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Ambedkar, Gandhi and Filth through Caste

Arpan Singh

Supervised by:
Ashis Roy

Dr Anup Kumar Dhar

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School of Human Studies

Declaration

This is to certify that this thesis titled '**Ambedkar, Gandhi and Filth through Caste**

submitted for the award of the degree of Masters of Arts in Psychology to Ambedkar University, Delhi is a bonafide work carried out by Arpan Singh under my supervision.

The work embodied in this dissertation is original and has not been submitted in part or full for the award of any other degree of any other university.

Supervisor

School of Human Studies

Ambedkar University, Delhi

Co-Supervisor

School of Human Studies

Ambedkar University, Delhi

Arpan Singh

Student

Dean

School of Human Studies

Ambedkar University, Delhi

Ambedkar University, Delhi
Kashmere Gate,
New Delhi.
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This kind of intertwining of almost biographical work with personal history has fascinated me for a long time. I started reading Dr Ambedkar's life when I was in second semester thanks to the Ways of Human course. He remains one of the most neglected pioneers of our nation.

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Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction pg. 6

Chapter 2: Reviewing Others pg. 14

Chapter 3: Revisiting Filth pg. 34

Chapter 4: Conclusion pg. 37

Chapter 1: Introduction

My dissertation is a work on filth and caste identity. When I had begun thinking about what my work would entail, I decided to work on Caste as an issue, and how deeply it resonated with my own identity configuration. The experience of caste for me has been one where I have had the privilege of the social capital. I was born as a caste Hindu, a woman, in a military family. I lived in various parts of India, yet the presence of caste has never evaded my life. There have been moments when I have been able to closely associate with the oppression attached to having a caste identity.

While travelling on a train bound to a city in south India for a cousins wedding, I was at the receiving end of caste politics, the idea of pollution and the danger of being vilified by contact. An elderly Brahmin couple started to talk to me, and we exchanged an interesting chat however when they offered me something to eat, it was offered in a manner which was very surprising. It was kept at an arm's length and offered. This made me introspect on the various experiences of untouchability that I had witnessed during my life. It took me to investigate the spaces that were untouchable to me and instances where I had been rendered untouchable.

This led me to my first dissertation proposal which was an attempt to historicize my own caste identity and where did it stem from. This is where I would like to take the reader to my initial musings on caste.

A lot stems from personal history, and one source of motivation for my research is my family history, although my paternal grandparents were a part of the freedom movement, they never imbibed certain aspects of the Gandhian struggle. They remained till their death staunch rajputs unwilling to give in to the somewhat changing mind-set. As a child it always fascinated me how some people were not allowed to cross the threshold of my ancestral home in Bihar, while some

of the others who also seemed different from me were. One incident in particular added to my confusion greatly at that time. When I was about 12 years old, our ‘dhobi’ who was washing clothes in the communal washing area (my ancestral home is still very much a joint family with four different generations living in a house) got thirsty and requested water from me, and I promptly got him water in a glass. His drinking water from a glass coincided with my grandmother passing and seeing this. She shrieked looking at this innocent gesture from me, and started berating the ‘dhobi’ with the choicest hindi and angika (it is an Indo-Iranian language from Anga region and spoken in southern Bihar) profanities. I was accused of being an unthinking and disrespectful young child. But I could never take out of my mind the image of ‘dhobi’ bhaiyya’s tearful eyes. Yet this unexplainable and spontaneous anger did not deter me from asking my clearly livid grandmother why she was so angry at what I did? And that is when she explained to me, that some castes and sub castes can pollute us and make us filthy if we interact with them in a manner which is not traditional. It is not okay to touch or have food or offer water in the vessels we use to castes like ‘dhobi’. ‘nai’ etc. however when I asked her , that he was engaged in washing our clothes which we wear, doesn’t that make all of us dirty? She scoffed and said no, it did not as that was their prescribed role and clothes washed by them don’t make us dirty.

This incident has planted the seed of doubt in my head as to the relationship we as people share with the idea of filth and dirt and pollution. And to help me come closer to the resolution I realised I had to investigate the writings of two exemplar critics of this system, Ambedkar and Gandhi. In his essay Annihilation of Caste , Ambedkar begins his attack on Caste, by examining the historical practices which legitimised and fostered the institution of Caste, he discusses the atrocities and discrimination of the oppressed caste, and how certain modes of being and living were systematically precluded from the imagination of oppressed classes. He cites the rule of Peshwas in Maharashtra and how within that regime, untouchables were not even allowed to use the public streets lest they pollute the Hindu by their shadow. How the ideology of purity and pollution have been internalised and have become an obvious part of the consciousness of the Hindu, and operated even then during the emergent colonial modernity. He is a thinker who I will rely heavily in to understand the internalisation and playing out of caste politics in an immanent India. My grandparents were products of a particular system and although not

belonging to a brahminical caste their consciousness was definitely within this fold. Ambedkar presents one angle of the educated Indian mind-set, although he was deeply embedded in his caste identity he never engaged in public presentation of this identity, he never engaged in manual work or worked towards restoring the dignity of manual work like Gandhi did. He was in fact in direct opposition to Gandhi's sensibility towards upliftment of oppressed classes. He was a splitting image of a modern man, and consciously he indulged in projecting this image. Hence this takes my query as to what it was in Gandhi's method of looking at filth and caste that violated Ambedkar's sensibility.

The other major contributor to my examination of this worldview would be Gandhi as he attempted to invert the periphery in to the mainstream and in effect made the mainstream into the periphery; he scoffed and reduced the foreign educated intelligentsia as not the real supporters of change from a western aggressive power. It is widely known that Gandhi used to clean toilets in Birla Ashram, and encouraged everyone to engage in manual tasks, he was a devout Sanatani yet the idea of being polluted never permeated his being by the act of cleaning the toilet. What was his relationship with the idea of filth, and nothing in human history is seen as more filthy than human shit, so how does Gandhi lend us a lens to view the relationship of caste with filth. And how does it become an opposition to Ambedkar's position on understanding caste.

In the Indian consciousness, the idea of dirt and pollution are closely tied with Caste. Certain castes hold the power of polluting other castes, this internalisation is so strong that castes which are disadvantaged from such an understanding also recreate the same systems in their dealing with castes that are lower than them on the ladder. This insidious circular perpetuation of pollution needs to be revisited and examined.

To understand the notion of filth more carefully, and how it plays out in a psychological relation with the self I enetered Kubie's (1937) text Fantasy of Dirt. It lead me to investigate further why I was so fascinated by filth and caste. This also coincided with my next visit to my village and ended in my second proposal which still was about caste and filth but the caste lines had become sharper. Filth and work on it had begun to fade from my immediate concern. Gandhi and Ambedkar were my heroes in this investigation but a different reading of the caste issue was necessitated to understand the filth inherent in caste. I could have gone the usual anthropological

way and tried to locate answers in Laporte and Douglas but they seem very distant from my reading of caste today. To culturalize Laporte would be a task I leave for some other time.

However Kubie proved to be an interesting source to locate my experience with my two friends. This led to my second proposal.

I began my previous proposal with an anecdote from my village and even now I will go back to my village to illustrate what I understood of filth. I visited Dharhara with two of my college friends last week for a couple of days and as any overenthusiastic parent (my father who also planned for his holiday at the same time) decided to show us the village. He took us around everywhere and on the last day he took us to the fields. To get to the fields one has to go across the other section of the village which is segregated by a railway line. This section comprises of jaatis like, chamaar, nai, dhobi, dusad, mushar, dom, bauri, bhoogta, chaupal. These are some of the jaaits which reside in that area and are classified as Schedule Castes. All of these jaatis have a traditional occupation which some continue even in this day. Affirmative action in a village is not easy to spot when segregation is so obvious. Obduracy of caste is inescapable. So my sort of liberated father took the three city girls across this section carefully explaining how long things have been the way they are. He met a few of his old domestic help and they expressed a lot of joy at meeting us but all from a distance. This distance didn't register at the moment it was happening however what left a clear mark on my mind was when one of my friends reached out to hold a beautiful lamb, the owner shrieked in excitement and dread. Although she was happy at my friend's spontaneous gesture, she was sceptical to touch her and like everyone expressed her joy from a distance. Her expression was of shock. It was unimaginable to her that my friend could do that. What was however more shocking was my father's expression which seemed to emulate the woman's expression. He was astonished and then laughed. As we walked over to him after this brief sensational moment, he told us, isn't that dirty?

