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DALIT-BLACK THOUGHT

An Intellectual History of Caste & Race

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Dedication

We lost *Aai* Yengde our grandmother during the DPhil work. I could not visit India to pay my last respects as it was during the difficult years of the Covid pandemic.

My father, who is no longer with us, continues to remain an inspiration for my work and ethics. It is on his birthday that I submit the thesis. I dedicate the thesis to him, Rohini, and the Yengdes. The former two never thought their name would be printed out of their hometown, let alone have crested at the world's top university's doctoral thesis for generations altogether to reminisce.

Short Abstract

Race and caste are two major human interventions in the history of humankind that have drastically altered social, cultural and economic relations. Studying both may suggest new methods of confronting prejudice and substantially advance the work of antiracism and anti-casteism movements. Their collective study will perhaps offer clues into decoding the puzzle of the ideas of racism and casteism. This thesis is concerned with the twenty-first century's intervention into the new-age politics of our time. The past century is a guide to understanding the issues of contemporary global struggles. What differs is the chronometer that advantages in culture and social reach through technology and accessibility. Yet, we are confounded with the worries of dealing with the problems that appear new in old clothing. Thus, two primary hallmarks of the modern era's indefatigable inventions are: race and caste. We will examine these concepts that were understood, analysed, experienced, and critiqued by the leaders of the Black and Dalit movements: W.E.B. Du Bois, B R Ambedkar, Frantz Fanon, and Steve Biko.

Long Abstract

Race and caste have to be understood through a historical enquiry of routes and roots with their appreciation in the contemporary era. The routes refer to works in the genre of reportage through travel writing, which were immensely popular in the earlier centuries. Accounts by pilgrims, merchants, royal delegations, aristocrats, diplomats and administrators, along with ordinary, lay travellers from the Iberian Peninsula show how the population in this region was more “mobile and travel-minded from top to bottom”.¹ In essence, they were a curious people who were more inclined than others in the Western world to seeking out knowledge about exotic foreigners. Descriptions from their travels in the medieval era give us clues as to how Iberian sociality was informed and eventually adjusted to ideas they had formed about these Others. They went far and returned with theories drawn from knowledge of “near-empiricism”, which refers to establishing familiarity of alien people using empirical ethnography.

The intellectual historians of these concepts also help us to anchor the discussions on caste and race which are now the two base structures that the world is witnessing. In two of the world’s largest democracies—US and India—their resonance is becoming pertinent. Increasing number of case studies of casteism in the US,² ‘Global Castes’,³ alongside the globalization of the racial struggle informed by the experiences and scholarly contributions of black people in India, are making it urgent for us to theorize colour-caste-race in order to better contextualize and understand our times in these specific terms. This thesis aims to launch a new enquiry into the epochal developments in theories around caste and race.

We begin with the theorization of the experiences of Dalit and black radical movements. This thesis critically examines the attempts of these two social groups to construct a new paradigm for building social and political solidarities. It achieves this through a comparative study of theories propounded by four key figures – W.E.B. Du Bois, B.R. Ambedkar, Frantz Fanon and Steve Biko – to draw out previously unrecognized connections in their thoughts. It situates the Dalit theory

¹ Michael Harney, *Race, Caste, and Indigeneity in Medieval Spanish Travel Literature* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), p. 24.

² Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origin of Our Discontents* (New York: PRH, 2020).

³ Suraj Yengde, “Global Castes”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 45 (2) (2022), pp. 340 360, DOI: [10.1080/01419870.2021.1924394](https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2021.1924394)

of B.R. Ambedkar alongside those of the black theorists, W.E.B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon and Steve Biko. The leadership of these men shaped influential movements that challenged the status quoist formulations in their respective societies. These men initiated conversations in didactic tomes about their conditions.

This then begs the question: what would have happened had the followers of B.R. Ambedkar, W.E.B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon and Steve Biko approached their oppression from the point of view of shared suffering? In many cases, they did so but were overwhelmingly preoccupied by their own domestic struggles – with the rare exception of Du Bois, who was truly an internationalist. He had a vision for coloured peoples' solidarity, that included an anti-capitalist stance and Asian struggles. He was drawn to India, his most famous novel, *Dark Princess*, is a love story between a black American and an Indian princess. Du Bois also celebrated Mao's revolution and visited China as a state guest to endorse his opinions on the Chinese revolution dubbed as the peasant struggle.

The important moment of interaction between Dalit and black struggle remained an imagined praxis and did not actualize into the story of their struggles. As a result, today, not only is there a total silence on the common struggles of black Africans and Dalits, but there is also no active solidarity being built between these two major movements.

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Acknowledgements

The idea of a second Ph.D. was in the making for some years. It was the inspiration of Dr. Ambedkar, who earned two doctorates in different disciplines. However, for me, charting that pathway was not clear. The pandemic brought job insecurity at Harvard. I had a research project in mind and needed an avenue to work on it. A day before leaving for Christmas break in 2019, my colleague informed me that I would have to start looking out for other options. I was on my way to Canada. That journey was a sombre reminder of uncertainties.

I arrived at a friend's apartment and discussed this idea with her. She was enthusiastic to support any ideas that came out of my head and said she had not done any academic work beyond her undergraduate thesis. Nevertheless, having her around and being in the same space made me start bouncing off my ideas. She was a sympathetic listener. Those days spent at her on the eve of Christmas ideas helped me to put together a formal proposal in just two days. Thanks to Anita Lal, who edited multiple versions of the proposal. The proposal sailed through to attract the attention of the Oxford faculties. The one I was keen to impress was the Don of Oxonian intellectual history, Faisal Devji.

I first saw Faisal Devji in Johannesburg when he came to deliver a talk at the University of Witwatersrand, where I was writing my first doctorate. Ever since, I followed his work. I was not aware then that I would be developing my ideas under his mentorship. Ranked among the world's top intellectual historians who deals with ideas of power and state, having Faisal supervise me was an honour. As it may be visible in the dissertation, his push, encouragement, criticism, and guidance have shaped the thesis. He encouraged me to bring out the novelty of my ideas and package them without having to rely on the preponderance of Euro-American schools of thought. I am grateful to him and his pursuit to test new ideas in the wild waters of Oxford.

Thesis writing is an isolated experience. I had planned to wrap the thesis in two years, which was a generous time to develop the thesis and write it in time. Faisal was confident, as was I. However, the pandemic-related shutdowns impacted my work. I was resigned to work in my room surrounded by books. I took on projects to review, working on a monograph (which I completed in the same week as the thesis in your hand), articles, and curating a special issue for *Outlook* weekly,

in addition to preparing the thesis. I had not realized during the process that it was taking a toll on my mental health.

One day, after concluding the text of Louis Dumont, I switched off my computer as my vision was blurry. I reckoned it must be the constant staring at the screen for months. That evening, I wrapped myself with the comforters around the evening hours. I woke up an hour and a half later with a weird sensation running throughout my body. It had not happened before. The heartbeat was as if it was going to explode out of my chest. I felt a sudden fear. I did not know what to do. I was afraid. I called an ambulance for the first time ever in my life.

Over the next few days, over the calls and visiting the hospital, it was understood that I had developed anxiety and depression. There were weeks when I could barely shut my eyes. The body was tired and was desperate for sleep. But whenever the mind was slipping into slumber, the heart would race, yanking me off the bed I earnestly sought. Sleeping for three hours seemed like an achievement. I did not know who to speak to. The counselling and therapy did not help either. During the fine Oxford summers, I would walk for hours in the rural areas. Then, suddenly, some thought would enter the labyrinth of my mind, and it would set me into the fear of the future. The thought would culminate in it becoming a dead end. I feared death or the experience of fatality, which I had thought would not affect me.

I packed my bags and arrived at an isolated abbot in Aberdeen, Scotland. The Buddhist monk, Venerable Sujano, agreed to have me stay for 10 days. I wanted a space to go deeper into the problems I was undergoing. I was looking for Vipassana, but that did not work out due to covid regulations. Thus, the 10 days with Ven. Sujano helped me heal as an initial balm was applied to the wound. We did not do any extraordinary activities except go on long walks a few times and hike a Scottish mountain. The rest of the time, the monk patiently listened to my fears and received them with compassion. Sometimes, he would offer allegories and, other times, ask me to push my limits that are blocking my path to overcome the anxiety. He would educate me about the teachings of Dhamma. In Buddha's wisdom, I learned that each one of us has anxieties. In his teaching and prayers, we learn the core of anxiety is grappling with the mind. Ven. Sujano explained to me that with smaller to bigger anxieties happening each day in our lives, we have not learned to process it. Instead, we brush it under the carpet. As we keep adding more there will come a moment when that will explode. My quest to find the reason for my anxiety was an irrelevant question. My gratitude to the Ven. Sujano for taking me in and administering the guidance of Buddha and his Dhamma.

Following this break, I took several months off work and went to Europe and the Balkans. During this time, I met Tjaša. She heard my ideas as they came and offered her consoling ear and empathetic attention in many countries and over many continents. Her presence helped heal the anxious mind. She became my companion over the past few years.

At Oxford, I won a couple of fellowships that would support my studies here. However, they were taken away after learning that I already had a Ph.D. As Faisal

once quipped, “Who knew being overqualified was a liability?”. In moments of distress, I had to raise funds from several stakeholders.

The college that I was allocated was St Antony’s, a desperately poverty-ridden institution complementing the ungenerous University of Oxford. These institutions have not been helpful to me in my doctorate degree. They sucked the last straw of my ability to raise funds. It was tiring to deal with their profit-driven hunger, forcing students from overseas into difficult situations.

Jim Cashel and Anne Ching have been my advocates and a rock in my mission to complete the second doctorate. When I announced my plan to Jim, he enquired with curiosity and then extended his generous support. Even in times of distress, he jumped in like a caring friend and took me by his hands. I am also grateful to Inlaks Shivadasani Foundation for coming on board and going out of their general practice, awarding me the grant for a year and then another for completion. Both times, I requested last minute, and I am grateful to the board, especially Mr. Azad Shivdasani and Prof Chauhan, for getting on the call and exploring the curiosity of my doctoral project. Special thanks to Amita Malkani for being a good friend and support.

At Oxford, I was supported by the Frere Fund, Beit Fund, Gildea Fund, and a Charterhouse European Bursary to undertake a research trip to Portugal. These funds were helpful, but with its paltry grant, I had to hobble for grants worth GBP 200. Many of my interactions at Oxford with various funding agencies tried to raise whatever I could to support my doctoral work. My mentor and supervisor of my first PhD in South Africa, Dilip Menon, supported me throughout this process. His continued interest in my success and well-being has been enormously profitable for my work and practice.

Darren Walker has been a lovely friend and a mentor. He has sustained his interest in me, my wellbeing, and my progress over the past three years. Each time we correspond, he is as enthusiastic as he was the first time we met. It is to his continued encouragement and love that big ideas have been an achievable thought for me.

As I was working on the thesis locked in a mountainous region of Slovenia, Ava DuVernay, the leading filmmaker of our times, contacted me to consult her on a film project that she was working on. It was Isabel Wilkerson’s dense text that she took upon to present on the screen. She hired me to be a consultant with the title of co-producer. I worked with her and shared many updates regarding the literature and knowledge that I had gathered in the course of DPhil research. The timing couldn’t be more ideal. The ideas that I discuss in the thesis are animatedly presented by Ava in her timeless reflection, *Origin* (2023).

I am back at Harvard, where the last iteration of my first thesis was accomplished in 2015. I am now a W.E.B. Du Bois Fellow with a busier travel schedule. The last brush to the thesis is provided at the Qatar Air lounge in Doha and the submission was executed 40,000 feet in the air.

At Oxford and the UK at large, I had the friendship and affection of Shrikant Borkar, a mentor and brother to me since my first arrival in the UK in 2011. Asang Wankhede, Bhawani Buswala, Sushant Singh Rajput cohorts Joel Littler, Mike Collins, our elders of the Ambedkarite community, Gautam Chakravati, Harbans Lal Virdi, Dev Suman, Santosh Dass, Madhuri Hirekar. My housemates, Temilorun Olanipekun, Jonathan Carter, Jules Desai, Phillip Marriot, and Suraj Thube, engaged in the kitchen areas. Shailendra Bhandare encouraged me to pursue the Marathi language sphere and initiated me into the online Marathi language group.

I was invited to deliver a few keynotes that came out of this project. I am grateful to Gurminder Bhambra for asking me to deliver at the British Sociological Association's Presidential Symposium in 2023, Hugo Gorringer for inviting me to deliver the Ambedkar Memorial Lecture at the University of Edinburgh, 2022, Awino Okech for the invitation to SOAS's conference on Global Blackness in 2022, and colleagues at the following institutes for hosting me to discuss the topics that represent in the thesis. Institute of Cultural Inquiry, Berlin, Dartmouth College, Northwestern University, London School of Economics, University of California, Davis, Berkeley, Columbia University, Cal State, Long Beach, W.E.B. Du Bois Legacy Festival in Great Barrington, Mass.

At Harvard, I had a company of mentors, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Khalil Gibran Muhammad, and the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute Fellows. Cornel West left to run for the President of the United States, who came down to Harvard for a day and spent an evening breaking bread and catching up.

The *Ethnic & Racial Studies* journal has published an article, "Global Castes", which was not included in the thesis due to the word count limit. The *Seminar* journal published an article, "Iterations of Shared Dalit-Black Solidarity". An extended version of the article is presented in some form in Chapter 6. *Current Sociology* will run a special issue around my article "Race & Case in the Making of American Sociology" with responses from Faisal Devji, Meena Dhanda, and John Holmwood. That article is also represented in the present thesis with elaborated arguments.

I am grateful to the Yengdes—mummy (Rohini) Yengde, uncles Mohan and Deepak, Aunties Sunanda and Amrapali, siblings Nitin, Pranali, Pavan, Samyak, Akash, Harsh, Prerana, grandma Sarubai Paikrao who is around and proud of me. My father, who is no longer with us, continues to remain an inspiration for my work and ethics. It is on his birthday that I submit the thesis. I dedicate the thesis to him, Rohini and the Yengdes. The former two never thought their name would be printed out of their hometown, let alone have crested at the world's top university's doctoral thesis for generations altogether to reminisce.

Suraj Yengde
Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.
14th July 2024

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Fig 2. K B Gamre signed as 'among the few chief leaders of the organisation'

Introduction

Race and caste are two major human interventions in the history of humankind that have drastically altered social, cultural and economic relations. Studying both may suggest new methods of confronting prejudice and substantially advance the work of antiracism and anti-casteism movements. Their collective study will perhaps offer clues into decoding the puzzle of the ideas of racism and casteism.

For that, we need to visit archives from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This epoch is responsible for creating most of the current social and political vocabularies around these two phenomena. The Iberian Peninsula, in particular, played an important role in exporting certain ideas that became foundational for global cartography. Iberia gave us two concepts – race and caste – both numbering among the most contested issues of the twenty-first century. This thesis is chiefly interested in the anthropological concept of “career of caste”.⁴ Caste was transfused into the Iberian colonies, particularly those in South America. Caste and race displaced religious distinctions and earned greater scientific and historic validity in the hegemonic discourse. I aim to contribute to the conceptual understanding of race and caste, particularly in terms of their relation, dependability and separation in contemporary debates of activists and scholars, laying emphasis on the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Race and caste have to be understood through a historical enquiry of routes and roots with their appreciation in the contemporary era. The routes refer to works in the genre of reportage through travel writing, which were immensely popular in the earlier centuries. Accounts by pilgrims, merchants, royal delegations, aristocrats, diplomats and administrators, along with ordinary, lay travellers from the Iberian Peninsula show how the population in this region was more “mobile and travel-minded from top to bottom”.⁵ In essence, they were a

⁴ Veena Das, “Caste”, in International Encyclopaedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences, *Science Direct*, 2001), p. 1529; Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1966] 1980).

⁵ Harney, *Race, Caste, and Indigeneity*, p. 24.

curious people who were more inclined than others in the Western world to seeking out knowledge about exotic foreigners. Descriptions from their travels in the medieval era give us clues as to how Iberian sociality was informed and eventually adjusted to ideas they had formed about these Others. They went far and returned with theories drawn from knowledge of “near-empiricism”, which refers to establishing familiarity of alien people using empirical ethnography.

Michael Harney dug into the travel texts from Iberia written between the early thirteenth to the mid-sixteenth centuries to tell us how the ideas of caste, race and indigeneity were formulated in the early European empires. The evolution of travel texts shows how they go from thick descriptions to anecdotes. The travellers recorded their encounters with various groups and classified them using the “author’s home community as the norm”.⁶ Thus, whatever the norms of post-Islamic and now Catholic Iberia, the mixes of otherings were notified in their appreciation of exotic lives.

The archive of Iberia gives us an example from the earlier stages of European colonial mandates. Reconquista provided mobility through various avenues including sponsorships by royalty or the Church. Many took off from the coast to explore the world as a result of this. The well-known stories of Columbus and Vasco da Gama can be traced back to this geography and history. Exploration of the world as a means to adventure, commerce and pilgrimage was a highlight of the time. The Mayflower that set foot on the Plymouth Rock also labelled their journey as a pilgrimage. The lineage of the debate that we are dealing with in this thesis can be located in the medieval centuries, encompassing three major historical phases: victory of the Christian empire over Islamic powers, explorations into the New World, and settlement of the Spanish colonies. To further establish its control, the Christian empire granted the right to land ownership only to Christians. Under their fief, the Iberian control in the region and elsewhere was used as a model by other colonial aspirants. Harney states that the thirteenth-century Iberian state structure established a “pattern and methodology of Christian conquest and colonization”.⁷ For this reason, these archives are pertinent to our investigation as they help us to make sense of various methods of social categorization and structuring which were invented and deployed in various colonies for the first time during this era, and finally leading us to the contemporary identifiers of race, caste and indigeneity.

Popular perception pits caste and race as two different identities, viewing them solely in terms of their contrasts and contestations. However, historical records show that caste and race were used either in light of, lieu of, or combination with each other. Their modern avatars draw directly from the Iberian Peninsula in the sixteenth century. To study this aspect of world history, we will look at thinkers who developed these themes and used them as theoretical bases to critique the systems of discrimination acting in their individual contexts.

⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

⁷ Ibid., p. 1.

The intellectual historians of these concepts also help us to anchor the discussions on caste and race which are now the two base structures that the world is witnessing. In two of the world's largest democracies—US and India—their resonance is becoming pertinent. Increasing number of case studies of casteism in the US,⁸ 'Global Castes',⁹ alongside the globalization of the racial struggle informed by the experiences and scholarly contributions of black people in India, are making it urgent for us to theorize colour-caste-race in order to better contextualize and understand our times in these specific terms. This thesis aims to launch a new enquiry into the epochal developments in theories around caste and race.

We begin with the theorization of the experiences of Dalit and black radical movements. This thesis critically examines the attempts of these two social groups to construct a new paradigm for building social and political solidarities. It achieves this through a comparative study of theories propounded by four key figures – W.E.B. Du Bois, B.R. Ambedkar, Frantz Fanon and Steve Biko – to draw out previously unrecognized connections in their thoughts. It situates the Dalit theory of B.R. Ambedkar alongside those of the black theorists, W.E.B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon and Steve Biko. The leadership of these men shaped influential movements that challenged the status quoist formulations in their respective societies. These men initiated conversations in didactic tomes about their conditions.

This then begs the question: what would have happened had the followers of B.R. Ambedkar, W.E.B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon and Steve Biko approached their oppression from the point of view of shared suffering? In many cases, they did so but were overwhelmingly preoccupied by their own domestic struggles – with the rare exception of Du Bois, who was truly an internationalist. He had a vision for coloured peoples' solidarity, that included an anti-capitalist stance and Asian struggles. He was drawn to India, his most famous novel, *Dark Princess*, is a love story between a black American and an Indian princess. Du Bois also celebrated Mao's revolution and visited China as a state guest to endorse his opinions on the Chinese revolution dubbed as the peasant struggle.

The important moment of interaction between Dalit and black struggle remained an imagined praxis and did not actualize into the story of their struggles. As a result, today, not only is there a total silence on the common struggles of black Africans and Dalits, but there is also no active solidarity being built between these two major movements.

AMBEDKAR, DU BOIS, FANON AND BIKO

The interface between Dalit and black politics operated in juxtaposition to each other. For example, Ambedkar, an untouchable caste scholar in India, worked with the colonial archive to theorize race, while at the same time, Du Bois theorized caste using sociological discipline. Du Bois was working with colour caste

⁸ Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origin of Our Discontents* (New York: PRH, 2020).

⁹ Suraj Yengde, "Global Castes", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 45:2, (2022): 340-360, DOI: [10.1080/01419870.2021.1924394](https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2021.1924394)

dynamism to describe his society. Caste features in Du Bois' analysis as a direct reference to the enforced subservience of a group in a hierarchical social system they did not create.¹⁰ He identified American society as a node of colour-castes. Du Bois kept revisiting the origin story of America—through European domination. He did comparative studies of Europe and America to examine the social hierarchies that gave way to new identities in the latter.

Following this, Fanon and Biko, in different generations, conveyed the theoretical proxy to the European thought. These thinkers theorized oppression and liberation in similar ways by deploying identical methodology – that of looking at history and its iterative possibility – to amend the location of people at lower rungs of their societies. The cross-cultural interactions in their thought do inform us that the context was adjusted with the concept. Africa as a colony remained as the context while race as a concept became global. The work of these scholars strengthened the anti-colonial, pan-African thought which influenced thinkers in America and India.

The debate of race versus caste needs to be explored to postulate a distilled version of these concepts. To methodologically approach this question, I aim to research contemporary anti-caste and anti-racism movements in the UK and US—both hotbeds of South Asian immigration and the migrants' practices serving to reproduce caste relations. In particular, looking at how they approach their grievances in the light of race-based protections in host societies. New developments in the field of social activism have notably seen the rise of caste-based sensibilities being debated in the US and UK.

A historical approach to the Dalit diaspora activism through an Ambedkarite praxis has existed since the 1960s. I revisit herein those episodes of an anti-caste uprising in the UK that produced a public caste-centric discourse. As a result, British Dalit leadership grew and started to challenge the oppressive caste forces of Hindu and Sikh domination. British Dalits also ran for Mayoral offices and even got elected in Wolverhampton, Ealing, Coventry, Darlaston. The history behind this activism, the politics of organizing and Dalit representation up to the Equality Bill, 2010 that had proposed to outlaw caste will be examined in light of the race-caste binaries of new politics.

In the US, the movement was different. It had a more professional-class base than the UK, which mainly comprised Dalit working-class members from Punjab. The US Dalit activists had found a way to work formally with the US government offices. They lobbied with the state officials and consulted the foreign committee of the US government on matters related to India. Finally, the American Dalit activists focused on influencing the political decisions back in India. The regional and linguistic diversity of the US group was remarkable. It had members from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh, among others.

¹⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1940)

LITERATURE REVIEW

There have been infrequent attempts by Indian scholars in the US to understand the twosome thoughts of leading intellectual giants from the last century—Du Bois and Ambedkar.¹¹ Departing from the extraordinary Du Bois–Ambedkarian intellectual construct, I incorporate other subaltern caste figures within the African-American tradition. Gyanendra Pandey reasserts the importance of comparative analysis of black and Dalit groups in the US and India.¹² Similarly, scholar M. Namishray dwells on the lives of Ambedkar and King in an attempt to recover the historical parallels between Dalit and black movements.¹³ Both seminal works, however, do not expand to include other black worlds that help to critically examine the developments of ‘coloured cosmopolitanism’.¹⁴ Kamala Visweswaran’s work opens new vistas of observing race and caste through a cultural anthropological lens. The commonality of cultural studies or the formation of culture into what she refers to as “un/common culture”—also the title of her book—remains a base for the examination of caste and race.¹⁵ Visweswaran’s take on the limitations of caste sociology is important to further develop on a lapsed theme of Dalit-Black Studies which I aim to advance through this project.

The subject of Dalit and black has been approached through the epistemological developments of caste and race. I approach this issue through five prominent lenses intertwining the disciplines of history, anthropology, sociology, genetics and political science. It can be broadly classified under historical, and seminal theories of ideas constituting the social life of caste and race subjects.

The historical developments of race and caste are traced to the emergence of colonial expansion intimately tied to predatory capitalism. In her majestic account of the invention of races, Geraldine Heng argues that the existence of race-related thinking and racial practices predated modern formulation of “race”.¹⁶ European conceptions, both pre- and post-Enlightenment, were heavily influenced by racial notions from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries. These conceptions, although searing, fall short of moving beyond the imagined spatial Western topography and placing the lens on the transparency of coloured-racism. Racism, as it is understood today, would be an underdeveloped thesis if contemporary exclusions were to be applied. Race was constantly improvised to create a total image of one broader category as opposed to the other, overlooking the immense internal divisions it harbours.

¹¹ Daniel Immerwahr, ‘Caste or Colony? Indianizing Race in the United States’, *Modern Intellectual History* 4, no. 2 (2007); Vijay Prashad, ‘Afro- Dalits of the Earth, Unite!’, *African Studies Review*, 43, No. 1, Special Issue on the Diaspora (Apr., 2000), pp. 189-201

¹² G Pandey, *A History of Prejudice: Race, Caste, and Difference in India and the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013)

¹³ M Namishray, *Caste and Race: Comparative Study of BR Ambedkar and Martin Luther King* (Jaipur: Rawat, 2003)

¹⁴ N Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017)

¹⁵ Kamala Visweswaran, *Un/common Cultures: Racism and the Rearticulation of Cultural Difference* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010)

¹⁶ Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018)

My concern here is to find the axes of development of the twin structural hierarchies and see if they relate and correspond to each other. The duration of their formation and eventual development will help us to find out how these were developed as political plots. I consult secondary sources focusing on the Iberian archives and colonial expansionist theories that formed an opinion of the inferior Other in a classical racial sense. This racial sense was adjacent to the cultural heritage of caste. The caste culture provided a support base for racial-colour obviousness to get the desired results in the form of oppressive colonization. Therefore, the literature focusing on the Indian Ocean, and Portuguese and Spanish colonization will be sought out to excavate any hints and references to the ontology of race-caste.¹⁷

One of the primary approaches to finding the relevance of dialectical struggles is to look at the seminal texts of the protagonists. Dalit-Black worlds build on the Du Boisian emphasis on “Pan-Negroism”, by revisiting it from a subaltern Dalit’s perspective. How would Du Bois invoke India’s untouchables to speak to contemporary global solidarity struggles as he did throughout his career? The *Souls of the Black Folk*, *Dark Princess*, *Dusk of Dawn* and *The Crisis*, in particular, serve to illuminate Du Bois’ approach towards the issues of untouchability and caste.

Du Bois was an experimental sociologist who probed with scientific rationality into sociology to counter the arguments made against black race in his famous Atlanta University publications. Under his leadership, a modern encyclopaedia of 2,172 pages was published that studied varied aspects of Negro life. By putting forth a huge mass of study of the “Negro problem”, Du Bois went on to challenge the limitations of sociology as a discipline. He laid out the inaccuracies in the sociological discipline that demanded “high quality of fairness.”

