

# **An Untouchable Against the Aryans: Some Reflections on Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's Perspective on The Savarna Theory of Caste**

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**Abstract:** *The paper historicises the Savarna theory of caste with an aim to contextualise the critique of varna/caste system that B. R. Ambedkar developed in his undelivered address at the annual conference of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal of Lahore in 1936. Contrary to the Savarna scholars, who had co-related caste, race and division of labour to portray varna/caste hierarchy as a democratic system, Ambedkar exposed its unjust and undemocratic character in his undelivered address, *The Annihilation of Caste*, and introduced the first major theoretical diversion from the existing Savarna theory that had hitherto dominated the colonial discourse on caste.*

**Keywords:** *Amebedkar, Aryan, Arya Samaj, Caste Hindus, reflective morality*

## **Introduction:**

‘...caste is the monster that crosses your path. You cannot have political reform; you cannot have economic reform, unless you kill this monster.’<sup>1</sup>

These words are of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, which he penned down as a part of his address for the annual conference of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal (Forum for Break-up of Caste) of Lahore in 1936; however, the speech could never be delivered owing to the cancellation of the conference by its organisers, who found the content of Ambedkar's address unbearable and his attack on the holy Vedas as well as Hinduism unacceptable. As Ambedkar has already printed several hundred copies of his address, he sold these to let the public know his critique of the caste system as well as to dispose of the printed copies which were lying with him. Having been printed and reprinted at multiple times since its first publication, the address titled, *Annihilation of Caste* has now come to be seen as a ‘revolutionary treatise’<sup>2</sup> and also ‘as a manifesto of disgust with caste oppression, a statement of the Ambedkarite creed, and the most important document in forming the resistance to caste discrimination.’<sup>3</sup> This address was written for the Caste Hindus (Savarna

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<sup>1</sup> Ambedkar, B. R. 2014. *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition*. Edited and annotated by S. Anand and introduced by Arundhati Roy, New Delhi: Navayana, p. 233

<sup>2</sup> Kumar, Aishwary. 2019. *Radical Equality: Ambedkar, Gandhi, and The Risk of Democracy*. New Delhi: Navayana, p. 220.

<sup>3</sup> Stroud, Scott R. 2023. *The Evolution of Pragmatism in India: An Intellectual Biography of B. R. Ambedkar*. Gurugram: HarperCollins Publishers, p. 158.

Hindus), mainly associated with the Arya Samaj, which believed in the sanctity of Vedas and aimed to strengthen Hinduism by reforming the Hindu society. Ambedkar was aware of Arya Samaj's attitude to social reform, which was different from his and therefore, after much insistence on the part of the organisers, Ambedkar had reluctantly accepted the invitation for the conference and decided to use it as an opportunity to critically engage with the Savarna theory of caste.

The *Annihilation of Caste* has been identified as a 'rhetorical artifact' by Scott R. Stroud, according to whom Ambedkar employed Deweyan pragmatism (John Dewey's philosophy) to criticise the caste system, and he appealed the Caste Hindus to inculcate reflective morality in their dealing with Hinduism as well as to make a shift from a religion based on rules to a religion based on principles.<sup>4</sup> Since the Vedas and the Shastras had made Hinduism a religion based on rules, they needed to be bombed to allow Hindus to change their habits and to make reflective morality a part of their faith. The textual past that the Vedas and the Shastras constituted was used to shore up the system of inequality in India, and therefore, by attacking this textual past in the *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar, according to Arun P. Mukherjee, perhaps 'was poking his Arya Samajist inviters in the eye for their pedagogical practice of starting the school day with ritual recitation of the Vedic mantras around the sacred fire.'<sup>5</sup> Ambedkar considered *chaturvarnya* or the division of society into four classes as an impracticable system<sup>6</sup> and held normative Hinduism itself as well as its devout Caste Hindu adherents responsible for creating the caste problem.<sup>7</sup> In his address, therefore, he demanded from Caste Hindus to accept caste as an innately oppressive system, to own up the responsibility of creating caste problem, and to 'give a new doctrinal basis' to their religion- a basis that would 'be in consonance with liberty, equality and fraternity; in short, with democracy'<sup>8</sup>, to resolve the caste problem, which had divided the Hindu society into thousands of competing caste groups.

For the radical change that Ambedkar demanded in their acts and attitude, most of the Caste Hindus were not ready, and we know that the conference was cancelled precisely because the organisers did not agree with the solution of the caste problem that he proposed. This paper historicises the Savarna theory of caste to provide a context to Ambedkar's theorisation of caste problem, its origin, its impact upon the Hindu society and its possible solution in the *Annihilation of Caste*. Furthermore, this paper proposes that the Savarna theory of caste that came into existence in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century had allowed Caste Hindus to justify their

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<sup>4</sup> Stroud, *The Evolution of Pragmatism in India*, pp. 172-181.

