



# ETHICAL POINT ON M. K. GANDHI AND B. R. AMBEDKAR VIEWS ON UNTOUCHABILITY

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## *Abstract*

Through an examination of Gandhi's and Ambedkar's discourses on the self, untouchability, and the emancipatory social projects they propose in their writings and political practices, this research paper seeks to explain the concept of human dignity and the ethical issues associated. In their common goal to overcome humiliation and institutionalize a pluralistic living world of self-respect, social recognition, and dignity, there are clear signs of both convergences and divergences in their approaches. They persisted in their efforts to find their own unique solutions to the challenges posed by the humiliating hierarchical social order. Their goal was to restore human dignity. In India, day-to-day violence and oppression based on our horizontal and vertical identity can frequently erode human freedom and prevent equal respect as a human being. This is because caste is a social construct that is both horizontal and vertical. These two founding fathers of modern India fought valiantly against social evils and did their best to rescue human dignity by changing individuals from the inside out to respect each other and to resist humiliating practices to open space for social recognition. They are considered to be among the most important figures in the history of India.

## *Key words*

Untouchability, Dalit, Struggle, Suppression, Priests, Harijan Sevak Sangh, Abolishkarma, Condemn, Hindu scripture, Discrimination, Religion, Buddhism

## **INTRODUCTION**

One of the most notable characteristics of the sociocultural landscapes of late colonial India was the imagining of multiple ideas of the nation. This occurred against the backdrop of electoral dynamics relating to communal representations for particular groups, such as the Muslims. This was an important aspect of the landscape. The Gandhi–Ambedkar debates on caste and ‘untouchability’ reached a flashpoint in 1932 specifically over the question of whether such separate electorates should be granted to the ‘untouchables’, on the grounds that they were not an integral part of Hindu social frameworks but were a group with a distinct sociopolitical identity. The debates centered on the question of whether separate electorates should be granted to the ‘untouchables’,

on the grounds that they were not an integral Their respective followers in modern India have frequently recast the differences between Gandhi and Ambedkar in terms of starkly polarized contrasts. These followers vehemently denounce each other's conceptions of caste and movements aimed at abolishing caste. In the body of scholarly literature, these disagreements have been subjected to a minute-by-minute analysis in terms of the differing understandings of Gandhi and Ambedkar in relation to modernist states, constitutional reforms, nationalism, socialist reconstruction, British imperialism, and other related topics.

In our everyday life, there are a few fundamental questions that continue to trouble us. Why do we feel it's important to be honored and respected? Why can only a Dom or a Mahar (a member of the Dalit caste) light the pyre at a Hindu funeral? Why, if their lighting is to ensure that our final journey is to heaven, are they considered to be untouchables and outcasts? Is it possible that God creates four distinct types of people? Why should I have to pay, suffer, and be humiliated in order to cross the social boundary of caste or jati if my birth is not something, I have control over? To what do we owe our ability to relate ourselves to the selves of others? Who has the right to make decisions about my previous birth and my upcoming birth? Why and how did the processes of the state make it so that a large number of people's resources for making a living were diminished, and how did this affect their support base? These fundamental questions not only regulate our social relationships, but they also have an effect on the way in which society and politics are discussed. An investigation into the concept of human dignity as it is held in Indian thought might be of assistance to us as we look for answers to these questions. This paper aims to review the ethical issues that arise from the Gandhi and Ambedkar vies on untouchability.

## NEED FOR STUDY

The key thesis of this essay is that while Gandhi and Ambedkar hold similar standpoints on the relation between religious orderings of the world and shapes of social existence, they sharply diverge, on certain occasions, regarding the question of what the crucial terms 'caste' and *varṇa* refer to, so that they often seem to be talking past each other. As a 'critical traditionalist', Gandhi sought to cut through various forms of Hindu socio-religious practices which he regarded as latter-day excrescences and develop a Hinduism which is grounded in the values of universal peace, love and benevolence (Sampathkumar, 2015). Ambedkar too rejected aspects of familiar historical varieties of Buddhism such as Theravada, Mahayana or Vajrayana, and he configured a new path, a Navayana ('neo-Buddhism'): its goals were to be more specifically material than spiritual, and in place of the traditional notion of individual liberation, the emphasis would fall on the establishment of social equality. However, while both Gandhi and Ambedkar thus sought to uncover the revitalizing impulses of religious ideals, they operated with different imaginations of the type of polity that would emerge from this social reconstruction (Roy, 2017). For Gandhi, the reinvigorated socio-religious whole would be structured by an ideal notion of *varṇa* in which there would be no conflict, antagonism and discord among the interdependent units. For Ambedkar, in contrast, the vocabulary of *varṇa* was irredeemably corrupted to the core through its enmeshment in millennia-old structures of hierarchy, so that its employment in social imaginations would not be able to generate sufficient momentum to break through entrenched systems of oppression.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 1.1 What is the basis of untouchability?