Du Bois’ sociological contribution to the race and class question is an evidence of methodologically scrutinizing the black experience. Du Bois examined the “Negro problem” of America as merely a question of poverty, crime, drug addiction, marginalisation and other socio-economic disadvantages by collecting data from the inner-city neighbourhoods. This data comprised surveys that wholesomely challenged the perspective of a low or incapable nature of black body politic. Du Bois’ experimentation with studying vulnerable population groups proved influential. However, we are still left with the questions that arise out of internal structures, with specific groups that are loosely defined but hold strong grips on the sociology of a community.¹⁸

Similarly, but in a different context, Ambedkar is concerned with the origin and status of untouchability. His *Untouchables: Who were they and why they became Untouchables?* (1948) and *Who were the Shudras?* (1948) offer a searing analysis on

¹⁷ Ananya Chakravarti looked at the religio-domination of European order through a Jesuit mission in India, Brazil through mostly the Iberian archive. *The Empire of Apostles Religion, Accommodation and The Imagination of Empire in Modern Brazil and India* (New York: OUP, 2018)

¹⁸ W E B Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: UPenn Press, 1899)

the origin of caste and untouchability. Contradicting the colonialist theoreticians like Herbert Risley (1891), Ambedkar combined textual and anthropological lenses and used his position as an authoritative “native”, as opposed to a colonial outsider, to reveal the origin of caste and untouchability. Ambedkar argued untouchability is an “outcome of the war of Brahminism over Buddhism” in contrast to the Hindu-indoctrinated varna order that is a-historical and unfounded on many grounds. This argument brings to light the singular influence of Brahminism—and not Hinduism—in describing caste-based realities.

Frantz Fanon, a prominent architect of the African consciousness as we know it, revolutionized the colonized world’s attack on the colonizer. In *Black Skin White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon phenomenologizes the deep-seated intra-racial, post-colonial discrepancies of the subject haunted by white colonial interpretations. Lewis Gordon and Henry Louis Gates Jr. draw a critical appreciation towards Fanon’s thought in the construction of radical black identity. Fanon’s *New Man* was invested in the politics of identity and difference. This postcolonial construct as the final arbiter of humanism was challenged by Fanon, which meant prioritizing the experience of a mind that was subjugated. In short, Fanon wanted to rescind the palpable domination of the white philosophy that had mistreated the black figure.

While being critical of the white man’s gaze, Fanon was also invested in addressing the dialectical pronouncements of colonized racism experienced in the black man’s neo-colonial desires. Therefore, Fanon underscored the supremacy of the dominant races as conjoined with the capitalist material interests that are within and beyond the metaphysical realm. However, it does not give a free rein to those who “first and foremost divide” the species on racial terms. Ambedkar weaves these connotations into his political praxis and social philosophy.

The purpose of consciousness is to contest consciousness. With this belief, Steve Biko immersed himself in the formation of radical consciousness that was rooted in religion, and his disagreements with it. So much so that he chose to work against those principles that refused to grant equality for his people. Biko’s text *I Write What I Like*, a collection of his articles, memoranda and speeches, that a sociologist and leading public intellectual of South Africa described as “the most authoritative collection on Black Consciousness in South Africa”, demonstrate wide array of interests that this young leader of pan-Africanist movement had.¹⁹ In addition, several other works on Biko’s philosophical developments aptly fix him as a front-thinker of pan-Africanism.²⁰

By expanding the theoretical horizon of Dalit and black epistemology, this thesis brings together scholars and activists of various geographies. By bringing them under one roof, it challenges their approaches and further develops novel and

¹⁹ Xolela Mangcu, *Biko A Life* (London: I B Tauris, 2014), p. 177-8;

²⁰ Andile Mngxitama, Amanda Alexander and Nigel C. Gibson (eds.), *Biko Lives!: Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008); Nigel C Gibson, *Fanonian practices in South Africa: from Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011); Lewis Gordon, ‘Foreword’ to Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Gordon, 2002)

nuanced perspectives relevant to current times. The Dalit and black may be nouns but are often treated as adjectives. My method shall help us to revisit some of the didactic articulations of the aforementioned figures.

CHAPTER PLANS FOR DPHIL DISSERTATION

Chapter 1.

THEORIZING CASTE AND RACE

This chapter argues that race and caste emerged simultaneously in the fifteenth century, and in the same womb—the Iberian Peninsula. The etymology of *racas* and *castas* paved a path for identifying differences in Asia and Latin America. Later, as colonial expansion took place, that discourse was taken forward by various empires. English adopted the Portuguese words and implemented them into its governance policy for the colonies. That is how caste came to be identified with race and race with colour in American colonies. As the plantation economy was strengthened, the economic interests collaborated with social markers like race to create a colour-caste order. Race came to be known as America's "original sin".

However, this was challenged by the abolitionists and some Christian organisations that found such a discriminatory practice to be anti-Christian, and against the wishes of the divine. One such organisation was the American Missionary Association, which defied caste in America. This influence was seen in the public discourses that influenced American scholarship in the first half of the twentieth century. *Deep South*, a collective ethnographic work of mixed-race researchers, provided an authoritative account of caste in America. This tome became a controversial text, but nonetheless, it intimately examined the social hierarchies of southern American society.

Chapter 2.

CASTE AND RACE A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF HIERARCHICAL SYSTEMS IN INDIA AND THE UNITED STATES

This chapter takes the discussion of the similarities and differences between race and caste to its practical form. In the ensuing decades after the abolition of slavery, the new society was viewed as a caste society, complete with hierarchy and occupational statuses accorded to groups differentiated by colour. This system was called "racial caste" that was popularized by a celebrated senator from Massachusetts, Charles Sumner, in the mid-nineteenth century. In his widely circulated lecture, 'A Question of Caste' (1869), Sumner articulated the social condition in America and how colour-based racial discrimination was a practice of America's age-old caste system. Reports from the nineteenth century identified caste rules to be at play in America.

In the twentieth century, this system was still in place, and combined with the Jim Crow laws, the field of American sociology was trying to grapple with it.

Some preferred to use race to identify and theorize the American experience, while some called it a caste system of America. This led to academic debates. One who incited much of this discussion was Oliver Cox, who took a racial position. In contrast, the opponents who took racial caste positions were W. Lloyd Warner, Allison Davis, John Dollard, Gunnar Myrdal and Gerrard Berreman. I put Cox and Berreman in conversation, so as to represent two different points of the debate. Cox pushed back these mostly white researchers who had advocated for a racial/colour-caste position. Cox saw this as an attempt by the whites to undermine the racial problem and instead replace it with a neutralizing concept of caste. Cox's understanding of caste was incomplete, so he saw it as a complicit organisation. This chapter essentially examines the development of caste in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by focusing on key actors in the discipline.

Chapter 3.

CAN DALIT AND BLACK LIVES MATTER TOGETHER? A DU BOIS, AMBEDKAR, AND FANONIAN PERSPECTIVE

In this chapter, I collate selected writings of three radical anti-establishment “darker” race thinkers, who fought to “light anew a great world-culture.” Along with highlighting the similarities in global cultures, I make a case for the inclusion of Dalit epistemology in African and African-American struggles for justice. I investigate the *raison d'être* of caste in the global capitalist and anti-capitalist order, and consider why the Dalit remains ignored in popular social justice movements.

The purpose of the chapter, as the title suggests, is to investigate if at all Dalit and Black people can be accorded the same status in popular social justice and equality movements, especially in light of growing demands in India to bring the two struggles together. The rise of a critical Dalit intellectual tradition clubbed with the progress of Dalit and Black movements in their respective geographies has provided an opportunity to explore and embrace various revolutionary traditions. That is why the suggested question is of political importance. A wider constituency of the oppressed is now taking control of their demands and rallying for context and concept instead of simple issues-based political programs. Du Bois, Ambedkar and Fanon were born at different times, but their political and intellectual lives have been brought together under the tradition of anti-colonial struggle, and continue to inspire intellectual as well as political movements.

Chapter 4.

TOWARDS DALIT-AFRICAN CONSCIOUSNESS: AMBEDKAR AND BIKO

Consciousness needs to be challenged with a competing consciousness of experience. In this chapter, I take a deep dive into Ambedkar's oeuvre and excavate his understanding of race. What and how did Ambedkar come to realize about race? There is a significant detailing of race as a social structure through which Ambedkar examines the black person's condition in America and the Bantu in South Africa. The chapter aims to understand Ambedkar's theorizing of race and globalism.

B R Ambedkar participated in the making of a new social and political consciousness among oppressed caste groups in India. His most outstanding contribution to the Dalit struggle was building an identity for them separate from the repressive Hindu order. Steve Biko's analysis of the race problem can be understood as making another kind of consciousness for the oppressed. These two thinkers and leaders, separated in time and space, appeal to their respective communities with powerful vocabularies of liberation.

This chapter will cement the intellectual prospects of Ambedkar as a pan-Indian Dalit and Biko as a black pan-Africanist. The convergences of the two figures helped gather fundamental ideals of praxis for their followers who took radical reckoning of Dalit and black consciousness. Putting these two in conversation, who were centuries apart, is an attempt to intervene in the Global South paradigm through subaltern agency. I frame the tome of consciousness through Buddhist ethos travelling from Kabir to Kantian apperception of enlightenment.

Chapter 5.

CASTE IN TRANSITION: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CASTE MOVEMENTS

Caste is not an isolated theory experienced by a few groups confined to particular geographies. The history of caste is as old and expansive as the politics of race. However, only a handful of struggles against oppression focused on caste as their chief category. But even places where race was used to fight discrimination, often possessed an explicit history of caste. Similarly, the movement that was built to contest caste in the Indian context was not limited to India but had an international presence as well. The history of such mobilizations is seven decades old. This chapter focuses on the second half of the twentieth century, when active anti-caste efforts in the name of Ambedkar started to take shape with a clear international agenda. They were invested in influencing the Dalit politics of Dalit natives on the one hand, while acting as emissaries to the world on the other. This has resulted more recently in anti-caste and Dalit organizing in the UK, US and.

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Chapter 1

THEORIZING CASTE AND RACE

The leading African American thinker W.E.B. Du Bois declared that the twentieth century would notably wrestle with the issue of colour. Similarly, the twenty-first century may be characterized by the collective struggle against global casteism—a proposition I will explore in this thesis. Caste is now reified in many forms in the social and cultural organizations of society. Caste can serve as a framework to explain distinctions and differences in various societies worldwide, extending beyond the limited language and scope of racial terminology.

There have been attempts to ascribe many such distinctions to the race-like or racialized identities which were originally employed in the process of European classifications of the social world as well to describe specific differences among India's diverse phenotypes.²¹ The apparent colour difference between the diverse

²¹ David Arnold charts the colonial archives, especially those from the eighteenth century, to locate the development of racialization in the Indian context. It was not always intended to be atypical 'racial' but was inspired by the medical, environmental (tropical), and even political contexts. 'Race, place and bodily difference in early nineteenth-century India', *Historical Research*, Vol. 77 (196), May 2004, pp. 254–273.

geographies of India was often observed as a racial difference. Race became a commonly recognized term in India only in the mid-nineteenth century. Prior to this, it had been confined to scholarly, medical, and climate-related discussions without significant existential implications. Conceptualizing race as a social construct in India risks diminishing the significance of other hierarchies that manifest in both lived and non-lived forms, functioning as pre-birth and post-death markers applied to the breathing body or corpse. Where race was popularized caste was undermined. Yet it is caste that has the ability to suture otherwise invisible hierarchies with intra-societal codes based on one's community descent and family bloodline.²²

Historicizing the existence or anything named by Western social constructs in the Indian context is ambitious guesswork. The origins of race and caste in India are difficult to definitively establish. This is because their purposes and etymological registers have temporally specific origins that vary with the space and the nature of the governing authority, particularly colonial rule. This introductory chapter discusses the development of caste and race, and their interrelatedness, from fifteenth-century Iberia to the debates of past-century America and India. It examines prominent academic debates that shaped the social sciences and humanities as a whole, as well as related inquiries into colour, caste, race and class. The stark differences in the terminology of race and caste produced the need for a sociological retelling of society through cultural norms. What I am arguing for, essentially, is the phasic telling of society through cultural allegories of origin. Culture, both as an academic discipline and a set of guidelines for various social groups, aids in elucidating the contemporary nature of a society deeply rooted in historical context. As we shall see later in the chapter, caste was always a dominant basis of systemic differentiation that was employed to justify exploitation in various societies across the colonized world.

However, there was never any agreement on one universal definition of caste. Many commentators approached caste according to their own experiences and scholarship. Caste was sometimes examined within the context of India and other caste-based societies, while at other times it was viewed as a vestige of American slavery in America. It was also seen as an outcome of the Brahminical faith in Hinduism, while some saw it as being reminiscent of the prejudice of clergymen of the Church that justified exclusion based on colour caste. Caste ('casta' in Portuguese) and Race (raça) have also been used interchangeably because the Indian caste system originated from varna, which means 'colour' in Sanskrit. This interchangeable use of terms was not limited to Portuguese contexts but extended to other societies in South America. Mexico, Brazil, and other countries in South and Central America had hierarchical systems with etymologies and structures similar to India's caste system, but with nomenclatures based on colour. Caste was also an identifier to underscore or accentuate the differences between racial and ethnic groups in South America.²³ Various independent groups such Gãuchûpinês (old colonial Spaniards), Mestizo (mix of white and Indians),

²² Presently, the registers of difference in most Western and even global south societies are made to reckon with racial definitions to substantiate their experiences of discrimination, inequality, and political economy.

²³ Hana Layson, Charlotte Ross and Christopher Boyer, 'Caste and Politics in the Struggle for Mexican Independence', *The Newberry*, 16 May 2013. Available at: <https://dcc.newberry.org/?p=14438>.

mulatto (mix of whites and negroes), criollo also pronounced as creoles (white of 'pure European race'), Indians, Zambos/Chinos (descendants of Negroes and Indians) and African Negroes were all identifiers of castes as much as races.²⁴ While in Northern India, light skin colour corresponded with Aryan characteristics and dark with the natives, or *dasa*,²⁵ in South America, whiteness was synonymous with nobility. There also, other castes tried to distance themselves from those considered inferior for fear that association with them might result in them losing caste status.²⁶

The early incorporation of caste or castas was chaperoned by Portuguese travellers, who found the term 'castas' apt for the purpose of categorizing the societies they were visiting. Historian Ângela Barreto Xavier argues that caste was as much a Portuguese word as it was Indian. Over the three centuries (the fifteenth to the eighteenth), caste came to be known by its various meanings and wider applications. It was understood as a basis of exclusion and inclusion, differentiation, and as a distinct organization with an inbuilt hierarchy. It was also used to refer to religious, national, and social groups. While Brahmins in India presented themselves to foreigners as a superior caste or nation ('casta dos bramanes')²⁷ Portuguese sources often characterized them as 'social groups of lower origins'.²⁸ Frequently, caste was used to refer to endogamy, blood purity and commensality.²⁹

The absence of a single, universally accepted definition of caste allowed for its broader application to various societal hierarchies worldwide, particularly in the Americas, India, and the British Empire. This expansive application led to caste being perceived as a distinguishing feature for much of the world's population.³⁰ Consequently, caste came to be associated with cultural rather than natural or biological institutions. These cultural institutions, deeply rooted in societal norms, assigned specific roles and permanent, inflexible statuses to various groups based on the circumstances of their birth. Caste was a system that was used to create divisions in societies with inferior and superior complexes, not least in psychology, but also in state policies.

Sumit Guha argues that the Portuguese, upon entering Indian waters, incorporated local statecraft, a combination of governance structures into their own system of rule. This process, he suggests, led to the evolution of caste from the Portuguese concept of 'castas', which originally described bloodlines or types

²⁴ H.G. Ward, *Mexico*, Vol. 1 (London: Henry Colburn, 1829), p. 21.

²⁵ For an elaborate treatment of this in the vocabularies of Portuguese and Latin dictionaries, see Ângela Barreto Xavier, 'Languages of Difference in the Early Modern Portuguese Empire. The Spread of "caste" in the Indian World', *Anuario Colombiano de Historia Social y de la Cultura*, 43.2 (2016), fn. 52, 53, 54, 55, pp. 97, 109.

²⁶ Ward, *Mexico*, p. 25.

²⁷ Brahmins were scorned by the Portuguese officials and missionaries. A catholic priest João de Cunha Jacques wrote a book critical of the Brahmins of Goa and their unfriendly behaviour. João da Cunha Jacques, *Espada de David contra o Golias do Bramanismo*, Biblioteca da Ajuda (ba), Lisboa, Códices. Cited in Xavier, 2016.

²⁸ Xavier, 'Languages of Difference', p. 105.

²⁹ Armando Cortesão, *The Suma Oriental of Tomé Pires* (New Delhi: Publisher Asian Educational Services, [1944] 1990) in Xavier, 'Languages of difference', p. 102.

³⁰ For more on caste in the British empire and its application in its colonies, see Catherine Impey's work, who aimed to expose the 'evils of caste' across America and the British empire. Caroline Bressey, *Empire, Race and the Politics of Anti-Caste* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015). We will return to Impey shortly.

of species.³¹ Guha argues that caste can be better understood through ethnic parlances than the overtly cultural definitions applied to explain caste. Though, the history of castas or caste in various regional contexts mattered, caste inevitably found its way as a “useful” method to governance and labour extraction.³²

Guha aims to decentre the Brahmin from caste analysis, proposing instead a broader perspective that considers other factors in the development and maintenance of the caste system.³³ He wants to think of caste located in the kingship ideals of power and economy not solely located in the Brahman. That is why he is critical of Dumont, Bayly, and Dirks, who start with a different hypothesis but end up concluding with “Brahman-centered models”. His ideal is A M Hocart who had challenged the understanding of caste as not purely based on occupations and hierarchy but as something changeable. The theory that Hocart advanced was undermining nineteenth century colonial ethnography. Guha finds a good critique of Orientalism in his thesis and thereby takes his observation of Sri Lanka as a caste society’s cradle. Hocart’s theory is that the textual guidance does not operate as castes. In fact, castes are merely families wherein priesthood is not limited to Brahmans alone but distributed into many castes. Caste is not located in the Brahmans but in the many castes other than Brahmans, such as Kshatriyas and other middle castes who use it as a politically divine tool. Guha observed that by making caste a purity-based religious notion misses the fact of Islamic and Christian rule during the pre-colonial times.³⁴

European debates about social classification and stratification were therefore obsessed with finding differences and similarities between race and caste as two of the most contested colonial categories, drawing in large part upon the Iberian archives of castas. I will focus primarily on India and the US because of their influence on the development of Dalit and Black body-politic, respectively, across the world. Over the years, there have been overlaps between caste and race studies, though both rely on past scholarship and only thinly on the new frontiers in comparative cultural studies, which arguably provided one of the more productive approaches to the research question at hand.

Comparative cultural studies provide a nuanced understanding of political and anthropological developments in caste and race research. This approach reveals how global class structures influence subcultures, which often function as caste-like communities within the context of dominant cultural norms established by the dominant ecosphere.

³¹ Sumit Guha, *Beyond Caste: Identity and Power in South Asia, Past and Present*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2014

³² Guha, *Beyond Caste*, p. 32.

³³ As seen in the works of Susan Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus The Caste System and Its Implications* enlarged edition, trans. Mark Sainsbury (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

³⁴ Arthur Maurice Hocart, *Caste: A Comparative Study* (London: Routledge, 2018 [1950])

EARLY PRESENCE OF CASTE IN IBERIA

While the nineteenth-century discourse on caste significantly shaped modern understandings, the concept's etymological history can be traced back to fifteenth-century Portuguese colonization. One of the earliest commentators using *castas*/caste widely in his work was Duarte Barbosa, a Portuguese official posted in the Malabar region of South India in the fifteenth century. Barbosa wrote about what he observed during the sixteen years of his travels in the Indian Ocean region, touching various littorals. Barbosa describes *castas* and its practices of abiding by Brahminical rules that were tied to social status and even prescribed penal provisions in cases of miscegenation, stealing, or the killing of a cow.³⁵ In short, he described caste as the way in which Brahminical status in a vertical hierarchy had to be maintained and upheld.

Explorers and missionaries like Barbosa were part of a broader late medieval and early modern Iberian tradition of long-distance sojourn. This propensity for oceanic exploration was common across various social ranks in Iberian society.³⁶ The nature of the society, especially after the establishment of the Christian kingdoms in the Iberia, elaborated various necessities through trade and massive military establishment. The nature of society was accustomed to having a life on the move. These expeditions often included individuals from all social strata, from the poorest and peasants to the wealthiest elites. For the rich, such journeys were opportunities to display their prestige through large entourages, creating extensive caravans that traversed the seas. This came with the enormous entourage comprising a longer tail of caravan moving on the seas.

Thus, travellers, when they thought of the world, had a social axiom of their society in mind. When they interacted with the other world, they made assumptions that were not entirely based on experiences. They were rather suggestive. This is how caste, race, and indigeneity arrived at the taxonomies of Iberia. Eventually, when the New World was colonised, these categories assisted the colonial state in ranking the groups. For example, the attribution of the word *raza* was used in 1438 and had the influence of Latin meaning—counting, a kind of species, or modality. However, by the sixteenth century, the word gained a “modern meaning” to describe purity or impurity of blood”. The Christian meaning of race was of those lineages “untainted by any trace of the race of Jews or false-converts”.³⁷ The Abrahamic identity of the Peninsular region is descendent, wherein lineages of various historical actors such as Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed are traced to find the true meaning and nature of multiple groups.

Rather than being based on concepts of spiritual damnation, caste in this context was framed as an ethical system for classifying vocational groups. This classification reflected a mutual understanding between monarchs, merchants,

³⁵ Duarte Barbosa, *Description of the Coasts of East Africa and Malabar in the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century* (1866), trans. Henry E.J. Stanley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 118.

³⁶ Harney, *Race, Caste, and Indigeneity*

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 2-3.

and skilled craftsmen. This was detailed in *The Book of Estates* in the thirteenth century by Don Juan Manuel. These three categories were priests, warriors and workers. They were assigned the position based on their noble and non-noble birth. It was in their interests to perform their respective duties in which they were born. For various castes salvation lay in sticking by their estates—their castes and not crossing over. This was meant to maintain a segmented society. Even the ones who had accumulated privilege were doing it as a caste obligation that was contributing to everyone's benefit.³⁸ The lower castes were punished more severely than the higher castes if they attempted to avoid their caste duties.³⁹ This was because the lower castes were considered unintelligent and prone to making mistakes.

Those castes who provided service were among the servile castes such as peasants, tailors, goldsmiths, shoemakers, saddlers, etc., and there were further inferior servile castes who were unworthy of mention.⁴⁰ These castes were essential communities, performing hard work and providing important services.⁴¹ A similar template of this form of segregation is found in Indian caste—jati practices. The peninsular social structure was legally regulated, with punitive measures for those who violated the caste norms. These were the precursors to how racialisation and caste were kept as a practice tied to spiritual needs and vocation. Race served as a means of segregating various castes, primarily through the religious distinctions among Christians, Jews, and Moors within the European religious estates.⁴² These socially practiced distinctions were closely observed and communicated among the caste groups.

Prior to this, race was used to distinguish the classification of flora or fauna. The sixteenth-century advances to the New World brought home new categories premised on sub-groups of species. This sub-ranking of the human race gave it a social meaning divorced from the genetic traits. Race eventually became normalized as a supposed genetic basis for categorizing certain groups as subordinate. A biological characteristic was attributed to the racial meaning. The concept of race evolved from it being a cultural category to a social category sharing heritage. Race was then an invention. However, it was not without a historical factor of interacting with new groups of people through conquest (colonisation) and profit (economic advantage).

³⁸ Ibid., 151. Harney discusses this in the fiction of sixteenth century by Garci Rodriguez de Montalvo who writes about a life of Amadis. When Amadis, a poor knight travels to an island, the residents there felt fortunate to serve Amadis. Amadis thinks of this privilege as a service in the maintenance of caste system. his knightly responsibility is to serve them but enjoying their service to him.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 69, 71

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 70

⁴¹ Max Weber compares the situation of untouchables with Jews in Europe but of the privileged community interspersed with other communities living side by side. The caste system has status and honour which keeps these communities in contact, however, they despise the others but because of their labour and occupational "economic indispensability they are tolerated". Moving out of the European zone, Weber traces the "phenomenon of 'pariah'" to people found all over the world. Max Weber, "Class, status, party", in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge, 1948), pp. 165-177

⁴² Harney, *Race, Caste, and Indigeneity*, p. 123

These new terminological inferences were not without creating a potential society. The common line in these categorisations was hierarchies that were familiar in the medieval era. These hierarchies were not innocent but directed against a group of people ranked lower in the vertical order. These hierarchies stigmatized a person's origin. In Christian Iberia, it was the Jews that were considered inferior and separate. There wasn't any biological meaning to out the Jews from others, however, the cultural element of their faith did provide some form of reasoning to segregate their behaviour.⁴³ The Jew was understood as an outcaste who was different. The difference here meant lower. Once catalogued into the register of the official state as lower, the Jew was then open to be exploited and controlled not just by the state but by society too.

To formalize the distinctions among Christians, Jews, and Muslims, a code of statutory law known as *The Siete Partidas* (Seven Codes) was composed during the reign of Alfonso X, an uncle of Juan Manuel. It was an attempt by the ruling class of the late thirteenth century to bring about a code that would marginalize the presence of Jews and Muslims. Though Jews were considered as “false converts” there needed to be a statutory injunction to segregate Jews and Muslims. The factors that distinguished them from the others were: ancestry and religion. The purity of blood was later upheld as an authoritative sub judice. Historians of Latin America registered this as an antisemitic perspective demonstrating “caste mentality”.⁴⁴ The peninsular life underwent several changes, and to control the over-influence of Jews, the categories of separating the Christians from Jews and Muslims were regulated in the Partidas.