<sup>5</sup> Mukherjee, Arun P. 2009. "B. R. Ambedkar, John Dewey, and the Meaning of Democracy." *New Literary History* 29 (2), pp. 349-350.

<sup>6</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, pp. 265-271.

<sup>7</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, pp. 289, 303-307.

<sup>8</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, p. 311.

superior and privileged status in the Hindu society by shifting the blame for creating caste problem to others, particularly Buddhists, Muhammadans, and even shudra-atishudras. The decision of Ambedkar to post-mortem the Savarna theory in the *Annihilation of Caste* attests its wider popularity, which likely to have compelled him to challenge it by elaborating on his own views on caste system. To avoid repetition only selective writings are studied in this paper, which is divided into three main sections: first two sections whereas deal with the Savarna theory of caste, the third section focuses upon Ambedkar's critique of it.

**Desacralisation of Caste:** In his response to the *Annihilation of Caste*, M. K. Gandhi, also known as Mahatma Gandhi, distinguished caste from varna and while former is condemned the latter is praised. As varna defined individual's duties, not the rights, according to Gandhi it was 'conducive to the welfare of humanity' because varna system directed individuals to follow their ancestral calling.<sup>9</sup> Gandhi was not alone in having faith in the goodness of varna system, and many Caste Hindus shared his views.<sup>10</sup> One brahmin historian, K. V. Rangaswami Aiyangar, described *varnashramadharmas* 'the ideal of economic self-sufficiency'<sup>11</sup> and identified division of labour as the 'life-breath' of *varnashramadharmas*.<sup>12</sup> The *varnashramadharmas* was projected as a solution of the social anarchy (i.e., statelessness), and the state under a king was suggested to have come into existence to ensure peace and order by implementing the varna norms.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the caste system rooted in *varnashramadharmas* was believed to have 'ensured the transmission of hereditary skill and aptitudes, the formation of natural industrial groups, the provision of suitable means of vocational training, and localisation of industry, with all its contingent benefits.'<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, R. P. Masani, a contemporary of Aiyangar, conflated the terms: varna, caste, class and race, and according to him, the innate tendencies (*prakriti*) determined an individual's function or duties, which in turn constituted the basis of his membership in a varna or caste; he further endorsed strict observation of caste rules to ensure purity of race, physical, moral as well as spiritual because all the caste rules, according to Masani, rested on the sciences of 'eugenics, hygiene,

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<sup>9</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, pp. 326-327.

<sup>10</sup> The tendency to employ 'caste is not same as varna' as a rhetorical tool that Caste Hindus perfected under the colonial regime, is still in practice, and a recent example of it is J Sai Deepak's article in *The Indian Express*. J Sai Deepak, who is called 'Manuvadi' by his critique, has employed the rhetoric- caste is not same as varna, to defend his views, his Savarna (class) pedigree, and his Hindutva ideology in this article. Deepak, J Sai. 2023. "Mind the civilization gap." *The Indian Express (The Ideas Page)*, Thursday, 13 July 2023, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup> Aiyangar, K. V. Rangaswami. 1934. *Aspects of Ancient Indian Economic Thought*. Benares: Benares Hindu University, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Aiyangar, *Aspects of Ancient Indian Economic Thought*, p. 85.

<sup>13</sup> Aiyangar, *Aspects of Ancient Indian Economic Thought*, pp. 45-48.

<sup>14</sup> Aiyangar, *Aspects of Ancient Indian Economic Thought*, pp. 85-86.

mental therapeutics, or metaphysics.’<sup>15</sup> Masani goes on to define caste system as an ‘ancient, time-tested scientific socialism’ that promoted ‘a strong sense of democracy’, ‘class collaboration’, self-governance (e.g., village assemblies), ‘social tranquillity’, ‘civic and economic welfare’, and also ‘individual happiness and contentment.’<sup>16</sup> The successful functioning of caste system even was argued to be necessary for national development by Masani, according to whom, several undesirable features, such as, untouchability had crept into caste system only after the Muhammadan conquest of India.<sup>17</sup> To build up their defence of caste, both Aiyangar and Masani borrowed their primary assumption, i.e., varna/caste as a division of labour, from their colonial masters’ theoretical framework of caste, which was first systematically introduced in James Mill’s book, *The History of British India* (1817). However, they accepted only those parts of Mill’s framework that allowed them to retain the centrality of the Vedas and the Shastras, and their brahmin authors in the making of the Hindu India.