I'm still befuddled to what it was that he referred to as dirty? But this internalisation of dirt and filth is so strong that even today for my father and that woman the first reaction is of shock which is followed by a mellow acceptance of the change. Two people from different classes and social strata have imbibed the same fantasy of dirt and play it out in reality. What is the

relationship that the psyche and body share with filth and how does this relationship gets played out in society?

As Kubie explains in a quote from his paper The Fantasy of Dirt

“Nevertheless it is true that we acknowledge no 'innate' or inherent distinctions between clean and dirty, whether on the basis of consistency, color, form, smell, utility, waste, or any combinations of these. Instead, the concept of dirt is looked upon throughout rather as the outcome of an emotional judgment which is imposed by the environment upon the ego of the developing infant.”

Lawrence Kubie’s paper attempts at unravelling the fantasy of dirt, however my worry is to examine the reality of dirt. Reality informs the condition in which fantasy is constructed. And the reality that I have encountered in my very limited reading and in my personal life is that, in a perennially hierarchical India even Dirt, filth and Shit have a hierarchy. They are the markers of civilization. And one of the markers of a progressive civilization is the relationship it shares with filth and its disposal. If we examine history ,The “great” Indus valley civilization is called so because amongst many other reasons it had sanitation facilities and what is regarded as one of the earliest flush toilets, common large baths and sewer pipes running through households. Keeping the filth of everyday away from civilization. So even though we produce filth and give it the meaning it has it has to be kept veiled, hidden. For reasons of hygiene of course but.

Our relationship with filth is a curious one. We distinguish between filthy and non-filth in every human exercise. And this is an insidious exercise when take it to its extreme creates a hierarchy where certain human and their experience of being a human itself become dirty.

This very same filth on which our existence is contingent, for example one of the modern state pillars where hygiene is systemically impressed upon is the healthcare.

A ubiquitous exercise in the Indian state healthcare policy is to vaccinate children against polio. It is done through oral polio vaccine which aims to achieve herd immunity against the disease

polio through attenuated vaccine via the oral route by keeping the pathogen viable. So basically any accidental transfusion of this pathogen is actually good. It means shit(because this pathogen is found in faecal matter) is good. So as Kubie rightly claims all shit is a fantasy. And retaining some of it even as we expel it is indispensable for humanity.

Freud in his paper Character and Anal Erotism claims that ‘dirt is matter in the wrong place’. However as Kubie goes on to explain further that it is not such a simple translocation of the matter in space but the construction of absurdities that surround filth. A construction in which filth is in interaction with the body producing a particular kind of reaction to it. Why is it that we get disgusted at the sight of faeces even though we make it everyday? We go the length of inhibiting out sensuous experience with filth. We curtail it and make it impersonal. An example from Kubie’s work would adequately define the experience talked of, the arbitrary nature of filth.

“If you move your tongue around in your mouth, you will become aware of the saliva. To you that saliva does not seem dirty. If then you contemplate your finger, it also presumably looks 'clean'. But now if you put your clean finger into your clean mouth, moisten it with your clean saliva, and stroke your neighbour’s cheek with it, he will have to control an impulse to shrink; just as we are troubled if we see a slum mother moisten the corner of her handkerchief with saliva to rub the soot from her baby's nose. Your clean saliva has become his dirt, and not to him alone: now that it has left your mouth you would hesitate to lick it with your own tongue. Thus a lover may shrink from the wetness which his own kisses have left.”

This illustrates clearly the absurd relation that body has with filth and how it is conjured in and through our environment. The danger of contamination through filth makes it necessary to remove oneself from subjection to filth. And in our society what then becomes critical is how we purge our self of this filth. Hence we segregate everything that is filthy. In my own village the tradition is to construct the toilet and washrooms away from the house. Hence the location of these basic structures is away from where other activities of everyday life happen. the kitchen and the ‘mandir’ are not constructed near the toilets. The toilets are usually outside the house. And in larger situation like a city, the dump or the sewage plants are usually outside the city. Location of sanitation plants shows the relation we share with our own filth. The danger and fear of defilement runs so very deep in our consciousness that we have created within us a special

caste of people to represent this defilement. The untouchables, are segregated to represent the fantasy of dirt. How was this fantasy created and how do people who are discriminated against by this fantasy create it for themselves? I don't know where all to look, for answers to these queries.

But I will look up the personal life history of Ambedkar through an archival method, Ambedkar's caste analysis in my limited reading has always been impersonal, a historical-social-political critique but never an attempt to disclose the personal idea of dirt and filth. Schedule Castes are constructed to be dirty but does Ambedkar talk about this dirt is what makes me curious? Whereas Gandhi and self-disclosure go hand in hand. Hence I will look at Gandhi as parallel thinker and try to locate the conception of filth within his dialogues with different individuals, like Ambedkar.

This was where the crossroads had left me between Ambedkar, Gandhi and Shit. Shit as experienced as a caste connotation. Shit that is expelled to make the body free of dirt. The dirt within the caste is centred in and around untouchables. From experience of dirt to grades of filth.

But the move to look for meanings of caste and the experience of filth as it has within the angles of shame and guilt drove me to seek Ambedkar and Gandhi in dialogue with Ambedkar. I align myself closely with Ambedkar, although my fascination with him will last a very long time. This is where my dissertation has left me…. These are the questions that continue to animate my identity. Ambedkar and Gandhi are historically constructed polarities, but how does one try and move away from such a binary? Is that even possible?

My dissertation broadly is trying to locate how filth is constructed to define the social structure with respect Caste. What it is that is rendered filthy and dirty and that which has the potential to vilify the normal, the privileged within Caste. And I am searching for this in the writing of Ambedkar and his dialogues with Gandhi.

Why is it that Gandhi can render the filth as 'harijan' but Ambedkar chooses to obliterate the structure itself. As the story goes, Gandhi chose to retain elements of the structure, the Varna

and ashram systems were seen as elements that were critical to Gandhi for an experience of equality. "If caste and varna are con-vertible and if varna is an integral part of Hinduism, I do not know how a person who rejects caste, i e, varna can call himself a Hindu" [Gandhi, 1936, 86]. Religion was a way to integrate and then ingratiate the filth. For him remaining as a 'harijan' within the religious fold would be the way towards acceptance and equality. He repeatedly asked the larger hindu community to recognise being an 'harijan' as a valid respectful equal. Why Gandhi chose to clean the toilets as a way resisting the perversion of the Varna system makes me curious. Is it because he took on the palleonemic weight of his culture? Was it because that since he himself did not experience the shame that comes attached with cleaning filth, or being seen as filth? Is it his guilt that makes Gandhi acutely aware of the pathalogisation that Hinduism produced vis-à-vis the scheduled caste. We rendered them as filthy to be clean. This is where I am stuck? Gandhi always makes me wonder, Why did he chose to rename filth (dom , chamar, mushar, bhangi) to harijan? Is this also not a denial of their history? Did it also not create a different bastardization? The filth had its own father. Filth was born(e) of filth that non-filthy created, so Why did Gandhi choose to call them son of God?

This is what makes me take my search to Ambedkar, his complete negation of religion, and his attempt to annihilate the system. His experience of filth is more intimate, he is a Mahar, who has not followed his Varna. His resistance to cleaning the shit is an experience of filth as intimate. He experiences the shame and does turn over to removing that which makes him dirty. He does not agree with the structure that feeds on dirtying the intimate other to feel clean. However, I always feel that his experience was so based in shame, an angularity of human experience that is only achieved in presence of the other, that he also denied his own history. He also denied his own forefathers the decency to be 'engraced'. His vehement denial of filth is also a reiteration that it should be seen as filth. Hence removed. Ambedkar did not clean shit. What is it that makes caste so obdurate that the filth it creates can't be sanitised or reworked? Gandhi suffers the guilt of caste and Ambedkar carries the shame attached to it. How will I negotiate this space is what animates me? How does one understand and reconcile these two without creating further debasement of filth? Filth is noble as purity. What can be profound can be rendered profane within the same culture.