The antisemitic viewpoint was designed to prohibit any interference by Jews with the ideal Christian life. Jews were not allowed to intermarry, not have Christians as servants, Jews were not allowed to be guests in Christian homes and not drink wine made by Jewish hands. The Christians were prohibited from taking things such as medicines from Jewish hands, and not bathe with Christians.⁴⁵ If Jewish men had sexual relations with Christian women, he was executed—this theory emanated from connecting the Christian women to Jesus Christ's spiritual wives. The touch of the Jews was polluting, and there was no possibility of them becoming friends with Christians. This regulation of intimate relations and professional interactions was restricted. The practices of social and intimate untouchability were regularized by outing the Jews as an outcaste from the Christians as a superior caste. The Jewish caste of economic prosperity was not allowed to partake in the social economics of the time. Like Christian lords may own Jew slaves, the vice versa was prohibited. To distinguish the Jew from Christians, he had to carry a sign on their head, failure to do so would invite fines. The same rules were applied to Moors, who were prohibited from exercising their rights to belong in their religious practice and social life.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 6-7

⁴⁴ Américo Castro, *La realidad histórica de España*. Edición renovada. 6th ed (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1975 [1965]) cited in Harney, p. 55. A meaningful reading of Castro's text is here: Américo Castro, *La realidad histórica de España*, Reading Guide, Guía de lectura https://agonzalez.web.wesleyan.edu/span264/guias/guia_castro.htm

⁴⁵ Harney, *Race, Caste, and Indigeneity*, p. 59

The dream of the drafter of the Partidas was to establish a society that would have a clear demarcation. Its aims were not limited to one generation but to establish a formal code for succeeding generations to rely upon. Similar to the treatise of Manusmriti, the model code of society was to segregate and denigrate the population that was considered spiritually impure. These groups were made spiritual outcastes and social burdens for the society to carry. Various signages and indicators were applied to distinguish the physically indistinguishable other.⁴⁶ It proves that the emphasis on the physical difference was not a mandatory exercise in ancient and medieval times. To discriminate and carry out the difference was not predicated on how one looked or appeared. The biocontrol was carried upon the bodies of those who were potentially challenged to maintain the order of the ruling castes. They did it by passing laws that would make a publicly indistinguishable characteristic a peculiar one.

In the words of medieval historian Castro, the 'peninsular life was reconstituted, after the Muslim occupation, along the lines of a caste system, founded on the fact of being the Christian, Moorish or Jewish person. When the Moors and Jews disappeared from the social scene, the esteem for the "caste" of the person, that is, the fact of being an old Christian, continued to be very alive.⁴⁷ Thus, the old and new castes were geographically situated in the ancestry of one's "castas de creyentes" (caste of believers), i.e., "spiritual lineage".⁴⁸ The Jew was considered the new convert, and thus, it fitted the experiments of colonial power in native, exotic societies of the colony.

The concept of 'exotic' continued to evolve through these cross-cultural encounters and long-distance sojourns. Exotic also assumed the superior self of the traveller. The other was a diminutive figure open to interpretations and docile in action. Though race and (the process of) racialisation took several turns, the inherent meaning of racializing the other meant subgrouping the species and establishing a hierarchy of the newly discovered group, then establishing a hierarchy in the group. Race, therefore, functions as a caste-like structure that emphasizes favourable differentiating factors, such as physical biological traits, while simultaneously othering groups by relegating them to lower positions in the local social hierarchy. The justification of 'collective domination and subordination' and each group within the hierarchy requiring compliance is seen as a process of racial demarcation⁴⁹. However, the features of collective and assigning of roles accepted by the larger society is a caste process of mobilizing the hierarchies. This is effectively manifested in caste, wherein groups within groups are graded in the hierarchy. These real markers of segregation are decentralized and accepted in people's everyday interactions.

Caste carries with it the stigma associated with one's birth. Like raza, it is composed of the meaning of the other who has assumed a superior position. It is relational. Thus, one's sense of true meaning gets complicated while discovering

⁴⁶ Harney, p. 60

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 55

⁴⁹ Ibid.

the traits of the higher-placed castes. To fit into the norms of society, many chose to opt out of the system by “falsifying pedigree”.⁵⁰ But this exit is not easy as caste identity is equated with one’s agency, Harney argues. The agency associated with caste is not freely chosen; rather, it is imposed upon individuals who are categorized within the caste system. The ones with an agency are freed in their practice of trade or labour. While castes subjugate trade with labour. Both become the same as it attaches to one’s heritage as productive labour in the agrarian economy.

CASTE

Caste is a fundamental concept for cognizing social and political realities, particularly in how individuals choose to identify themselves or being identified within this system. It is an interpersonal relation. The grammar of shared affinity is omnipresent in the system of caste, be it the ones dominant in the hierarchy or those lowered by it. It is a shared social prognosis of identical yet originally different societies and their particularistic histories. In the fifteenth century, when caste was deployed as a rulebook of state authority, it primarily involved enforcing prohibitions against intermingling between diverse and distinct caste groups. This application shaped the contemporary understanding of caste during that period. In the same century, caste was first used in the Catalan texts.⁵¹

The taxonomical origin referred castas to as hereditary social classes in India. Its meaning had evolved to understand the pure lineage. Thus, caste was meant to be known through the cultures and values of those considered pure castes. The benchmark of the higher castes meant that its castes practised endogamy to maintain purity. If not purity of blood, then there didn’t exist the pure blood castes. Like *raza*, it was used in a religious, localized context in Iberia to eventually understand the New World societies. Caste was also internally recognized through Indian hierarchies in Iberia. The term was not limited to the Peninsula but travelled to Ibero-America to refer to the mixing of European, African, and Indian (native) blood.⁵²

This experience of caste emerged in the fifteenth century and led to its further exploration as a term. The many meanings of caste and their wider usage in different contexts highlight the influence of the Portuguese empire in promoting and exchanging the various definitions of caste in India. The way caste was understood in the Portuguese quotidian was by using religion as a distinguishing marker. The word for ‘difference’ in the Portuguese archives from the fifteenth century was concerned with Christians, Moors (Muslims), Jews, Berbers, saqalibas, and tribes. The concept of ‘purity of blood’ was to be developed only later and was used to locate hierarchy among the social groups. Like Barbosa, many writers in the sixteenth century used caste for various purposes but with

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 10

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., p. 10. For the sake of citations available in Spanish language that elaborate this, I have preferred to keep the original citation in Harney’s text.

identical meanings. One such writer was Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, who wrote *History of the Discovery and Conquest of India by the Portuguese* (*Historia do descobrimento e conquista da India pelos Porugueses*) in several volumes after his stay in India in 1554. It was a geographic and ethnographic study of India.⁵³ In it, Castanheda drew associations between religion and blood as two distinctive attributes of caste.

The Portuguese were familiar with a social ranking system in their own society that incorporated elements similar to caste, including distinctions based on descent, regional origin, and religious affiliation. The religious distinction in the medieval Peninsula was divided into three acts of castes—Muslims, Christians, and Jews.⁵⁴ The meaning of caste was derived from lineage and purity. The purity of blood was not a significant marker. Still, it became one when Pope Alexander VI passed an order in 1495 restricting the new converts (as in impure mix contaminated by Jews or Moors) from attaining the ecclesiastic office without verifying blood purity.⁵⁵ This idea remained influential in the Catholic reign of Iberia. Purity of blood as a matter of social life and official position did find meaning in the Vedic practices of India's caste system, wherein the Brahmin elites controlled the ranks of Brahmin acceptance based on lineage. The Pope's decision came in light of the control of the Church on state institutions, but in the case of the Brahminical faith, that act of control was in practice since the medieval alliance of Brahmins and the ruling class. The Portuguese who went about travelling to other parts of the world were educated about their own experiences in their region.

However, they did not necessarily impose their version of prejudice upon others, but as Ângela Barreto Xavier writes, it was certainly a two-way exchange.⁵⁶ As Portuguese missionaries and travellers observed Indian societies, they became acutely aware of parallels with their own social hierarchies, prompting reflection on their own societal structures. Thus, the appropriate term to understand the system they observed and studied, was caste. Therefore, the Portuguese applied the concept of castas to both India and Iberia, with the term influencing and being influenced by both contexts. The term had an Indian value, too. The word 'caste', Xavier argues, was not as successful at home in the Iberian metropolises as it was in the overseas centres.⁵⁷ This explains the possibility of how the rise of the Iberian discourse on caste may have coincided with the Portuguese arrival in India.

One could argue that Indian social differences must have influenced the Portuguese to sharpen their own systems of difference and blood-based hierarchies. We lack conclusive evidence to support this claim, as contemporary reports do not indicate the influence of other societies, particularly India, on the

⁵³ Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, *Historia do descobrimento e conquista da India pelos Porugueses* (Lisbon: Typographia Rollandiana, 1833), for more on Castanheda's materials, see Archives.org: <https://archive.org/details/historiadodescob00cast/page/n3/mode/2up>.

⁵⁴ Thomas Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain in the Early Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979)

⁵⁵ Harney, *Race, Caste, and Indigeneity*, p. 22

⁵⁶ Xavier, 'Languages of Difference', pp. 89–119.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

Iberian language during the pre-medieval or medieval eras. The Portuguese used the term caste because they saw a group neatly organized in contesting hierarchies in which the Brahmans were higher and non-Brahmans were poor and therefore, lower castes. After going through several modifications and multiple colonial experiences in various colonies, caste became ‘a common-sense social category’ in the Portuguese world.⁵⁸ Caste became a common word to identify good—one better than the other. It was applied to plants, animals, people, and lineages. The word introduced various groups from particular geographies and stabilized various concepts and ideas and new discoveries made in the natural and pure sciences, alongside the slow development of the scientific study of societies.

Certainly, the Portuguese understanding of the term during the fifteenth century was fraught with many inconsistencies, but it nevertheless made a point and conveyed to Lisbon and Rome (through the Jesuit missionaries) information about the systems of social hierarchy existing elsewhere. Subsequently, the English language adopted the term ‘caste’ to facilitate understanding of social structures in the unfamiliar societies that colonizers encountered during their expeditions. While caste systems have evolved across epochs, their fundamental characteristics—including hierarchical structures, endogamy, concepts of purity, and limited social mobility—have remained intact. Its features or modes of operation must certainly have changed, but it has not loosened its grips on the architecture of social relations in India.

After Barbosa’s generous deployment of the term *castas/caste* in his travelogues, the career of caste went in many directions, eventually occupying a central thesis in the contexts of Iberian and Indian societies. The notion of caste and hierarchy was not singularly available to Iberia only, but many other European societies dealt with it too. In the Middle Ages, caste had a phonetic presence in the Northern European societies. For example, ‘kastai’ in the old Norse, ‘kastōnā’ in old German, ‘kaste’ in the Danish and ‘kasta’ in Swedish.⁵⁹ Though the meanings of these terms vary, the essence of the word’s evolution has carried on through them.

Xavier’s extensive treatment of the history of caste in relation to the Portuguese empire is probably the most authentic study on the etymology of caste in early modern history. Xavier goes to the Portuguese and Spanish archives, in addition to India and Latin America, to assess the activities that paved a path towards solidifying caste in the global lexicon. I go farther from these geographies and uncover the existence of the caste system in North America later in this chapter. In addition, caste in India will be examined in detail in the later part of this thesis.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 110

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 106.

RACE AS THE CASTE SYSTEM OF THE US

To begin a discussion on race or caste, we need to understand the contexts of their theorization. Was race an invention of bigots or was it channelled by the state to effectively exercise control over the population? I argue that race, similar to caste, is a socially constructed imagination developed by dominant groups to regulate society according to their interests, often without accountability to the broader population.

The debate over race and caste in the US was really one about class, either seen as being forestalled by or replacing them. By the late twentieth century, class had lost its importance as a central term of social analysis. The end of the Cold War and the transformation of capitalism in the wake of neoliberal policies brought the focus back onto social groups. Thus, race and caste now came to share a new relationship with each other. But in the earlier period, it was the stubbornness of racial difference and antagonism that made it comparable to caste, with the assumption being that once these differences started breaking down, races would be replaced by classes as the true constituents of modern societies. While race could be used to describe complex social units, it was also compounded with the logic of economic distribution. The unifying factor between race and class was nation. Consequently, postcolonial nation-states were analysed through the dual lenses of race and class.

The practice of untouchability within India's caste system is intertwined with economic structures that extend beyond class divisions. Ambedkar argued that in addition to its being a religious issue, caste was also an exploitative economic system which was 'worse than slavery'.⁶⁰ 'As an economic system', Ambedkar underscored how untouchability 'permits exploitation without obligation. Untouchability is not only a system of unmitigated social exploitation, but it is also a system of uncontrolled economic exploitation.'⁶¹ The economics of the caste system in the US and India are far more similar than they are different.

Caste-based inequality in various parts of the world is generated by economic forces that stratify society into distinct social zones of classes. Therefore, economic disparities conditioned by strict and unalterable hierarchies are a norm of casteism, as is the permanent condemnation of the subordinated castes in such a hierarchy beyond the evolutionary or dialectical paradigm of class conflict.

In contemporary scholarship, following the decline of Marxist approaches, class has diminished as an important analytical category. Concurrently, caste has gained renewed attention, even in contexts where explicit caste distinctions were previously thought to have been eliminated. Recent scholarship posits that caste-

⁶⁰ B R Ambedkar, 'Slaves and Untouchables', *Dr. Babasabeb Ambedkar: Writings & Speeches*, Vol. 5 (Mumbai: Govt of Maharashtra, 2008), p. 9.

⁶¹ B R Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to The Untouchables* (Bombay: Thacker & Co., 1945), p. 197.

like structures can emerge or become more prominent following the erosion of formally enforced racial classifications. India provides a similar story, with caste having been seen in colonial times as an antiquated form of hierarchy whose truth and future lay in class.

Returning to the history of caste in the study of American society, we see a prescient analysis being presented and debated by the sociologists of the twentieth century, who argued for the significance of Indian caste-like features in the US context.⁶² Although differing from the former's religious hierarchy, the system of immobile social stratification was observed in the US racial-caste system. Caste was a category routinely used to understand the US social system as one defined by distinctions between various categories of coloured citizens. Many scholars attested to the view of 'Negro-white' relations in the United States as being based on caste. Gerald Berreman identifies seven key scholars (Allison Davis, Kingsley Davis, John Dollard, Buell Gallagher, Gunnar Myrdal, Kenneth Stampp, and Lloyd Warner) whose works on caste in America were later critiqued by Oliver Cox—a perspective we will examine shortly.⁶³ What remains central to this scholarship is the context provided by the Jim Crow order. "Negro-white relations" described social as well as legal restrictions against Blacks. In our own post-Civil Rights context, we might argue that antebellum society's colour-caste distinctions were replaced with race-class ones, thus undoing the debate on caste in the US.

The anthropological fights over race versus caste animated much of the 1930s and '40s. Both supporters and opponents of caste relied on their own sources. The opponents were not armed with empirical data to back their refutations. The supporters of caste in the American context were able to push back with the latest data acquired from India and the US. The continued disagreements between the two sides were published in the *American Journal of Sociology* as well as in various books. However, the weakness of caste as a category to describe the condition of American society meant that the proponents of the race canon prevailed. Later anthropologists, sociologists, and historians of the American north dominated the discourse by creating threatening counterarguments. The terms race and class prevailed due to Marxist influence on the social sciences. But now, caste is being resurrected through the works of Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* and Isabel Wilkerson's *Caste and The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*, where the caste system is the central locus of analysis to narrate the American story and in particular, the socio-political dynamics central to differences between black and white. Alexander emphasizes the racial caste system that has penetrated civic life in America, contending that '[i]n the era of colorblindness, it is no longer socially permissible to use race explicitly, as a justification for discrimination, exclusion,

⁶² Declan Quigley poses a question about caste, 'Is a theory of caste still possible?' This perspective focused on South Asia—India, in particular. 'Is a theory of caste still possible?', *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 41 (1), 1993, pp. 25–48.

⁶³ Gerald D. Berreman, 'Caste in India and the United States', *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (September 1960), fn. 2, p. 120.

and social contempt.⁶⁴ Thus, the era of Jim Crow did not eliminate the racial caste system, but rather reinforced it in newer forms. It is important to pay attention to this system riddled with linguistic fragilities in order to see how a racial caste system exists in the US that was characterized by stigma and rigidity.

Acknowledging disagreements over the usage of “caste” as a system operating in US society, Alexander states that caste could be used in ‘common parlance to denote a stigmatized racial group’ that is ‘locked into an inferior position by law and custom’.⁶⁵ The legalized form of discrimination and unaccounted-for acts of violence inflicted upon lesser bodies, have made caste visible in a system of mass incarceration designed to inflict harm by legalizing discrimination against and permanent exclusion of its convicts to produce America’s ‘new undercaste’. These undercastes are permanently treated as inferiors by the system and are therefore unwanted both ‘by law and custom’. Looking at the example of mass incarceration, one can draw similar parallels to the system operating in India. The Indian caste system is also like a prison house for the people at the lowest rungs of the hierarchy. It is a predesigned method to make Dalits vulnerable by exposing them to acts of violence and degradation.

The Indian caste system survives on Dalit bodies by integrating them into production cycles while simultaneously excluding them from the value of the labour they produce. The caste system asserts tight control essentially through the imposition of strict social laws in a context where caste discrimination has been legislated out of existence. To regulate the activities of society, controlling it is mandatory. To validate such control over human bodies, the norms of society are directed towards manufacturing customs and once those norms become assimilated with theory, the oppression becomes easily deployable in society under the guise of principles of culture and religion. Once we have a mass of organized bodies in place to impose orders and control the activities of the oppressed caste groups, it then falls upon the dominant or the oppressive castes to discipline them.

This system puts the responsibility on the Dalit body for his/her actions and squarely places the blame on the victim. This is similar to what Gunnar Myrdal saw in the American south, among black Americans. The ones with relative access to the white man used the available avenues to advance themselves, irrespective of the insults, subordination, and dependency on the white man in a neo-slavery society.⁶⁶ The white man’s insistence on having a neo-slave willing to follow the slave-like relations led to the development of the ‘white man’s negro’ or ‘Uncle Toms’. Even though this was a berating address, the black man with access to whites was an important mediator in commerce. Thus, irrespective of the

⁶⁴ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow Mass Incarceration in the Era of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), p. 2

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁶⁶ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1944), p. 679, 682.

disapproval the black subordinate in white society met, the existence of such black bodies was both undeniable and indispensable.⁶⁷

THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN CASTE SYSTEM

Perhaps no other topic ignited as many conversations in American anthropology and Indian sociology as comparisons between caste and race. The genealogy of the debate can be found in twentieth-century social science. Before that, in the nineteenth century, caste was comfortably studied as a hierarchical structure that cut across class and was defined by the strict practice of endogamy. Added to this was the exploitation of labour and labourers on the field or in vocations that demand servility and comprise the lowest paying jobs. Caste in the American context was also seen as a system for institutionalizing divisions that ranked colour with castes—the servile castes were the coloured citizens, while the superiors were whites.

Early Champions of Caste in America (1847–1941)

One of the most prominent champions of the term ‘racial caste’ in the mid-nineteenth century was a lawyer, academic and abolitionist senator from Boston, called Charles Sumner. Sumner introduced a perceptive analogy of caste to race in America’s post-bellum society, which he described as a system of racial caste. Racial caste described the state of the relationship between white and black racial groups, while the state as a governing structure adhered to the values of republicanism, i.e., equality before law. However, societal prejudices defended the republican values at the cost of their principle, by denying social and political rights to the formerly enslaved population. Sumner was among the first to contend that racial castes were nondemocratic, antirepublican and against the Jeffersonian defection against slavery.⁶⁸

In his most influential lecture, ‘A Question of Caste’ (1869), Sumner described caste as a category peculiar to the organization of a post-slavery society. He saw the system as being incompatible with the republic’s ostensibly universal laws. Sumner held caste to be prevalent both in antiquity and in pre-Enlightenment Europe. This lecture by an influential senator paved the path for more caste-based analogies, like the launch of the international journal *Anti-Caste* by a British quaker woman, Catherine Impey (1889–1893).

Sumner was not an ordinary abolitionist. He vociferously argued against the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. Sumner gathered public momentum for “the repeal of all acts for the rendition of fugitive slaves” that had put the onus on the Federal government to capture and return the runaway slaves. Sumner argued that the

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 682, 685.

⁶⁸ Hari Ramesh, ‘India, Racial Caste, and Abolition in Charles Sumner’s Political Thought’, *Modern Intellectual History*, Vol. 9, Issue 3, Sept 2022, pp. 708-733. doi:10.1017/S1479244321000044

Fugitive law was “repugnant” and contrary to the Divine law.⁶⁹ He called it the “Heaven-defying Bill” that impacted not only the slaves but the white people who wanted to aid slaves in abetting slavery. The prevalent idea during the time was that slaves equated the masters’ right to their service or labor’.⁷⁰ Sumner’s advocacy was widely reported in the media with the *New York Times* expounding on the importance of Sumner’s open denunciation.⁷¹

By citing Constitutional legality, Sumner also held the view that voting rights should be given to black people post-abolition, which was eventually accepted after the enfranchisement of black population through the fifteenth amendment to the Constitution. He also wanted there to be a black political economy and thus argued for land redistribution among former slaves.⁷² His lecture was delivered four year after the abolition of slavery.

But Sumner’s views about caste predated abolition by two decades. In the case of *Roberts v. the City of Boston* (1849), the Supreme Court of Massachusetts held the view that separate schools for whites and blacks did not violate the latter’s rights. Sumner, along with Robert Morris, one of the first African American attorneys, represented Sarah C. Roberts to argue in favour of ending racial segregation in schools. Sumner argued,

‘The separation of children in the public schools of Boston, on account of colour or race, is in the nature of caste, and is a violation of equality.’⁷³

Sumner saw caste as an institution of inequality that birthed various structures to validate its purpose. Race and colour were part of America’s creation that were balanced on the accepted, yet not as talked-about phenomenon of caste. Sumner used caste as an analytical category to provide critical reflection on anti-democratic values. For him, caste was not just a spiritual or ethical question but was a constitutional one. Racial castes were ‘injurious to a whole race now dwelling among us, and bringing shame upon our country’.⁷⁴ The sentiment was nationalist not in the overt sense of dogma but liberal republicanism that honoured individuals as equals in the eyes of the divine.

Sumner’s submission to the court was published widely. The *National Era*, a newspaper from Washington, D.C., carried the argument against segregation

⁶⁹ Sumner, Charles, 1811-1874. Freedom national; slavery sectional: Speech of Hon. Charles Sumner, of Massachusetts, on his motion to repeal the Fugitive Slave Bill, in the Senate of the United States, August 26, 1852, 1852. Antislavery Pamphlet Collection (RB 003). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries

⁷⁰ Albert Taylor Bledsoe, "Liberty and Slavery, Or Slavery in the Light of Moral and Political Philosophy" in *Cotton is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments*, ed. E.N. Elliot (Augusta, GA: Pritchard, Abbot, & Loomis, 1860), 426-430

⁷¹ *The New York Times*, ‘Mr. Sumner and the Fugitive Slave Law’, August 28, 1852, p. 3.

⁷² Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, p. 224; Demetrius Eudell, “Not only natural but necessary”: On Ambedkar and the Caste/Race’ (unpublished paper). In possession of the author.

⁷³ *Sarah C. Roberts v. The City of Boston*, 59 Mass. 198, 5 Cush. 198, 1849, p. 202.

<http://law.howard.edu/brownat50/brownCases/19thCenturyCases/RobertsvBoston1849.pdf>.

⁷⁴ Charles Sumner, “Opening of the Street Cars to Colored Persons” (1864) in *The Works of Charles Sumner*, Vol. 8: 103–17, cited in Ramesh, 2022, p. 717.

on the first page, titled ‘Caste in Massachusetts’.⁷⁵ An author of the wire for *The National Era*, J.G.W., offered a basic and erroneous understanding of caste in 1850. He relied on a statement by Abbe Dubois (1766–1848), a French missionary to India who was hailed as ‘the most accurate observer of the Hindu manners and customs’,⁷⁶ who claimed that the Brahmin and Shudra kneel side-by-side in front of Brahma, the creator.⁷⁷

The author, J.G.W. continued, ‘Bad as the absurd institution of Indian caste unquestionably is, in one important particular, it has the advantage of our Christian and republican prejudice against color’. This was because discrimination based on colour was rampant. However, the author observed that it was diminishing owing to the anti-slavery debate, and that such public conversations were weakening the ‘strength of this prejudice of Caste’. The report observed that many coloured citizens were now becoming dentists, doctors, lawyers and even justices, sitting to pass judgment on white pick-pockets and vagabonds. Thus, it was argued that power was shifting, and caste was finally being challenged in the form of professional achievement. Where even,

‘the Governor of the Commonwealth maybe seen riding on the same seat with a black man, engaged in familiar conversation, upon railroads and in stagecoaches, where a few years ago the sight of a black skin would have been the signal for indignant uproar on the part of the white passengers, and of violence and abuse on the part of conductors and driver.’⁷⁸

This ethnographic snapshot explained the changing status of caste—here, a colour-based distinction that restricted freedom and equality to blacks in Massachusetts.⁷⁹ It invited ‘insult or indignity’, or labour considered menial upon the oppressed. The author JGW presented the irony of a returned missionary from the East, who wiped his tears, thinking how a similar situation could not arise in Massachusetts. This missionary was most likely Rev. Joseph Roberts, who preached in Madras. Upon returning to the US, he wrote a text that was a compilation of documents published between 1828–1847, entitled *Caste, in Its Religious and Civil Character, Opposed to Christianity* (1847) in London, which became one of the earliest book-length summations of caste. This text observed that caste was not merely social, but also religious in nature.⁸⁰ The concern here was not confined to Hindu religious practice, but also extended to the ‘permeation of caste thinking and practices into the lives of native [Indian] Christians’.⁸¹

⁷⁵ JGW, ‘Caste in Massachusetts’, *The National Era*, Vol. IV, No. 2, 10 January 1850, p. 1.

⁷⁶ ‘East Indies’, *Richmond Enquirer*, 1 January 1820, p. 1.

⁷⁷ For more on Du Bois, see Jan Peter Schouten, Chapter 6, *The European Encounter with Hinduism in India*, trans. Henry Jansen (Leiden: Brill, 2020). https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004420076_002.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ In the article, JGW appealed for justice through the patronage of the Supreme Court over its ‘children’—the citizens of the Commonwealth. And then he shifts his attention to the white race, who claimed superiority. If they did so, then it was their responsibility to take care of the coloured people if they are ‘ignorant, degraded, and unhappy’. Ibid.

⁸⁰ For more on this see Hari Ramesh, ‘India, Racial Caste, and Abolition in Charles Sumner’s Political Thought’, *Modern Intellectual History*, Vol. 9, Issue 3, Sept 2022, pp. 711-712. doi:10.1017/S1479244321000044.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 712.

A Brahmin convert Christian woman from India, Pandita Ramabai Saravasti introduced the status of Hindu women and Hindu castes to the American public in the 1880s. Saravasti operated within the worlds of British and American education systems. Her memoir, *The High-Caste Hindu Woman*, was published in 1887.⁸² It was essentially an introduction to the caste system in India, how it operated in the intimate life of the Hindus, in the religious doctrines and scriptures, and what *Manu*, the lawgiver of Hindu laws offered to maintain castes. Saravasti's work was well known. This is evident from the series of lectures that she delivered in Boston and on the Canadian Pacific Coast. In 1887, an association was formed upon her advice to fund her projects for establishing a 'secular school for the high-caste child-widows who could not be reached in other ways'.⁸³ The association was finally registered in her name, the American Ramabai Association, which channelled the funds to the education activities of Saravasti in India.

