect of caste reflected in everyday activity, that is the establishment of hierarchy and stigmatisation promoting the caste order.

In understanding Ambedkar, the *savarnas* play a vital role in establishing a caste-less society. The Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal was named for the cause to establish an anti-caste society which uplifts the act of breaking caste system. Its decision to invite Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a Dalit (*Antyaja*) leader to preside over their conference shows a mark of progressive shift in the *savarna* community's approach to social reform. It showcased a willingness to engage with Ambedkar's radical critique of caste and to acknowledge the voices of the marginalised communities. It also seemed as questioning the unquestionable, the divine religious scanty of the Shastric law hood of selecting a *Guru* (a teacher). In the same light of argument Ambedkar states, "According to the *Shastras* the *Brahmin* is appointed to be the *Guru* for the three Varnas, ... is a direction of the *Shastras*. The Mandal therefore knows from whom a Hindu should take his lessons and from whom he should not. The *Shastras* do not permit a Hindu to accept any one as his *Guru* merely because he is well-versed." (Ambedkar, 1936, p. 37)

However, when Ambedkar refused to dilute his critique of Hindu scriptures, the event was cancelled exposing the superficial gesture of the *savarna* driven Mandal. It unfolds the tokenistic approach of the reform which was not sufficient for confronting the society drenched with caste oppressions. This proved that the *savarnas* are incapable of questioning the religiously sanctioned inhuman laws of oppression and proving again that neither can an *Antyaja* be a *Guru* just because he is well versed and learned (*Pandit*) nor can he show a contention to it. Thus, we can explore how the cancellation of the event raises the question of how the *savarnas* self-diagnosed approach to social reform leads to "*Sunyata*" in Buddhist philosopher's Nagarjuna's term. As caste is deeply embedded in the mind minds of the *savarnas*, and they are not willing to let go their privileges as Ambedkar states, "The *brahmins* do not have the patriotism of the samurai of Japan." (Ambedkar, 2013, p. 27) How did this class let go their privileges for the greater good of their nation and to establish equality and unity. Hence the *savarnas* need to rejuvenate their consciousness with the seeds

of equality and produce an equal space for all which will lead in formation of a united nation in true sense. He calls for a fundamental reorientation of their perceptions and position in the caste society, as he states, "...Caste System is not merely division of labour. It is also a division of labourers. Civilized society undoubtedly needs division of labour. But in no civilized society is division of labour accompanied by this unnatural division of labourers into water-tight compartments" (Ambedkar, 1936, p. 47). The eradication of caste cannot be just achieved by changing the laws, rules on paper or tearing down physical symbols of division. It requires the *savarnas* to actively and radically dismantle their mental framework which perpetuate caste-based hierarchies and privileges. Thus, the idea of "notional change" which Ambedkar proposes injects the need for transformation internally rather than externally making the adjustments. It won't be enough for the *savarnas* to simply alter their outward behaviour. They must unlearn their embedded assumptions of caste superiority and consciously work towards establishing equality and humanity for all.

This analogy can be extended further to mirror the realities of caste which is not only shown through oppression of Dalits but also should be analysed through the actions and privileges of the *savarnas*. Here the shift of locus is needed. The frosting of the Ambedkarite consciousness has now led the margins to turn itself as the locus and cross examine the defaulted center as faulted and with the unnatural oppressive epithet for humanity. The *savarnas* should metaphorically and literally shatter this mirror and while doing so, one needs to have consciousness and recognition that the image it presents is false, constraining both the oppressed and the privileged; rather than breaking it in mere denial. This could be one of the interpretations when Ambedkar states for an active participation of the *savarnas* and not just act as passive participants. It established through the Hindu religious texts and other sanctioned texts by the Hindu social order such as *Manu Smriti* and it all depicts how the *savarnas* are the architects and beneficiaries of the Caste System. Their complicity in maintaining caste structures prism out that they bear a moral responsibility to lead in dismantling this very system. He argues how for this moral responsibility to be fulfilled they need to confront uncomfortable truths about their historical and social privileges. The change Ambedkar is advocating for is not a simple relinquishing of privileges; it demands an active reigning of one's identity which is grounded in the recognition of shared humanity and social justice.