James Mill narrated the evolution of Hindu civilisation from tribal communities to monarchical polities in his *History*, and he made the origin of varna/caste system as an integral part of this evolutionary process. In his view, beginning of cultivation necessitated the division of people into different occupational classes: brahmins (priests), kshatriyas (soldiers), vaishyas (husbandmen) and shudras (servants and labourers)<sup>18</sup>, and it turned varna system into a division of labour. In Mill’s view, this division of labour was entirely in the favour of brahmins, who enjoyed many privileges including exemptions from taxes and punishments, control over the sacred books, and above all a position of powerful divinity in the Hindu society.<sup>19</sup> Contrary to that of a brahmin, this division of labour was all against the interests of a shudra, who was ‘an object of contempt, and even of abhorrence, to other classes of his countrymen’.<sup>20</sup> While brahmins could take up the profession of other three classes, their occupation was ‘exempt from the encroachment or competition of any other description of men’.<sup>21</sup> Next stage in the evolution of Hindu society took place, when inter-varna marriages (Burren Shunker) produced numerous sub-classes (castes), each having a distinct occupation, and some of these were even reduced to the level of untouchables.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Masani, R. P. 1962. “Caste and the Structure of Society.” *The Legacy of India* edited by G. T. Garratt, Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, pp. 132-134, 143-144.

<sup>16</sup> Masani, “Caste and the Structure of Society”, pp. 151-153.

<sup>17</sup> Masani, “Caste and the Structure of Society”, pp. 158-159.

<sup>18</sup> Mill, James. 1820 reprint. *The History of British India, vol. I.* London: Printed for Baldwin, Caradock, and Joy, pp. 155-158.

<sup>19</sup> Mill, *The History of British India, vol. I.*, pp. 160-165.

<sup>20</sup> Mill, *The History of British India, vol. I.*, pp. 167-168.

<sup>21</sup> Mill, *The History of British India, vol. I.*, p. 170.

<sup>22</sup> Mill, *The History of British India, vol. I.*, pp. 171-173.

With the publication of Mill's *History*, the divine origin theory of varna/caste system had been rejected and it was replaced with the two stage evolutionary theory: first, formation of *varnas* or classes as division of labour, and second emergence of new sub-classes (castes) due to an intermixing of *varnas* or classes. Alongside it, James Mill not only deconstructed the sacrality of the Hindu Shastras, but he simultaneously reconstructed an image of ancient India, in which despotic rulers (kshatriyas) ruled the land with the help of brahmins, who enjoyed liturgical, legislative and judicial powers while vaishyas managed production and shudras along with untouchables faced the worst form of exploitation. The views of Mill were shared by another British administrator, Mountstuart Elphinstone, who in much agreement with Mill, identified varna/caste system as a division of labour into occupational classes, and like Mill, and he too was 'struck with the prodigious elevation and sanctity of the Brahmins and the studied degradation of the lowest class' of the shudras in this system.<sup>23</sup>

Whereas James Mill's *History* deprived the *varna/caste* system of its divine sanctity, the race (pseudo)-science, which gained popularity in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, naturalised caste and provided it a scientific basis. Following the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* in 1859, the theory of monogenetic origin of humans based on Biblical framework lost its rationale, and as Darwin's study affirmed 'the essential unity of the human species,' different human races came to be seen in Europe as representing different stages in the linear progress of human development.<sup>24</sup> For the study of different races the science of anthropometry was developed, and methodologies including cranial measurement, nasal indices and skin colours were employed to study the physical features of different human groups in Europe, Asia, Africa and America to create a hierarchical order of different races: superior ones at the top followed by inferior ones in a descending order. People with large skulls (indicating large brain), sharp nose and white skin were considered superior, while those who lacked these were identified as intellectually, culturally and biologically inferior.<sup>25</sup> In context of India, the German Indologist Max Muller connected the Caste Hindus with that of the ancient Aryans, the supposed authors of the Vedas.<sup>26</sup> He made the racial conflict between the Aryans and the non-Aryans an integral part of India's Hindu past, and the

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<sup>23</sup> Elphinstone, Mountstuart. 1841. *The History of India, vol. I*. London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, pp. 23-36.

<sup>24</sup> Bates, C. 2011. "Race, Caste, and Tribe in Central India: The Early Origins of Indian Anthropometry." In *The Concept of Race in South Asia* edited by Peter Robb, Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 226.

<sup>25</sup> Bayly, S. 2011. "Caste and 'Race' in the Colonial Ethnography of India." In *The Concept of Race in South Asia* edited by Peter Robb, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 170-171; Bates, "Race, Caste, and Tribe in Central India," pp. 222-227.

<sup>26</sup> Leopold, Joan. 1970. "The Aryan Theory of Race." *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 7(2), pp. 271-272; Thapar, Romila. 1996. "The Theory of Aryan Race and India: History and Politics." *Social Scientist* 24 (1/3), p. 5.