Sarasvati became an influential speaker and advocate for the rights of Hindu women. Her supporters were mostly secular Christians. In her appeal to support the cause of the poor and the dispossessed in India, Saravasti made a successful plea to fund her activities in India. She was not an anti-caste activist or sensitive to the rights of the downtrodden castes. She was invested in preserving the order of the High-caste Brahmin women. Sarasvati had an audience of influential people in the Boston area. Though the term 'caste' was used to designate India, it nevertheless may have brought comparisons in the minds of Americans, who had their issues of segregation, endogamy, and discrimination. It is also possible that Saravasti's patrons and supporters may have persuaded her to explore the question of caste, religion and her place in it. By now, Bostonians were well aware of caste through the advocacy of Sumner's advocacy and other abolitionists in the area.

Caste was introduced to Sumner and other New England progressives through the nineteenth-century abolitionist movement. Popular outlets such as *Colored American* (famously known as a black abolitionist newspaper), *Richmond Enquirer*, *Constitutional Whig*, *Boston Atlas*, *Philadelphia Recorder*, *Boston Recorder*, *The National Era*, and *Religious Intelligencer*, among others, started to cite caste and its connection with India from 1820 onwards.

Historian Hari Ramesh works with the citations in Sumner's text. One of the visible references in Sumner is to Rev. Joseph Roberts' *Caste*.⁸⁴ Sumner generously reproduced several paragraphs from this text in the case of Roberts vs. City of Boston. John Jay, the New York-based abolitionist and author, was also influential in Sumner's thinking.

Jay published one of the earliest tracts on caste, comparing the 'Brahmin from the Soodra' in 'heathen India', with the clergy and laity in the Episcopal church.⁸⁵ This text elaborated upon the theological and historical reasons for

⁸² Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati, *The High-Caste Hindu Woman* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1901), reprint

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 15

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 711; Joseph Roberts (ed.) *Caste, in Its Religious and Civil Character, Opposed to Christianity* (XXX: London, 1847)

⁸⁵ John Jay, *Caste and Slavery in the American Church By A Churchman* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1843), p. 8.

advancing a dialogue against caste. Jay, a devout Christian, followed the case of the rejection of Rev. Alexander Crummell's application to the seminary, by the Trustees of the General Theological Seminary in 1839. Following this rejection, Crummell went to Cambridge University to earn a degree. Rev. Crummell became a pioneering African American minister, preacher, academic and anti-slavery activist. However, the rejection of Crummell on account of his colour was met with strong objection by Jay, who presented the by-laws of the seminary's constitution, which did not prohibit anyone from admission. Yet, Crummell's rejection was not only in violation of the constitution in question, but also a proof of the machinations of its trustees, who went further to amend the statute that granted them discretionary powers over such matters. Jay found this to be a case of caste discrimination. He bemoaned the existence of caste in the church and demanded the reasons from those who were responsible for its innovation, i.e., the trustees.⁸⁶ Caste was thus clearly viewed as an unwelcome institution that created hierarchical differences between people based on their colour. It is suspected that Sumner had read Jay's text before going to fight in the Massachusetts Supreme Court. The famous black preacher and abolitionist of the time, Alexander Crummell, who also experienced discrimination in the church, also believed in the existence of two castes in the church: white and black.⁸⁷

CASTE IN THE PRINT SPHERE

The 1830s saw noticeable references being made to caste as a metonym for the Hindu caste system as well as American racism, which accorded superiority to white skin. This 'ranking' was a 'corrupt prejudice of caste'.⁸⁸ A news item from Boston Atlas was reprinted in the Richmond Enquirer—initially a Jeffersonian publication from 1798 then known as the Examiner. The Richmond Enquirer, in particular, had been sensitive to caste issues in India and had been diligently reporting on them, being the first newspaper to carry an explicit report on caste. For example, in 1820, it carried news of an inter-caste marriage between Maharaja Holkar and a Rajput queen. Owing to Holkar's lower status as compared to his bride, she was first married to a sword in a 'strange ceremony'.⁸⁹

Caste and its misfortune had a sympathetic audience in America. In Virginia, newspapers such as the *Constitutional Whig*—which was also known as Richmond Whig at one point—reported the case of an inter-caste killing in 1825. Entitled 'Hindo Caste', the piece presented the case of a couple belonging to the same religion but different castes, who had to elope to evade parental pressure. Later, the girl's mother convinced her daughter to return home, so a proper marriage celebration could be organized. 'The poor girl' readily agreed and was received with open arms by her brother and father. A few days later, she realized it was not going to happen and that she had been cheated. She then began looking for an opportunity to return to her husband, which soon presented itself to her.

⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 9.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

⁸⁸ 'The Real Object of Thompson's Mission', *Richmond Enquirer*, 27 October 1835, p. 4.

⁸⁹ 'East Indies', *Richmond Enquirer*, 1 January 1820, p. 1

Soon after, she was overtaken by her brother, who promised her a safe passage to her husband. On their way, on an 'unfrequented path', taking advantage of the situation, he drew his sword and beheaded his sister. He left her to die on the streets. The next day, the father and brother were apprehended. They not only 'confessed to the crime but exulted in the accomplishment of it'.⁹⁰ Due to the nature of personal laws and the authority given to parents over their children, it became evident that things could escalate to the level of depriving or taking away the child's right to life itself. It was proved that the son had merely obeyed his father's orders. Both miscreants were acquitted. This was the first instance of international coverage of an inter-caste atrocity. Most likely, this news was circulated and reprinted in other countries as well.

These early reports of caste brutalities in India were eventually welded into a scholarly understanding of the category by comparing it with slavery. The pioneering African American physician James McCune Smith, wrote of America's backwardness in his classic autobiography, 'the only drawback' is 'caste ... which is the chief minister to continuance of slavery'.⁹¹ In his introduction to Douglass's *My Bondage My Freedom*, Smith juxtaposes the two as 'American slavery or American caste'. He states how Douglass escaped 'the depths of chattel slavery in Maryland' only to be confounded into the 'caste-slavery of the north'.⁹²

One of the tallest black leaders of anti-slavery, Frederick Douglass's invocation of caste to describe slavery and its sociological structure, is perhaps one of the earliest references to the topic. Certainly, the influence of caste could be partly credited to the Christian church, whose adaptation of the caste analogy paved a path for a comparative analysis. This was also to build a case against the non-American-ness of the wretched caste system existing in the slaveholding South. '[T]he cruel and malignant spirit of caste, which is at the foundation, and is the cause, as well as the effect of our American slave system', Douglass argued in his not-so-well-analysed speech, 'Citizenship and the Spirit of Caste'. In his second autobiography, *My Bondage My Freedom*, Douglass reminisced about the same incident and the bruising experience he had had with the Jim Crow laws, wherein he was designated to the inferior caste and subjected to segregated seating arrangements on the railway lines of New England. This custom, Douglass observed, was 'fostering the spirit of caste'.⁹³

Slavery was often seen as constitutive of caste. However, it did not receive a more detailed analysis as it was during the aftermath of the civil war. Caste rules regulated the structures of operation on the plantation. But a clear distinction of

⁹⁰ 'Hindo Caste', *Constitutional Whig*, 15 March 1825, p. 4

⁹¹ James McCune Smith, 'Civilization: Its Dependence on Physical Circumstances', *The Works of James McCune Smith: Black Intellectual and Abolitionist*, ed. John Stauffer (New York, 2006), pp. 261–2, cited in Hari Ramesh, 2022.

⁹² James McCune Smith, Introduction to Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 9.

⁹³ Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, p. 310. Available on Project Gutenberg: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/202/202-h/202-h.htm#link2H_4_0032.

caste only tends to appear in the later years of slavery. The racial order of slavery was formalized into law and custom as a relic of caste society in America.

The American Missionary on Caste (1883)

American Christian organizations in the nineteenth century were sensitive to caste. It was considered an anti-Christian principle that had persisted in America after the abolition of slavery.⁹⁴ The journal of the abolitionist protestant group, the American Missionary Association, *The American Missionary*, carried an elaborate discussion on caste in its December 1883 issue, which claimed that the church was committed to the abolition of caste from society.⁹⁵ The American Missionary Association's 'Aim and Work' was to 'benefit the and caste-persecuted Chinese in America'.⁹⁶ The journal usually ran reports on the minutes of meetings, proceedings, speeches and articles delivered by the office bearers and members. The December 1883 issue reproduced a report of annual meeting of the church entitled 'Sayings at the Annual Meeting'. The vice president of the association, Dr. Behrends, commented that the existence of caste was not limited to India and its presence 'constitutes one of the most serious obstacles to the progress of the Gospel'.⁹⁷ The association was also conscious of the work of John Jay of the Episcopal Church, who had written an entire book condemning caste in the church in 1843.

To elucidate the situation of caste and its operations outside India, an article entitled 'Caste in America' by the secretary of the organization, Rev. M.E. Strieby, was carried in the issue.⁹⁸ This article offered an introduction to the caste system in India, explaining the Hindu social system of castes. Unlike India's fourfold caste system, Strieby stated that the American caste system had two poles: the coloured and white races. The condition of the coloured races was equated to 'Soodras', who were born to serve the higher classes—the whites. Coloured meant both Negro and Chinese.

In a flippant, ironic remark, the article compares the American caste with Indian stating that 'Caste is a worse sin in America than in India'. The author bases this claim on the moral mantle that fell upon America, which boasted of its values of equality, while at the same time 'dishonours his God and disobeys his Bible'.⁹⁹ Whereas the Hindu was merely following the religious codes instructed by his faith. Strieby points to the hypocrisy of American missionaries condemning caste in India, while at the same time exercising it by holding on to the 'shame of slavery' in their own nation. It was not merely a moral or economical issue of interest, but there was also theological shame placed on 'the press, the pulpit and the theological seminaries' that partook in caste practices.

⁹⁴ Secretary Powell, 'Sayings At The Annual Meeting', *The American Missionary*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 12, December 1883, p. 360.

⁹⁵ 'Report on Church Work', *ibid.*, p. 395.

⁹⁶ 'Aims and Work', back cover advert, *The American Missionary*.

⁹⁷ Dr. Behrends, 'Sayings At The Annual Meeting', *ibid.*, p. 359.

⁹⁸ Rev. M.E. Strieby, 'Caste in America', *ibid.*, p. 376–381.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 376.

Caste was seen as a ‘shameful’ defence of slavery that aggravated it and was, therefore, the ‘tap root of slavery’. Caste was an outcome of slavery that acted like slavery but in a juridical and social context, to deprive the ‘coloured races’ of their rights.¹⁰⁰ The condition of caste was setting up to be a great political challenge, especially in the South, where after emancipation, the demographic balance would throw a daunting challenge to the political establishment. As a result, various tactics were deployed to close the avenues of jobs, churches, schools, and businesses to coloured people. Thus, post-slavery discrimination was identified as caste and the need for a new kind of reform was propounded, which would draw its foundations from existing anti-slavery methods. A clarion call was made by the church and Strieby, in particular, to uphold the rights of coloured castes on the principle of equality.

TWENTIETH-CENTURY SCHOLARSHIP ON THE AMERICAN CASTE SYSTEM

Caste helped to contextualize and understand solid as well as fluid rules that did not just exist in principle but also operated in everyday life—a heuristic *modus operandi*. Caste didn’t just accentuate the expression of hostility, violence, and inequality, but also amplified the extremely diverse social practices that conditioned social and cognitive aspects of the life of dominant and subordinated castes. This peculiarity related to the permanency of one’s birth characterized the specificity of the caste created during slavery.¹⁰¹ However, caste had essentially ‘replace[d] slavery as a means of maintaining the essence of old status order in the South’.¹⁰² Du Bois, as we shall see later, describe social status as a heritage of caste society produced in the US order of colour-castes. Kamala Visweswaran argues that Dollard picked up on the relation between caste and slavery from Du Bois’s formulation. Du Bois had endorsed Dollard for his contribution to the “Southern scene”.

Dollard, one of the leading psychologists to study caste relations in the twentieth century, went on to define caste by differentiating it from class. Caste, he argued, was given at birth and cannot be changed, while class as an economic classification is given after birth, through the circumstances of one’s family. And if one’s economic circumstances change, then there is a change in class as well. Dollard argued that caste in America had biological factors at play and that it was not “pinned to cultur[e]”.¹⁰³ The definition of caste has passed through several stages. W. Lloyd Warner and Allison Davis, for instance, distinguished race in America from India’s caste system. They stated that they do not argue in favour of a direct analogy but emphasize the similarity in how the two systems were

¹⁰⁰ Caste is often used a race, or a representative of a group separate from race.

¹⁰¹ Kamala Visweswaran, *Un/common Cultures: Racism and the Rearticulation of Cultural Difference* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 111; Purvi Mehta presents an excellent summary of the literature, its debates and theoretical posits in her thesis, *Recasting Caste: Histories of Dalit Transnationalism and the Internationalization of Caste Discrimination*, Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2013, p. 120.

¹⁰² John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1937), p. 62.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 64, from Dumont, fn. 16, p. 343.

structured. They were, in essence, ‘the same kind of phenomena’.¹⁰⁴ Myrdal, to whom we shall return in a short while, also argued along similar lines. He observed ‘caste relations’ as denoting the ‘social phenomenon in present day America’, emphasizing on the need to understand this term in a ‘relative and quantitative sense’. Myrdal was essentially making a case for applying the terminology of caste to the American context.¹⁰⁵

Caste was strengthened further during the era of the Jim Crow laws. In many ways, Jim Crow legislation was caste legislation as it emphasized segregation and discrimination, including segregation in railroad cars, restaurants, theatres, public parks, playgrounds, swimming pools, etc. These laws aimed to severely restrict social interaction between white and black populations. Prior to the Jim Crow laws, there was a varying tendency among the whites to treat black people according to their class and level of education. However, after the passing of the laws, there remained no such opportunity to mete out preferential treatment to some capital-owning, educated black people. All African Americans were effectively relegated to a lower caste status and were required to adhere to the discriminatory American rules of segregation and separation.¹⁰⁶

After the emancipation proclamation in 1863, the condition of black people underwent drastic changes in relation to their rights. Even though the 1875 Civil Rights Act granted equality and non-discrimination in access to public conveyances, this was held as unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1883. Alongside this, there was a swift move in postbellum America to redefine the image of the country. Owing to this, the recognition of the “Negro” as a slavery-associated identity became possible. Thus, to replace this noun “caste” came about as an effective method of address to economic hierarchy of groups that was already in use in the antebellum era.

The debate over appropriately describing the social system of post-slavery America went in many directions. The ones who stuck with caste had good reason to do so. They did not prefer to validate unscientific claims of hierarchy and superiority attached to race by the colonial forces of racial biologism. Davis and Warner did not advantage genetic, biological interpretations of the white–black dichotomy. They saw it as a socially defined relationship which came to be popularly accepted during the later stages of civil rights activism and academic study.

In this tradition, *Deep South*, a monumental monograph produced after two years of ethnographic study conducted by white and black ethnographers in

¹⁰⁴ Allison Davis and John Dollard, *Children of Bondage: The personality development of Negro youth in the urban South* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1940), p. xxii, cited in Visweswaran, fn. 39, p. 252.

Dumont also disagreed with Warner and Davis’s (1939) formulation of a comparison wherein he distinguished between ‘the caste system’ and ‘certain number of features of the Indian caste system’ (p. 243). Dumont used a sociological lens to argue that even if endogamy is a common feature, it is not a ‘sociological fact’ because it is ‘a conscious fact’, to begin with. The essence of endogamy is not just applicable to two groups as in a racial context (white and black) but also has a larger relevance to caste (p. 245).

¹⁰⁵ Myrdal, *ibid.*, p. 668.

¹⁰⁶ Myrdal, *ibid.*, p. 579–581.

Natchez, Mississippi, provided an authentic account of the caste practices in the American South. This was the first major work that exposed the differences between the lives of white and black Americans in a starkly divided, unequal society in a Western democracy. The numerous, compelling case studies presented in *Deep South* provide a powerful illustration of caste dynamics in the American South. The methodologies that were applied in studying the caste relationships were similar to studying the class dynamics that produced a subordinate (black) and superordinate or supraordinate (white) caste.¹⁰⁷

The comparative framework offered a nuanced perspective on a system that was created by internal and outside forces. One of the ways to go about this was to remove oneself from localized narratives and observe them fully; a bird's eye view to help anchor caste appropriately. Anthropologist Chris Fuller, who specializes in Indian society, supports this comparative approach. Fuller argues that 'indifference to comparison has been a hindrance' and asserts that understanding India's caste society requires comparative analysis with other unequal societies.¹⁰⁸

Deep South offers anecdotes of the white-black condition and the situation of black groups in post-slavery South. The experiences of black people in the American South were far too much like the situation prevailing in India; so much so that they could easily be confused with the Dalit condition. For example, the public hanging of a black man on false charges stemmed from the anxiety and fear of white groups. The act of public lynching was also a way for the white population to retain their superior position over the black caste population, considered lower in status. They were ways to reaffirm that 'caste is a reality and that any variations from the patterns will be severely punished'.¹⁰⁹ To maintain the status quo, the whites 'will enforce their authority with punishment and death' if, in case, a 'Negro forgets' and falters.¹¹⁰

In *Deep South*, the authors observed that privilege and opportunities were unequally distributed. The white castes had exclusive access to positions which were rewarding, while the black castes were penalized for avoiding the lowest-paying, non-compensatory positions. These jobs were a method of retaining caste-based occupational hierarchy that warranted the lowest castes to offer their duties like obligations. Warner, one of the earliest commentators on caste in America, saw caste as a 'theoretical arrangement of the people of the given group in an order in which the privileges, duties, obligations, opportunities, etc., are unequally distributed between the groups which are considered to be higher and lower'.¹¹¹ To maintain this inequality, there was 'social sanction', though we are not

¹⁰⁷ W. Lloyd Warner, 'American caste and class', *American Journal of Sociology*, 42, No. 2, September 1936, p. 236; also see introduction to *Deep South*

¹⁰⁸ C.J. Fuller, 'Caste, race and hierarchy in the American South', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.), 17, p. 605.

¹⁰⁹ Allison Davis, B.B. Gardner and M.R. Gardner, *Deep South: A social anthropological study of caste and class* (abridged edition, with an introduction by W.L. Warner and 'Retrospect, 1965' by A. Davis and B.B. Gardner) (Chicago: University Press, 1965 [1941]), p. 538.

¹¹⁰ Davis and Dollard, *Children of bondage*, p. 49, 50.

¹¹¹ Warner, 'American caste and class', *ibid.*, p. 234.

told what 'social' refers to, in the context of caste in America. However, one can draw from his arguments the inference that social sanction is the governmentality of the hierarchal society invested in maintaining an order of upper and lower distinctions based on colour and descent.

The methodical operation of caste takes the perverse form of plurality. Multiple castes exist alongside and within each other. That is why the castes are subject to gradation and ranking at each level. Caste also does not neatly operate in binaries, as simply white or black. There are multiple rankings within each status group and outside of the strict upper and lower ends. The middle caste groups are either a mixture of or entirely separate from the two extremes of the binary system. Thus, Davis, Gardner, and Gardner observed that within each caste, groups were further divided into lower, middle, and upper-middle classes.

In America, 'blue-vein societies' referred to groups of light-skinned African Americans whose skin was so pale that the blue colour of their veins was visible beneath the surface. This group existed as a result of inter-mixing. This was known as an intermediate caste group, given its middle status. It came to be eventually categorized as part of the brown identity.¹¹² The intermediate middle categories were not simply class-based hierarchies, but also a result of the conventions of religious institutions, schools, workplace, courts, police, family, etc. These institutional structures acted as a support for caste-based hierarchies. Segregation as a *modus operandi* of the caste system nourishes the parlance of India's caste system in housing, schools, and other government-sanctioned institutions.

The class dynamics within caste groups were independent of caste structures. The factual difference between caste and class is that the latter afforded flexibility and unconventional tools to help navigate differences. Caste is a rigid and deeply rooted cultural institution that derives its existence from a complex interplay of beliefs, faith, and purported rationality. In America, Warner observed, caste blocked any prospect of rendering class-based dignity to the oppressed. An upper-class, professional Black person who rose to the top ranks in any profession was still considered a 'nigger' by whites in lower class rankings.¹¹³ He was not just lower but inferior, relegating his identity to subordination. The practice of privileging social status over economic status played out against the highly educated, capital-owning black person. Consequently, the process of acculturation, or adopting white cultural norms, began to unfold in the Southern town of Natchez and other studied locations.

Louis Dumont provided a comparative analysis of caste and race structures in the United States and India, examining various definitions of caste, class, and estate. Published as an appendix to his book *Homo Hierarchicus*, Dumont's analysis was mounted on the various interpretations and understandings of caste and class identifiers.¹¹⁴ In the US, two prominent intellectuals laid special emphasis on the canon of caste for their analyses— Myrdal and Warner. Both approached the

¹¹² Davis, Gardner and Gardner, *Deep South*, p. 246.

¹¹³ Warner, 'American caste and class', *ibid.*, p. 236.

¹¹⁴ Dumont, p. 248–9.

question of caste slightly differently. As previously noted, Myrdal showed little interest in comparing the American caste system with India's caste system, whereas Warner and his team actively pursued such comparisons.¹¹⁵ Dumont looked at their particular definitions and hypotheses. For Myrdal, 'the choice of the term' was 'a purely practical matter'.¹¹⁶ The other two terms— race and class— did not make as much sense as caste did, due to their own limitations. 'Race' implied false justifications for inequality, while 'class' failed to capture the persistent contempt faced by oppressed groups, even when they achieved higher economic status.¹¹⁷

CONCLUSION

Contemporary attempts to differentiate between race and caste as distinct categories may be futile, as they essentially describe similar social phenomena with shared historical roots. It is, after all, the languages that differ in talking about the same social category that was constructed in the early modern period of world history.¹¹⁸

Both caste and race can be understood through an examination of their shared ontology, characterized by suffering, depreciation, and backwardness. Caste and race were developed with identical registers. Though they have had different trajectories, these two were developed simultaneously. Race, clubbed with capitalism and empire, produced colour-based order. However, its operation relied on hierarchy and hereditary. Caste, though much order in form and content, had roots in religion and society. If seen through the original interpretation of varna-based caste, colour acted as an accurate identifier to generate the caste system. As we shall see in the rest of the thesis, how these two categories remained central to defining society and shaping democracy. That is why India, and the US remain the focus of this study. They have different origin stories separated by history and law, yet they manage to proclaim democracy as their guiding principle.

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¹¹⁵ Ibid., 244, also see 240, 241.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 243.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 244.

¹¹⁸ Xavier, 'Language of Difference', p. 92.

Chapter 2

CASTE AND RACE

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF HIERARCHICAL SYSTEMS IN INDIA AND THE UNITED STATES

This chapter examines the influence of caste as a category of academic importance in twentieth-century American sociology. The past four centuries of colonial capitalist engagement have profoundly shaped marginalized communities, resulting in both cultural synthesis and detachment from indigenous histories. This chapter investigates how these groups construct new narratives to situate themselves within contemporary society. We take a look at the influence of twentieth-century provenance of caste as a category of academic importance meriting a debate in American sociology and beyond.

Two key figures, Oliver Cox and Gerald Berreman, present differing views on the applicability of caste to American society. Oliver Cox took a class position to define caste, unmaking the hierarchies set in social structures. Instead, he advocated for a racialized system to understand the post-slavery capitalist America. Gerald Berreman, however, represented a different camp that found social

hierarchies to be co-determinant of relations and division arranged into a caste society. The debate over caste, nevertheless, acknowledged the plausibility of castes when contrasted with India's caste system. Both schools of thought varied in their attempts to imprint an original caste definition.

THE GENEALOGIES OF SOCIAL CASTES

Academic study of caste predated mid-nineteenth-century inquiries. Colonial interests in the topic paved a path for the study of modern caste. The Iberian experience in South Asia, particularly South India, sparked Western European interest in caste, primarily viewed through the lenses of colonial administration and religion. They explored caste as a cultural form that had organized society in dynamics ways. Colonial-era writing already had available glossaries of other worlds, and race and ethnicity were among the easy classifiers used to identify divisions in society.

The experiences of caste and race can be traced back to the same genealogical roots. The former stems from epochal phasic shifts. Over the years, dominating classes organized into a confined, solid social structure, enabling caste and race to receive religio-philosophical approval. The Hindu Brahminic system, as it is known today, offered various justifications for the existence of caste groups. Through the piety of religious doctrines, caste is taken as an order established by the Brahmana—the creator of the world. In the racial-colour context, one explanation was founded in theology. Theologians claimed that Africans were a curse descended from Ham, a son of Noah's. I will explore this proposition later in the chapter.

The emphasis on Christian values was derived from the idea that Christ was depicted as a light-skinned, blue-eyed, blond person, reflecting typical Enlightenment-era European characteristics. Religious scriptures, associated with empires in the Iberian belt, also found resonances in the phenotype that vested social status and hierarchy. Thus, similar to caste, religious scriptures aided the notion of race, colour and difference as understood then. This became a guiding rule for other institutions to build upon.

This chapter examines instances of caste racialization in both the United States and India. Cross-cultural comparisons took a leap with scholars debating the usage of both terms. However, none disapproved of the importance of the social categories—race and caste—and their centrality to social and political relations in their particular histories. American and Indian scholars sought to identify both similarities and differences in the complexities of their respective societies. India differed from the US and other caste societies due to the apparent importance of sub-caste and sub-sub-castes to the practice of Brahminism. Further, untouchability as a permanent religious resource worked as a distinct marker which couldn't be washed away even after the performance of sacred rites. This is because there were two kinds of untouchables: the accidental, temporary “positive” untouchables who were invited back into society, and the permanent outcastes who were condemned

and debarred from accessing mainstream society. The earlier category was individuals, while the latter was a social group.

In the US, as in India, various institutions provided justification for treating coloured races as inferior. From the mid-nineteenth century, for example, the criminalization of lower groups became a reason for the expansion of the carceral system.¹¹⁹ The genetic make-up of groups was often cited as grounds to justify such discrimination. In addition to this, religious, philosophical, and psychological reasons were also used. The inferiority of blacks¹²⁰ continues to be reinforced by social elites, who demand reverence for their superior position in the caste hierarchy and at the same time, grant a lower status to “permanently scapegoat” the untouchable.¹²¹ American anthropologist Gerald Berreman found similarities in the lived experience of black groups in America and untouchables in India. So much so that he declared it would just require substituting “negro” and “white” with “low caste” and “high caste” to arrive at the same result. Berreman had lived and experienced Jim Crow Alabama in the early to mid-1950s, while also working in North India. He was an exceptional contributor to the global caste debate and one of the first Americans to prove the claim of caste in a comparative context. We shall revisit his core arguments shortly.