The analysis of this text clearly states one of the core ideas: a caste-less society can be achieved through a mental revolution. In this mental revolution the

savarnas will have to move from being passive inheritors of caste privileges and become active dismantlers of the ideological structure which sustain it. It cannot be denied that political and legal changes are important but it fails to serve the purpose of building a equitable society as nothing concrete can be done without the internal shift of consciousness. To genuinely contribute to the creation of a just and equitable society, the *savarnas* will have to sink in their infected consciousness and hunt for the humanity buried under the pile of caste superiority within their mental framework. Further, by locating the suppressed humanity and entrenched notions of superiority one needs to replace it with values of equality, solidarity, fraternity and mutual respect. This is what we can draw as an essence of what Ambedkar's call for "notional change" (Ambedkar, 1936, p. 68) maps. It seeks to transform which starts within the mind of the individual, but its impact would extend outwards in action and will reshape the social structure.

In the text 'Caste in India: Their Genesis, Mechanism and Development' Dr. B.R. Ambedkar strongly asserts that the caste system is fundamentally a *savaran's* problem. He traces it politics, how this system is engineered and perpetuated by upper caste through oppressive customs like Sati, child marriage and forced widowhood to women. While the lower caste bear the weight of this hierarchy, it is the upper caste men who benefit by this structure in particular, and in general the entire *savarna* community exercise these privileges. But the Brahmins are who created and maintain it for their personal benefits.

Ambedkar has defined caste as "an enclosed class," (Ambedkar, 1917, p. 15) emphasising that the mechanism for endogamy and social isolation is central in the sustenance of caste. He provocatively asks the question, "What is the class that raised this 'enclosure' around itself?" (Ambedkar, 1917, p. 15) and his reply is also very clear, locating the position of the *Brahmins* that is the highest within the Hindu social order and exercises the optimum power and privileges. While the other non-Brahmin caste may observe some of these customs, their adherence is neither strict nor complete, as they can be analysed as the derivative of Brahmin practices. This critical distinction underscores that the *Brahmins* are the architects of caste system. Ambedkar states that *Brahmins* are, "...father of the institution of caste" (Ambedkar, 1917, p. 15). This strengthens their social dominance while limiting the mobility and opportunities of the others.

Ambedkar's argues that caste is not just a social ill affecting the marginalised but a system that benefits a selected few within the social frame. When we

look within this framework, upper caste men gain significant advantages as their personal benefits are prioritised in a society that sees them as superior to women. For this Ambedkar notes, how “man as a maker of injections is most often above them all,” (Ambedkar, 1917, p. 11) highlighting how men navigate the caste system with all the power and privileges designed as per their benefits while women remained subjugated. He argues that the responsibility of dismantling caste rests squarely on those who have historically benefited from it. Drawing upon this, we can trace how this exposure of hypocrisy among upper caste reformers, who seem to advocate for change but at the same time resist to cease their privileges which calls for a profound transformation within these communities. One can witness how Ambedkar urges an unlearning of the caste and patriarchal consciousness which has been deeply ingrained over generations upon everyone in the name of moral grounds for the upliftment of the society. Ambedkar’s speech at the Karma in 1937 provides a sharp critique of caste divisions within untouchable communities, but we need to investigate it also as a presenter of a broader reflection on the responsibility of *savarnas* in perpetuating and dismantling these divisions. By using vivid metaphors and direct appeals, we can see how Ambedkar not only addresses the untouchables but also holds the *savarnas* accountable for the continuation of caste order. He begins by lamenting the lack of unity among the untouchables. As he states, “First, it is a misfortune of all of us that there is no unity among the various castes such as *Mahar*, *Chambhar*, *Bhangi*, etc. prevailing among the untouchables.” He directly links this disunity to the broader system of caste discrimination in Hindu society and emphasises that it is not the untouchables themselves but the Hindu social order which needs to be questioned and blamed. He states, “The real reason for absence of this unity is the existence of caste distinction (*jatibhed*) in the Hindu society. *Mahars*, *Mangs*, *Chambhars*, or *Bhangis* are not responsible for this caste discrimination,” This critique of Hindu caste system is further strengthened through Ambedkar’s use of a graphic metaphor, where he compares caste discrimination to a stream of filth flowing downwards: “Caste discrimination is the gutter of dirty water (*gataar gangaa*) coming flowing to us from the above. This is the shit (*narak*) flowing towards us.” This image of caste as a filthy, toxic force highlights the dehumanising effect of the caste system.