Aryans under the leadership of brahmins were identified as a civilising force in India's ancient history.<sup>27</sup> Following Max Muller's views, Indian elites underlined the common racial origin of the Caste Hindus, particularly brahmins, and the white-skin Europeans from the Aryans, and one such elite, Keshab Chandra, a member of the Brahma Samaj, went on to visualise the British rule in India as a 'reunion of parted cousins, the descendants of two different families of the ancient Aryan race.'<sup>28</sup>

In 1863, G. M. Tagore read a paper on the formation and institution of the caste system before the Ethnological Society (London), and argued a common racial origin of the Hindu authors of the *Rigveda* and the Iranian authors of the *Zendavesta*. The Aryans were argued to have migrated to India due to the religious pressure of those, who followed Zoroastrianism.<sup>29</sup> After settling down in the North-western India, the Hindus/Aryans were divided into three classes, namely priestly (brahmins), military (kshatriyas), and commercial (vaishyas); and servile non-Aryan Dasyas were distinguished from the Aryans by identifying them as 'dark-skinned demon worshippers, the barbarians and the outcasts of the earth'<sup>30</sup>, and at a later stage, from the ranks of Dasyas, shudras are suggested to have emerged to serve the others. The first three classes were designated the status of twice-born and they acquired 'the privilege of wearing the sacrificial thread,'<sup>31</sup> but shudras were denied of this privilege. The caste-race correlation was formalised through the Census of India in 1901, when Herbert H. Risley, Commissioner for the Census, opined that the '*community of race*, and not, as has frequently been argued, *community of function*, is the real determining principle, the true *causa causans*, of the caste system.'<sup>32</sup> These studies, endorsing the racial conflicts/differences among Indians of different castes, helped the Caste Hindu scholars to claim an Aryan identity by identifying the low or out-castes people and tribal of India as non-Aryan, who were believed to have been conquered by Aryan ancestors of the Caste Hindus in ancient times.<sup>33</sup>

**In the Defence of Caste:** In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a history of India from the Caste Hindu's perspective was developed as a perennial struggle that Aryans and their descendent led in various forms against the non-Aryan people as well as numerous foreign invaders to protect their blood and civilization. Several scholars and

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<sup>27</sup> Trautmann, Thomas. R. 1997. *Aryans and British India*. New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, pp. 174-176.

<sup>28</sup> Leopold, "The Aryan Theory of Race", pp.272-273, & footnote. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Tagore, G. M. 1863. "On the Formation and Institution of the Caste System-the Aryan Polity." *Transactions of the Ethnological Society of London* 2, p. 379.

<sup>30</sup> Tagore, "On the Formation and Institution of the Caste System," pp. 370-371.

<sup>31</sup> Tagore, "On the Formation and Institution of the Caste System," pp. 376-377, 380.

<sup>32</sup> Inden, Ronald. 1990. *Imagining India*. Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, pp. 58, 61, 63; Bates, "Race, Caste, and Tribe in Central India," p. 242.

<sup>33</sup> Thapar, "The Theory of Aryan Race and India," pp. 5-6.

politicians, who were contemporary or near contemporary of B. R. Ambedkar had internalised the correlation between race-caste-and-division of labour in their thoughts and beliefs, and a summarily analysis here of their views will help us in developing a more nuanced understanding of Ambedkar's critique in the following section of the Savarna theory of caste. Not only the British historian, V. A. Smith began his history of India from the Aryan conquests<sup>34</sup>, but also a renowned native historian, RadhakumudMookerji identified the Aryan invasion and subsequent colonisation of India by the Aryans as 'the most important event in the world's history.'<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, nationalist leaders, for instance, Balgangadhar Tilak and M. G. Ranade too lauded the military achievements of the Aryans against the non-Aryans.<sup>36</sup> This binary of Aryan and others constituted the basic premise of a leading sociologist G. S. Ghurye's several studies, in which caste differences corresponded to racial differences, and Aryan migrants were glorified as the founder of higher culture (i.e., Hinduism) in India.<sup>37</sup>

In a same spirit, another famous nationalist historian R. C. Majumdar characterised the institution of caste as 'the best form of social corporation known to history'<sup>38</sup>, and he while retained James Mill's two stage schema of caste formation, characterised the caste system as a product of brahmin genius. In the Rigvedic society, the first three classes, viz., brahmin, kshatriya and vaishya, whereas were argued to have comprised the Aryans of Central Asian origin, all the non-Aryans were placed in the shudra class.<sup>39</sup> Although shudras could not change their class and remained at the bottom of class hierarchy, no Aryan men were stopped, according to Majumdar, from changing his class in the Vedic age. At this stage, Majumdar opined that it was not birth rather knowledge and aptitude that decided a class identity of an Aryan man.<sup>40</sup> Situation changed in the post-Vedic times, when brahmins separated them not only from non-Aryan shudras but also from Aryan kshatriyas and vaishyas by making birth the sole criteria to attribute a brahmin identity to a person.<sup>41</sup> As the offspring of inter-class marriages could no more be assigned their father's status, numerous castes (*jati*) to accommodate these mixed

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<sup>34</sup> Smith, V. A. 1907. *The Early History of India: From 600 BC to the Muhammadan Conquest including the invasion of Alexander the Great*. Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, p. 5.

<sup>35</sup> Mookerji, Radhakumud. 1912. *Indian Shipping: A History of the Sea-Borne Trade and Maritime Activity of the Indians from the Earliest Times*. Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Omvedt, Gail. 1971. "Jotirao Phule and the Ideology of Social Revolution in India." *Economic and Political Weekly* 6(37), p. 1973; Figueira, D. M. 2015. *Aryans, Jews, Brahmins: Theorizing Authority Through Myths of Identity*. New Delhi: Navayana, pp. 120-143.