Chapter 2: Reviewing Others

Conventions of writing a dissertation often dictate a separation between a survey of literature and our own personal rendering of what we have surveyed, also called an analysis. However I am going to circumvent this social more and combine the two. It is unconventional but for me very effective to draw larger debates into this overpopulated debate.

"Men make their own history, but they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past."

- Karl Marx, 1852

Ambedkar was a one such luminary whose life could be predicated on this piece of gem by Marx, who remained an inspiration for Ambedkar. Ambedkar had many teachers, but Marx was who he investigated with love and had a falling out with him. Many Ambedkarite's have captured this, I will move through them to come closer to his conception.

Gail Omvedt (Omvedt,2004) is an unapologetic Ambedkarite. In my nascent engagement with the luminous figure of Ambedkar, I too was an Ambedkarite. I identified with his anger and upset with the hierarchy that we have inherited, a system imposed on us historically. We are the

unfortunate children of an enslaved India, a deeply hierarchical India. And after 60 odd years of Independence, and in the aftermath of Ambedkar and Gandhi, we still are reeling under the pressures of Caste identity.

However, when I stop being involved emotionally with this slavish system, it does become clear.

Ambedkar was a deeply embittered angry young man who decided to go up against a hierarchy which was going to foster under the tutelage of the wise old Gandhi. The Bapu in opposition to Baba.

Ambedkar was a Mahar, born in a military family in Mhow. The immediacy of his caste identity was not so pronounced in the environ of a military background, but which became clearer to him, post his father's retirement to Satara. Bhiva as he was called, gave up his family name of Sankpal, and retained Ambedkar which he got from his caste Hindu teacher. (Omvedt, Ambedkar, Ch1 , 4-7)

This is the first instance in which we can see renunciation of a caste identity, his parents decided to bestow on Ambedkar a last name which did not showcase his caste. Ambedkar, went on to never performatively engage with his caste identity. His parents were instrumental in him becoming an exceptional scholar. They instilled in him a self-confidence which enabled him to become the leader that he did. However, this did not eliminate the shame that he felt being seen as an achhut, or an untouchable. Although Omvedt would like us to believe otherwise. She disengages from the psychological shame that was a part of Ambedkar's life. This is a proposition that is difficult to believe, he was continuously discriminated against, 'Bhiva an untouchable student forced to sit separately….he could only choose between Persian and English' (Omvedt, Ambedkar, Ch1, 5). This was his battle for the longest time, when in Baroda state he took on a Parsi name when lodging at a Parsi hostel. He worked as military secretary to the king, in the Baroda state, but even after such esteemed credentials he could not secure a position of equality and respect. His angst and anger towards caste Hinduism stems out of this feeling of alienation. Psychological and sociological understanding may not be equated but definitely both get created within the social fact of Shame. A sociological history of shame would take us in the direction of how social lines are kept straight by maintaining the conditions of shame intact. It has controlled entrances to shame. And the exits maybe very difficult.

Experiences of shame are experienced as shame vis-à-vis the other An alienation that was predicated on the idea that if there is engagement with a achhut, there is defilement. Ambedkar was made to be profane, profanity induces a deep sense of shame. The shame which is often produced from the triangulation of brahamism, oppressor and oppressed relationship. A movement to cultivate self-respect amongst the untouchables, a movement which was Ambedkar's life long mission was to purge the sense of shame attached to being achhut.

He carried on in this mission, with a motto that today is easily seen as Ambedkar's legacy. Educate, Agitate and Organise. The way towards emancipation for the 'depressed classes' was by following through this mantra. This was the way towards asserting the Bahiskrut Samaaj rights. Bahiskrut is a Sanskrit/hindi term meaning ostracized or excluded. What is it that is excluded? And what did this exclusion mean for a New York, London return scholar, who had faced discrimination abroad being an Indian but what about the his own community that treated him worse? One cannot collapse race and caste. It is not a simple relation of binary between an oppressor and the oppressed. There are gradients of oppressors and oppressed. With respect to Ambedkar's theorisation of caste and his immense thirst to find a model to explain it, is deeply problematized. The length and breadth of his scholarship made him move towards Constitutionalism as a means to overcome the insidious systemic repression of ethics which populated the Hindu fold. He remained a nationalist till the end of his years. He reconciled his identity as that of a Dalit in the Hindu fold as, 'But I am not a part of the whole, I am a part apart!' (Omvedt, Ambedkar, Ch2, 29). Ambedkar had deeply imbibed the alienation which was inherently part of the structure if this graded hierarchy. Basic human rights were denied to untouchables, right to clean water, access to education and a feeling of being equal. When attacked by Gandhi as to how he negotiate with the British over the round table conference as he was negotiating against his homeland? Ambedkar gave Gandhi a heavy rejoinder, 'I have no homeland'. Even though he remained a nationalist, his sense of both internationalism and being alienated can be gauged form this statement. How does an individual feel part of the whole, if they are treated worse than animals in their own 'homeland'? Ambedkar searched to develop a new political reality and language for the Dalit however constraints of caste connotations remained a big impediment for him. The separate electorate which was forwarded by Ambedkar as a method to equalise the power that could be exercised over the lowest in the gradient was a proposal that was vehemently opposed by Gandhi. Gandhi believed a separate electorate would

take the Dalit away from the caste Hindus. Why does Gandhi believe in such a homogenisation? How does one create a language which will equalise the gradient yet retain the elements that make each that? Gandhi believed in founding a homogenous language that would retain the elements of Hinduism yet uplift the untouchables. His term Harijan was an attempt to move away from a history which was marked with violence and inhumanity. However at the same time, this can be read as an attempt to usurp the caste histories, which are marked by oppression and degradation. Why deny people the history which makes them aware of their hardships. It entails a story of their subjugation. How will reconciliation happen if denial is the basis for it? Ambedkar sought to move away and find resonance in the enlightenment mantra of Equality, Liberty and Fraternity. His voice was strongest echoing this. He insisted on keeping the history of his own (untouchables) shame alive but resignifying it through constitutional measures. His firm belief in nationhood and nation building through removal of social inequities is critical to understanding his homogenisation. His firm negation and critique of the Poona Pact was in tandem with his critique of caste Hindus who tacitly supported the domination of the untouchables. What was it that made alienation critical yet, alienation that was determined by domination?

Religion for Ambedkar was not critical, he openly discarded ritualism and did not set agenda to be accepted within the religious fold. Secularism in all its spirit was embraced by Ambedkar. “I did not launch the temple movement because I wanted the Depressed Classes to become idol worshippers…or that temple entry would make them equal members in and an integral part of Hindu society… only because I felt it would make the depressed classes conscious of their position.” (Ajnat 1993,55-56)

He did not place much value to religious identity if the purpose was to make humans happiness subordinate to religious sentiment. Yet Hindu identity had become perversely intertwined with a nationalist identity. However his resignation at Hindu caste politics became more evident when he declared to convert. He may have been born a Hindu but he did not want to die as one.

He wanted to escape the turmoil of untouchability by renouncing a religion to follow another one. Untouchability did not exist in another religions but within the Indian subcontinent, it has percolated in what may seem like other more egalitarian frameworks. Sikhism, Islam, Christianity and Buddhism are marked by this malaise.

But this was a gradual move for Ambedkar, who was still not sure as to how he negotiated the Hindu identity, 'We have to consider whether Hindu religion is our own or not'(Omvedt,2004,31). Ambedkar moved closer to class identity in his radicalism. From Bahiskrut Samaj to Independent Labour Party exemplifies his concern for class struggle which had cut across different caste and class structures. His fight against the tenantship system for peasant workers is a legacy that we attempt to follow through in the land reforms. His was a fight not only for the Dalit, but for an idea of equity which would transcend caste identity. This does not negate the fact that the most vicious victimisation did happen to the Dalit. His critique was sharp at the rally organised to agitate against the zamindari structure which perpetuated caste oppression.