Is it logical to say that the state is responsible for this issue? In point of fact, one ought not to place blame on the state. The idea of untouchability is not one that can be resolved through legal means, nor is it even a legal concept in and of itself. It is more of a social problem than a political one, and neither can be solved by the other. On the other hand, the idea of a caste system has become politicized in recent times. Because of this, the political system in India actually makes the problem worse rather than finding a solution to it. This was

something that took place in the past, and it is still something that takes place today (Ambedkar). Who could possibly turn a blind eye to the debate that took place between Ambedkar and Gandhi regarding the concept of untouchability? Ambedkar adopts a scientific methodology in his investigation of religion and is critical of the spiritualistic mode of practice. In this regard, he was opposed to the Hindu religion. According to Ambedkar, as long as Hinduism is practiced as a religion, the practice of untouchability will continue in Indian society (Oza, P, 2019). Gandhi, in contrast to Ambedkar, supports Hinduism as well as the caste system that is associated with Hinduism. Accordingly, Gandhi and Ambedkar did not share the same views with regard to the idea of untouchability (Fuchs, M., & Linkenbach, A, 2018). The question that arises now is, "Where does untouchability come from?" Is it something that can be backed up by evidence from the scientific community? Why does it continue to exist in today's society? Is this something that has the potential to be decriminalized?

These are just some of the questions that need to be answered in this context; there are plenty more. In point of fact, untouchability functions as both a social and religious sanction under the guise of a religious verdict. Religion serves as the fundamental pillar of every society. The Varna system is maintained by adhering to a number of stringent precepts that are part of the Hindu religion. In point of fact, the Varna system, in its original form as it existed in ancient India, went on to serve as the larger framework within which the caste society was eventually established (Rathore, A. S, 2016). It was evident from the Rig Veda that the four different Varna systems were the ones that ultimately led to the development of the human race. At the time of creation, it is said that the brahman were born from the mouth of Purusa (the Primeval Man), the kshatriya were born from His arms, the vaisya were born from His thighs, and the sudra were born from his feet. In point of fact, the Rig Veda is the most important scripture in Brahmanism, and it is the vehicle through which the so-called Varna systems are institutionalized and given social legitimacy. When we investigate where the practice of untouchability first began, we discover that it was the Vedas, and the Rig Veda in particular, that first advocated for the caste system known as Varnas, which segregated different groups of Hindus according to their social status (Palshikar, S, 2015).

### ***1.2 Ambedkar and Gandhi on Untouchability***

The disagreement between Ambedkar and Gandhi is not ideological; rather, it is fundamentally philosophical and reflects opposing views on how human life should be organized. The majority of commentators and critics ignore this facet of the relationship between Gandhi and Ambedkar, and as a result, they are unable to see the cosmic drama that was being acted out in the microcosmic event that was the movement of harijan uplift. As a consequence of this, they present interpretations of the political relationship between Gandhi and Ambedkar that give the impression of being credible but are, in reality, highly distorted (Gandhi, M. K., & Ambedkar, B. R, 2016). The issue of untouchability, the bane of Hindu society that has for several millennia kept millions of people in the shackles of poverty, exploitation, and oppression, was the bone of contention that put Gandhi and Ambedkar in politically opposing camps.

Gandhi approached the issue of untouchability from a fundamentally religious and spiritual standpoint in his analysis of the problem. He wished for the harijan to continue their practice within the Hindu religion. He turned to reforms as a means of not only enhancing the sociocultural standing of the untouchables but also of ridding Hindu society of the evils that were contaminating it and cleansing the conscience of Hindus. He did this by using reforms (Gandhi, M. K., & Ambedkar, B. R, 2016). Because of this, he placed a strong emphasis on reopening the traditional doors that had previously been shut in the faces of the untouchables. Because he believed that the Poona pact would pave the way for the division of Hindu society, this is the primary reason that he vehemently opposed the Poona pact.