<sup>37</sup> Oommen, T. K. 2011. "Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and the Nation: Situating G. S. Ghurye." *Sociological Bulletin* 60(2), pp. 228-244.

<sup>38</sup> Majumdar, R. C. 1922. *Corporate Life in Ancient India*. Poona: The Oriental Book Agency, p. 329.

<sup>39</sup> Majumdar, *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, pp. 333, 345-346.

<sup>40</sup> Majumdar, *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, pp. 336, 340-341, 343.

<sup>41</sup> Majumdar, *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, p. 354.

offspring were invented. In Majumdar's view, the creation of caste system was a triumph of brahmins over other classes and it placed them at the superior position in the Hindu society.<sup>42</sup>

The colonial writings that portrayed caste as a 'politically divisive' essence of India itself, equalled it to 'political impotence' as well as characterised it as a hurdle in the formation of Indian nation.<sup>43</sup> Such a negative portrayal of caste in the colonial writings perturbed the Caste Hindus, whose socially higher location in Indian society itself had depended upon the same old system of caste. In their view, caste had been invented to preserve the blood purity of the Aryans and their descendants. To counter the colonial writings, therefore, the Caste Hindu historians explained the failure of the descendants (e.g., brahmins, kshatriyas) of superior Aryansto protect the independence of India from foreign invaders by shifting the blame to Buddhists and the shudra-atishudras, who refused to follow the caste system and by doing so, they were argued to have not only disrupted the otherwise ideal caste system, but also weakened the Hindu defence against foreign invasions, which allowed foreign invaders including Muhammadans and after them Christian Europeans to conquer India.

K. V. Rangaswami Aiyangar while agreed with Mill and Elphinstone and styled the caste system as a division of labour, he refused to characterise it as an oppressive system, and in fact, he styled the brahmin authors of the *Arthashastra*, the *Dharmashastras* and other Sanskrit texts as the pioneer economists of ancient India.<sup>44</sup> He maintained that 'while birth and caste give a person a natural calling to start with, no serious attempt appears to be made to prevent a person of one occupation finding his way into another, if he has the requisite aptitude or desire for the change'.<sup>45</sup> The expression 'requisite aptitude or desire' is noticeable here, in the absence of which the change in varna/caste status, in Aiyangar's view, was not possible. In other words, those people who were at the bottom of the varna/caste hierarchy themselves were responsible for their degraded conditions because they lacked either requisite aptitude or desire to rise in the social hierarchy. The fundamental assumption of *varanshramadharm*a was argued to be the reciprocal services that were rendered by the members of castes to one another<sup>46</sup>, and both Muhammadans as well as Buddhists were held responsible for disrupting the ancient economy of India, which was believed to have been based on the laws inscribed in the Hindu Shastras.

While the Muhammadan conquest, according to Aiyangar, created a social and political instability by setting up new ideals and standards in India, the Buddhist

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<sup>42</sup> Majumdar, *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, p. 372.

<sup>43</sup> Inden, *Imagining India*, pp. 49, 63, 65-66.

<sup>44</sup> Aiyangar, *Aspects of Ancient Indian Economic Thought*, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> Aiyangar, *Aspects of Ancient Indian Economic Thought*, p. 85.

<sup>46</sup> Aiyangar, *Aspects of Ancient Indian Economic Thought*, p. 86.

teachings 'led to the popularisation of apolitical and uneconomic ideals.'<sup>47</sup> In addition, Aiyangar held the manual workers responsible for causing a communal rivalry by taking up profession not entitled to them in the caste system. As reciprocity remained no more a defining characteristic of the varna/caste system, the old-social system was argued to have broken down.<sup>48</sup> Like Aiyangar, R. P. Masani too located the formation of caste problem under Muhammadan rule, when untouchability crept into otherwise democratic caste system, and this system was argued to have protected Hindu culture in spite of the Hun invasions, Muhammadan despotism, and British rule for centuries.<sup>49</sup> In this way, Caste Hindus were absolved from all the blames by shifting the responsibility of causing caste problem either to Buddhists or to Muhammadans and even to manual workers (shudra-atishudras), who themselves were the worst sufferers of this system.