" really, seen there are only two castes in the world, the first of the rich, and the second that of the poor. Besides that there is a middle class. This class is responsible for destruction of all movement"(Omvedt, 2004, 81)

It is obvious in his statement how much Ambedkar had identifies with the communist socialist agenda. His radicalism had left sympathy and his critique had moved towards a left critique. However the romance between him and the left did not last for very long. He placed a great importance on the realisation of the left dream. Practicing what left ideology seemed to preach was critical to Ambedkar's vision. It is for history to judge whether this vision did materialise. Certain 'left' oriented states in India suffer from some of the worst track records in casteist communal politics. The disjunct between caste Hindu communist leaders and Ambedkar became sharper as they could not fully understand the oppression of the Dalit. Caste was inimical to the prevalent Marxist framework. Class was under the belt but how would they address caste issues which did not have a place in the received wisdom of Marx. If Marx didn't understand India how would his followers? Ambedkar moved on, communist remained the impediment which stopped short his attempt at forming an alternative front to the Congress. This did not stop him from continuing his work for the upliftement of the untouchables. He went on to become the labour minister under the British and opened college for the Dalit community. This was also the time when he wrote extensively criticising Gandhi and congress. Post-independence the influx of refugee untouchables had become a major point of contention between the two country, the

subjugation of the community for cheap labour was prevalent. The caste Hindus and refugee Sikhs were preferred when rehabilitating than Dalit.

Ambedkar's legacy was one where he imagined emancipation for all those reeling under the hierarchy of the Brahmanic system. The Hindu Code Bill which was an attempt to emancipate the women who were unfairly predisposed under the Hindu law. However its failure in the parliament proved as the last straw for Ambedkar's disillusionment with the caste Hindu majority. It was what prompted him to convert to Buddhism. His conversion in 1956 to the Buddhism was one after a careful engagement with Buddhism. his was an interpretation based on Buddhism as a moral law, rejecting the metapsychological and metaphysical aspects of the faith. Ambedkar's attempted to reconcile Buddha and Marx and closely align both their philosophies in order form a new world vision which was to recreate human relations. Equality , fraternity and liberty for him were the core principles to restructure the Dalit identity to reduce the pain and shame attached to these identities. His was an education of the oppressed, his was a story of unravelling the oppression in different forms. The Shudra, if retained in the Hindu fold would remain the 'dhool' of the purusha, but if he rejected the Hindu fold, he would be emancipated from the dhool. The dust, the dirt of the Hindu identity.

To read into the experience of shame it was necessary to go to V Geetha's essay (Guru,2009) Bereft of Being.

Untouchability is the space for existential scar and ontological wounding. The Dalit is historically constructed to be indispensable yet an abscissa on humanity. It pours out filth and is constituted within this filth. She says that corporeal and spiritual existence itself is debased and disallowed the knowledge of its integrity. And in such a malevolent environment, the experience of humiliation is constant and consistent.

But the hurt and humiliation is placed in a larger structure where everyone is placed in a graded hierarchy. We are the homo hierarchicus (Dirks,1950). Women, muslim, the shudra all are to be subjected to narcissistic sadistic destruction. the existence of these categories in a casteist hindu state is for a cannibalistic purpose. they are valuable only when in service of a higher gradient. Yet this sense of fulfilment is so perverse that the goal is only realised when the other has been annihilated. Geetha refers to such proclivities of human nature as dark narcissism. Narcissism

that seems to prevail in the caste construction of humanity rips a sense of coeval existence. The other exists to service a sense of the self. This is a pathological narcissism that cannot account for the other's existence. The attack is so vicious in its logic that the site of the attack is body which then feeds into the psyche. They are constructed to be physically set apart which then is evidenced as them being inferior and hence to be humiliated. This logic controls every aspect of The Dalit's life, the tools of controlling the life and body of the Dalit are the same, ostracisation, killing, rape, mutilation etc. these sadistic tendencies in the non-Dalits make it explicit where the evil lies. Yet the entrenched understanding of purity and pollution make it difficult to transcend these perverse structures.

For the Dalit, the mundane is as effective a reminder of his humiliation as the extraordinary ostracisation in terms of an event.

An incident as retold by my grandfather comes to mind to explicate this. The Bihar earthquake of 1934 was one of the most devastating natural calamities, thousands lost their life. My grandfather who was about 8 years of age was in Munger district in relative's village. He was indoors playing. When the earthquake hit, he was rescued by the house help, he ran out with her and started sobbing. She picked him up to pacify him. This was where his aunt spotted him. And admonished the help for the physical intimacy, instead of focussing on the devastation, the aunt focussed on the transgression of caste boundaries. This is the extent to which an internalisation of caste identity happens. The humane is chiselled away from the Dalit. The help could not protest or show displeasure at this confirms the suspicion of the removal of a sense of her labouring body. Her body is impure, and even if she rescues the upper caste boy, she has vilified him nevertheless. She becomes mariamma, the one which gives life and yet is the harbinger of destruction. She does not make the links which can protest. She does not say to the aunt, that had I not been there the boy would have died. Her valour in face of such adversity is lost both on the tormentor and the victim. In retrospect she is expendable, but in the here and now she is wholly necessary. The Dalit, is never a contemporary, the coeval entity does not exist. The shudra, the dhool(dust) can never be close to the mouth.

However this bit of traditional reading of the scripture can be destabilised a little if read from Heimann's lens. What is the unconscious fantasy that dictates our imagination of being different?

Psychoanalytic framework shows a way of re-reading this psycho social reality. Humiliation is extended as an indispensable arm of felicitation. And these are structures which can be reversed, what is humiliation can be turned into felicitation and felicitation into humiliation. When one recognises that without the relief of the filth, existence is under erasure then the received wisdom can be revisited. The non-dalit can be dispensable as well. What good is the intellect that is bereft of humanity. However this structure of undoing a sense of humanity and brotherhood is not limited to the Hindu social order, as Ambedkar would like us to believe.

Another everyday incident will be utilised in making this explicit. It has been more than 60 years of our independence. Yet caste is a reality that remains so consistent. This is a conversation that I had with a classmate who is Christian, I was curious to know when Christianity made its foray into India. She informed me that Thomas the apostle came to India in around 52 AD much before even England. She went on to add that the first converts to Christianity were Brahmins in Kerala. This piece of information on proselytization and her admission to the fact that her family was one of the few from the region that converted as Brahmins is what confounds me. How is it that in a seemingly egalitarian order like Christianity, does caste consciousness is so ingrained that we can't let go of our caste identities.

Why can't we give up our narcissistic attachment to Caste? Heimann, (propounds that the civilization is built upon individual's renouncing a narcissistic pursuit of his instinctual drives. In her paper, anality has inherent a certain sadism, the eros experienced with respect to anality has a certain morbid destructive arm.

It is this destructive force that curtails the experience of love. Love is rendered impossible if the guilt and shame looms large on the psyche. Yet restrictions and juridical notions around love and caste are put to question. The fact that there were instances of inter-caste, inter-community coupling suggests that although the penalty for such was heavy, transgressions were made. The circular logic of love fed to displace the notion not just strengthen it as Geetha explains in her paper. Creation of laws means that there are individuals already resignifying them. The folk lore around love is to construct shame where there isn't any. Mariamma and Eleamma are not just representations of shame but also felicitation. They are curative and are construced from an upper caste angle as punitive. The norms of tactility are historically broken and revisited. the embrace between the dalit woman and the rishi's wife is should not be read only as polluting.