Ambedkar does not stop at merely pointing fingers at the *savarnas*, he systematically decodes how upper caste manipulates and exploit divisions among untouchables. He explains, “Hindus, not only do not remove the caste discrimination among themselves, but on the contrary, they strive for strengthening the differences among the untouchables, taking undue advantage

of their ignorance,” By putting different groups against each other, upper caste Hindus ensure that untouchables remain divided and weak, this politics of the *savarnas* which is in alliance with the caste order prevents the untouchables from collectively challenging this system. The ladder of hierarchy continues, and the caste conspiracy wheels with this division making its extinction harder. He points out the *savarnas* politics of dividing the nation into rigid ranks of communities and sustain their hierarchy, “They support *Mangs* and raise them against *Mahars*; They support *Chanbhars* and raise them against *Mahars* and *Mangs*.”

Here we can see how Ambedkar’s message is very clear and should not be understood as a message of victimhood alone. Reading his text reflects how he stresses the need for untouchables to take responsibility for their own liberation. He states, “But though the original responsibility of the caste distinction is on Hindu society, for us, to forget our responsibility would be suicidal.” By this Ambedkar produces a sense of agency which is very crucial. He urges untouchables to actively reject internal divisions, calling for the abolition of caste distinctions and bans on inter-dining and inter-marriage within their own communities. As he puts, “It is our foremost duty to remove the caste distinctions among ourselves and prevent the entry of policy of discrimination among us.”

For Ambedkar, holding onto caste pride within untouchables communities is futile given the gaze with which these caste names are viewed by society. He asks, “What is there so great about the names *Mahar* and *Mang*, that you should feel proud of it? What bright history comes in front of your eyes by uttering these names, so that you should strive for preserving old traditions?” He always fought for the dismantling of any notion of pride in these labels. He stressed pointing that *savarnas* and their caste order can only offer degradation. This text be seen as the heart of his call for unity, as he argues the untouchables to recognise their shared oppression and unite against the common enemy: “Both our societies are getting crushed under one common grinding stone, and work unitedly.” Ambedkar goes beyond rhetorical appeals, offering a guarantee that he will ensure the unity. He proudly declares, “Talking about *Mahars*, about this, they are not willing to follow any caste distinction. They are ready to have inter-dining and inter-marrying with *Mangs*, *Chanbhars* or *Bhangis*. And if they are hesitant, I undertake that I will compel them for it,” Ambedkar’s commitment to achieving this unity reflects his larger vision he had to form a society that transcends the caste system, one where untouchables unite in their struggle and refuse to allow caste names or traditions to divide them.

In the speech referred above Ambedkar's critique of the *savarnas* is expressed with clarity. He narrates how they are not only perpetuators of caste distinction but they also actively work to deepen them within the oppressed groups. However, he equally emphasises the responsibility which the untouchables hold to break free from these divisions and work towards solidarity. He foregrounds clearly that both oppressed and oppressor will have to take their share of responsibility for dismantling the caste system. The call to unity and the rejection of caste-based pride are the first steps towards achieving a caste-less society, where one can break the barriers imposed by Hindu society to remove the social divide and dehumanisation by othering the people. The vision of living in a caste-less society seems farfetched. Over a long anti-caste struggle and fostering of the anti-caste consciousness within the Dalits, they have mobilised and worked against the grain to eradicate caste, but one community alone cannot turn this dream into reality. As the reality feeds upon the collective consciousness and evolving humanity of each one of us living in this society, where *savarnas* have a major role to play. We can explore how Ambedkar framed caste as a social construct rather than a divine mandate. He always stressed that if caste is a product of human design, then dismantling it is within our human capacity. However, as it can be observed the upper caste who are both, the beneficiaries and protectors of this system have often resisted the structural changes necessary for a true reform.