To further elaborate this point, here the views of T. N. Roy ('Hindu Eugenics', 1927) are particularly noticeable. In his article, Roy characterised the caste system as the 'greatest eugenic movement that the world has as yet witnessed'<sup>50</sup> and credited the brahmins for inventing it to ensure the birth of highly intellectual and efficient brahmin children in ancient times. As a part of this eugenic movement, brahmins promoted varna endogamy and gotra exogamy, and only those individuals were admitted, according to Roy, into brahmin fold from other castes who 'could give evidence of the possession of the requisite mental and moral traits, ability and attainments'.<sup>51</sup> In other words, caste identity was not based on birth in the beginning, rather an aptitude and intelligence of an individual was argued to have decided his location in caste hierarchy. In Roy's view, this eugenic movement of brahmins was disrupted by the Buddhists, which caused the intermixing of brahmin blood. As a result, brahmins, whose skin originally was of whitecolour, acquired various shades of skin, and subsequently, birth became a criteria to decide an individual's caste location in the Hindu society. The Hindu civilisation under the leadership of brahmins was an intellectual civilisation, according to Roy, and its downfall was argued to have been caused not by caste distinctions rather by failure of the Hindus to observe the caste rules well enough.<sup>52</sup>

Evident from above discussion is that the Indian scholars, mostly of Caste Hindu background, maintained a division between varna and caste either by connecting the origin of varna with racial differences or division of labour, or both, and of caste with inter-mixing of varnas ('class'). While they acknowledged the appearance of some anomalies in the functioning of castes because of Buddhists and

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<sup>47</sup> Aiyangar, *Aspects of Ancient Indian Economic Thought*, p. 153.

<sup>48</sup> Aiyangar, *Aspects of Ancient Indian Economic Thought*, p. 154.

<sup>49</sup> Masani, "Caste and the Structure of Society", pp. 156, 158.

<sup>50</sup> Roy, T. N. 1927. "Hindu Eugenics." *The Journal of Heredity*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1927, p. 67.

<sup>51</sup> Roy, "Hindu Eugenics", p. 69.

<sup>52</sup> Roy, "Hindu Eugenics", p. 69-72.

Muhammadans, they upheld varna based social organisation as the best innovation of a brahmin mind. Gandhi shared this belief of the Caste Hindus, and although he never followed the profession of his own ancestors, Gandhi praised varna as an ideal system based on ‘ancestral calling’.<sup>53</sup> The writings of Aiyangar, Masani and Roy show their refusal to characterise caste system as an innately oppressive system, and they appear to have shifted the blame from Caste Hindus for causing the caste problem to non-brahmins through a selective appropriation of the writings of their colonial masters.

**Caste is Anti-National:** At a time, when ‘the congress leadership and Gandhi maintained that the caste system was a social matter and not relevant to the political struggle to attain freedom from colonial rule, Ambedkar brought it into the discourse of civil liberties and the individual’s right to choose.’<sup>54</sup> Ambedkar considered the annihilation of caste more important compared to freedom from the British Raj, and he believed that only a casteless society in India can build a truly independent nation. To achieve the utopian idea of casteless society, the Hindus were to be made free of ‘cognitive servitude’ by ‘recovering the moral psychology of action from the treason of India’s intellectuals themselves’.<sup>55</sup> In Ambedkar’s view, Caste Hindu intellectuals committed treason against the nation by formulating a theoretical justification of caste system, and therefore, the Savarna theory that rationalised caste was required to be annihilated first by exposing its undemocratic roots and practise to achieve swaraj in a truer sense. ‘Annihilation’ (*ucched*) therefore becomes ‘a tradition-defying concept’ that Ambedkar cultivated as ‘a rhetorical and interpretative *coup de force*’ against cognitive servitude.<sup>56</sup> In the *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar made ‘a distinction between social reform in the sense of the reform of the Hindu family, and social reform in the sense of the reorganisation and reconstruction of Hindu society’<sup>57</sup>; the former while promoted widow remarriage and criticised the child marriage, the latter endorsed the abolition of caste system. The Caste Hindus including the Arya Samajis were interested only in the reforms of Hindu family, but Ambedkar argued for a complete overhaul of the Hindu society before political freedom from the British Raj and characterised the caste system as innately oppressive system. Commenting on the Savarna theory of caste, Ambedkar draws our attention to the fact that in addition of being a division of labour, caste system ‘*is also a division of labourers*’<sup>58</sup> (italic in original). Having characterised this division of labourers into watertight compartments as unnatural, he further highlighted the organisation of the divisions of labourers in a

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<sup>53</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, pp. 326-327, 342.

<sup>54</sup> Mukherjee, “B. R. Ambedkar, John Dewey, and the Meaning of Democracy”, pp. 364-365.

<sup>55</sup> Kumar, *Radical Equality*, p. 257.

<sup>56</sup> Kumar, *Radical Equality*, p. 220.

<sup>57</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, p. 219.

<sup>58</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, p. 233.

graded hierarchy one above other, which no other country except India had ever developed.