Race, which we understand and discuss today by way of English-language scholarship from around the world, is overwhelmingly interpreted through the US experience of the past 350 years. The US-dominated understanding of race differs from the experience of race and race relations in other societies. The French, for example, disagree with the US interpretation of race relations and the sensitivities it may carry.¹²² The US experience of race, although different and geographically distinct, has established the reference point for global race relations by categorizing people into clearly marked white, black, coloured, Hispanic, Asian, Arab and Native American categories. Similar ethnic differences in other societies do not register as systematically as they do in the US. However, in recent years, due to the dominating influence of the US, we have come to see clear demarcations between race identity debates elsewhere. Brazil, for example, with its enormous racial and sub-racial ethnic divisions, produces a lengthy glossary of the many groups and their sub-racial categories.¹²³ The caste system in Brazil is observed

¹¹⁹ Khalil G. Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness: Race, Crime, and the Making of Modern Urban America* (Cambridge, MA, 2010).

¹²⁰ J. Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (Garden City, N.Y., 1957 [1937]).

¹²¹ Gerald D. Berreman, ‘Caste in India and the United States’, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 66, No. 2 (September 1960), p. 123.

¹²² The race identifier in the US is an important reflection of its capitalist and colonial history. The French society, for example, has a normalizing utopian vision that refuses to acknowledge or call out fellow French as black but instead suggests including their racial identity under the umbrella of the common political identity—being French.¹²² The motto of “liberte, equalite, fraternite” disciplines the conduct of French nationals discussing race. This was evident from the exchanges between a television host and comedian, Trevor Noah, of *The Daily Show* and the French Ambassador to the US. The Daily Show, “Trevor Responds to Criticism from the French Ambassador - Between The Scenes”, Available at YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=COD9hcTpGWQ>

¹²³ Achal Prabhala, ‘Neymar and Brazil’s racial politics’, *Africa is the New Country*, 1 June 2014. <https://africasacountry.com/2014/06/neymar-and-brazils-racial-politics>.

colloquially as a system of racialized violence.¹²⁴ One can then look at the historical journey of settler societies.

The influence of the Iberian, particularly the Portuguese empire, is apparent in defining the contours of castes as it did in Asia.¹²⁵ Sumit Guha states since both the empires of Iberia (Spanish and Portuguese) were held under one monarch between 1580-1640, this expansion was governed with the local dimensions of statecraft in the faraway colonies.¹²⁶ The segmentation of racial and cultural politics that we see today in the US has centred the dominating discourse of body-politic colour-coded perception. This has provided an uneven and thinly scattered analysis of caste epistemology. Thus, it can be beneficial to interrogate the histories of caste in the US, going back to the famous contests of black American sociologist Oliver Cromwell Cox, who advocated for a racial class analysis as opposed to racial caste, alongside others like Gerald Berreman, to understand the limitations of racial discourses as contrasted with caste.

COX–BERREMAN: DEBATING RATIONALES

The debate between Cox and Berreman is emblematic of divergent viewpoints that took American sociology and history by storm. The first focussed on the region as the only authentic context of any category. The second was open to global comparisons and histories. The first school of thought developed its ideas around the institution of slavery and subsequent legal institutions that validated racial discrimination as an accepted part of American life. Its supporters wanted to deal with American society exclusively through the figure of race seen as an indigenous concept different from India's caste system. The second school of thought departed from the master-trope of slavery and examined stratification from a comparative perspective, which meant thinking about race as a concept rooted in the larger structure of caste. Thus, the caste school of race relations was developed by ethnographers in the first half of the twentieth century.¹²⁷ The debate ensued for some time, eventually bringing victory to the racial school of thought, and two scholars who dealt with these issues head-on were Oliver Cromwell Cox and Gerald Berreman.

Cox's interest in caste dominated a major part of his academic oeuvre.¹²⁸ He studied caste as a point of intersection for studying race, capital, and class relations.¹²⁹ Cox refused to align caste with the now-established conception of race

¹²⁴ Jessy Damba Diamba, "Brazil's Violent Caste System", *Africa is the New Country*, <https://africasacountry.com/2022/10/brazils-violent-caste-system>

¹²⁵ Several works bear testimony to this. One particularly hypothetical and provocative work was by Morton Klass, *Caste: The Emergence of the South Asian Social System* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1980). Here, Klass argues for a non-Indian origin of the word castes. For a survey of the Portuguese archive see, Sumit Guha, *Beyond Caste: Identity and Power in South Asia, Past and Present*, Leiden: Brill, 2013

¹²⁶ Guha, *Beyond Caste*, p. 21

¹²⁷ This was a newer formulation, different from the previous century's epithet of "coloured races".

¹²⁸ Oliver C. Cox, *Caste Class & Race: A Study in Social Dynamics* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1948)

¹²⁹ Herbert M Hunter & Sameer Y. Abraham (eds.), *Race, Class, and the World System: The Sociology of Oliver C. Cox*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1987)

relations in America,¹³⁰ owing to the fact that race was theorized as having a “scientific”¹³¹ basis as opposed to the unscientific doctrines espoused by the Brahminical rituals and Manu-ordained laws of India. Race became a scientific subject as the natural sciences early on took interest in classifying human beings according to their various physical and descent-based traits, whereas such treatment wasn’t extended to caste. Race also corroborated capitalism primarily as a rationale for exploiting darker-skinned people and their resources, giving way to the establishment of slavery, indenture, and colonisation. The conjoining of race with capitalism became a foundational trait of the American empire. Curiously, economic class does not find an explicit mention in the early Portuguese vocabulary of social hierarchy, be it race or caste. Class didn’t play the role of a definite marker in the early modern age as much as it did in the twentieth century, when a debate in capitalist societies divided people over class and colour traits.

Gerald Berreman, on the other hand, made a case for caste replication in the American context. A decade later, when the debate arose, he went to India to find out for himself. He visited North India to conduct a comparative structural analysis of race and caste in cross-cultural studies, a disciplinary investigation to study “social process[es]” and comparisons between race and caste studies.¹³² Berreman found that ‘despite the difference in content’, race–caste comparisons invited more generalizations than the ones predicated on specific historical analysis. He found caste relations to be ‘closely similar in operation’ to racial equations in America, which offered further support to the theory of cultural relations between caste and race.¹³³ His anthropological research takes us closer to the race–caste comparison than Cox’s claims do, which were convincing but not adequately substantiated by empirical evidence. However, Berreman also did not delve deeper into the societal interactions of caste with regard to untouchability and graded hierarchies beyond the twin divisions of touchable and untouchables in India. He wanted to compare this non-nuanced dichotomy with that of white and black people in America.

Cox’s analysis led to a bipolar segmentation of caste and race relations, in which he analysed “negro”–white relations in the capitalist context and those of lower and upper castes in the “traditional” Brahminical fold. Berreman and Cox did not disagree on the two-level segmentation of caste. Both were comparing the same models, examining power and hierarchy—a classic concern of sociology, as interrelational to the functioning of society. However, one curious scholar who inherited the pangs of slavery went on to investigate the character of classes in castes. He was Allison Davis.

Davis identified a range of ‘social classes within each caste’ noting that subcaste groups serve as primary classifiers of caste identities.¹³⁴ As demonstrated

¹³⁰ Allison Davis had observed that using “race relations” was a “protective euphemism” for black people, as opposed to “caste”. Allison Davis, ‘Caste, Economy, and Violence’, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 51, No. 1, July 1945, p. 8.

¹³¹ Oliver Cox, ‘Race and Caste: A Distinction’, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 50, No. 5, March (1945), 368.

¹³² Gerald D. Berreman, ‘Caste in India and the United States’, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 66, No. 2, September 1960, 120–127.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

¹³⁴ Davis, ‘Caste, Economy, and Violence’, p. 7 (original emphasis).

earlier, the caste system, as we know today, has had far-reaching consequences and much larger implications which go beyond the binaries of lower and upper, or black and white. The peculiarity of the caste system is that it scatters its ontology. Because of this, one cannot hold onto one theory to define caste relations. Contrasting it with the “bipartite” segmentation of race relations, Cox argues that caste is more ‘ancient, provincial, culturally oriented, hierarchical in structure, status conscious, non-conflicted, nonpathological, occupationally limited, lacking in aspiration and progressiveness, hypergamous, endogamous, and static’.¹³⁵

Cox rightly emphasizes the Brahminic model as a more developed form of the Indian caste system. This model had been in existence as religion and polity over two millennia. Cox viewed race primarily through the lens of black-white relations, a more recent phenomenon dating to the era of American slavery. Capitalism needed to exploit labour to generate profits in the classed society which American slavery had produced. In addition to this, there were social relations that required regulation—which meant that the newfound theories of race developed by eighteenth-century scientists came in handy.¹³⁶

Cox argued that casteism represents a “hereditary monopoly rather than competitive opportunism”, with individuals fixed in caste-specific vocations.¹³⁷ Thus, rather than being in permanent bondage to the production system, the black person in America was free to participate in the free market. Unlike, the Dalit, the black person could choose to sell his labour the way he wanted in the competitive market.

Scholars generally agreed that in Western societies, wealth-based status was not inherently tied to birth. And due to this, its claims were open to be challenged. Because class distinctions, unlike caste, were “alienable, acquirable, and transferable” without drawing “permanent lines of cleavage as does birth”.¹³⁸ In the caste system, birth defined the status of the individual. How, then, do we move to liberalize our understanding of pre-capitalist society, i.e., caste, and its adjustment with capitalism, the modern caste system? Race here offers a cue to answer the latter part of the question.

Cox identified the visibility of physical characteristics as a key difference between race and caste. He observed that one could identify as ‘Chinese, Indians, Europeans, Negroes, or Filipinos, [and] expect responses indicating consciousness of ocular evidence of physical differentiation’.¹³⁹ However, with regard to the various castes in Hindu society, namely Chamar, Brahmin, and Baniyas, all appear to the outsider as one physical unit.

This argument needs further elaboration. The physical markers of distinction are not universal in nature. American perceptions of racial groups are

¹³⁵ Cox, ‘Race and Caste’, p. 360.

¹³⁶ James H. Sweet, ‘The Iberian Roots of American Racist Thought’, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 1, Constructing Race, January 1997, 144.

¹³⁷ Cox, ‘Race and Caste’, p. 360.

¹³⁸ G.S. Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India* (Mumbai, 2004) [first edition, 1932], 2.

¹³⁹ Cox, ‘Race and Caste’, p. 362.

shaped by historically specific, localized definitions of race. Similarly, one has to work towards locating caste markers with the physical and social habits of various social groups. The lower castes are subject to caste rules. They cannot live in the main village. They have to perform certain jobs and remain available to serve as village servants, much like the black population of the American South, who worked as unskilled labourers, servants, and workers.¹⁴⁰ The outcastes in India do not own the land or resources to be independent. Due to this, social habits are designed to keep them subservient and loyal subjects. Their forced submission to the order of the village system is far more visible. In villages, where the caste system is the *modus operandi*, one knows the caste of the other. Therefore, there is a visible spatial marker, unlike colour but still apparent enough for locals to distinguish the caste of the person.¹⁴¹

There are various social habits innovated to distinguish the higher and lower. One of this is the method of salutation (*johar*).

Some of the lower castes carry their reverence for the Brahmins, especially in Northern India, to such extremes that they will not cross the shadow of a Brahmin, and sometimes will not take their food without sipping water in which the big toe of a Brahmin is dipped.¹⁴²

Such physical attributes characterized the identity of lower castes in society. In terms of culinary practices, pure, cooked food and impure, uncooked food have to adhere to certain regulations applicable to each caste. The deities of worship for all are markedly different. Similarly, the worship practices of different castes also vary. In marriages, one can maintain the lines of purity by monitoring the blood circulating within the kin or the sub-caste fold. Likewise, in a different context—the racial context—the emphasis on physicality and appearance determines the plausibility of intimate relations. This allows for the black and white to develop relations—whether they are sexual or servile. However, in the caste context, the preoccupation is with avoidance and distance. The sight of the untouchable itself is considered defiling, thereby, diminishing opportunities to cross over into relations of any other kind. Unlike the racial paradigm, wherein the appearance of a person can lead to further differentiations, caste is a predetermined system wherein physicality is not the underlying principle. And yet, physicality does play a pivotal role in maintaining caste. The practice of distance and segregation is not an unconscious bias but a confirmed, educated choice made by various castes, who cognize and reaffirm the person's stature in the caste system. It is localized information enforced strongly by the protocols of dominant castes.

The undisputed hierarchical position of dominant castes facilitates their ability to exert influence over others. Cox and Berreman agree that the privileges of even an impoverished high-caste person are far greater and more rewarding than those of a well-off lower-caste person. So, if there is a rivalry among various castes, it is not guaranteed that such a quarrel will produce the equivalent of a revolution

¹⁴⁰ C.J. Fuller reviews the literature on caste and race in the American South, wherein he observes the status of labourers as found in the work of Davis, Gardner and Gardner's *Deep South*, 609.

¹⁴¹ Ron Hall, 'The Globalization of Light Skin Colourism: From Critical Race to Critical Skin Theory', *American Behavioral Scientists*, Vol. 62, No. 14, pp. 2133–2145.

¹⁴² Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India*, p. 14.

capable of breaking through the caste system. On the contrary, Cox argues that ‘the greater the rivalry between the caste and caste; the more stable the caste system’.¹⁴³ If the same occurs in racial society, however, it is possible to settle the differences.

The complex interrelations among castes and sub-castes within the village economy generate an awkward and often inconsistent social order. The rivalry between the castes is primarily emanating from jealousy. The insulated nature of India’s caste system prevents any form of overt solidarity and concern for other caste groups. The petty jealousies turn the possibility of forming an alliance into a mortal conflict. Often, caste formations take the shape of macro religious forms. Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, tribal, and native religions then designate roles according to simplified separations identified via clan gods and goddesses. The absence of trustworthiness and suspicion of the other is the hallmark of India’s caste system. The nature of the relationship is often compounded by a lack of access to adequate resources and unequal distribution of power. Due to this, various castes try to eliminate each other from the competition. Castes are sustained by remarkably sophisticated units of sub-castes that primarily regulate the caste system, where micro-hierarchies are enforced at a social and personal level. Cox was not entirely aware of the above-mentioned complexities, but he did talk about the feature of the caste system in Hindu India as being sub-caste oriented. The “invidious rivalries” which were “incidental”, existed among all the castes.¹⁴⁴ Thus, this peculiarity confirmed caste behaviour—rivalry confirmed caste rather than threatening it. Berreman had refuted Cox’s argument at first by reporting that in Sirkanda, his field site in India, the lower castes could not initiate aggression against the high castes, though they did express their discontent in private.

Cox’s assertion regarding the lack of social aspirations among lower castes in India, compared to African Americans was grossly inaccurate. The latter, Cox observed, ‘have been seeking to increase their participation and integration in the dominant culture’.¹⁴⁵ Cox argued that the ‘scheme of race relations in America centres around attempts of the “Negro” to reach new levels of participation and opposition to these attempts by whites’. Quoting a black congressman, George H. White, who had impressed upon the House in his farewell address the suffering of the black population of America, Cox stated, once again without evidence, that such an incident is difficult to spot in the Indian caste context.

Cox remained sceptical about the sociological similarities between racial America and caste India. Cox argued that if these systems were indeed “sociologically identical,” as Berreman proposed, it would be more logical to view the Indian system through the lens of American racial structures. He even went further to call the fieldnotes from Sirkanda as “race relations”—which, one supposes, would astonish most Hindus’.¹⁴⁶ He was not wrong that it astonished Hindus but also examined the non-applicability of non-convertible social

¹⁴³ Cox, ‘Race and Caste’, p. 364.

¹⁴⁴ Oliver Cox, ‘Berreman’s “Caste in India and the United States”’, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 66, No. 5, March 1961, p. 511.

¹⁴⁵ Cox, ‘Race and Caste’ p. 366.

¹⁴⁶ Cox, ‘Berreman’s’, p. 511

institutions that he assumed were frozen in their respective time zones and spatial zones.

Both Berreman and Cox appear to have been unaware of the significant anti-caste movements in India that challenged established caste theories. At the height of their debate, towering figures from the untouchable castes were contesting the modernity of traditional caste norms through popular social movements across India. In North India, the Punjabi movement led by Mangoo Ram Mugowalia; in Uttar Pradesh, Swami Achutanand; the pan-Indian heavyweight presence of America-educated Dr. Ambedkar, in South India EVR Periyar went by unnoticed.

The Cox–Berreman debate exemplifies two Americans plotting their defence from an awkward Orientalist position. In this, one can study the biographies of Berreman and Cox to know how they perceived their debate from the point of view of a white American and Trinidadian, respectively. Granted, however, that Cox’s experiential fieldnotes were drawn from his own country, where he observed the Indian community in Trinidad, which was a sizeable proportion of the island nation. He had spent ‘some months observing the partial operation of caste among the thousands of East Indians in Trinidad, British West Indies’, but he grasped this concept from the exegetical reading of texts published in the English language in the West. In a preface written in 1947, he states that the data reported ‘have been taken almost entirely from published materials on the Hindus in India’.¹⁴⁷ Cox acknowledges observing caste dynamics among Trinidad Hindus and gaining insights through discussions and interviews with East Indians in Trinidad. They were his primary interlocutors in the study of castes.¹⁴⁸

He observed those Indians who had dislocated their caste affiliation and caused caste to fail in the new land.¹⁴⁹ This was particularly in light of the post-indentured racial order of the hierarchy presented in the colonial governmentality. After this, in 1929, due to polio, he was attached to a wheelchair, which prohibited his easy mobility. Perhaps, if he could travel easily, his fieldnotes would have given a newer perspective than what he had seen in Trinidad. In my recent fieldwork in May 2022 and April 2024, I observed that caste works more as a factor in nomenclature and ritual position than in regular social life. Trinidadian Indians are aware of their caste roots and status, but most of them claim a generic “Maharaj” title, indicative of Brahmin roots. Many in Trinidad contest this interpretation of history.

This raises questions about the sources and production of knowledge in this debate. Who are the perceived informants and scholars upon whom Cox and Berreman have relied on to make their points? Cox relied heavily on colonial works by George W Briggs, Herbert Risley, Denzil Ibbetson, John Nesfield, S V Ketkar, G S Ghurye, among others, and data from the Census of India, along with the translation

¹⁴⁷ Oliver Cromwell Cox, *Caste, Class & Race A Study in Social Dynamics* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1959), p. ix

¹⁴⁸ Cox, *Caste, Class & Race*, p. xvii

¹⁴⁹ An excellent archival and ethnographic fieldwork by Barton M. Schwartz does a good job of reporting on the caste system in Trinidad. ‘The Failure of Caste in Trinidad’, in Barton M. Schwartz (ed.), *Caste in Overseas Indian Communities* (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1969), pp. 117–148.

of the *Laws of Manu* by Max Müller. Berreman primarily relied on his doctoral fieldwork in North India, and drew from the studies by Allison Davis, S.C. Dube, McKim Marriott, John Dollard, M.N. Srinivas, B. Gallagher, and Pauline Mahar, among other noted ethnographers who elaborated the study of caste. While Cox was correct in identifying the Hindu logic of caste and its intrinsic connection with ritual, he struggled to broaden the analysis to define caste as a rigid structure detrimental to progress, especially within the evolutionary debate. According to him, caste had to be understood within the cultural framework of Hinduism, which he viewed from a hermeneutic point of view.

Cox and Berreman were interested in caste for similar reasons, but their objectives differed. The comparison of race and caste gained prominence as American sociology increasingly recognized caste as a significant analytical category applicable to domestic contexts. Historiography contested with sociology, especially in view of the popularity that caste was gaining in discussions pertaining to the incidents of racial prejudice. Cox was comfortable with race because it corresponded with the Marxian idea of class (and class struggle) operating as the interpreter of slavery and racism.¹⁵⁰ However, caste put the focus squarely on cultural systems that were not only the output of slavery, but persisted in social relations beyond economism and class divides.¹⁵¹ It was a “racial caste system” that was based on inheritance, inflexibility, and literal moral authority.¹⁵² Researchers who studied the nineteenth-century American South found that class structures among the white population were also influenced by the caste system, alongside the wealth, power, and prestige of the planters. Flynn Jr. is among the notable historians of the American South who took the position that neither racial nor class exploitation alone can define our understanding of post-war America. Instead, he considers the interplay between both the “South’s culturally defined caste and economically defined class system,” which were sometimes in harmony and often opposed to each other.¹⁵³

NINETEENTH CENTURY CASTE IN AMERICA AND ANTI-CASTE

Cox and Berreman inherited historical debates that began in the late-nineteenth century. To understand them better, we need to delve into the nineteenth-century global politics of coloured solidarity. This moment became the impetus for early twentieth-century scholarly interventions in caste, race, and class in America. One of the most significant episodes in the caste–race debate can be seen in a popular anti-racism, abolitionist journal, *Anti-Caste*. Published by radical Quaker activist Catherine Impey from Somerset, England, in 1888, Impey struggled to foreground a

¹⁵⁰ He saw this as ‘racial antagonism’ developed after the ‘commercialization of labor in the West Indies, the East Indies, and in America’, where the businessmen of different European centre ‘cities’ competed for profit. Cox, *Caste, Class & Race*.

¹⁵¹ Charles L. Flynn, Jr., *White Land, Black Labor Caste and Class in Late Nineteenth-Century Georgia* (Baton Rouge, 1983).

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., pp. 2–3. Interestingly, Cox is willing to agree that caste is an extremely ‘powerful’ form of cultural organization existing since antiquity. Cox, ‘Race and Caste’, p. 368.

unified definition of caste. Early on, she aimed to address the concept of “colour caste,” which encouraged arbitrary distinctions based on social ranks.¹⁵⁴

Impey came upon this idea after experiencing first-hand the problems faced by black people in America. Her meeting with Frederick Douglass led Impey to start *Anti-Caste*. The lynchings in the American South were graphically reported in *Anti-Caste*. Several African American commentators sent in their own testimonials of the horrifying lynching cases that were published in the journal. This phenomenon was noted as violence among the coloured classes. Caste as a category of analytical distinction did not make for an elaborate read in the pages of the journal.

When Impey travelled to Philadelphia, she engaged widely in public debate. At one public meeting, she had an audience with the noted journalist and anti-lynching activist, Ida B. Wells, who then became associated with the journal *Anti-Caste*. It is also said that alongside Celestine Edwards and Impey, Wells edited a special number of *Anti-Caste* as well.¹⁵⁵ Following their meeting in the US, Wells was invited by Impey and her colleague, the author and activist Isabelle Fyvie Mayo, to tour England and Scotland in 1893 and 1894 and garner support for her movement against lynching.¹⁵⁶ In her autobiography, Wells notes the work of Impey and the *Anti-Caste* journal. She seems well-informed about the issue of caste in India and America, observing how caste was practiced by Great Britain in India and noting that Impey was also “interested in the treatment of darker races everywhere”.¹⁵⁷ According to Wells, caste was a problem of colour mediated by the state. Here, caste is understood as the problem of the darker races, which has applicability everywhere. Thus, caste meant an amalgamation of colonization, exploitation, violence, and subjection, widely present in major societies of the nineteenth century. It was a recognized way of delineating societies which relied on the coded hierarchies based on birth.

Anti-Caste advocated for equality through reform rather than the system overthrow proposed by more radical movements. Anti-Caste was not concerned with slavery or “legalized oppression” but with “social oppression”.¹⁵⁸ This was understood to extend beyond then-existing legal paradigms underscored in the liberal structure of citizenship for freed slaves. Caste was truly an international category that relied on international connections between the various anti-caste movements of Indian, African, European, and American societies. It was essential to have a coordinated, interconnected lobby to combat racism around the world.¹⁵⁹ Since the challenges were similar, it was advantageous to form a united alliance.

However, not all agreed with this proposition. Commentators like Lala Lajpat Rai, an Indian nationalist, argued for the neat separation of caste- and race-based hierarchies. His protagonist as a theorist of caste, who helped separate India from

¹⁵⁴ *Anti-Caste*, 1, March 1888, taken from Caroline Bressey, ‘Reporting oppression: mapping racial prejudice in Anti-Caste and Fraternity, 1888-1895’, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 38, 2012, fn. 59, p. 406.

¹⁵⁵ Bressey, ‘Reporting oppression’, fn. 117, p. 410.

¹⁵⁶ Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago, 2020), second edition, p. 75.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 71, 75.

¹⁵⁸ Bressey, ‘Reporting oppression’, p. 401.

¹⁵⁹ Roderick Ellis Mitcham, *Geographies of Global Humanitarianism: The Anti-Slavery Society and the Aborigines Protection Society, 1884-1933*, PhD thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2001, in *ibid.*, fn. 16, p. 402.

the US, was none other than Manu, the author of the Manusmriti. While he acknowledged parallels between caste and race in America, Rai found the peculiarity of caste to be confined to Hinduism. What then differentiated caste from race was religion—Hinduism versus Christianity.¹⁶⁰

LALA LAJPAT RAI AND “CASTE IN AMERICA”

‘To me the prospect of the disappearance of the caste feeling in America, in the near future at least, seems to be very meagre.’¹⁶¹

Rai put the condition of the “Negro” next to that of the Hindu by drawing a contradistinction between Hinduism and Christianity. His outlook towards society was influenced by his affiliation to the reformist organization, Arya Samaj. In fact, he had earlier written a book by the same title. The Arya Samaj had issues with some interpretations of the caste system in the Hindu religion.¹⁶²

Rai was an enthusiastic traveller. He wanted to travel the British dominions and America to understand societies and their politics. In particular, he wanted to study the social relations in America. A well-read and erudite social liberal, Rai was an Indian nationalist. Along with Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai formed an anti-imperialist alliance to demonstrate pan-Indian unity, popularized as “Lal-Bal-Pal”.

Rai visited United States after his stint in England in November 1914. He was introduced to a few people in America, one of whom Rai mentions in his book’s preface, namely Edwin Seligman of Columbia University—who, incidentally, was Ambedkar’s teacher. It is through Seligman that Rai perhaps might have sought out Ambedkar in New York City. Rai covered the enormous entirety of America by visiting various important places and meeting various important people, including professors at top universities and colleges, attorneys, editors, journalists, Christian preachers, Indian communities in America, especially the Hindusthanee Students’ Association, and other individuals. After surveying the various facets of American life, Rai recorded his travelogue as a treatise entitled *The United States of America: A Hindu’s Impressions and a Study* (1916).

During his travel in America, Rai made a point of visiting Black American quarters that exposed him to the condition of “coloured people”. He penned the summaries of his travelogue as impressions of a Hindu with distaste for the caste system, yet benignly upper caste in his leanings. Rai was a Bania from Punjab who was one of the prominent leaders of the Arya Samaj movement, which exerted significant influence in the northern states of India and aimed to unify Hindus of all castes into a single community and nation. While in America, Rai developed intimate ties with the black leadership, including with W.E.B. Du Bois, upon whom

¹⁶⁰ Lala Lajpat Rai, *The United States of America: A Hindu’s Impression and a study* (Calcutta, 1916), pp. 387–390.

¹⁶¹ Rai, *ibid.*, p. 395.

¹⁶² Lala Lajpat Rai, *The Arya Samaj An Account Of Its Origin, Doctrines, And Activities, With A Biographical Sketch Of The Founder* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1915)

Rai handsomely relied, and vice versa.¹⁶³ This connection led Rai to critically examine race and the colour problem of America, which he identified as “Caste in America”—the penultimate chapter of his book, *The United States of America*.