The embrace also signifies a space for camaraderie. The feeling of brotherhood is possible between the Dalit and the Upper caste woman. Can the shame and guilt be reconciled? History gives us certain clues through folk lore, and the exceptions to the Humiliation. The reclamation of a history distraught with humiliation and celebration of that history to resignify the humiliation. Ambedkar's militant efforts to destroy caste is a method of reclamation. Agitate, Educate and Organise was his motto. Periyar's self respect movement was another method. But there are many more readings which maybe available to us to resignify the homo hierachichus.

We can take another politico-socialist route to understand caste and Ambedkar's theorisation of Caste, Geetha also seems to suggest that there is inherently in Ambedkar that he understands that Gandhi could not come close to. It was his identity as a Mahar that gave Ambedkar a different vantage point like Periyar, Iyothee Das or Phule. The subaltern spoke together in a voice which differed from the voices of the caste Hindus. French political social scientist explores Ambedkar in this manner.

Jafferlot (Jafferlot, 2005) elucidates very carefully on the Mahar identity. The complexity that is retained within the jati of Mahar. They were holders of Baluta which brought them into contact with upper caste Hindu, they were given better quality of harvest for service provided and were even entitled to vatan(land free from taxation) as part of their service rendered to the village community. The service which the community provided to the village, ranged from being gate-keepers to messengers and removing cattle carcasses. It was this cleaning of animal remains that placed them within the untouchable. They were traditional meat eaters and were traditionally consumers of dead cattle. They were made to collect alms or bhakri in order to sustain themselves. They were often forced to wear certain accessories to declare their caste status.

These were the occasions and activities which entailed an inherent sense of shame within the caste contours. The collective as a whole had to suffer the consequences of the traditional occupation of Mahar.

Ambedkar escaped this sort of traditional upbringing as his father was a subedar major in the british army. A profession from which the Mahar community extracted great prestige. Ambedkar's mother family was also from a military back ground. His was a family that was away from traditional caste roles. They were also a sub-caste among the untouchables who were

able to gain from the british considerably. A large number of Mahar could boast of an education which was unavailable to many other untouchable communities or sub-caste. The Mahar were the foremost when it came to untouchable community. Their prestige was intrinsically linked to the service they provided for the British. This has effectively given Ambedkar, a strong ground from which he could get a sense of confidence. He had the unique vantage point. His birth determined certain privileges to him which would not have been available to another Mahar practising the traditional ancestral role. Hierarchy remains the structural principle for the Hindu community, rather it remains the structural principle governing identity in sub-continent.

In such circumstances, it becomes imperative that Ambedkar found new ways of find out the internal indigenous meanings of Caste much before the celebrated anthropologists studying India like M.N Srinivas and Louis Dumont. Ambedkar's first such book on a serious study of caste came out in 1917. He challenged the accepted manner in which western scholars often collapsed caste as a race issue, their own lens was tinted with the weight of race. The history taught to us in school of an Aryan invasion has roots in long standing tradition. The need to continuously look for a simplistic oppressor and oppressed dyad falls short when trying to implicate the vertical hierarchy prevalent in India. Ambedkar has serious streaks of madness both of the genius and the idiot. He theorised on endogamy as the pillar on which caste existed with such fervour, but this as we know today is false, certain castes exercise both endogamy and exogamy in order to preserve and perpetuate the caste status. For examples, Kshatriya may marry within the same jati but not the same gotra hence both exogamy and endogamy are prescriptive. Gotra largely refers to a single male progeny line, a clan descended from the same original Father. Whereas Jati may consist of several clans and usually refers to an occupational tradition associated with the jati.

The naiveté of such a theorisation by Ambedkar can be contrated with the genius of certain theorising, Ambedkar explicated that caste was a social fact based not on some imposition by the Brahmin clan but rather the imitation of certain values of the Brahmanical by the other castes. The hegemonic presence of caste was not only through force but an internalisation of Brahmanical superiority. But the question remains why do other castes see the Brahmanical caste as superior, what is it that made the internalisation of this inferiority so holistic? One would like to blame and seek Sanskritisation as an insidious agenda. But is that really the case? The problems with such models of explanation are the errors of omission and commission. We are

expected to believe that with such a system, the smallest unit of Indian civilisation would lead the way to village and its big partner the urban set up, so who is imitating whom in this respect? If it is always the subordinate who emulates the superior then why have caste realities survived in the modern post liberty, fraternity, equality phase of Indian cities. The village remains the breeding ground for caste but the structures have definitely changed.

Ambedkar's logic of graded inequality has been explored by multiple people in many ways, the most significant of which is the fact that it prevents a feeling of shared mutuality even between varna as each varna has multiplicity of jatis within it, each heralding its prestige in the inferiority of the other. The Mahar can claim to a higher status within the untouchables as compared to the chambhars(leather workers). Their traditional occupation entitled them to such a claim, just like the Mahar who worked exclusively as a balutedar and did not indulge in consumption of dead cattle meat could claim a higher status than ones who did. Hence the status claims were intrinsically tied to the moving away from certain work which was seen as polluting, yet not moving so far away that it would call for the collective wrath of the village. The system feeds off on provisions that sustain and then perpetuate it. The untouchables themselves had no sense of unity just like other caste Hindu clans. These are the pitfalls when trying to locate camaraderie between caste clans. Caste doesn't promote a sense of identity that is distinct, it promotes an identity which has a sadistic core. The sense of value is intrinsically attached to the devaluation of the other. To feel ingratiated by caste, the search is to continuously look for someone who is below us in the social order. This makes the caste system inimical to social change, as it threatens the structure itself. Hence, Ambedkar's apprehension that if there has to be change in the status of Depressed classes then the obvious change has to be made in the structure. Hence strike at the core of the structure, Hinduism, the tree from which soul energy is fed into the caste system.

Hence his evaluation of the caste in the classical text Annihilation of Caste is such a radical one. One which was for many spreading of vituperative against the Hindu Order (Ambedkar, 1936) .Written in the year 1936 as a speech aimed in the direction of Reformation of the "Indian consciousness", Dr Ambedkar attempts to express a radical and militant thought, that of obliterating the caste through annihilating the Hindu religion. In this bold speech, not only is the attempt to make his own history, but also to alter the history of India.

India at the time was an imminent nation state, and in this address he questions the indigenous philosophies of life, and attacks the central tenet of the organization, that is Hinduism. The most populated and insidious of all systems. He investigates historically, empirically, politically, philosophically the erosion of humanity caused by Hinduism. His foremost attack is on the vilest division within this fold of Hinduism, that is, Caste.

He begins his attack on Caste, by examining the historical practices which legitimised and fostered the institution of Caste, he discusses the atrocities and discrimination of the oppressed caste, and how certain modes of being and living were systematically precluded from the imagination of oppressed classes. He cites the rule of Peshwas in Maharashtra and how within that regime, untouchables were not even allowed to use the public streets lest they pollute the Hindu by their shadow. How the ideology of purity and pollution have been internalised and have become an obvious part of the consciousness of the Hindu, and operated even then during the emergent colonial modernity. Ambedkar includes The Times of India report, date: January 4th 1928 to further his claim of atrocities meted to the untouchables, by citing the case of Balais.

The tragedy of India at the time was to be born as a Nation where the modern humanist notions of Fraternity, Equality and Liberty and its political ally Democracy had not percolated beyond the superficial schema of its people. Hindus functioned under the hegemony of Caste, to which they owed and they pledged their greatest allegiance. This was reflected even in the reform agenda of the “elite” Brahmanical ruling class. They wanted reform, but not in the structure of the Hindu system, they co-opted the aspirations of the upper class majority, and relegated the modest claims of the untouchables, that is, to be treated as equals. For them reformation began at family and ended at family however this did not mean a restructuring of family power equations and politics. Ambedkar questions this hypocrisy of the ruling class and challenges their attempt at reformation to be anything but a bad idea executed by a mediocre statesman. These are the weapons in his argument to destabilise and exterminate caste.