Ultimately, Ambedkar's message is loud and clear, where he asks the upper caste to recognise that caste and accompanying gender inequalities is their problem. They need to engage with it consciously and address the roots of caste and gender oppression. If they truly aspire to establish a casteless society, they must confront their privileges and actively work in destroying the system which help the caste and gender hierarchies sustain. As we are pointing at these intertwined problems of caste and gender inequalities, Ambedkar draws our attention to how these injustices permeated within the caste structure but the *savarna* community becomes the locus of it. Gender inequalities, particularly practices like forced widowhood and child marriage, became focal points for those *savarnas* who identified as social reformers. This group of leaders is distinct from those who advocated political reform only. Ambedkar poses a critical question in this context: Are we fit for political reform when our masses are suffering? His answer in this context is a clear resounding "No". He challenges the Congress Party, particularly its leadership, by questioning their opposition to colonial rule while ignoring internal oppression within India. It reflects how the *savarnas* were very eager to decolonize from the rule of the Britishers but simultaneously

failed to address the colonisation governed and imposed by them within the Indian society through the practice of caste system. Thus, we got independence from the external colonisation of the Britishers but till present time we have failed to gain freedom from the caste system. As the Congress Party declared that one country should not rule over another, Ambedkar asks how they could justify the rule of one class (the upper castes) over another (the lower caste).

As we read the text, we can see how Ambedkar portrays the discourses of social and political reform in relevance of *savarnas* party consciousness. We trace how he reflects on the withering away of the social reform consciousness and how the political reform overshadowed it. This decaying of the social reform reflects not only on the demise of the movement rather the concern is deep, it speaks loudly of the *savarnas* indifference towards genuine social change. Looking at the social reforms which the *savarnas* initiated Ambedkar decodes their limited and restive approach. Mostly the so-called social reforms were concerned primarily in improving the conditions of the upper-caste Hindu families. They centered around practices like widow remarriage and opposing child marriage. They never genuinely questioned or intended to challenge the caste system itself. Ambedkar also notes the hostility of Congress, the party portrayed itself as leading the political reform movement and towards social reform efforts. He cites the speech of Mr. Bonnerji, a prominent Congress leader, who dismissed the necessity of social reform as a prerequisite for political reform. Bonnerji's rhetorical questions, whether political reform was contingent on ending widowhood or allowing women to attend universities demonstrate the superficial understanding of social issues which can be held by many in the political reform camp. We see how Ambedkar was clear that Dalits must agitate for their rights, but we can also see how he equally recognised that the upper castes must actively engage in the reform too. In *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables*, Ambedkar writes:

Mr. Gandhi does not merely claim for himself the championship of the Untouchable. He claims similar championship for the Congress. The Congress, he says, is fully pledged to redress the wrongs done to the Untouchables and argues that any attempt to give political safeguards to the Untouchables is unnecessary and harmful. (Ambedkar, 1945, p. 7)

We can see the politics of Gandhi who advocated for the upliftment of the Untouchables, referring to them as "*Harijans*" by which he meant children of God. But one needs to question this choice of address made to the Untouchables

by Gandhi. Did it change the situation of Untouchables? Can he, being so influential, take the issue of caste and the oppression of the Untouchables within this system with a more concert approach? Renaming of the Untouchables to *Harijan*, whom does it serve the purpose to? Can it be seen as a superficial approach or could it make sense in Gandhi's approach towards the anti-caste establishment? To answer these questions, Gandhi defended caste as stated by Nico Slate earlier, and as has been recorded by Dr K. Jamanadas who states, "...Narsi Mehta, who 'invented' the name *harijan* for fatherless children of Devadasis. But Gandhi applied this name to SC's. If it was somebody else not knowing the language, life and literature of Narsi Mehta, there might have been some excuse. But Gandhi was well conversant." This shows a conscious choice by Gandhi and makes the people of the margins to question and doubt his approach which he showcased to be in the path of social and moral reform reflecting a shallow initiation for the sake of uniting the nation for his bigger agenda to get freedom from the Britishers. However the thorns of caste never affected him as speaking for the margin and having the rationality to listen the margin varies. He often emphasised moral reform within the existing social order but never initiated the movement to radically restructure it. Many including Ambedkar viewed this approach as inadequate as it did not challenge the entrenched caste system but rather sought to improve the conditions of the marginalised within it.