Gandhi's insistence on temple entry combined these two goals into a single one. It was meant to convert the orthodox Hindus to the belief that it is wrong to prevent harijan from entering temples and to treat them as pariahs. Additionally, it was meant to open up the temples for the untouchables. Ambedkar, on the other hand, was adamant that the untouchables should not acknowledge and act out the part that was written for them in this script. He saw them as individuals who, once liberated from the constraints of Hindu society, would be able to experience freedom and equality and craft their own fate (Cháirez-Garza, J. F, 2016). As a result, he endeavored to establish for the untouchables an independent political identity within the frameworks of the social, economic, and political powers. The elimination of the caste system entirely was a necessary step in the construction of such an identity because of the humiliating nature of the caste system for the untouchables. Ambedkar never wavered from his stance that the only way the outcaste can be liberated from their oppression is through the abolition of the caste system (Afzal, S., & Afzal, R, 2021).

Ambedkar insisted that the problem of untouchability be approached as a matter of civil rights, and he refused to accept Gandhi's religious and spiritual approach to addressing the issue of untouchability. In their efforts to abolish untouchability, Gandhi and Ambedkar took approaches that couldn't be more different from one another (Yaday, 2022). Gandhi was adamant in his conviction that the practice of untouchability should be abolished if Hindus were to have a change of heart. Ambedkar was adamant in his belief that it could not be solved by merely having a change of heart. He insisted that his people be granted protections as well as political rights. Ambedkar believed that Gandhi should have the role of natural leader of the untouchables, while Gandhi believed that he should have the role of natural guardian of the untouchables. Many advocates for social change advocated for the integration of people who were previously considered untouchable into mainstream society (Ranjan, R). The "people of god," as Mahatma Gandhi referred to them, are the "h a r I j a n s." Since many people consider the term "harijan" to be patronizing, the term "dalit," which means "downtrodden," has taken its place. The contribution that Gandhi made toward the emancipation of the untouchables has been called into question. This point is typically driven home by the commentary of his contemporary Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who was untouchable in his own right. Ambedkar had a deep-seated mistrust of Gandhi's intentions, and he frequently viewed Gandhi's actions as being counterproductive to the goal of elevating the status of Ambedkar's people.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### *Data and sources of data*

According to Patton, qualitative research findings are compiled using three distinct methods for data collection, namely open-ended interviews, direct observation, and written documents. Document review was the method of collecting qualitative data that proved most useful in this scenario. The purpose of using the document analysis method is to investigate the various written sources pertaining to the topic at hand. In addition, Ulutaş (2015) notes that the methodology utilized by the researcher is of utmost significance in determining whether a document is used as primary or secondary material in the research process. In this article, Mahatma Gandhi's life, personality, and thoughts on a variety of topics are discussed in relation to acceptable ethics, human rights obligations, and the subject of untouchability values and peace. Additionally, a correlation between Ambedkar and Gandhi is intended to be established. In order to accomplish this, researchers make use of a few documents that are connected to both Ambedkar and Gandhi's life.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The sources referenced herein at the appendices of this paper are the ones that were interrogated to extract and obtain useful findings presented in this research as follows:

### ***Ethical considerations and human rights***

Ambedkar envisions a society based on the principle of justice that is either a caste-free utopia or an ideal society. According to him, "ideal" refers to a society that is "based on liberty, equality, and fraternity." He explained what justice meant by saying that "Justice is simply another name for liberty, equality, and fraternity." Therefore, in order for us to comprehend Ambedkar's vision of a "just society," we are required to comprehend the significance of the following three phrases: liberty, equality, and fraternity. Ambedkar believed that the existing social order, which was founded on the classical Hindu religion, was corrupted by evil, which is why he advocated for a fundamental shift in the system (Pathania, G. J., 2022).

Ambedkar envisioned a society that was not structured on the basis of caste but rather adhered to two guiding principles. The first of these is the idea that in this context, the individual is an end in himself, and that the purpose of society is to foster the expansion of the individual's capabilities and the maturation of his personality (Masuki, 2022). In this context, the individual is not superior to society, and if the individual is required to subordinate himself to society, it is because such subordination is for the individual's improvement and only to the extent that it is required. A consideration that is based on liberty, equality, and fraternity must be given to the terms of associated life between individuals who are members of the society. This is the second essential. According to Ambedkar, an individual has no place in a Hindu society that is based on caste, but in a just society, an individual is the final end.