He furthers his attack on Caste by scrutinizing the religious sanctions that let caste operate with impunity. He traces the perverse manifestation of caste in the Manu Smriti, the notion of Shuddhi, and the Vedas. He incriminates all the Holy Scriptures in his fact finding against the inhuman nature of the caste system. He compares and contrasts them with other Holy scriptures, and how uniquely Hinduism does not allow the feeling of mutual trust and dependence that is

fraternity to develop between its members. There is caste affinity in light of obvious differences, but there is no affinity within the ranks of its people. The water tight hierarchy has been established through a historical process. And the beneficiaries of which will not let their privileges be lost. He draws a sharp contrast between the ideology of Jati and Varna and how they are actually a part of the social formation. Varna based on 'worth' and Jati based on birth were the ideological basis of caste. The historical antecedents of Jati lie in Varna. But, in due course of history, Jati became the dominant ideology. This understanding was an open challenge to Gandhi's historical sociology. Till this point Ambedkar's critique of the Caste as a system has been steeped in the dominant ideology of the time, it is an internal critique of Caste.

But within the argument there is a shift. Ambedkar moves from examining the underbelly of Caste as a system to how does caste rupture the imagination of the Modern India. How caste hinders the smooth operation of the political system and is a humungous impediment in India's progress. Caste is viewed as a harmful artefact of the slavish Hindu community. It cannot be a part of the psyche of a free society. It can't be part of a Social Democracy. His vision of Modernity as a framework was 'inspired' by the Renaissance. Liberty, Equality and Fraternity are the pillars on which the modern state stands and Caste is like a dog that defiles it. In his speech Ambedkar is an ardent supporter of Communal Award and advocates reservations and privileges to the oppressed classes as a method towards Equality. His vision of Modernity was inclusive of a modern education system where everyone got an opportunity to be educated. Education was visualised by him as a necessary tool in self-preservation of an individual in the modern times. He believed in communal representation to give voice to every community in the country. As a leader of the nation and oppressed classes he saw democracy as a space for equal sharing of opportunities and responsibilities.

Modernity, as I understood, Ambedkar's Vision was not an unqualified reified object but was embodied in the citizens of the nation. His vision encompassed the social reformation at the core of modernity. His fight for preservation and construction of a different Dalit identity by advocating safeguards for the community is a part of his very complex vision of Modernity. He cites the example of the Irish with reference to this idea. However this did not stop him from advocating at the same time principles of equality and secularism. He elucidates this in the speech by bringing into notice the other more egalitarian religions like Buddhism. His vision of

modernity traverses from a homogeneous nationalistic imagination with respect to equal rights to the diversity of identities that are to be preserved by the state.

Caste as a system is antithetical to Modernity and Humanity. He is reluctant to budge from striking at the core of Hinduism as he is convinced that all evil resides in the wisdom of Hinduism. He visualises the religion as a parasite that is sucking the vibrancy out of our nation. Ambedkar's dilemma was the grip that caste had over a majority of the nation. There is an inherent contradiction in his method, you can't alienate the people you're trying to transform. And this was the short coming in his speech. His 'intellectual arrogance' and spite which was transferred to the reader made some very fierce detractors of his ideology and his vision. There are also some glaring misses in his thought as well. The reformation that he aims remains at the level of politics and society, there is no presence of a moral arm to the reformation. There is an overgeneralisation in his critique of the caste Hindus. Why does he not investigate the emulation of Brahmanical ideology by the Dalits?

Ambedkar traces caste ideology through the historical examination of the shastras, he examines how the shudras were the default fourth varna, which existed as the Brahmin caste refused to bestow the sacred thread on some of the Kshatriya clan. Here Ambedkar points out to the deep Sanskritisation which in turn fuels the sharp caste contours. However he diverges significantly when trying to explain the genealogy of Untouchables, he claims that the Dalit were the broken men, who post their conquest continued to live and follow Buddhism which was antagonistic to the Brahmanical prevalence. So they were ostracised, in the same vein, the Dalit also ostracized the Brahmin. The Dalit consider it inauspicious to have engagements with the Brahmin.

These arguments propounded by Ambedkar effectively trace two different histories. The untouchables had been co-opted by the Hindu fold, whereas the Shudras were effectively denigrated Kshatriyas who could reclaim their past position. The Dalit on the other hand could effectively move away from the clutches of Hinduism. This also helps to forward the case against Hinduism's claims to ancient status and the biggest religion within the sub-continent. There was an emergent need in Ambedkar to look for an ethnic racial angle to explain this. These were methods adopted to resist Sanskritisation, which sought to sanitise human experience. They governed what was and would be seen as pure and impure. The rules of purity were determined by the priestly class. The Sanskritisation was an attempt to imitate the ritualistic life of that of

Brahmin but without the distinction of being one. Move away from what was historically seen as impure yet never join the ranks of pure. Sanskritisation is effectively a process to destroy what is noble and what can be salvaged as noble. It is to recruit people in the policing of purity. There is no sense of an ethical arm to this kind of ritualistic over determination of identity. The method recommended to rinse oneself from the impure practices was, 'We should not eat meat, drink, or sell cows to butchers. We should not read books of other religions. We should appoint a Hindu teacher and educate our children. We should not raise pigs --- caste Hindus hold us untouchable because of this. Our women should not go to tamashas. We should take part in religious observances'(Jafferlot,2005).

It is evident from this that Sanskritisation as a program had been emulated as a way to escape the caste atrocities from caste Hindus.

But Ambedkar whose charted his course on examining Hinduism from sympathies to Bhakti movement which tried to redress the caste atrocities was rejected in favour of completing disowning the caste system and in effect Hinduism. This was a contentious issue between Gandhi and Ambedkar.

Of Gandhi and Ambedkar

While one cannot disagree that both Gandhi and Ambedkar worked very closely with the subordinate classes for their emancipation, it is also true that they shared a very contentious and disagreeable relation. The binary of Ambedkar and Gandhi is a political historical binary. Their goals largely were the same but the methods adopted by the two men were entirely different.

Gandhi and Filth. Gandhi wanted to remain close to the experience of filth. He so desired to get close to that instance of being an untouchable, that if he failed to redress the issue of untouchability effectively, then he wanted to be reborn as one. He wanted to fulfil his Hinduism through the service of the untouchable. Gandhi's understanding of filth comes from his liberal interpretation of the varna-asharam arrangement. Gandhi could not visualise the differentiation between intellectual work and labour that was deemed dirty as any different in the value they held for humanity. For him, both were equal considering both were performed in the service of

humanity. Hence his insistence that people ideally should follow what their own Varna demanded of them.

He saw as penance the duty that caste Hindus had towards the untouchables for years of subjugation, yet he also in the same vein goes on to say that it is imperative one recognise the lowliest of creatures of the God! He does not deny that untouchables are low; there is a patronisation of the untouchables which is seething in Gandhi's proposition.

"The purification, required is not of 'untouchables' but of the so-called superior castes. There is no vice that is special to the untouchables, not even dirt and insanitation" (Gandhi, 1954, p.6).

Gandhi did not consider that work as noble or beyond the scope of virtuosity or vice, but continued to perpetuate that, although it was sinful to engage in those kind of occupations this was a sin no one could be cleansed from. The purification hence alluded to was for the penance that the caste Hindus must undertake to be rid of this malaise. The sin remains the practice of untouchability; with those were doing what their Varna demanded of them. The occupations may be equal in value yet the constant of dirt is only the burden of one. It seems from such a powerful exposition that Gandhi had conceptualised sin, differently from vice and dirt. The idea of graded inequality is reinforced in Gandhi's interpretation. One may be low on the caste hierarchy yet, there should be no practice of untouchability that should be sanctioned. Gandhi focussed on the religious aspect of untouchability his was not a fight for equality but eradication of untouchability. Gandhi had a deep religious belief which he extended to everyone. Temple entry was an issue that remained close to him, his desire was that entry to temple be extended to all. He supported the satyagrah launched in 1924 by Vaikam to agitate for temple entry. However this was vehemently opposed by the caste Hindus and Brahmins in particular, this was a turning point for the Mahatma. Gandhi turned a sanatani post this.

Why did Gandhi seek to come close to the experience of filth? Gandhi wanted to enter shame and wanted to go close to shit. But what is it to live another person's shame? And what propels this unique journey of Gandhi to come close to it.