As this work intends to examine and map out why the tokenistic reforms failed and why even the presence of well-intentioned *savarna* leadership often reproduces caste oppression? Ambedkar's analysis can be seen in parallel with the contemporary validation which Wilkerson's has to state while analysing the hierarchies. In her work *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* she documents how embedded prejudices are. What she calls these prejudices is the "unconscious bias" (Wilkerson, 2020, p. 178) She explains how it automatically operates within the minds of dominant-caste people and can be seen even in those who consciously claim egalitarian ideals. Drawing on Harvard sociologist David William's research, Wilkerson notes how "approximately 80 percent white Americans" (Wilkerson, 2020, p. 178) carry implicit biases so automatic that they precede conscious thought. She further argues how these are not crude stereotypes openly defended but it should be understood as ingrained associations deeply lodged in the subconscious of these people. We can draw a parallel similarity with the kind of "sickness" notion Ambedkar diagnosed within the *savarna* consciousness. We can see a thread of alliance within Wilkerson's analysis of hierarchy with what Ambedkar talked about while expressing how

savarnas could not truly engage in reform because they lacked the willingness to undergo genuine introspection. He further points this phenomenon as how caste has become embedded not as an explicit ideology to be debated but as an invisible program running beneath the surface of consciousness. Wilkerson's analysis thus can be understood as the reinforcement of the urgency of Ambedkar's call for a "notional change" (Ambedkar, 1936, p. 68). Thus, without addressing the deep-rooted automatic encodings of superiority that have been like a rock sedimented into their consciousness which is infected by their "unnatural" privileged over centuries, the dismantling of hierarchy becomes hard, even if we introduce policies and draft rules for the same.

While on the one side Ambedkar's diagnosis of consciousness as the problem remains valid, we can trace contemporary Dalit scholarship, like the works of Anand Teltumbde's analysis, to reveal how *savarna* consciousness has transformed into institutional forms making moral appeals insufficient. Teltumbde argues that, "the social consciousness of the average Indian is his or her caste consciousness" (as cited in Natrajan, 2006, p. 31) This consciousness operates through what Teltumbde identifies as a concealed architecture of privilege, that is, "The fact that the accident of birth in a social structure of differential privileges is more important than individual 'merit' is so well concealed that it may go unnoticed even by the victims." (Teltumbde, 2018, p. 89) Here, Teltumbde exposes how caste naturalises itself in birth-based hierarchy. It appears as a natural outcome while meritocracy functions in its mystifying veil. This suggests that the problem is not individual belief, but the issue lies in the fundamental framework in organising society itself. In modern India, this consciousness manifests through electoral systems and bureaucratic procedures distributing resources along the caste lines with mathematical precision yet appearing merit based. Ambedkar's "notional change" (Ambedkar, 1936, p. 68) thus faces a contemporary obstacle, that is in the institutional structures which have become so embedded with caste logic that *savarna* individuals experience their complicity as participation in neutral procedures. This institutional invisibility explains why consciousness transformation though remaining necessary has proven very difficult to turn into reality. Thus, within contemporary Dalit scholarship this recognition that consciousness operates through institutions refocuses the problem not on individual morality but on the very systemic transformation.

Hence, when we outline the failure of the social reform movements and the neglect of caste annihilation; they symbolise the unwillingness of the *savarnas*

to confront the deep-rooted injustices that sustained their own privileges. Ambedkar's argument that *savarnas* must bear a significant portion of the responsibility for dismantling caste comes from his understanding of caste as a system of privilege and oppression. In *Who Were the Shudras?* (1946) Ambedkar asserts,

Chaturvarnya would have been a very innocent principle if it meant no more than mere division of society into four classes. Unfortunately, more than this is involved in the theory of *Chaturvarnya*. Besides dividing society into four orders, the theory goes further and makes the principle of graded inequality the basis for determining the terms of associated life as between the four *Varnas*. (Ambedkar, 1946, p. 3)