This chapter is not thematically arranged, which thus lacks a cohesive argument. Rai’s chapter presents a complex, sometimes contradictory analysis that oscillates between different arguments and conclusions. It wants to appear as an impartial ethnography, while at the same time refusing to question some of its own easily challenged findings. It is critical of caste society, while at the same time revelling in the purity of Brahmins as the ‘high-minded, noble-spirited, self-denying and unselfish leaders of the society’.¹⁶⁴ First, the author berates the “highly jealous” Brahmins for setting up of the caste system.¹⁶⁵ He detests the Hindu caste system and untouchability, but at the same time, offers a defence of it by suggesting that this ancient division was “well suited” to its times and based on ‘fundamentally right ideas’. Alongside this, in the same paragraph, he defends Hinduism by asserting that caste was not inherently part of the faith itself.¹⁶⁶ Rai wants to criticize the caste system, but at the same time, to preserve the superiority of his culture and religion in the face of challenge by American missionaries; to defend the great Hindu civilization against their calumnies.

Rai’s conception of caste in America was multifaceted, lacking a fixed definition. His understanding of caste encompassed aspects of colour, race, religion (particularly Christianity), economic systems (capitalism), and mechanisms of social differentiation and prejudice. This prejudice, Rai contends, is less racial than economic and political. It is against equality. He emphasizes how the fair-skinned black people of America as well as the Hindus who, like white Americans, were of Aryan stock, were also victims of prejudice. “Varna” means colour and so the discriminations in India were identical to those in America, which promoted stratification and prohibited the free mixing of different categories of people. Rai saw Manu’s ideas incarnated in American life, seeing how endogamy ruled and proscribed the inter-mixing of lower and upper castes. This observation was legally sanctioned by the American courts and thus had public approval. Rai’s observations were informed both by his first-hand experiences in America and his understanding of India’s caste system. The defence of the system by the privileged and the epithets about “lazy” and “insubordinate” black workers hit home for him, too. His comparison was a useful plot to subside the injury of caste by casually relativizing it with race. This allowed Rai to criticize Americans for the same sins they condemned among Indians while simultaneously creating a kind of brotherhood with them.

Even though Rai relied on comparisons between the Indian caste system and America’s colour discrimination, he touched on the critical aspects of American

¹⁶³ Du Bois features admirably in Rai’s description of the social problems of America. He calls Du Bois the gifted writer whose *The Souls of Black Folk* was a most “forcible and masterly” exposition of the colour question in America. Dohra Ahmad, “More than Romance”: Genre and Geography in *Dark Princes*, *ELH*, Vol. 69, No. 3, 2002, pp. 775–803.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 398.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 398.

caste mainly through anecdotes. His empirical observations were not adequately reported in the text. The lower status of the black worker, the hesitation of whites in accepting the equality of black people, racial gradations in occupations, and the regulation of social mixing and protection of women's sexuality and sexual practices are some of the traits that find mention in Rai's chapter, allowing him to examine caste in American society. He also looks at what he called the European caste system, which divided society into five estates: priests, feudal lords, traders, ordinary labourers, and serfs. Rai's purpose, it seems, was to offer a defence of the Hindu caste system in comparison with the American one. He is willing to criticize caste but not the Hindu religion. And in doing so, he subtly offers justification for the caste system. That is why his takedown of America's colour problem, which he saw as a caste problem, is contradictory and difficult to follow.

There was plenty of writing available on the caste system in India that attributed its existence to the Hindu social order. Jyotirao Phule's treatise on caste saw Vedic or Aryan culture as an inheritor of the caste system.¹⁶⁷ He was not alone. Even the famous nationalist B.G. Tilak had believed in the superiority of the Brahmin race as a caste group.¹⁶⁸ Rai's argument can be seen as an intervention in the long colonial debate about the hierarchy of civilizations, led by the elite ruling classes. Lala Lajpat Rai's comparative treatment of Indian caste and American race, in other words, both engaged with and departed from the ontology of caste and race understanding formulated by the caste school of race relations in America.¹⁶⁹

Cox's analysis of Indian social relations appears to have been based on limited or inaccurate information. He was anxious about the political future of black people in America. He saw the use of caste in America as "obfuscat[ing]" race relations, which was "misleading" the cause.¹⁷⁰ He went so far as to declare that caste in America was a "mystical concept" that is neither a theory, hypothesis, nor a description of its society.¹⁷¹ Perhaps Cox saw the majority of white anthropologists diverting their attention from anti-black racism during the Jim Crow era by presenting it as a global phenomenon, which Rai also attempted to justify for his own reasons. Cox was so convinced of his argument that he erroneously proclaimed the passivity and assimilation of outcastes in the caste Hindu project. He argued against the "universalizing" of caste by applying cross-cultural comparisons that would keep the focus limited within a particular society. Instead, Cox argued caste "constituted the social and institutional structure of a distinct pattern of culture". The amenability of caste in adjusting and adapting to the religious sentiments hardwired into institutions and structures sat at its core.

Louis Dumont, one of the noted French sociologists who studied caste in the later 20th century, agreed with Cox's "admirable insight", though he differed from

¹⁶⁷ Jyotirao Phule, *Gulamgiri (Slavery In This Civilised British Government under the Cloak of Brahmanism)* (Pune: Poona City Press, 1873), <https://archive.org/details/slaveryincivilis00phul/page/n5/mode/2up>.

¹⁶⁸ B G Tilak, *The Aric Home in the Vedas, Being Also A New Key To The Interpretation Of Many Vedic Texts and Legends* (Poona: Kesari, 1903)

¹⁶⁹ Slate N, *Coloured Cosmopolitan The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012)

¹⁷⁰ Cox, 'Race and Caste: A Distinction', p. 368.

¹⁷¹ Cox, *ibid.*, p. 368.

him. Dumont noted that Cox was relying on secondary and even third-hand sources on caste, mostly from the French scholar Bouglé. The idea of religion as intrinsic to society was unfathomable to Cox. For a Western audience, religion could be separated from state and society. Much of Cox's understanding stemmed from "our most rooted Western prejudices", Dumont concluded.¹⁷² There was much more to the situation than the fact of India being a society based on inequality due to the intimate relationship of the state with religion. Cox particularized caste by arguing for its religion origin. Contrastingly, the "American creed" that Myrdal referred to in his work, was premised on free competition and a system of egalitarian order. This distinction could occur due to the belief that society and religion were comingling factors in producing inequality, as opposed to them being separate, thus undermining caste-based distinctions.

SUB-SUB-CASTES

A prominent feature of the caste system is the solidification of multiple sub-castes. In the South and Central American context, the seven prominent castes had further divisions which varied according to geographical location. There existed "divisions and sub-divisions" amongst these castes along the lines of tribe, colour, common origin, and language.¹⁷³ In the Indian context, these are known as jatis that exist within each of the four or five major castes. In addition to the sub-castes, there are further divisions, giving rise to sub-sub-caste lineages (gotra).¹⁷⁴ E.A. Blunt, who worked on the 1911 census, conducted investigations into "certain specific aspects of castes".¹⁷⁵ His detailed enquiry in northern India gave him insights into the function of castes. He found the subdivisions of castes fragment further into "smaller groups of the same nature" as "sub-subcastes."¹⁷⁶ The untouchable caste group Mahar (which is a sub-caste), for example, has 12.5 sub-sub-caste groups like Laadvan, Aandvan, Somosh, Tilvanshi, Bawane, etc. The Brahmins are divided into two larger "fraternities—Dravida and Gaudas".¹⁷⁷ Among them there are nearly 1620 castes. The sub-castes further trickle down to the sub-sub-castes. Take the Maharashtra Brahmins who have two prominent divisions: Konkanstha and Deshastha (a rival faction of Brahmins), the Saraswat Brahmins are further divided into many seven divisions as reported by their organization Saraswat Vidyarthi Sahayak Mandal.¹⁷⁸ The same hierarchical ranking of various sub-sub-castes are maintained in practice and exchange among Brahmins and other castes.

¹⁷² Dumont, p. 254, 255.

¹⁷³ H.G. Ward, *Mexico*, Vol. 1 (London, 1829), 23–24.

¹⁷⁴ G S Ghurye, *Caste and Race in India* (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, [1932] 1969), p. 184; Ketkar also suggests that the subdivisions of castes in several groups form gotras, and the gotras are an exogamous entity. Shridhar Venkatesh Ketkar, *History of Caste in India Evidence Of The Laws Of Manu On The Social Conditions In India During The Third Century A.D. Interpreted And Examined* (Ithaca, N.Y, 1909), 17.

¹⁷⁵ E A Blunt, *The Caste System Of Northern India With Special Reference to the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931), p. v

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49

¹⁷⁷ B R Ambedkar, 'The Curse of Caste', in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches Vol. 5* (Mumbai, (1989) 2014), p. 211

¹⁷⁸ Ghurye, *Caste*, p. 194-5. Ambedkar collates another data that gives him 1866 total Brahmin sub-castes. While the Saraswat alone in Punjab were nearly 490. He prefaced by saying that nobody had made an "exact computation" of the sub caste numbers. Ambedkar, [1936] 1987, p. 45.

The caste system is a generic totem. However, in actuality, it is the sub-subgroup that maintains the functionality of the system. Sub-sub-castes have independent religious beliefs about the deity. Some of them have different Hindu sects or orientations such as Vedanta, Vaishnavites, Shaivites. Sub-sub-castes in the Marathwada region of Maharashtra are expressed as *pahuné*, *soyrey* (relatives) to connote an indirect reference to the bond between the sub-sub-caste groups that have different last names. The existence of sub-sub-castes is knowledge for intra-caste relationships and have little to do with outside the caste groups.¹⁷⁹ However, in recent political battles, candidates from specific sub-castes and sub-sub-castes are preferred over the demography despite them belonging to the same castes.

Edward Gait, one of the colonial officials and co-authors of the Census report of 1901 and 1911, argues that the ‘chief characteristic of a caste is to treat all so-called sub-castes as the real castes’.¹⁸⁰ The sub-caste identification is paramount for the outside world to establish the location, a la social position of a particular caste. However, sub-sub-caste distinctions are crucial for the internal caste groups to find their absolute totemic fixation in the caste ladder. This identifier is very important, for it indicates the “purity” of the blood line, which in turn helps in finding the right partner in intra-caste endogamous marriages.

In the classical social anthropological model, there is an inclination to adhere to this phenomenon of kinship, which appears similar to the familial intra-blood bonds—maternal and paternal ancestry. Irawati Karvé, in her two-part article, reported the use of different terminologies concerning kinship in Maharashtra that are blood-related kin within the consanguineal family.¹⁸¹ Sub-sub-castes are not blood-related in the sense of direct descendants, but they pretend to have a common lineage that is not tied to one gotra. It, therefore, gives permission to marry within the specific sub-sub-castes as ‘exogamous sections’.¹⁸² Here the principle of endogamy betrays for the simple reason that the familiarity of marriages within the closed group is nurtured at the intimate sub-sub-caste level. All the above caste and subcaste formations are generally endogamous outside gotras. The nature of gotras is exogamous. I have noticed that among Mahars of Maharashtra, sub-sub-castes play a role in marriage, while the same was reported in Mangs, the Deccan Brahmins, and coastal Brahmins. Though a common religious identity does skirt the sub-sub-caste importance such as Buddhists or Hindu. In regular life in rural and urban areas these issues do crop up. In particular, the rural economy of social relations is governed by village laws that are feudal dominated and caste oriented.

Keeping a close watch on interpersonal relations governs the state of caste life in the overly romanticized term “village republic”, first mentioned by Sir Charles

¹⁷⁹ Ghurye, *Caste*, p. 195-6

¹⁸⁰ The same was argued by Irawati Karave. Both quoted in Ghurye, *Caste*, p. 19, 182; Ketkar, *History*, p. 15; M N Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays* (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1962).

¹⁸¹ Irawati Karvé, ‘Kinship Terminology and Kinship Usages of the Marāthā Country’, *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute*, Vol 1, No. 2/4, March, 1940, pp. 327–389; Irawati Karvé, ‘Kinship Terminology and Kinship Usages of the Marāthā Country: Part II’, *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute*, Vol. 2, No. 1/2, Nov. 1940, pp. 9-33.

¹⁸² Blunt, *Caste*, p. 49

Metcalf in his East India Company report and later refashioned by Gandhi.¹⁸³ Endogamy serves as the primary purpose for the retention of the caste system. Ambedkar argued that endogamy ‘is the only one that can be called the essence of Caste when rightly understood’.¹⁸⁴

In the US context, endogamy remained a reality within broader colour-coded groups but did not extend further as in the case of sub-sub-caste classifications. Although linguistic and regional dynamics did constitute a factor in endogamous practices among African Americans and in the immense diversity of European Americans, the broader objective of maintaining endogamy was to confine the debate within coloured groups. Race pride did not mean being confined to ‘intra societal groups’ as in the caste system, but rather, reaching out to an entire people who had been coded by a singular ‘commanding loyalty in a body’.¹⁸⁵ The body here describes black and white corporeality that one had to declare their alliance to.

In the case of the American caste, white superiority was protected in what were called “sexual gains”¹⁸⁶ for the white man, because he had free access to both black and white women without any necessary repercussions. However, the black man–white woman relationship was liable to suffer a fatal outcome. This scenario was described early on by the framer of caste codes, Manu, in his lawbook *Manusmriti*. The idea of anuloma refers to the sexual gain of an upper caste man over a lower caste woman. The “punishment” for this act is negligible, compared to pratiloma, which is the equivalent for a lower caste man and upper caste woman. The woman of higher caste status, if married to or cohabiting with a lower caste man, was condemned to severe punishment. Inter-caste relationships and love affairs are among the most regulated relations of caste society.

Berremen described caste, for the sake of generalization, as a concept of ‘endogamous divisions in which membership is hereditary and permanent’.¹⁸⁷ Miscegenation was illegal in many U.S. states and upheld by court decisions until 1967. However, it was not until 1967 and the famous case of *Loving v. Virginia* that such anti-miscegenation laws were declared unconstitutional. Today, in the post-anti-miscegenation era, the acceptance of interracial marriage is encouraged and appreciated. Pew research observed that ‘One in six U.S. newlyweds (17%) were married to a person of a different race or ethnicity in 2015, a more than fivefold increase from 3% in 1967’.¹⁸⁸

In contrast, inter-caste marriages in India often face significant social opposition, many times resulting in violence. In a survey of about 43,000

¹⁸³ Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee on the affairs of the East India Company, vol. ii (Revenue), Appendix 84, 1832, 331–2.

¹⁸⁴ B.R. Ambedkar, ‘Caste in India Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development’, *Indian Antiquary*, Vol. XLI, May 1917. http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/txt_ambedkar_castes.html.

¹⁸⁵ Cox, *ibid.*, 363.

¹⁸⁶ Dollard, *Caste and class in a Southern town*. In his five months of ethnographic work, Dollard worked with the models proposed by W. Lloyd Warner that of caste-class analysis of two racial castes—white and black.

¹⁸⁷ Berremen, *ibid.*, 120.

¹⁸⁸ Pew Research, ‘Key facts about race and marriage, 50 years after *Loving v. Virginia*’, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/12/key-facts-about-race-and-marriage-50-years-after-loving-v-virginia/>.

households, it was discovered that 89.04 per cent of women marry within the same caste. The percentage of women marrying below their caste was 5.38 per cent and above their caste was 5.08 per cent.¹⁸⁹

Ambedkar goes a step further to present the ontology of caste and its role in controlling the sexuality of gendered bodies.¹⁹⁰ His thesis on the caste system centralized women as the primary carrier of caste. By controlling her sexuality and reproduction, the potential difficulties of maintaining castes were curbed. The possibility of women's autonomy over their bodies and reproduction posed a questionable future to the purity-based caste system. When the blood of diverse castes is mixed, it is hard to categorise them into neatly prescribed categories of jaatis. Nonetheless, *Manusmriti* came up with a glossary of categories to fixate the progenies born out of the union of exogamy. This argument of Ambedkar's was not pursued with empirical research by sociologists and anthropologists of caste or rural relations.

One of the reasons Ambedkar's theses remained unknown outside academic circles can be attributed to his departure from the traditional scholarship on caste in the social sciences. He did not publish in sociology journals and bemoaned the fact that class, communalism, and nationalism received extraordinary attention in comparison to caste. Ambedkar's first-hand knowledge of the caste system was not reported either in the works of Berreman, Cox, Myrdal or other scholars of the time, who were making definitive claims about the caste system even if these were sometimes erroneous and without adequate evidence.

Rai's definition of caste was informed by his personal experience as an Indian Bania and his activist interest in foreign societies. Rai's project was largely political. He wanted to use American examples to advance his nationalist cause against the British colonial regime, which was seen in a white-coloured context. Similarly, Cox, Berreman, Dumont, Dollard, Davis, and Lloyd Warner, among others who studied caste, had an intended objective to theorize caste in the framework of nation and culture. The geographical angle of spatiality and culture was the focus of these debates and took place within this framework.

The American theorization of caste was allegorical and placed in "cross-cultural studies". Amongst the two camps, there was one agreement: to interpret America in its uniqueness—as American essentialization of caste. The naysayers like Cox wanted to analyse American social categories through class and racial dynamics. At the same time, the other camp was redefining caste as an American creation of purity for the New World. The second agreement in this debate was the application of the modern and ancient paradigm to America and India, where America was viewed as a modern nation with Enlightenment values, while India was seen as an ancient republic with traditional Hindu values.

¹⁸⁹ Kumudini Das, 'Inter-caste Marriage in India: Has it really changed over time?', *European Population Conference*, Vienna, 1–4 September 2010, Session 24: Social and ethnic intermarriage.

<https://epc2010.princeton.edu/papers/100157>.

¹⁹⁰ Ambedkar, 'Caste in India'

Thus, the correct question is not what caste did to America but what America did to caste. In the latter, we notice that American experiments with democracy and capitalism were largely unchallenged by the original creed of the American empire that predated constitutional republicanism. With caste coming into the picture, the American historical order was put to a critical lens that exposed the vulnerabilities within the cracks.

UNTOUCHABILITY

Untouchability manifests in various practices that reinforce a hierarchical order of contempt from higher to lower castes. G S Ghurye, one of the pioneering sociologists of India to study caste describes the “features of the caste system”. He looks at the fines and punishments incurred by various caste subjects for defying the rules required of them. Punishments for such offences include outcasting (temporary or permanent), fines, feasts to be offered one’s caste fellows, corporal punishment, and religious expiation.¹⁹¹ This is what makes untouchability a feature of the caste system with the potential to remain unique to the Hindu-Brahminical system. However, the norms of untouchability can exist in other societies and under different material conditions. Caste-based untouchability is prescribed through a ranking order, whose status is predetermined and protected by the community’s rules. Marriage, vocation, spatial segregation, and political power are designed to preserve this aspect of the caste system. Untouchability as a psychological enactment is exercised on the exterior elements of one’s environment.

Untouchability denotes a sensorial proscription of touch and disgust.¹⁹² Gopal Guru argues that the corporeal self represents and is always at risk from dirt—filthiness in both moral and material senses. Therefore, the body indicates a kind of “ontological unity” as it is composed of the same elements—the *panchmahabhute*, comprised of air, water, sky, earth, and fire, across time and space. The readiness to align oneself with the Other presupposes exposing oneself to his impurity in a kind of “moral relativism” because it makes it “difficult to produce a negative judgment of others”.¹⁹³

The impurity of corporeality is stronger than the corporal mass itself. Even the lifeless shadow of a Dalit carries the enormity of contamination. One of the determinants of untouchability is the shadow of a Dalit that has the exteriorized possibility of carrying the weight of caste beyond corporeality. This power of the Dalit extends beyond the materiality of their selves. Thus, to prevent Dalits from exercising their negative power, they were prevented from accessing the space of upper-caste fragility. They were permitted to enter cities or village centres only from late afternoon to early morning when their shadows were limited and did not defile others.

¹⁹¹ Ghurye, *ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁹² Sundar Sarukkai, ‘Phenomenology of Untouchability’.

¹⁹³ Gopal Guru, ‘Archaeology of Untouchability’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 44, No. 37 (September 12-18, 2009), 49-56.

If seen in the politicized racial context in America or in South Africa, we can notice that the parallels remain, but the rationale is different. In South Africa or Jim Crow-era America, restrictions on the black body to enter and traverse towns were far more significant. The separation of eating facilities and seating reserved for “Blacks only” in public spaces meant minimizing touch and interaction, let alone the prospect of social intercourse, between black and white groups. Social untouchability was a defining characteristic attributed to reasons such as purity and impurity (pollution).

The concept of touch fundamentally shaped the lives of untouchables, affecting nearly every aspect of their daily existence. Physical touch was not the only significant attribute; a distant touch exercised through the visual or aural extension of oneself also mattered. Even interactions with natural elements were strictly regulated for untouchables. An untouchable couldn't come in contact with the flowing water of river Ganges, while the common pond or the well would be polluted if an untouchable drew water from it. In case he was thirsty, the untouchable would have to patiently wait, until a touchable passed by and did her the favour of drawing water from the well. A mere touch on the precincts of the well would pollute the entire well. Therefore, untouchables had to wait for the water to be dropped from a certain height. The custom of drinking water with folded palms in a cup-like gesture is widely practiced even today.

Food remains segregated and separated in the caste system. Brahmins do not accept food made by untouchables, whatever its quality. Food is also central to the caste system where touch and saliva can freely intermix. Therefore, to encourage inter-caste affairs, inter-caste dining was initiated by Ambedkar and promptly followed by his higher caste comrades.¹⁹⁴ This initiative also received worldwide attention, especially from African Americans. In his weekly column for the Pittsburgh Courier, conservative columnist George Schuyler appealed to the “Negro” leaders to learn lessons from Ambedkar's efforts for the Dalit community in ceasing segregation.¹⁹⁵

Such is the force of inter-dining that today it is considered a marker of progress and caste harmony. Every major Brahminical political party organizes food exchange initiatives with Dalits. Many dominant caste leaders pay a visit during election campaigns once in every five years to a Dalit's house to eat. Images of such visits are broadcast across India to demonstrate that there is an acceptance of Dalits as equals. The acts of eating food and drinking water at Dalit houses are considered revolutionary. This indicates that the caste dynamics of untouchability are still relevant and prevalent.¹⁹⁶ This is why Ambedkar's first agitation—for the

¹⁹⁴ Suraj Yengde, *Caste Matters* (Gurgaon, 2019).

¹⁹⁵ Suraj Yengde, ‘Dalit in Black America: Race, Caste, and the Making of Dalit-Black Archives’, *Public Culture*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (98) (2023), pp. 21-41. DOI 10.1215/08992363-10202374

¹⁹⁶ Bhanwar Meghwanshi's memoir talks about his experience of operating in a Brahminical organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh or the RSS, where the food prepared by his hands was unacceptable to his Brahmin compatriots.

right to access common water resources in the Mahad satyagraha, was such a hit and at the same time invited the wrath of disgruntled upper-caste groups.¹⁹⁷

GLOBAL EXPERIENCES OF CASTE

Caste-like features exist in other parts of the world, as demonstrated in various research works spanning Africa, Japan, Arabia, Polynesia, and France (Cagots) in Europe.¹⁹⁸

Shridhar Venkatesh Ketkar was the first Indian sociologist to have received a doctorate from the US at Cornell University in the 1910s for studying caste. Ketkar was a foundational figure to have brought forth the critical discussion of caste and Hinduism. He had argued for the applicability of caste principles beyond India in the first decade of the twentieth century. That decade was filled with critical discussions about colour line in America. He found caste to be located as much in the India's Vedic society as in the America's colour society. For him, the notion of caste was based on the "tendencies of mind" which, in common parlance, could be "found among all peoples on the globe".¹⁹⁹ Looking at the principles of marriage, organization of society, hierarchy and endogamy, Ketkar charted examples from America, Britain and Europe, including Sweden, France, Germany, the South Sea Islands and Polynesia.²⁰⁰

Ketkar was following new developments in the sociological discipline and the growing discipline of anthropology, which started off as a comparative examination of societies. Cultural traits were used as a primary identifier for distinguishing societies, instead of evolutionary approaches to race or caste. Franz Boas' pathbreaking research encouraged many scholars across the world to look at societies through differences not located in race or biology.²⁰¹ Around the same time when Ketkar was writing, there was a popular move towards finding similarities pertaining to social status in culturally distinct societies.

The same approach was followed by many researchers who aimed to develop a cultural understanding of society. One of them was Boas's student, Melville Herskovits, known for his treatment of cultural relativism.²⁰² It gained popularity across various disciplines in African societies: social history, cultural studies, and anthropology adopted the same epistemological approach to other societies beyond Africa, North America, or South Asia.

Even today, the Oxford historian David Priestland uses the framework of caste as a theoretical and methodological structure to make sense of human history

¹⁹⁷ Anand Teltumbde, *MAHAD: The Making of the First Dalit Revolt* (New Delhi, 2019).

¹⁹⁸ For a summary of this, see Suraj Yengde, "Global Castes", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 2, Feb. 2022, pp. 340–360. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2021.1924394>.

¹⁹⁹ Ketkar, *ibid.*, p. 10.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁰¹ Cf. Jesús Francisco Cháirez-Garza, 'B.R. Ambedkar, Franz Boas and the Rejection of Racial Theories of Untouchability', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2018.1431855>.

²⁰² Melville J. Herskovits, 'Some Further Comments on Cultural Relativism', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 60, No. 2, 1958, pp. 266–73.

from antiquity to present day Europe.²⁰³ He doesn't explicitly mention caste identities, as caste is constructed within the local-specific frameworks of religio-socio-economic dynamics. To explain it better, Priestland deploys categories such as sage, merchant, warrior and peasant. The strict caste hierarchical structure existed for four long millennia until modern industrialization and the radical rise of individual consciousness gave birth to a new revolutionary call for the complete abolition of exploitation.

An often overlooked aspect in comparative studies is the concept of untouchability as it applies to Brahmins. Ambedkar had argued untouchability exists among Brahmins, too, but as an autonomous and free-willed status, not as an enforced penal injunction. Brahmin untouchability was an act of self-infliction or renunciation, and it carried the highest virtue and positive value.²⁰⁴ Being a Brahmin untouchable meant subscribing to a purer form of existence which lent exclusive access to higher spiritual empowerment. However, in the case of Dalit untouchable groups, the specification was different. It was an enforced condition that invited contempt. Sarukkai argues that those Brahmins who failed to attain their higher spiritual self, constituted an entire group of untouchables. In order to combat the problem of Brahmin failure, a class of non-Brahmin untouchables was important to emphasize the sanctity of Brahminhood.²⁰⁵ This confirms Ambedkar's theory of Brahmins and untouchables belonging to one corporeal self of the same race and therefore as two sides of the same coin.²⁰⁶ Drawing upon this formulation, Arjun Appadurai distinguishes between contact and untouchability. He argues contact is relational-dependent on mutuality, while untouchability is imposed in the metrics of power relations.²⁰⁷

In the context of white-black relations, the process of white individuals elevating their status by negating the capacities of black individuals was often dismissed as inconsequential. In genetic theory, Africans were said to be resilient to some life-taking diseases. Yet their assumed genetic superiority over Europeans paradoxically positioned them in a position of racialized inferiority. Social Darwinism repeatedly constructed "scientific" justifications for categorizing Africans as inherently inferior. And therefore, race became accepted as a term to unite biological theory and experience.