Gandhi had experienced being discriminated based on birth first hand in South Africa, where he spent 21 years fighting for social justice and against racial discrimination. His life on Tolstoy farm had ingrained in him a deep reverence for non-violent method and peaceful protest. He

tested the civil disobedience method through the time he spent in South Africa, though this method does not owe its allegiance to Gandhi for genesis. However Gandhi very well captured the sentiment of the people to mobilise the effort against racial discrimination.

This was Gandhi's groundwork for social reformation, yet India posed layered problems. Gandhi recognised India's need to be freed from imperialistic rule and come into being a free nation. However a deeper problem that the subcontinent was reeling was of caste discrimination and untouchability. Gandhi focussed all his attention to eradicating untouchability and fighting for freedom. He astutely evaluated that self-rule without eradication of untouchability would amount to nothing. However the relation between the untouchables and the caste Hindus were not as black and white as the relation between the British and Indians. There was not an apparent antagonist, in the layered structure of caste. The oppressor and oppressed could easily be switched in this graded hierarchy. The caste contours were sharp yet murky. Within the untouchables was an inherent hierarchy. This hierarchy which reduced the viability of founding a language that would homogenise the layers yet not be reduce the oppression suffered due to belonging to that layer.

This was a conundrum which proved too murky for even Gandhi to resolve in my humble opinion, in his effort to reduce the gaps in the layers; schism had in fact been retained in the langue of the oppressor. Gandhi conceded to regarding the untouchable as a human and maybe as an equal, but he did maintain that a Brahman could maintain his own roads, temples, etc. provided it not be a nuisance to his neighbours (Gandhi, 1954. p.12). This tacitly made sure that discrimination may continue, provided it is not a nuisance. The question to ask is nuisance to whom? How do we practice tactile relations with people? If I am against touching people based on their caste credentials then how do we justify that untouchability is not practiced by me?

Gandhi continues his belief in the Shastras, he did not dispute the authority of the Shastras and in that spirit adopted Harijan as a category to integrate all untouchable castes. His interpretation of the untouchables as Harijan, i.e. man of god is an interesting method to evolve a homogenisation which infuses a sense of distinction yet camaraderie. Gandhi wanted to use the term to show that it was the untouchables who had toiled in the service of mankind and which the caste Hindus in a gesture of repayment had not only ignored but had subjugated their identity. However Gandhi fails miserably in that attempt. Not only in the sense of how the identity of the Harijan does not

survive historically, as we have moved onto other problematic categories like Schedule castes, or subordinate castes, but also the fact that such a categorisation has reduced the individual caste struggles that are intimately tied to their caste origins. The reality of graded hierarchy is denied. A Dom may not share the same struggle of a chamar or a bhangi, their identities are different, and as much as there needs to be a way of removing the denigration that is tied to being a particular Jati, it cannot be by denying the history of oppression of that Jati.

And why say that they are men of God? Why denaturalize their struggle? As men of men they have struggled for so long. By placating them as men of God again a distinction is made, which alienates. If the other cannot be recognised as an equal, then how does a sense of fraternity emanate? Why can't the history that is marked by oppression and shame be lead on a way to a re-ethnicisation where one can claim pride on their identity. The shame which can be turned into grace.

At all these junctures Mahatma did falter, he attempted a social reformation steeped in religion, he understood clearly that without a social reformation in the heart of the Hindu populace, untouchability would persist. However his method fell short. There wasn't a political arm in to his moralizing. He resisted the separate electorates with a fast unto death. He arm twisted the opportunities because he believed that it was religion that would ultimately save the Hindu society, for him religion was intrinsically linked to Swaraj.

It was these claims which were a thorn in Ambedkar's imagination of political social justice for the untouchables. Ambedkar did not consider religious overhaul as critical to achieving safe-guards against untouchability. He sought these in the structure of the government and specifically the legal safe-guards which were ensured through the Constitution. Filth could not be relegated to a corner, this filth of caste was central to the entire structure and Ambedkar insisted that this which was regarded as filth not be reduced under the upper caste hegemony.

Ambedkar in the ring with Gandhi

Ambedkar's reply to Mahatma is a trenchant reply to neutralise Gandhi's appraisal of Ambedkar's speech Annihilation of Caste. He is accused of seeking publicity however Ambedkar makes it very clear that Gandhi could be accused of the very same. The propositions Ambedkar makes in that speech are clear, his is an attempt to restructure Hinduism on the principles of fraternity, equality and liberty. But these are antithetical to the spirit of Hinduism if Hinduism is trapped in the Varnavyastha. The four principle occupations. This restricts the mobility of individuals born within the Hindu fold to follow what appeals to them. It restricts knowledge production and to whom that knowledge will be accessible to. There isn't a base for equality contained within the Shastras.

Gandhi contended that it is the interpolations of the Shastras that have caused the excrescences of the Hindu religion, but Ambedkar points out that it isn't the interpretations but what has happened historical that will determine the sway of the interpretation. To the commoner the Shastras are unavailable for scrutiny. No one practicing really knows what is written but believes the tradition that is established.

He nullifies Gandhi's claim that an institution should not be judged by the worst but by the best of its specimen? However Ambedkar alleges that the 'worst' spill over when contrasted with the best. How does one claim sanctity of a religion if it inspires so many to be cruel towards their fellow humans? Nevertheless I feel that Ambedkar lost what Gandhi tried to imply, the best of an institution serves as the potential that can be realised. Gandhi did not believe that social justice with respect to legal safe guards would work in isolation, unless there was a change in the manner we observed our own religiosity. These were the changes that would reform the Hindu society.

He refused to have faith in Gandhi's proposition that if caste Hindus became charitable and moral, untouchability would fade. And it is true that for a structural change it takes more than just a pleasant disposition towards the other. To truly admit the weight of historical guilt and apologise would require a prostration in front of the other.

Ambedkar never individualises the societal malaise, he sees it as a product of time and history. Gandhi on the other hand locates the malaise squarely within the individual. This is a

complication which I cannot resolve. A society based on caste according to Ambedkar is a society based on wrong relationship. For Gandhi it is the relationship which is wrong and can be repaired, anything that is relational is dynamic and can be healed. His debate with the Mahatma is on many other technical grounds, which I will not enumerate here.

The critical question remains if filth is a structure and a relationship then what is it that will bring us closer to re-examining this notion of filth. Ambedkar's distant examination of filth, his own experience of shame vis-à-vis his caste identity , his need to locate it structurally outside the personal. Ambedkar's inability to examine the individual's internalisation of filth.

Or Gandhi's too personal an inquiry that all of the external remains outside the purview of scrutiny. Why does Gandhi want to relive the shame of the other or of himself? His insistence to come closer to shit is to redeem shit. But this filth cannot be redeemed without the investigation of shame and guilt. The contours of experience are determined by the angularities of these two polarities.

How does one try to rework these two binaries? What is the way forward that can reconcile these two polarities? If Gandhi's guilt is overpowering then Ambedkar's sense of shame too is difficult to reconcile with. Where is the structure that makes there reconciliation possible?

Chapter 3: Revisiting Filth

How has the experience of filth changed? Theorisation of caste is cast in a mould which subscribe to the established structure, and the reality of caste has to an extent moved away from this. This does not however contest that there is a lot that still subscribe to the same old mode of being. One cannot but notice the caste atrocities that happens in the villages and the cities. The denial of access to water, to education, to healthcare is prevalent in our villages. The segregation is still prevalent but things have shifted. Villages remain no more the epicentre of caste consciousness, it thrives in cities too. What is retained of caste and what has been expunged needs to be explained. The older notions of purity and pollution don't remain as they are. The social capital attached to being a Brahmin has lost its prior lustre and the shame that was attached to being a Bhangi is being challenged from within.