This helps us bind our thoughts how *savarnas* have till present continued the internalised institution of inequality through the very practice of caste division. Contemporary scholars such as Anupama Rao, in *The Caste Questions* (2009), have extended Ambedkar's critique by examining how modern political and cultural institutions continue to preserve caste hierarchies. Rao emphasised into the complex ways in which caste manifests as a form of "structural violence" (Rao, 2009, p. 94), can be seen to be intricately woven into social hierarchies and institutional practices. She sheds light on a troubling paradox by referring how laws and policies which are designed to protect Dalit rights, end up reinforcing the very separateness and vulnerability they aim to address. We observe how this phenomenon of legal exceptionalism recognises Dalit identity but also traps individuals within a framework that continues to marginalise them. Rao explores and asks us to reflect on the lived experiences. She states that these legal structures can inadvertently create a loop of dependence and exclusion. By emphasising the need for genuine inclusion rather than mere acknowledgment she calls for a re-evaluation of the systems in existence. Further she urges us to imagine a society where Dalit identities are not just recognised but fully integrated and empowered within this social structure. Through her insights one would be encouraged to consider the broader implications of caste discrimination and the urgency to transformative changes that would truly lead towards the empowerment of the Dalit communities.

The historical movement when Ambedkar initiated the Chavadar Lake *Satyagraha*, was not because drinking the water from there would make the Dalits immortal, rather he stated, "We are going to the lake to assert that we too are human beings like others. It must be made clear that this meeting has

been called to set up the norm of equality...” (Ambedkar, 2013, p. 24) T.H.P. Chentharassery also states in the same light that, “Untouchables were yet to be accorded the status of human beings.” (Chentharassery, 2013, p. 37) Thus, we can say, this caste system has made the soil barren so that the seeds of equality, liberty and fraternity can. The Dalit Panthers Manifesto, also mentions that “The present legal system and state have turned all our dreams to dust.” (Dalit Panther Manifesto, 2013, p. 64) We still can see the *savarnaa*’s failing to dismantle the caste hierarchy and create a society where everyone is equal and not dehumanised in name of being born in an Untouchable caste.

Ambedkar in *Annihilation of Caste* states giving up caste is giving up fundamental religious notions and therefore one needs to “destroy the authority of the *Shastras* and the *Vedas*” (Ambedkar, 1936, p. 69). Further he states that it seems impossible to annihilate caste and one of the reasons is, “...the attitude, which the *Brahmins* have shown towards this question...” (Ambedkar, 1936, p.70). Chandra Khan Prasad, in his writing, “Untouchability and it’s ‘Hidden’ Agenda,” reflects, “But society, by and large, has been refusing to internalize that verdict to the hilt, and therefore Dalits remain excluded from institutions outside the command of the state” (Prasad, 2013, p. 161) reflecting how it is crucial for the *savarnas* to have a notional change for creating a caste-less society. This recognition is crucial for fostering genuine allyship with the marginalised communities, centering Dalits and Adivasis, who have borne the burden of caste-based discrimination. As the news headlines on the 28th May, 2024 states, “The willful ignorance of caste in *Savarna India*” (*The News Minute*, 2020) powerfully illustrated the deep rooted presence of caste in Indian society and exposed its systematic oppression, often masked by convenient ignorance among privileged groups, especially the *savarna* elite. We can explore how from incidents of caste-based violence and exclusion to the manipulation of public discourse surrounding reservations, the text serves as a comprehensive commentary on the state of caste in modern India.

It emphasises how caste continues to dictate everyday interactions be it policy making and power structures. Its extension of presence is visible in every space, such as media representation, education or corporate spaces. Even in the 21st century, discriminatory practices persist such as violence against Dalits, to the denial of basic dignity in spaces like temples or public services. Aunupama Rao’s sates in this relevance , “...whether it be the mysteries of the body, as with Gandhi, or of the authentic India, ‘Bharat’, which for Nehru was peopled by the simple peasantry rooted to the soil, lacking consciousness of the nation

as a whole.” (Rao, 2014) This aligns with Ambedkar’s point that there is a need for *savarna*’s to have notional change, and which can be done once the new consciousness of establishing a equal society for all is implanted in their mind. She also expresses how the representation of Dalits selfhood strengthens the minority’s claim of suffering, their pain of being othered within the nation they are part of. In this lack of consciousness of nation by the *savarna*’s made Ambedkar to state, “we are part apart” (Ambedkar, 1939, p. 280) in the context of the Dalit situation in India.