In more recent times, Stuart Hall advanced a concept of race understood through the interlocking themes of global social order, which he rooted in the theoretical framework of cultural studies.²⁰⁸ Race, ethnicity, diaspora, and nation are prominent categories that work with each other in the cause of mutual definition. They cannot exist in isolation and that is why race, according to Hall, is

²⁰³ David Priestland, *Merchant, Solider, Sage A New History of Power* (London: Allen Lane, 2012).

²⁰⁴ In the Iberian world too, caste came to be eventually identified with positive values with regard to the "purity of blood" tracing the lineage of the patriarch. Caste was also a common noun used for good virtues. Cf. Xavier, *ibid.*, p. 107.

²⁰⁵ Sarukkai, 'Phenomenology of Untouchability'.

²⁰⁶ Ambedkar, *Who Were The Shudras*, p. 302.

²⁰⁷ Arjun Appadurai, 'The Haptic And The Phatic In The Era Of Globalization', *Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics and Innovation*, 1, 2022, pp. 1-13. DOI: 10.12893/gjcpi.2022.1.2

²⁰⁸ Stuart Hall, *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore (eds.) (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2021)

a floating signifier. It signifies more than what it says. As a signifier, race goes beyond genetic make-up and biological essence. One cannot find a figment of history in it and thus, it is amenable to being moulded according to a number of apparently extrinsic social relations.

THE BIOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RACE AND CASTE TRIUMPH

The fundamental difference between race and caste lies in their interaction with modern capitalist forces, whereas the commonality between race and caste stems from their genealogical similarities. Race evolved from a concrete difference to an abstract one when faced with the early modern material world, eventually manifesting as black and white distinctions. In the era of the Greek and Roman empires, darker-skinned people were not enslaved or looked down upon solely because of their skin colour. Historical records show black individuals holding positions of kingship and military leadership in the Graeco-Roman world. However, this did not prevent the devaluation of black skin within Greek society, albeit for different reasons than outright racist colourism as understood today. This perspective also influenced Arabic slavery practices, which persisted into the Enlightenment.²⁰⁹ The Enlightenment brought modern innovations and tools, leading to exploration, colonization, and the slave trade, during which race became a crucial category.²¹⁰

Race provided a defence against accountability for state violence. Extracting uncompensated labour from enslaved bodies was the most efficient form of guilt-free material exploitation.²¹¹ Race thus became biological, with heaps of anthropometric research and social Darwinist methodology paving a path for rationalizing the inferiority of coloured castes. In his 1909 address to the National Negro Conference, Du Bois observed how the works of Charles Darwin, August Weissman, and Francis Galton were being misinterpreted by racialists who resorted to establishing the supremacy of European races. They argued that the inferiority and incapacity of the yellow, “swarthy”, black and brown races would eventually cause them to succumb to extinction.²¹² That is why colour discrimination was justified as a reaction to keep ‘black people in their places’, and ‘not attempt to treat a Negro simply as a white man with a black face’. If the latter was done, it would ‘mean moral deterioration of the race and nation’.²¹³

²⁰⁹ To understand racism and how it has shaped European philosophy, please refer to Chapters 1, 2 and 3 of the excellent collection of essays compiled by Julie K. Ward and Tommy L. Lott (eds.), *Philosophers on Race Critical Essays* (Malden, MA., 2002).

²¹⁰ The experience of caste is interpreted in terms of society and its myths. The colonial inventories of India were the first of their kind, along with English- and German-language interpretations. The obsession with Vedic knowledge production was one of the early interventions of Europeans. Caste is also seen in three broader generalizations about Indian society, known as ‘tripartite foundation of hereditary: occupational specialization, ritualized/sacralized hierarchy, and mutual repulsion or separation’. Balmurli Natrajan, ‘From Jati to Samaj’, *Seminar* 633, May 2012, p. 54.

²¹¹ The Arab slave trade in Western Asia, Africa and Transatlantic Slavery provide a snapshot of the slave-holding colonial societies.

²¹² W.E.B. Du Bois, ‘Evolution of the Race Problem’, *Proceedings of the National Negro Conference, 31 May -1 June 1909*, New York, p. 150.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

In contrast to race, caste was not understood as a biological category. Devoid of modern capitalistic sensibilities, caste exercised a spiritual sanction that concentrated on extracting human labour according to the divine-monarchical command. Due to the repetitious instances of caste validity, it was made into a custom to be religiously observed to preserve the order of the society. There were no strict markers or biological traits that differentiated caste subjects. Although Varna, meaning colour or character as a species, was central to hyperbolic claims made for caste stratification, it did not necessarily involve the colour-coding of groups as in the case of racial segmentation in the US.

The colour component attached to biologism established the foundation for the grand claims made by the race system. Du Bois had refuted biological determinism as a factor defining racial order. In his monumental sociological work, *The Philadelphia Negro*, Du Bois makes a claim for class and social structure being responsible for the poor condition of “Negroes” and not an inherent, inferior biological aptitude attributed to the black residents of Philadelphia ghettos—who were labelled lazy, uncivilized, aggressive, and uncivil due to their racial background. This study proved to be a seminal work influencing those researching the topic.

Myrdal also laid emphasis on the non-biological and non-genetic connotations of American social relations. In his magisterial study, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, Myrdal endorsed the work of Du Bois, in particular, his *Black Reconstruction*, which pushed against the view that biological determinism was a factor in “Negro” inferiority.²¹⁴ Myrdal also cited *The Philadelphia Negro* as an example to support the thesis of non-biologism of race factor.²¹⁵

Myrdal represents an interesting episode in the world of American social science. A Swede, he was commissioned by the Carnegie Corporation of New York to undertake the behemoth task of investigating the race problem. He compiled data using ethnographic and archival material and travelled by road to capture the essence of America’s colour problem. As a result, his study found race to be an “inappropriate” category for a scientific investigation, and class as insufficient and “impractical”, since it was birthed by the groups in which fluidity was possible, so that it was only in caste that rigid structures could be appropriately analysed.²¹⁶ Caste, in many senses, was an “extreme case of absolutely rigid class”, according to Myrdal’s analysis.²¹⁷

Thus, the category of caste was used to denote the “social status difference” between white and black Americans wherein ‘the boundary is fixed [...] it is a bar erected with the intention of permanency’.²¹⁸ The fixed and rigid differences between white and black groups varied across different regions and social classes. They were also “changing in time”. Caste was used over the biologically loaded

²¹⁴ Myrdal, *ibid.*, p. 96.

²¹⁵ Myrdal, *ibid.*, p. 1132.

²¹⁶ See Myrdal, chapter 31, ‘Caste and Class’ and chapter 32 ‘The Negro Class Structure’, *An American Dilemma*.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 675.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

concept of race, which Myrdal argued was not only “static” but carried ‘much more erroneous connotations’.²¹⁹ He clearly stated the reasoning for his use of caste, writing that, ‘[T]he sole criterion in defining scientific terms is practicality. Concepts are our created instruments and have no other form of reality than in our own usage. Their purpose is to help make our thinking clear and our observations accurate’.²²⁰

Myrdal tried to clear up the controversy surrounding the use of caste terminology to understand America’s problem of race. Myrdal argued that the controversy stemmed from a conflation of two distinct yet related concepts: caste relations and caste lines. The changes observed in American society were related to American caste relations, where the divides between caste lines were seen as fixed, rigid and unblurred.²²¹ Myrdal relied on sociological and economic studies on caste and American society to understand the topic at hand. The Carnegie Corporation granted him autonomy to choose his staff and research direction, and he selected expert scholars and leaders from across the southern states. His acknowledgments reflect the complicated debates he engaged during this study. He solicited feedback from a wide range of scholars who were leaders in the field, including Franz Boas, Du Bois, E. Franklin Frazier, Allison Davis, and John Dollard.

Myrdal relied, in particular, on Charles S. Johnson’s advice. For each segment of his study, Myrdal drew upon existing works and also commissioned new research from scholars. The list indicates that critical studies of the “Negro” question in America were examined in detail and supplemented with convincing ethnography and sociology. Those who were commissioned to produce scholarship were independently stored at the Schomburg Library in New York. Some of the works that engaged with caste in the US included Allison Davis’s “Negro Churches and Associations in the Lower South”, Ashley-Montagu’s “Origin, Composition and Physical Characteristics of the American Negro Population”, T.C. McCormick’s “The Negro in Agriculture”, and Sterling Brown’s “The Negro in American Culture”.

Du Bois had argued for the significance of the caste system in the South. He had observed that caste as a racial and colour system existed both during and after slavery. His definition of caste was fluid. It was multifaceted and evolved over time, adapting to different contexts in his analysis. Sometimes it referred to the black condition in the American South. At other times, it was an academic, social research category.²²² But more importantly, his identification of race becomes an important lens to examine caste. Du Bois claimed race to be a ‘heritage of slavery’ inherited from his ancestors, who gave him the ‘colour and hair’ which became the reason for the ‘discrimination and insult’ he faced. These were ‘obvious things, but of little meaning in themselves’.²²³ Thus, Du Bois was very clear that ‘[R]ace is a cultural, sometimes an ahistorical fact’.²²⁴ Educated in the liberal North, Du Bois had closely

²¹⁹ Ibid., fn. a, p. 54.

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 667.

²²¹ Ibid., p. 668.

²²² Visweswaran, *ibid.*, p. 114; fn. 57, p. 253.

²²³ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*, (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 59

²²⁴ Ibid., p. 77.

experienced the caste system of the South. Coming from an elite Harvard educational background, Du Bois was unprepared for the predominantly religious-heavy educational curriculum at Wilberforce,²²⁵ where, as a professor, he was surprised to see the American caste system so deeply rooted in religious patterns that governed the life of black folks.

Not only black groups but also other minorities identified with the caste system to better relate their experiences. The Native American experience, unlike the Black African experience in America, was viewed through the prism of caste.²²⁶ The tracts of —black, white, Native American—were all modern identifiers developed during the phase of colonization, as were the classification of race and caste. However, according to Native American scholar Jack D. Forbes, pre-modern classifications were defined by caste, which also influenced the understanding of Europe and Africa.²²⁷ The application of caste concepts to Native American experiences highlights the versatility of caste as an analytical framework. Unlike African Americans, whose status was primarily defined by the slave/free social caste binary, Native Americans faced a complex system of tribal affiliations, reservations, and forced assimilation policies that more closely resembled hierarchical caste structures.

On the other hand, the Latino population of America found itself entangled between the legal whiteness of the American Caucasian regime as Spaniards, while remaining coloured in the “Mexican racial caste system” as people with mestizo (mixed) ancestry.²²⁸ Jorge Esguerra argues that the advent of biological determinism in colonial empires began with the Spanish Inquisition in South America.²²⁹ But this also gave rise to caste-centric metaphors which started being used in public vocabulary. Mestizos, Mestizaje and Mulattos were some of the categories that were invented to contain the racial idea of colonial difference. Over time, such differences became the foundation for rules to confine “transgressions” amongst various caste groups.²³⁰

The inconsistencies of the race paradigm across settler societies, particularly since the sixteenth-century Iberian expansion of race, are well-explored in James Belich’s work. After surveying the cartography of settler colonial society with its expansionist logic rooted in racism, Belich concludes that racism or white superiority was shaped as and when required, without paying particular attention to a definition of “white”. In his article, Belich points out that the Incas and Aztecs were given white status, a theory drawn out of thin air.²³¹

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

²²⁶ Jack D. Forbes, *Black Africans and Native Americans: Race, Caste and Colour in the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (Oxford, 1988).

²²⁷ Jack D. Forbes, ‘The Manipulation of Race, Caste and Identity: Classifying Afro Americans, Native Americans and Red-Black People’, *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 17 (4), Winter 1990. Pp. 1-51

²²⁸ Martha Menchaca, ‘Chicano Indianism: A Historical Account of Racial Repression in the United States’, *American Ethnologist*, vol. 20, no. 3, 583–603.

²²⁹ Jorge Cañizares Esguerra, ‘New World, New Stars: Patriotic Astrology and the Invention of Indian and Creole Bodies in Colonial Spanish America, 1600-1650’, *The American Historical Review*, vol. 104, no. 1, 1999, 33–68. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2650180>.

²³⁰ Ben Vinson III, *Before Mestizaje: The Frontiers of Race and Caste in Colonial Mexico* (New York, 2018).

²³¹ James Belich, ‘Race’, in *Pacific Histories. Ocean, Land, People*, ed. by David Armitage and Alison Bashford (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 271.

Similarly, Japanese colonialism was viewed through the lens of European values, leading some commentators to identify them as “Aryan”: ‘White men, belonging to the great Aryan family [...] were the first Japanese’.²³² The classification of individuals into specific racial or colour groups varies across historically contextual societies with distinct registers of race and colour. For instance, a black identifying scholar in the US told me she was identified as white in Brazil and part of a mixed community in New Zealand, while her blackness was a crucial aspect to her American citizenship.

The marking of racial categories in relation to ‘occupation, status, cultural cohesion’ is a hallmark of a caste society. The theories of race science and social science around colour difference were still evolving at that time. Many were curious about these terminologies and their applicability to their diverse native and foreign societies. They were trying to appropriate the latest understandings of societies that relied on markers of colonization and extractive capitalism. There wasn’t any concrete thesis to rely on. Various disciplines and intellectual enquiries were publicly made to make sense of the “Negro” or to understand why some people had darker skin. Such investigations in the eighteenth century, in France and other parts of Europe, attempted to settle the controversy over the physical and anatomical differences between the darker-skinned peoples and Europeans.²³³

Race, or *raza*, became fashionable in the sixteenth century due to Iberian coastal expeditions. Its origin may be traced back partly to the Western framing of difference in the Book of Genesis, which tells of Shem, Ham and Japhet—Noah’s sons—who were familiar to the Christians of medieval Iberia. However, the biblical account notes that humans of all nations descended from a common ancestor. The nation was referred to in the racial stock of the term. Race expressed clannish desires, which gave rise to myths and fictions of one’s differentiated existence.²³⁴

Since the advent of the Enlightenment, “difference” has been validated as a legitimate form of inquiry, making it easier to develop a hierarchy of races. To support slavery, “science” as knowledge had to rationalize the inferiority of dark-skinned people. Thus, eighteenth-century Europe invested heavily in deciphering and eventually justifying the inferiority of dark skin.²³⁵ The race metaphor was promulgated athwart nations, clans, tribes, and peoples. However, the putative quality of difference when studying societies is to examine the groups within. Caste, therefore, is also a study of internalized racialization. Like our understanding of race through its modern mythical origins, caste is used in the archaic sense, with fragmentary and mythical fictions without a unified foundational story. It changes as the graph of history is constructed in line with the political system in power.

²³² Quoted in Belich, “Race”, 2014, 273.

²³³ Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Andrew Curran (eds.), *Who’s Black and Why? A Hidden Chapter from the Eighteenth-Century Invention of Race* (Cambridge, MA, 2022).

²³⁴ Harney, *Race, Caste and Indigeneity*, p. 43

²³⁵ Gates Jr. and Curran, *Who’s Black and Why?*

THE INDIAN RACIAL CASTE SYSTEM

In contrast to theories of racial origin, Louis Dumont examined caste and race through the lens of hierarchy. Another concept instrumental to the caste system is the notion of purity and pollution.²³⁶ However, hierarchy is more suitable as a comparative characteristic because the central feature of race and caste is ideology. “The opposition of purity is thus the necessary ideological form of the ideal type of hierarchy,” Dumont argued.²³⁷ To identify something similar in other societies, hierarchy served as a useful comparative category.²³⁸

Caste, he argued, “is used to designate any permanent and closed status group”.²³⁹ With this criterion in mind, South African apartheid and the American colour bar may be examined as caste conditions. But he found this to be a “greater misinterpretation” because caste did not fit well with the ideologically egalitarian society of America.²⁴⁰ Dumont contradicts his own views of comparative possibilities seen in hierarchical societies. He contends that for castes to exist, there must be a defined set of castes. Because there isn't such a set in non-Indian societies, he considers it inappropriate to apply the term “caste” to the study of these societies. Taking this view further, one can argue that for a set of castes to exist, there needs to be a status hierarchy which is hereditary in nature, and a socio-economic parlance that conveys it to the rest of the castes that sit lower in the hierarchy. Ketkar compares occupation and endogamy as essential elements to identify caste systems in non-Indian societies.²⁴¹

Dumont viewed hierarchy as a conscious or ideological feature recognized through the division of labour, involving contestation for status and power, with the latter being subordinate to the former. The unit of Brahmin castes were status-oriented groups who did not draw absolute power, but due to their position, they maintained a higher, upper status over power brokers. This is the peculiarity of the caste system, Dumont argued.²⁴² To elucidate his point, he looked at the establishment of the priestly quarters of Brahmins, *agraharams* who established a monopoly over religious functions themselves.²⁴³ The coded spatiality was to maintain physical distance and economic intimacy to the avenue of commerce, temples, markets, and colonies. However, for caste to exist outside India, Dumont wonders if the equivalence of the Brahmin and Kshatriya relationship can be found elsewhere. To add further this discussion and incorporate the third varna, the Vaishya, we can see caste–capital norms thriving in Asian and pre-modern modern societies.²⁴⁴

²³⁶ Ketkar, *ibid.*, 116–123.

²³⁷ Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications* (Chicago, 1977, 1980), p. 213.

²³⁸ Dumont, *ibid.*, p. 214.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁴¹ Ketkar, *ibid.*

²⁴² Louis Dumont, *ibid.*, p. 212.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

²⁴⁴ See the analysis by David Priestland, who brings the caste order in line with the economic and social order of different societies in *Merchant, Solider, Sage*.

One of the limitations of Dumont's study is his linguistic structuralist approach to the analysis of caste.²⁴⁵ Dumont relied on behaviourism as a principle of concrete actions observed in the caste patterns. This approach invited the rage of critics, who produced an entire corpus of literature pushing back against Dumont.²⁴⁶ Dumont centralized the Brahmin figure to develop an understanding of caste, which was a departure from the structuralist notion of class as constituted by mutual differences without any centre. He was, however, not the first to do this. Prior to him, R.G. Bhandarkar, D.D. Kosambi and S.V. Ketkar had also advanced the study of caste by examining the role of the Brahmin and the status of caste and class systems in India. Dumont's unique contribution to global caste studies was to propose that analogizing caste involves examining the practices of certain caste groups that operated independently of each other yet strengthened the caste order. His reliance on the liturgical meaning varied in practice but the essence of control and dominance found its origin in the textual guidance of Brahminical religion.

CONCLUSION

The applicability of caste as an analytical category has been a subject of intense debate in both American sociology and Indian social sciences. Many in the Indian context argue for a jaati-based varna model, which sanctifies caste divisions. Jaatis are subcastes that function as autonomous units in the varna hierarchy. The debate among American sociologists has had an impact on policy and the civil rights movement.

Caste as a social order can be observed in non-Indian, non-varna societies. They function with encoded hierarchies and distribution of resources and power. The existence of caste-like structures in various societies raises important questions about their impact on social cohesion and conflict. Do non-varna castes become reasons for perpetual conflicts amongst its citizens? While, these hierarchical systems often persist through adherence to customs and traditions, they can also be sources of tension and resistance. Comparative studies of caste-like systems across different cultural contexts can provide insights into the conditions under which such hierarchies lead to overt conflict or are maintained through more subtle forms of social control.

One of the significant differences between the overt varna caste system and racial caste is the former's ability to regulate caste through sub-castes, while in the racial caste system, the grouping has to be made via fixed colour differences. Even though there is no colour uniformity, it is an ideal place for developing sub-racial castes. We have not come across such sub-racial castes. However, there exists a hierarchy in the colour regime. There is also a national, ethnic, and religious segment that could fit the classification of sub-castes among the American racialized groups.

²⁴⁵ Visweswaran, *ibid.*, p. 103.

²⁴⁶ For a debate on this, see Ritu Sen Chaudhuri, 'Ambedkar Beyond the Critique of Indology: Sexuality and Feminism in the Field of Caste', in S. Yengde, A. Teltumbde (eds.), *The Radical in Ambedkar: Critical Reflections* (Gurgaon: Allen Lane, 2018), pp. 359-374.

While untouchability is a unique and central feature of the Indian caste system, racial colour systems have developed their own forms of extreme social exclusion. Practices such as racial segregation, anti-miscegenation laws, and various forms of economic and social discrimination have created barriers comparable to untouchability in their impact on social interaction and opportunity. The key difference lies in the religious and ritual justifications for untouchability in the caste system, which are absent in secular racial ideologies. This distinction is one of the qualitative differences between caste and race-colour regimes. This theoretical postulation demands a nuanced comparison. We shall see these ideas explored in the upcoming chapters through the lens of Du Bois, Ambedkar, Fanon and Biko.

####

Chapter 3

CAN DALIT AND BLACK LIVES MATTER TOGETHER?

A DU BOIS, AMBEDKAR, AND FANONIAN PERSPECTIVE

I am inclined to think that the law of heredity is an eternal law and any attempt to alter that law must lead us, as it has before led, to utter confusion. I can see very great use in considering a Brahmin to be always a Brahmin throughout his life.

– M K Gandhi.²⁴⁷

This chapter begins by examining one of the most misfit characters of the Dalit-Black solidarity and race-caste discourse. Many anti-colonial and social justice movements outside India aligned themselves with Gandhi or portrayed his work as saintly.²⁴⁸ Regarding the liberation of Dalits, the saintliness of Gandhi's oeuvre is

²⁴⁷ Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. Vol. 22, 67 (New Delhi: Publications Division, Government of India), <https://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-literature/collected-works-of-mahatma-gandhi-volume-1-to-98.php>

²⁴⁸ M K Gandhi in the African American context had a history of the religious reverence with regard to Hindu spirituality of 'non-violence' and Christian morality of passivity. For an elaborate critical examination of this topic see,

remarkably troubling. His position on caste and the Dalit political future is an unfortunate citation in history. While this chapter opens with Gandhi's quote, it aims to complicate both Gandhi's position and the predominant rhetoric of his era regarding caste and Dalit liberation. In doing so, the chapter directs attention to the empty archives of such rhetoric that did not provide a path for anti-colonial Dalit solidarity. The absence of Dalit presence in Dalit-African public and private sphere attests to the fact that it was always meant to be undermined by the power brokers of post/anticolonial scene. Dalits were not regarded as positive individuals with the ability to think and comprehend and thus they were assumed rather than represented. The representation was yet to be made on their behalf. That is why we face a large gap in the inventories of the Dalit past and unrecorded histories. This is where my task becomes salient and interesting in that it opens the intellectual historical project to recover the archaeology of memories, aspirations, and topos.

Faced with buried histories, this chapter takes on the role of excavating evidence and deciphering existing records to reconstruct Dalit-Black solidarity. The records are sometimes direct, and often indirect. They are intellectual, existing in symbols, semiotics, gestures, care, solidarity, and ethics of universal humanism, all conveying a time frame that has the urgency of presence and a faithful investment in the future. The time frame is a common backdrop to argue for connected histories of the oppressed. In the case of the Dalit-Black archive, we shall see that the *scapes* are omnipresent and need to be interpreted to draw analogies, connections, and disagreements, unsettling the heretofore contexts and chambers of resistance that were always zoned.

Du Bois, Ambedkar, and Fanon, the three thinkers examined in this chapter, transcend geographical and cultural boundaries while grounding their arguments in their specific historical contexts. These thinkers are attaining increasing relevance in contemporary politics.²⁴⁹ These thinkers bore witness to protracted struggles against both colonialism and the entrenched cultural system of caste. Du Bois (b. 1868), Ambedkar (b. 1891), and Fanon (b. 1925) were born at different times, a mini generation apart. However, their active political and intellectual praxis commingled around the arc of global developments against colonialism, though Ambedkar had quite a distinct reading of colonialism and imperialism. Du Bois and Ambedkar were very much products of the nineteenth century, while Fanon was an intimate witness to the colonial-postcolonial program of the twentieth century. Du Bois, Ambedkar, and Fanon died a few years apart on different continents. Of the three, Fanon died the youngest at the age of 36, while Du Bois lived the longest, reaching 95 years and witnessing several generations. Ambedkar's life was cut short

Lama Choyin Rangdrol, 'Strange Bedfellows Sideline Ambedkar', in Suraj Yengde & Anand Teltumbde, *The Radical in Ambedkar: Critical Reflections* (Gurgaon: Allen Lane, 2018), pp. 311-327.

²⁴⁹ On Du Bois one can refer to 'The Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race' a journal published out of Department of African and African American Studies at Harvard University. Not least academia but also the public honouring of Du Bois medal is 'awarded to individuals in the United States and across the globe in recognition of their contributions to African and African American culture and the life of the mind.' It happens to be the Harvard University's 'highest honor in the field of African and African American studies.' As regards Ambedkar, the dawn of 1990s saw exponential rise in the appetite of Ambedkar scholarship. This decade coincided with reservation protests that drew inspiration from Ambedkar. It was also the decade of Ambedkar's birth centenary that drew people from across. On Fanon and his rise Henry Louis Gates Jr. brings to bear witness the legacy of Fanon and postcolonial debates in 'Critical Fanonianism', *Critical Inquiry*, Spring, 1991, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Spring, 1991), pp. 457-470

at the age of 65. Their deaths inspired intellectual as well as mass movements, with Ambedkar surpassing in the measure of being the uber figure of his movement in India. These men were appropriated 'as both totem and text,' as was the case with Fanon.²⁵⁰

The twenty-first century movements astutely inherit strategic actions initiated by these men of the past century. Their testimony to the world was aligned in the service of civility; they advocated for a just and equitable society, utilising the state to act in favour of the civic nature of the public as opposed to macro, abstract governance. They stood in defence of the smashed psyche and robbed history of their people, who were relegated to the status of the oppressed. If Du Bois, Ambedkar, and Fanon are to be thought of as movement-based actors of a tradition, then the teleologies of these figures need to be cemented with cross-cultural analysis. These figures, as Sartre would describe, are the 'interpreters' of the situation in their respective geographies of suffering.

This chapter examines the comparative experiences of Dalits, Africans, and African Americans, analysing their praxis and epistemologies to identify points of convergence and divergence. It will include the Dalit political response to issues of intersecting commonalities and differences with Black—African and African American politics. Gates Jr., in his analysis of race and psychoanalysis presented in Fanonian lens of the contradictions of colonized, argues against the tendency in postcolonial studies. The postcolonial canon was used to replicate imperial agendas in cultural, literary, and political discourses as the new postcolonial state was put at the helm of the new ruling castes. I agree with his position. The present thesis is unconcerned with the postcolonial itinerary of global imperial theory and history. This work does not aim to propose a 'grand unified theory of oppression'.²⁵¹ Instead, it focuses on the often-overlooked Dalit 'sociogeny,' examining provincial particularities within the context of Dalit-Black global connections. Sociogeny refers to social formations that are not predetermined by ontological existence. Rather, it is a product of sociogenesis, explaining socially produced phenomena in contrast to the concept of an individual isolated from society. This concept was advanced by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*.