The division of labour in caste system was neither spontaneous nor was based on natural aptitudes, according to Ambedkar, who argued that it did not provide equal opportunities to all individuals to develop their capacity to the point of competency to choose and make their own career choices. In the case of caste system, duties and functions were fixed of 'individuals in advance- selected not on the basis of trained original capacities, but on that of the social status of the parents.'<sup>59</sup> Not only this, an individual was not allowed to change his profession freely with the changes in industries, which were never static and had been subjected to change owing of the pulls and pushes of markets over a period of time. The caste system by not allowing an individual, particularly of lower castes, to take up new occupation that was not assigned to his caste, in Ambedkar's view, caused much of the unemployment and forced an individual to starve as well as fail to realise his potential. Caste system prefixed an individual's vocation on the basis of his parent's caste and did not take into account 'individual sentiment' and 'individual preference' before assigning to him a social and economic role in the Hindu society.<sup>60</sup> According to Ambedkar, the 'division of labour brought about by the caste system' was 'not a division based on choice,' rather it was 'based on the dogma of predestination,' which pushed many persons to take up callings that made no appeal to them.<sup>61</sup> Occupations that were considered degraded by the Hindus, provoked those who were engaged in them to aversion, and these persons constantly desired 'to evade and escape from such occupations'.<sup>62</sup> Because caste system subordinated 'a man's natural powers and inclinations to the exigencies of social rules,' it was argued to be a harmful institution.<sup>63</sup> By not providing equal opportunities to all, caste as an economic organisation was argued to have failed to take into account an individual's aptitude and free choice, and it pushed individuals into professions that they disliked, which made it a highly inefficient system.

Based on D. R. Bhandarkar's paper ('Foreign Elements in the Hindu Population'), Ambedkar argued that 'men of pure race exist nowhere,' and in all parts of the world including India mixture of races had taken place to an extent that no one can claim to be of a pure race any more. Neither warrior classes including Rajputs and Marathas nor brahmins were of pure blood in India due to the intermixing of numerous races of Indian and non-Indian origins.<sup>64</sup> To support his argument, Ambedkar draws our attention in the *Annihilation of Caste* to the differences

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<sup>59</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, p. 234.

<sup>60</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, p. 235.

<sup>61</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, p. 235.

<sup>62</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, pp. 235-236.

<sup>63</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, p. 236.

<sup>64</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, pp. 236-237.

between brahmins of Punjab and brahmins of Madras, who neither have same skin colour nor body structure. On the other hand, brahmins and chamars of Punjab as well as brahmins and Pariah of Madras were shown to have shared several common physical features, which, according to Ambedkar, made them of common racial stock.<sup>65</sup> Ambedkar, who did not believe in race science, here appears to have invoked racial differences between people of Punjab and Madras as a rhetorical strategy to reinforce his larger argument against the caste as race theory.

The caste as race theory was based on the presumption that the Aryan conquerors invented caste system to maintain their blood purity by segregating the non-Aryan shudras and atishudras. In response to it, Ambedkar argued that unlike animals, all human beings scientifically were of same species and had ‘capacity to interbreed and produce offspring,’ which was ‘capable of breeding’ and which was ‘not sterile’.<sup>66</sup> In his view, caste system did not demarcate racial division; rather it was ‘a social division of people of the same race’.<sup>67</sup> In other words, according to Ambedkar, Hindus divided into brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya, shudra and untouchable castes, all belonged to same racial stock and carried mixed blood, and later he elaborated this view in greater detail in his two books: *Who Were the Shudras: How They Came to be the Fourth Varna in the Indo-Aryan Society?* (Published in 1946) and *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables?* (Published in 1948).<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, Ambedkar raised the question regarding the location of sub-castes in caste system: If caste is a race, then on what ground sub-castes are based? Having adopted a pragmatic attitude, he responded to this question as follows: If sub-castes belong to different races, then all brahmins cannot be of supposedly superior Aryan race. On the other hand, if sub-castes are not racially different from the main caste (for instance, brahmin) to which they belong, then the restriction on inter-marriage as well as inter-dining ‘between sub-castes cannot be for the purpose of maintaining purity of race or of blood’<sup>69</sup>, and therefore, caste cannot be considered to be eugenic in origin. After rejecting a correlation between caste and race, Ambedkar then makes a rhetorical attack on self-claimed superiority of the Caste Hindus in the *Annihilation of Caste*:

‘If caste is eugenic, what sort of a race of men should it have produced? Physically speaking the Hindus are a C3 people. They are a race of pygmies and dwarfs, stunted in stature and wanting in stamina. It is a nation nine-tenths of which is declared to be unfit for military service. This shows that the caste system does not embody the eugenics of modern scientists.’<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, pp. 237-238.

<sup>66</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, p. 238.

<sup>67</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, p. 238.

<sup>68</sup> For details see: Kumar, Ashish. 2018. “Aryans versus Non-Aryans: A Study of Dalit Narratives of India’s Ancient Past.” *Contemporary Voice of Dalit* 10(2), pp. 4-7.

<sup>69</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, p. 239.

<sup>70</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, pp. 240-241.