It’s not even surprising, as caste has been normalised within our lives, and Ambedkar sharply critiques how caste remains an unproblematized issue in mainstream spaces. Even the progressive movements often fail to address caste-based issues adequately. The economic argument against caste-based reservations is debunked. It demonstrates how it cannot transcend economic status and affirmative actions until systematic barriers are dismantled. The change can only be visible when the *savarnas* educate themselves and push for policy change that focus on caste based representations. The call for a caste censuses, more data-oriented policy making and active participation in political processes that challenge caste structures highlights the need for collective social reform.

This paper advocates for commitment to confronting caste and emphasising that until the caste system is thoroughly dismantled India cannot claim to be an equal society. The role of the *savarnas* is crucial as it’s their notional sickness which perpetuates caste. Hence the cure through change in notion for a society where equality prevails needs to be initiated from their mental doors. Ambedkar’s *Annihilation of Caste* is not only a scathing critique of caste oppression but also a call for upper-caste Hindus to take responsibility for the system they uphold. This paper aims to add in the prevailing scholarship where there is change in the subject of experience and the theorisation can be gazed into. As its high time the gaze needs to be shifted, as the margin speaks from the lived experience and their writings reflects the perspective that they perceive of the world surrounding them. The Dalit Panther Manifesto states, “...the atrocities on the Dalits have grown endemic” (Dalit Panther Manifesto, 2013, p. 61). This issue was also highlighted by Ambedkar when he states, “...as long as caste in India does exist, Hindus will hardly intermarry or have any social intercourse with outsiders; and if Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, Indian caste would become a world problem” (Ambedkar, 1917, p. 6). This has now turned into a reality, caste is no longer problem limited in India. It has spread globally

as international nations are also forming anti-caste rules to prevent caste-based discriminations in their nations. As in the present time, caste still breathes, even stronger than ever. As B. Krishnappa states, “Caste plays an important role even to this day. Be it elections or political office, caste is a living force, eating its way into human lives like termites.” (Krishnappa, 2013, p. 111) The void of lack of responsibility by the *savarnas* results into the hyacinth-tic growth of the caste which has conquered the world. As T.M. Yesudasan states in his work, *Towards a Prologue to Dalit Studies*, “Dalit studies evolved under the following limiting conditions emerging at global and national levels, which have a bearing on the everyday practices of Dalit life-world” (Yesudasan, 2013, p. 151). As a result, in building upon the argument that caste sickness has now turned pandemic, it raises the urgency to create a dialogue between the *savarnas* and their ability of social consciousness.

Ambedkar’s vision of a caste-less society underscores the need for those who benefit from hierarchies will have to lead change by dismantling it, be it through abandoning endogamy, renouncing caste-based privileges, or critiquing the religious texts that justify caste. As Ambedkar himself states, “Make every man and woman free from the thralldom of the *Shastras*, cleanse their minds of the pernicious notions founded on the *Shastras*, and he or she will inter-dine and inter-marry, without your telling him or her to do so” (Ambedkar, 1936, p. 68). Even Gandhi towards the ending phase of his life built some alignment to Ambedkar’s: his argument in *Caste Must Go and the Sin of Untouchability* is in similar light as Ambedkar. In it he writes that “The present caste system is the very anti-thesis of *Varnashrama*. The sooner public opinion abolishes it the better...The existing practice is therefore doubly wrong in that it has set up cruel restrictions about interdining and intermarriage and tolerates anarchy about choice of occupation” (Gandhi, 1946, pp. 3–4). The Mahatma’s understanding took a tour of evolution to some extent, but his followers still got shackled with the notional slavery of the caste system. Hence, even the Mahatma failed to bring notional change within the *savarna*’s showcase the tragic rigidity of holding unto an unnatural superiority complex.

In summing up we can say that Ambedkar’s vision of annihilating caste is therefore not merely a battle for the oppressed but also a profound responsibility that rests with the oppressors. The upper castes *savarnas* must change their mentalities, abandon their privileges and actively work towards building an equal society and rejuvenation their moral consciousness with the act of contribution in building one.

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