In addition, in a society based on caste, a person's relationship with other members of his or her class or with members of other classes was already predetermined; however, in the just society that Ambedkar envisioned, these relationships must be based on freedom, equality, and brotherhood. The demand that is being placed on society in this scenario is to safeguard the human rights of the individual (Mandol, M). Ambedkar was of the opinion that any good social order or society must pass two tests, which he referred to as the "test of justice" and the "test of utility." In addition to these two essential principles, one of the most important components was justice, or the principle of justice, because the standard or the criterion by which judging the right and wrong in the modern society is justice, which is another name for liberty, equality, and fraternity. In addition to these two essential principles, one of the most important components was the principle of justice. For this reason, in order to comprehend the true character of the just society, it is necessary for us to comprehend the meanings of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

The contribution that Gandhi made toward restoring the human dignity of India's untouchables was significant and superior to that of many other Indian political leaders. Before him, nobody had ever mounted a frontal assault on untouchability and launched a vigorous national campaign. He was the first person to do both of those things. Gandhi made his home in Bhangi colonies, where he also adopted a Harijan girl, interacted socially, and ate his meals with the locals (Fuchs, M., & Linkenbach, A, 2018). He instilled a sense of dignity and self-confidence in the Harijan people, as well as the bravery to fight for their legal entitlements. An in-depth investigation reveals that while Ambedkar was only interested in equity among selves, Gandhi paved the way for the realization of "the shared self," which is a concept in which a caste Hindu self can share a Dalit self and vice versa. In this passage, Gandhi moves beyond the traditional vocabulary of rights and enters into more expansive categories of human compassion through the concept of shared self. Understanding and regaining one's dignity can both benefit from this kind of shared self (Oza, P, 2019). Even Gandhi's contribution was constrained by a number of factors in many ways. The practice of untouchability was problematic on both a moral and a political level, and its origins could be traced back to the incredibly unequal power dynamic that

existed between the upper castes and the harijans. The only level on which Gandhi's campaign was conducted was the moral and religious level. It provided the Harijans with self-respect but not the power to organize and fight their own battles; moral and, to some extent, social equality but not political or economic equality; dignity but not power; and self-respect but not self-confidence. During this same time period, Ambedkar's method also suffered from a strong bias toward statism and elitism. He was correct in highlighting the significance of political power, but he was incorrect in believing that the State offered solutions to each and every one of society's issues.

## CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

On the basis of the observations made above, it is now abundantly clear that Ambedkar was not merely a critic or a person who possessed some novel ideas. In his analysis of the preexisting social order that was based on caste, he was very clear about the evils that it carried. He was also very clear about the basis of his alternative society, which was justice. Again, at the very end, he was very clear about how to establish an ideal or just society. According to Ambedkar, the Varna system was the foundation of the traditional social order in India, and it was this system that was to blame for all of the inequalities that existed within the traditional order. He talked about the eradication of caste, but he made it very clear that it is not possible to do so without first eradicating the religious notions on which the caste system is founded. This is why the caste system cannot be eradicated. This could not have been accomplished through a straightforward reformation, but rather only through revolutionary change. "You must give a new doctrinal basis to your Religion," Ambedkar advised, "a basis that will be in consonance with Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, or more succinctly, with Democracy." It brings about a fundamental shift in one's understanding of what it means to be alive. It calls for a radical shift in how we present ourselves to other people and in how we think about the world around us. It refers to becoming a new person, or beginning a new life. Only in a new body is it possible for new life to begin. Before a new body can be created and new life can begin to exist inside of it, the old body has to pass away first. To put it another way, in order for the new to become active and begin to pulsate, the old must first stop functioning as intended. Because of this, Ambedkar insisted that the Shastras should not be considered authoritative and that their associated religion should be abolished.

Both Gandhi and Ambedkar shared the goal of freeing the individual from the shackles of hierarchical and caste-based constraints, as well as the bonds of unfreedom. Both of them emphasized the importance of having access to open space in order to improve the human experience of dignity and respect for oneself. When it came to the concept of untouchability and how it could be eradicated, however, there were an excessive number of barriers that prevented a full comprehension of either. They disagreed on the principles that should guide the organization and improvement of society in order to uphold human dignity. Ambedkar placed a large amount of reliance on institutional mechanisms to protect and promote the interests of the untouchables. However, he did not fully appreciate the significance of altering the moral culture of society as a whole. It was necessary for there to be a significant cultural and moral shift in order for Hindu society to be able to deal with the shame and deprivations that were inflicted upon the untouchables. Since Gandhi realized this, he focused his efforts, as they should have been, on transforming Hinduism from within, and Ambedkar was in error to disregard the work he did. In the minds of caste Hindus, Gandhi instilled a profound sense of shame and guilt, and he reawakened their awareness of the egalitarian current that runs through their religion. <sup>32</sup> Despite the fact that they had many disagreements, the concept of "human dignity" was significant to them as they worked to dismantle inequality and promote justice.

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