In spite of having no faith in the science of eugenics, Ambedkar here uses the eugenic category of C3 that was coined for Indian population by British military<sup>71</sup> as a purely rhetoric devise to demolish the biological defence of the caste system. Contrary to the Caste Hindus like T. N. Roy, Ambedkar identified caste as ‘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 inferior.’<sup>72</sup> Later, in his book, *Who Were the Shudras*, Ambedkar directly attacked brahmins for endorsing the caste as race theory, and accused them for using it to establish their kinship with the European races and to justify their overlordship over the non-brahmins.<sup>73</sup> The Caste Hindus in the *Annihilation of Caste* were accused for deliberately preventing the lower castes from rising to the economic and cultural levels of the higher castes, and the Savarna theory of caste was suggested to be a part of their strategy to protect their self-interests. Caste system, according to Ambedkar, made people conscious of their respective caste communities, dissuaded them from participating in common activities, hindered the formation of a unified national life, turned caste groups into warring groups, and killed the public spirit in India, where not only virtue but morality too had become caste-bound.<sup>74</sup>

Worth noting here is Ambedkar’s objection to the use of labels, viz., brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya and shudra, by Arya Samajists for the classes, into which Hindu society was supposed to be reorganised after reform. The aim of Arya Samaj was to eradicate all castes by reorganising Hindus into four classes (*chaturvarnya*) on the basis of the division of labour and the entry of an individual into each class was to be decided on the basis of his worth (*guna*) instead of birth. In Ambedkar’s view, no such permanent labels were required to differentiate a learned person from the one, who carries another type of expertise in a society. Owing to their long use in public life, these archaic labels that had acquired certain notions, according to Ambedkar, would continue to carry same notions, i.e., a hierarchy based on birth, in future. As the continuation of these archaic names would make the reforms futile, Ambedkar opined that to eradicate caste, it was imperative for a Hindu to unlearn all these archaic labels as well as fixed notions associated with these.<sup>75</sup> In this way, a mental revolution that was advocated by him in the *Annihilation of Caste* could not be achieved without a new language of public discourse.

Even though Ambedkar acknowledged a difference between varna and caste at semantic level, he considered both, *chaturvarnya* and caste system as same in essence. In a response to Arya Samaj’s support to *chaturvarnya* system, Ambedkar

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<sup>71</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, pp. 240-241, footnote no. 49.

<sup>72</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, p. 241.

<sup>73</sup> See for details: Kumar, “Aryans versus Non-Aryans,” p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, pp. 242-244, 246, 259.

<sup>75</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, pp. 263-264.

elaborated its limitations in the *Annihilation of Caste*. Since the qualities of individuals have been diverse, he argued that it was not possible to pigeon-hole them into four sharply demarcated classes or varnas, and likewise, it was impossible to stop people from transgressing their assigned classes without an external force. Ambedkar questioned: If a brahmin /kshatriya/ vaishya failed to perform his assigned duties, then who would ensure his eviction from his assigned varna (class)? Any class having a control over this external force could misuse it, which would make *chaturvarnyaa* highly impractical system. Owing to the absence of any clarity on the nature of the 'external force' that was supposed to regulate the functioning of *chaturvarnya* division of labour, Ambedkar appears to opine that it was not possible at all to protect the interests of those, who were placed at the bottom from those placed at the top in varna hierarchy.<sup>76</sup> In addition, he defended the right of an individual to opt for a profession that he desired as well as that suited his capacities, irrespective of his ancestral calling.<sup>77</sup>

**Conclusion:** The treason that the Caste Hindus committed against the shudra-atishudras by devising varna/caste system to justify their superiority, was unmasked in the *Annihilation of Caste*, in which its author, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, demanded from Caste Hindus to own up the responsibility for creating the caste problem. Following the de-sacralisation of varna/caste in the colonial writings, the Caste Hindus invented caste-race-labour division theory and made it the basic premise for the study of India's past and present. As a part of this theory, native scholars, mostly Caste Hindus, shifted the blame to Buddhists, Muhammadans, and shudra-atishudras for disrupting the otherwise an ideal grouping of Indian population into varnas/castes in ancient times; they held fast to their beliefs and rejected Ambedkar's views on caste, which is well evident from the cancellation of the Lahore conference. In spite of its cancellation in 1936, Ambedkar's undelivered address acquired a status of 'revolutionary treatise,' and 'Dalit manifesto' in the following decades owing to its ability to develop a counter-narrative from an untouchable's perspective, and this counter-narrative of Ambedkar laid bare the anatomy of caste as well as provided a road-map for its annihilation. The historical significance of the *Annihilation of Caste* lies not only in the fact that it marked an actively critical participation of an untouchable, Ambedkar, in the colonial and nationalist discourse on caste, but also in the fact that it caused a first major diversion from the existing Savarna theory<sup>78</sup> that had hitherto dominated this discourse.

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<sup>76</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, pp. 271-273.

<sup>77</sup> Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, p. 343.

<sup>78</sup> Jyotirao Phule and other Dalit intellectuals associated with the Ad-dharma or Ad-dravida movements accepted the Aryan-non Aryan binary by inverting it from shudra-atishudra perspective; however, they could not cause any theoretical diversion from the Savarna theory of caste. See for discussion: Kumar, "Aryans versus Non-Aryans," pp. 2-4.

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