There is an affirmation that I have witnessed of the identities that are considered by many as casteist. They do not wish to be identified as Harijjan or Schedule caste unless it will provide some relief in terms of what amount of social mobility these identities provide. Dalit is the term that they have embraced with vigour to give a sense of this unique ethnicisation. However not all subscribe to this as well, some remain faithful to their caste identity without a sense of compunction. And it isn't just 'upper' caste Hindus. Toddy workers community in my village vehemently oppose being called as Dalit. They are proud of their history and their ancestry, they have reconciled their past in a manner that Ambedkar and Gandhi could not have.

One of the most interesting woman I met was a member of this community, she lived to be a 110 years old. I think she might have the record for being the oldest Indian. She was called Sugri Mai by the entire village (Sugri's mother) she would come to help out my aunt, one afternoon not many years ago I had a conversation with her about when she came to the village and why does she help my aunt with certain tasks only. She told me she was Pasi, and they had been living in the village for many years, she added before even my family had settled there. She told me that her ancestors were similar to mine and that we pray to the same gods, Durga and Kali. And that basically they are also warrior tribes like us who had gotten displaced post the British came to India. Her sense of identity was deeply tied down to being a Pasi and she told me how

her community was even more progressive than mine, daughters in her community could inherit land, something that we as caste Hindus don't allow. She was a proud Pasi, and when I inquired what she wanted for her granddaughters and sons. She said she wanted them to study and become big men with money. She did not consider herself or her profession low and had a history of which she was proud. How had this old woman in my village internalised the much available shame so differently that she did not see any shame attached to it. How had she managed to invert the terms of transaction of caste so confidently? She spoke to me like an equal, there was no sense of hierarchy. Except probably when she might have thought I was a complete idiot to ask her such questions.

Today the communities are asserting themselves like never before, they are utilising to a great extent the governmental guarantees given to them. They are asserting their right and their discontent with the caste Hindus, this was evident not only during the great conversion but as now when electoral politics have left even traditionally caste Hindus searching for backward status, the Gujjars and the Jat agitation in recent past for OBC status, so a lot has changed. The rise of the Bahujan Samaj is exciting and a group of Dalit millionaires are helping support the larger community in many ways. They are reclaiming their identity.

It is a difficult proposition to continue to believe that the Dalit community continues to internalise their baseness when contrasted with other communities. It is widely recognised that they have been subjugated systemically, yet now it isn't seen as fate in all pockets. There is resistance to this kind of exploitation. But do we have a space for a language that will help us enter the filth and reclaim and celebrate it. If the filth didn't exist then how would an experience of cleanliness be achieved? Filth is what gets us closer to godliness, it provides for a way towards sanitising to achieve that sense of cleanliness. Communities today are trying to adapt themselves to the filth that is created and see it as much as a part as the non-filth. What was yesterday as filth is today no more that? Caste and its expellant tendencies need a new language to understand how this filth is being reworked? Or if it is being reworked since Ambedkar and Gandhi. Many today are reclaiming their caste identities without the burden of pollution and purity. Notions of purity and pollution do not bother us as much as they probably did to my grandmother, however a certain sense of sanitisation still persists.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

In the work above I stayed close to what is referred to as a deconstructive reading of the text. It is only when you read something with love that you can see it in its entirety. Ambedkar and a limited amount of Gandhi were read by me in this fashion.

What is that they wanted to convey so dearly? To whom is the work addressed? What were the compulsions of their time? What was that they could not overcome in their writing? How have they been produced within discourse? And what is the kind of language that they have used to express themselves therefore extending or limiting that discourse?

Making sense of the world they inhabited through their lens vis-à-vis their work. Gathering information from a series of work is not difficult but recognising the logic of why some are read in the way they are is a difficult task. It isn't my aim to get to some 'truth' which all-encompassing but rather get closer to how it can be read differently.

Why is it that Ambedkar is read as the social-political reformer who possibly did not suffer from internalising the psychological shame attached to being a Mahar? How have historians, political scientist etc have read him in this way? Can shame be signified in language? What does it do to a person to endure such shame? It is difficult to get near the personal with respect to Ambedkar, his life story has been captured only as a political saga. If Ambedkar can be accessed through Ambedkarism then what is it that Ambedkarism stands for?

He professed the ideals of liberty, fraternity, and equality. These were his guiding principles. Principles which are enshrined in our constitution, he safe-guarded against any perversion of these by ensuring constitutional guarantees to communities that were excluded. The SC and ST were identities which were created all thanks to him. Although these ensured political safe-guards and electoral politics has made these even more strategically important. The question remains has this brought about significant change in the mind-set of people. Are constitutional safe-guards the method that has ensured social-equity? The answer strangely remains a categorical no. The constitutional safe-guard was an impetus towards social equality but it had to have an ethical arm, that could have expanded the ambit of the effect it would have had.

His frustration with the caste Hindus had reached the point of no reconciliation. He declared that to imagine a Hindu as good would be erroneous. There couldn't exist a Hindu that could be noble as when living in the clutches of Hinduism, it was difficult to realise the ideals of Equality, Fraternity and Liberty.

For Ambedkar the way out remained conversion, he dwelled on Islam, Christianity and Sikhism as safe refuge for the untouchable however he found all of these lacking in some way or the

other. He decided that it would have to be Buddhism which could possibly host the aspirations of the untouchable and he with his millions of followers converted to Buddhism. But even his interpretation if Buddhism could not be hosted by Buddhism. A Buddhism which Buddhism could not tolerate or accept. He believed whole heartedly in Buddhism but this was not enough. He refined the tenets of Buddhism to closely align with the ideals that he solemnly swore by and this was something that was not tolerated by Buddhist monks in his visit to Myanmar. His Navayana, modernistic interpretation of Buddhism was not celebrated by many.

The refuge that Ambedkar sought for the untouchable away from casteist prejudice remains till today a dream not fully realized. Ambedkar's biggest error was the alienation of the people he was trying to reform. Caste Hindus have maintained their hegemony for so long as often the Dalit Bhaujan samaj is seen through a lens of fear and the paranoia keeps them away. Ambedkar critiqued the caste Hindus of perpetuating the insidious system of caste but never investigated why the graded inequality has such deep roots even between those who suffered the worst of caste. He explained it off as the slave imbibing the master.

His denial of the Hindu religion also helped in some ways to maintain the status quo. He challenged the status quo within the juridical framework. His conversion although liberated many individuals, it could not eradicate the root itself. In a comical way it in fact made no sense. The constitutional aimed at the upliftment of the untouchable class were available to those who remained within the caste system and identified themselves within the confines of their caste identities. The caste converts remained untouchables even when they embraced Buddhism. Such were the roots of caste.

Ambedkar had decided to annihilate the religion that was the root cause of the misery of the untouchable. But at the same time in the process he had also decided to annihilate the history of the people who suffered from the oppression. How does one overcome this reality through a denial of one's history? By such a gesture hadn't Ambedkar also imbibed the very same logic of caste from which he so desperately wanted to be emancipated? How does one seek emancipation if we continue to define ourselves in the language of oppression?

Reclamation of personality is when there is no sense of shame that is attached to the work one does or where one is born. Sugri Mai is an embodiment of that reclamation of personality. She is proud of being a Pasi and proud of her caste affiliation. She does not see herself as lower caste. She values the hard work that she does and the history of that hard work. She has benifitted from constitutional relief provided to her in terms of reservation, etc. But she does not want to leave the religion or caste that she was born in. She was born a Pasi but that is not the only thing that defines her.

Ambedkar at that historical moment could not have been like her, because his journey had been different and his visualisation of Hinduism was very different. Intoxicated by ideals that were markedly different he could not fathom the space within the religion to reclaim the personality.

He did not wish to fall in the pitfall of Gandhi and retain the language of Harijan and demonise an already difficult identity. Gandhi made the untouchable the man of God and the caste Hindus durjan- men of evil. Gandhi effectively made sure that another kind of alienation would happen perhaps different in its mode of manifestation but alienation nevertheless. It is testimony to this that the term Harijan plays no part in the social scheme of the nation anymore. History chose its master carefully when it came to untouchability.

Ambedkar lives on as the greatest Dalit leader, and will remain the foremost a nation builder.

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