DALIT-BLACK LIVES

Du Bois' concept of the 'colour line' resonated throughout the colonised world, which was struggling with the racial aspects of colonialism. Ambedkar identified this as a paradigmatic issue intertwining history, politics, and social caste. Thus, the agenda in India was set towards the annihilation of castes, while Fanon determined the paradigm of the oppressed in a world dominated by the colonial white race. These influential figures identified a transitional period, a passing temporality—a moment between the present and the future—characterised by uncertainty, in which they found themselves.

²⁵⁰ Henry Louis Gates Jr., 'Critical Fanonism,' *Critical Inquiry*, 17/ 3 (1991), p. 457.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 470.

Du Bois, Ambedkar, and Fanon were deeply invested in studying the *Other*, united in their efforts to decode its psychoanalytic nature. For Fanon, and to some extent Du Bois, this included an examination of women's desire. Fanon goes as far as to express outrage over the fetishisation of white women by some black men, which he interpreted as a form of revenge against domineering European women, who remained the *Other* in this context. Ambedkar's depiction of the *Other* similarly encountered resistance as he sought to humanise the lethal caste landscape. The *Other* for Fanon was an unpleasant experience. In his case, the *Other* participated in shaming the oppressed, the 'sexed, coloured, and colonized suffering body'.²⁵² Therefore, when examining Fanon's perspectives, we require a cross-sectional analysis of his subjects, in contrast to the approaches needed for Du Bois and Ambedkar.

In this chapter, I present selected writings and texts of Du Bois, Ambedkar, and Fanon, who have influenced various social, political, and intellectual camps around the world, and emphasise Du Bois' emancipatory characterisation to 'light anew a great world-culture'.²⁵³ The three thinkers under investigation are men, and therefore, their ideas do suggest the sexed nature of politics and culture. One cannot escape the gendered dimensions present in these figures. The notions of nation, state, violence, critique, political economy, and state war at times represent a strong, confident male character in their conceptualising. However, they were writing at a time when the idea of the male was expected to be a sentinel, one who is ready to serve and fight for the nation. In this process, though, these thinkers did not advocate for a textbook template of masculine desires as an oppositional term to non-males. Yet, their terrain was internationalist in nature, and therefore their localised experiences contributed to forming a debate advocating for a certain kind of freedom and liberation.

Upon closer examination, these men demonstrated sensitivity to those issues impacting unrepresented groups, giving centrality to women and other oppressed constituencies in their advocacy and movement. It was, as stated earlier, an internationalist, liberal, progressive thought of the twentieth century that worked with the aforementioned intra-group sensitivities.

The arguments in this chapter can be seen as a methodical hermeneutic exercise. The three influential thinkers under discussion—Du Bois, Ambedkar, and Fanon—speak for the oppressed, bespeak the oppressed, and offer a pronounceable logic that is conversant in the philosophy of the downtrodden as well as in praxis. The philosophy of the downtrodden responds to unjust oppression by those in power and is a response to the unjustified assault of the oppressor who controls the polity and state. The interchangeable process of doctrinal and social thought is an active element lived by the oppressed, preparing them to challenge the system.

The purpose of this chapter, as the title suggests, is to investigate whether

²⁵² Dayan-Herzbrun, *Foreword*. p. xiii.

²⁵³ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dark Princess: A Romance*, Introduction by Claudia Tate (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, [1928] 1955), p. 102

Dalit and Black lives can matter together, especially in light of growing demands for sharing the knowledge and discourse of the aforementioned thinkers. The emergence of a critical Dalit intellectual tradition, combined with the advancement of Dalit and Black movements in their respective geographies, provides an opportunity to explore and embrace various revolutionary praxes. This question holds significant political relevance. It not only reshapes new paradigms but also shifts the imbalanced approaches to change. The ideas presented by these thinkers propose solutions that are both structural and cultural. One cannot work in silos and certainly not in domesticated praxis anymore. There is a wider constituency of the oppressed now taking control of their demands and rallying for context and concept instead of simple issue-based political programs.

To interrogate further, a few phenomenological questions need to be asked.

1. Can one speculate on the distinctive elements of Black and Dalit, race and caste features in the present enquiry?
2. Can caste take the provenance to make a case for the Dalit-African project?
3. Can caste methodologically situate the temporal conditions of white as state, and Brahmin as devotional?

Simply put, the metamorphosis of caste into race and ethnicity as postcolonial identifiers has altered the longer history of caste from its current occurrence. Postcolonial theory, as a new genre of scholarship, developed in concurrence with the rise of subaltern intellectualism and economic neoliberalism. A literature review of the postcolonial scholarship will demonstrate how the categories of race and ethnicity received attention at the hands of black and progressive non-black scholars in the West.²⁵⁴ However, the same did not happen with caste. Relevant to the current argument, one can follow Paul Gilroy's methodology and aspiration. As Gilroy makes a case in his classic work *The Black Atlantic*, there is a need to interrogate Black aesthetics and its impact to assess the evolution of cultural studies. Gilroy emphasises the dominant role of 'race' in the context of generating postmodern fixated identities such as 'Englishness, Christianity, and other ethnic and racialized attributes' that were focused on whiteness.²⁵⁵ He proposes a semantic conception that moves beyond nation-state and ethnicities, which is the 'Black Atlantic'—a concept that speaks to the African American intellectual legacy, as well as Caribbean and Afro-diasporic enclaves in the Western Hemisphere.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ One could look at the leading academic journals and their publication record. *Transition Magazine* started in 1961, *Ethnic & Racial Studies* was started in the late 1970s with a focus on race, ethnicity, and nation but also gender, sexuality. Caste was not in the purview because it was not seen as an international category of social importance. Caste was always seen as an anthropological relic located in the antiquated societies of South Asia.

²⁵⁵ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 9.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15, 19.

DALITALITY

Geography as a marker of national identity has advantaged the dominant groups who define it. The fields of modernism, postmodernism, culture, and literary analysis of the Third World all posited an unclear agenda regarding Dalits. These fields of inquiry were preoccupied with a supposed nationalist narrative in the context of new global politics, i.e., postcolonialism. Nationalist narratives, controlled by dominant groups, advanced their cause by excluding non-elites from societal examination. Even when society was observed, it lacked recognition of Dalit existence or lifeworlds. Dalits threatened the progressive program of the state. Therefore, our geographies are group-centric, allowing heterogeneity to juxtapose with the community. That is why the idea of the global is not a paraphernalia of postcoloniality; rather, it is an uncompleted project in the colony as opposed to of the colony.

Novelist and poet Ari Gautier co-mingles the making of his Dalit and Africanness by forming a conjunctural globality of Dalit and Black sites integrated by the colonial sites.

In me live the Negro and the Dalit...
Oh yes, I am the affirmation of your doubts.²⁵⁷

Gautier was born in Madagascar to a Franco-Tamil father and a Malagasy mother.²⁵⁸ His existence and expressions are based on ‘the terms that love each other’—the Dalit, the black, or even ‘Parianegro’—an airy weighted sythensis of Paraiyan and Negro entangled with the forces of the non-British empire.

Unlike typical Francophone expansionism, Gautier's work remains uninfluenced by creole elements.²⁵⁹ Gautier frames a neo-paradigm of *Négrodalitalité*, a poetic gesture aiming to transform formerly shed identities into shared ones. From denial to embrace, the proposal is to form a common, hybrid alliance of diverse backgrounds. *Négrodalitalité* is a verselet that promises new geographies of possible histories that are perhaps not understood, nor investigated for the lack of their ‘mainstream’ totality. Gautier’s Tamil origins are locked in the caste chains of Dalit statehood that were misunderstood to be the lowest ‘Pariah’ caste. This relegation of a proud people to an outcaste resembles experiences of intra-colonial mobility of various groups to Madagascar. The Merina tribe of Madagascar has four castes: Andriana (nobles or royalty), Hova (military men, businesspeople, and farmers), Mainty (lower but with recognised privileges), and Andevo (slave castes).²⁶⁰ The injunctions imposed on the Andevos impede their free

²⁵⁷ Ari Gautier, ‘Negrodalitality’, trans. Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Il Tolomeo*, Vol. 23 – Dicembre | December | Décembre 2021, p. 59.

²⁵⁸ Ari Gautier, ‘Dalitality: Négrodalitalité, la Negrodalitality’, *The Indian Express*, Jan 23, 2022.

²⁵⁹ Ananya Jahanara Kabir, ‘Ari Gautier, *Négrodalitalité*’, *Il Tolomeo*, Vol. 23 – Dicembre | December | Décembre 2021, p. 35

²⁶⁰ Gulnara Shahinian, ‘Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences’, 24 July, 2013, A/HRC/24/43/Add.2, https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session24/Documents/A-HRC-24-43-Add2_en.pdf; Dumont, *Homo Hierarchichus*, p. 215.

access to other available avenues. They are further restricted from intercaste marriages and from accessing quality education and jobs. These directives actualise the experiences of Dalitality within the beingness spatialised into categories of black or negro.

Dalitality a kinetic form that embodies the dynamic essence of Dalit existence, centring the life of the Dalit that was never meant to be in the first place. Chronicles of the past and their histories were seldom preserved as stories of the state or original narrative of the nation. The creation and innovation led by the Dalit sphere remain unrecognised and unverified. A conscious effort to reintegrate Dalit presence in various lifeworlds and embrace their participation in a common space breathing the same air invites to combine and reproduce. The fickle ones who are threatened by the Dalit existence may find opportunities to overcome their apprehensions and embrace the wholesomeness of the Dalit identity both internally and externally.

Thus, Dalitality possesses a central axis but lacks rigid angles or boundaries. It revolves like a top, balanced on a foundation of multiple, shifting polarities. This was the objective behind portending a synthesis of different object worlds not confined to the mono-hegemony of either caste or subcaste groups. It represents an intentional resistance against notions of dominance and control. It is a space that captures them all in the local *bazaar* and defies norms of caste civility.

Dalitality represents an alternative perspective that redirects focus from hegemonic, oppressive narratives towards an introspective, potentially universal project. It is an evolving synthesis that advances various forms of pluralities through historical de-brahminisation and modern de-coloniality. It is a shape of Global Decoloniality. Dalitality is a native praxis that is not nativist in experimentation but globalist in formation.

We understand the world through simplistic narratives of explanation. Complexity belongs to the occult and to saints walking the path of *Nibanna*—ultimate freedom. The unexplained must be poetically inscribed for generations to interpret. Words exiled from the dominion of simplicity form a nation in the minds of greatness. Such vocabularies define the future. Their logics are grammatical, and their telos is care. Would a person belong to a world of injustice when their birth and lineage contest for justice and compassion for all? The premise of one's measured liberty is to care for oneself, then for others. Dalitality co-creates the meanings of dualisms.

THE UNMET TRINITY

W.E.B. Du Bois was one of the foremost pioneering thinkers, activists, and intellectual leaders of the black movement in the United States. He stood apart from other leaders of his time by not being parochial in his objectives. His progressive attitude placed him in active conversation with other radical, often leftist movements around the world, especially African and Asian anti-colonial movements. Du Bois' trajectory as a black modernist who intertwined people's

humanity with music, sociology, and literary spheres makes him a unique representative of the coloured world, predominantly situated in America but with influences extending to Africa, Europe, and even South Asia.²⁶¹ Du Bois' writings enable us to argue for black modernity, surpassing ethnocentric accounts of modern black history and politics.²⁶² Du Bois' faith in dogma as well as his scepticism towards the ideology of progress and culture created a radical axis of relationship with domestic, national, and transnationalism. He became associated with various political identities: Fabian Socialist²⁶³, Communist²⁶⁴, Marxist²⁶⁵, a committed and self-declared socialist.²⁶⁶ Like Ambedkar, Du Bois experimented with available methods to fight for the rights of his people. Both were trained in economics and had developed a profound interest in labour and worker rights.

Similarly, but in a different context, Frantz Fanon, a radical Caribbean thinker from Martinique, examined the violence of colonial, white supremacist philosophy. Trained as a psychiatrist, Fanon was involved in treating war-affected patients. Profoundly, Fanon distilled the black and white dichotomy that he learned while serving as a professional subordinate French subject. His experiences in the Algerian war exposed him to the brutality of colonialism and the widespread 'generalization of inhuman practices'.²⁶⁷ Political philosopher Achille Mbembe argues that Fanon's lived experience 'was always in progress, unstable, and changing'.²⁶⁸ This international exposure to fatality within a colonial framework pushed Fanon to advocate for a broader, more humane collective call. Fanon expected every human to engage in the process of 'self-transformation' in order to rise and revolt as a duty.²⁶⁹ Colonialism was foundational to Fanon's philosophical apparatus and political project.²⁷⁰ This methodological intervention is relevant to our analysis because some scholars view the contemporary Anthropocene as a product of 'neocolonial or paracolonial' conditions that have given rise to entrenched 'institutional racism'.²⁷¹ And this is why Fanon becomes more timely in addressing our predicaments and formulating well-thought-out answers to our urgent ailments.²⁷²

In a distinct socio-political context, far removed from the Africana world, B.

²⁶¹ Arnold Rampersad, *The Art and Imagination of W.E.B. DuBois* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1976)

²⁶² Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic Modernity*, p. 115.

²⁶³ Adolph Reed Jr., *W. E. B. Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line* (New York: OUP, 1999)

W.E.B. Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line (NY: OUP, 1999)

²⁶⁴ Anderson, Patrick, 'Pan-Africanism and Economic Nationalism: W. E. B. Du Bois's Black Reconstruction and the Failings of the 'Black Marxism' Thesis', *Journal of Black Studies*, (48) 8, 2017, pp. 732–757.

²⁶⁵ M J Saman, 'Du Bois and Marx, Du Bois and Marxism', *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, 17 (1), 2020, pp. 33-54. doi:10.1017/S1742058X20000089

²⁶⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois, 'Letter from W. E. B. Du Bois to Communist Party of the U.S.A., October 1, 1961', Du Bois Library Collection, UMass, Amherst, <https://credo.library.umass.edu/cgi-bin/pdf.cgi?id=scua:mums312-b153-i071>

²⁶⁷ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (2017), p. 161.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 162

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 167.

²⁷¹ More on Anthropocene see, Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History: Four Theses,' *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 197–222. <https://doi.org/10.1086/596640>; Dilip Menon, 'Walking on Water: Globalization and History,' *Global Perspectives*, 2020 (1): 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1525/gp.2020.12176>

²⁷² Ibid., p. 170

R. Ambedkar, a scholar from the untouchable caste, challenged the caste system's foundations. Comparing Ambedkar's legacy to the posthumous international recognition of Du Bois and Fanon reveals a relative lack of interest in Ambedkar's scholarship and its limited dissemination in postcolonial and postmodernist discourse. This disparity can be attributed to Ambedkar's focus on India's internal issues and disinterest in the Western episteme as a singular source of inquiry. The colonial and postcolonial debates were often perceived as more internationalist in scope. Consequently, Ambedkar has been viewed primarily as a local polemicist.

Ambedkar acknowledged that imperialism offered 'some scope for the advancement of the Indian people,' a view shared by others of his time.²⁷³ His perspective on imperialism, which sometimes appeared narrowly focused on nationalism, led to the perception of his politics as locally oriented. Ambedkar nuanced the concept of imperialism, arguing that it did not monopolise oppression and exploitation. At the height of his working-class activism as leader of the Independent Labour Party in 1938, Ambedkar posited that British departure alone would not resolve India's problems, as 'landlords, mill-owners, and moneylenders will remain in India.'²⁷⁴ They served as a source of imperial imagination in the form of capitalism. Ambedkar emphasised capitalism and imperialism as powerful forces that indiscriminately oppressed natives. He equated imperialism with capitalism from the viewpoint of an exploited native. In a period of caste expansion, Ambedkar couldn't afford to merely refute imperialism as a singular, idiosyncratic obsession.

Later that year, Ambedkar committed himself, even offering to put it in writing that if the Congress party committed to anti-imperialism and its ministers were to resign from the Federation, he would also be willing to temporarily dissolve all his political organisations to create a united front against a 'common foe'. Ambedkar declared that despite his community suffering the most, he was ready to set aside differences and join the Congress if it 'decided to fight imperialism'. However, Ambedkar remarked that this was unlikely because he didn't see the Congress as interested in an anti-imperialist struggle. He noted that Congress members secured positions from the British government to advance their own class interests. Thus, the concept of imperialism desired a caste contract as a deal for the Indian republic. Therefore, the narrative of colonialism and imperialism in India has a liberal definition that encompasses the history of class and caste benefits for those at the top of the hierarchy. After the 1935 Government of India Act, when one fought to secure their own interests, Ambedkar took the same stance but in a way that would mount an anti-colonial critique of the Raj. He did this tactfully when the occasion arose, albeit in the interest of Dalits, while also holding a mirror up to so-called anti-colonial figures who claimed an anti-imperial position but manned the government with their caste compatriots. This paradox illustrates the understanding of imperialism as a status quo of metropolises colonial position in the

²⁷³ B R Ambedkar, 'Dr. B R Presidential Address at The All India Depressed Classes Congress, Nagpur on August 9, 1930', in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings & Speeches*, Vol. 17 (3), p. 52.

²⁷⁴ B R Ambedkar, 'Presidential Address at the "Great Indian Peninsula" (GIP) Railways Conference', Manmad, 12 & 13 Feb 1938, in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings & Speeches*, Vol. 17 (3), p. 188. Fanon saw this in his admonition of the new caste that was developed in the process of anti-colonial, nationalist struggle.

colonies.

Du Bois and Fanon have received the credit they deserve from their followers who have elevated them to canon status and established a knowledge-based enterprise around their intellectual thought. Yet, there are qualified lamentations from the heartlands of Du Boisians and Fanonians. In her foreword to the book *What Fanon Said*, Sonia Dayan-Herzbrun laments that Fanon's original thought is often overlooked, and when considered, Fanon is often juxtaposed with the revolutionary Che Guevara. Dayan-Herzbrun argues that 'Fanon ignites violent passions,' much like Guevara, but Fanon's career doesn't receive the same attention.

Ambedkar doesn't receive the same recognition, let alone attention for theorising the original caste experience through a blend of disciplinary genres and philosophical inquiries. Similarly, Fanon achieves this in different forms by 'getting rid of ready-made discourse' and crafting fresh ideas with a sincere commitment to the humanity of the oppressed.²⁷⁵ Ambedkar's concern for the fragile and marginalised population forced him to wrestle with the titans of knowledge and scholars of caste regulations. In contrast to Du Bois and Fanon, Ambedkar did not achieve comparable international recognition after his death. The latter two offered an impassioned appeal to their people—the dark-skinned condemned masses across the world.

However, for Dalits, their humanity and experiences were theorised and often misrepresented by India's dominant caste scholars. They found resonance in the black program. These scholars, primarily left-leaning admirers of Fanon and Du Bois, appear in retrospect to have misinterpreted or deviated from the core principles of Du Bois and Fanon's work.²⁷⁶ By positioning themselves as privileged victims of colonialism, Fanon's indictment was misrepresented in service of the abstract working class in India. These proponents were solely responsible for suppressing the voices of the 'wretched of the earth' in their respective regions. Consequently, rather than focusing on Ambedkar's work, these scholars favoured the ideals presented by Fanon and Du Bois.²⁷⁷ If we consider Dayan-Herzbrun's lamentations about Fanon's delayed recognition in France, there are many reasons to lament the mistreatment accorded to Ambedkar's work as well.

The postcolonial Marxist canon primarily viewed class as the sole

²⁷⁵ Sonia Dayan-Herzbrun, *Foreword*. In Lewis Gordon, *What Fanon Said A Philosophical Introduction to this Life and Thought* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2015), p. xvi.

²⁷⁶ Gates Jr., 'Critical Fanonism.'

²⁷⁷ Postcolonial scholars in this tradition contributed to this obfuscation. Homi Bhabha, for example dealt with Fanon extensively in his introduction to the *Black Skin White Masks* (1986). Yet, in his appraisal of Fanon's scholarship he did not deal with the thesis of oppression. Same goes for Spivak in her illuminating and a critical text, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Spivak advances dominant caste thinkers and their views on the Hindu (Radhakrishnan) but does not note Ambedkar's view on the same. One can surmise that Ambedkar and his scholarship was not yet available to the international audience and perhaps that contributed to the factor of overlooking Ambedkar. On the other hand, the leaders of the postcolonial scholarship were Indians, and one would think their investment in the native scholars of their country. For more on this, Robinson, Cedric. 'The Appropriation of Frantz Fanon.' *Race & Class* 35, no. 1 (July 1993), pp. 79–91. <https://doi.org/10.1177/030639689303500108>. Another testimonial to this work is by Aditya Nigam, *The Insurrection of the Little Selves: The Crisis of Secular-Nationalism in India* (New Delhi: OUP, 2006)

determinant of social change, largely disregarding other factors. Their faith in the orthodox Marxist creed of non-class categories such as religion, gender, caste, and ethnicity as identities hampered the unity of classes. They maintained that once class unity was achieved, historical non-class factors would become irrelevant in the new proletarian society. However, in a colourized caste society, the proletariat was not uniformly devoted to the idea of liberation against the oppressor because oppression was not just class-based but also political and cultural.

Ambedkar identified religion as a potential solution to existential problems, while simultaneously rejecting Hinduism, which he characterised as a set of oppressive doctrines for Dalits and Hindu women. As an alternative he suggested his followers to find other faith that would grant them equality. Many of his followers went to different faiths, Islam, and Sikhism. However, his enduring belief in the Dhamma as a value for all the people especially its use for the liberation of Dalits brought him closer to Buddha. His public ceremonial conversion to Buddhism in October 1956, two months before his death, represented a profound reconnection with India's historical Buddhist tradition.

Ambedkar's struggle to secure equal rights for everyone in India faced challenges from orthodox Hindu and Brahminical groups. Alongside social and political reforms, Ambedkar turned to religion as an alternative. He spent two decades evaluating various religions that could align with his mission and help his people regain the dignity that had been robbed from them within Hinduism. The task was formidable, as it involved abandoning one's ancestral faith, adopting new practices and customs, and adapting to new norms within a relatively short period. This act represented a visionary rebirth of the Dhamma, suturing past and present in a dignified spiritual renewal. Nevertheless, Ambedkar's choice of Buddhism was not without controversy. He faced challenges from both Hindus and Buddhists who viewed his move towards Buddhism as inauthentic. This criticism intensified after the posthumous publication of Ambedkar's treatise, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, in 1957.

Two Buddhist journals took offense at Ambedkar's interpretation of the Buddha, which they felt diverged from established norms in Buddhist traditions. The Mahabodhi journal in India and *The Light of the Dhamma* published by the Union of Burma Buddha *Sāsana* Council criticised Ambedkar for what they saw as a lack of authenticity in his interpretation and direction of Buddhist teachings. They particularly objected to his approach to interpreting and modifying the Buddhist canon. Critics accused Ambedkar of not citing sources adequately to support his claims that challenged established Buddhist narratives. However, scholars of religious studies, Fiske and Emmrich, have addressed these accusations by credibly demonstrating that Ambedkar's interpretations draw heavily from original Buddhist scriptures rather than contemporary Eastern or Western thinkers, despite the absence of explicit citations.²⁷⁸ The purpose of *The Buddha and His Dhamma* was to present a simplified and accessible version of the Buddha's

²⁷⁸ Adele Fiske and Christoph Emmrich, 'The Use of Buddhist Scriptures in B.R. Ambedkar's *The Buddha and His Dhamma*', in Surendra Jondhale & Johannes Beltz (eds.), *Reconstructing the World. B.R. Ambedkar and Buddhism in India* (New Delhi: OUP, 2004), pp. 97—119.

teachings (Dhamma) to lay readers. These teachings are typically considered esoteric and extensive, aiming to make them more comprehensible and approachable for a broader audience.

While recounting the Buddhist past and incidents related to Buddha, Ambedkar maintained a healthy suspicion due to the texts being written after a prolonged oral tradition. During Buddha's lifetime, incidents are recorded where Buddha was misrepresented by the *Bhikkhus*—the Sangha—and he had to correct them. Ambedkar's Buddhism differs from orthodox Buddhism or Hinduism because he emphasises rationality, logic, and human welfare. He continually contends that all these aspects should have a basis in science.²⁷⁹ Therefore, the role of religion and its potential to challenge oppression was a primary concern for the thinkers discussed here.

AMBEDKAR: RACE AND CASTE

Race and caste have maintained sustained interest in anthropology and its subfields, including political, cultural, and social anthropology.²⁸⁰ Early colonial administrators and European researchers initially conceptualised caste as a totemic organisation, describing it as a system operating within modern manifestations of clan structures. Given the complex nature of caste to European researchers—where caste was likened to the old European estates that had recognised hierarchy and aristocracy—these researchers nevertheless applied a racial logic with contentious interpretations. British ethnographer Herbert Risley applied anthropometric methods to identify racial aspects of caste. Conversely, philologist Max Müller, working with Sanskrit translations of ancient Indian texts,²⁸¹ argued that caste derived its validity from Hindu scriptures. Sanskritist John Muir noted that the belief in the primordial origin of varnas from Brahma did not exist in ancient times.²⁸² The identification of varnas with a supreme human hierarchy emerged only in later antiquity.

Ambedkar, writing from the perspective of an experienced subject, endeavoured to locate the origin and genesis of caste.²⁸³ He refuted predominant theories proposed by various disciplines and scholars, offering instead a perspective aligned with the Indic/native narrative. In his work 'Castes in India' (1916), Ambedkar engaged with existing caste studies, beginning with Risley's work.

²⁷⁹ B R Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (Bombay: Siddharth College Publication, 1957), pp. 342—345.

²⁸⁰ Anthropology is condemned for its orientalist, colonialist viewpoint. Scholars like Nicolas Dirks argue that the colonial administration utilised 'anthropological knowledge to understand and control its subjects, and to represent and legitimate its own mission'. He called it an ethnographic state. Nicolas Dirks, *Castes of Mind Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 44

²⁸¹ John Muir, *Original Sanskrit Texts On The Origin And Progress Of The Religion And Institutions Of India; Collected, Tr. Into English, And Illustrated By Notes*. Vol. 1 (London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1868)

²⁸² Ram Sharan Sharma, *Sudras in Ancient India A Survey of the Position of the Lower Orders Down to Circa A.D. 500*, (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1958), p. 2; Muir, p. 159.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, fn. 4, p. 3. Sharma cites Senart (1896) who stated that the castes were 'compared by Hindus to English upbringing with the social distinctions that exist among Europeans' which in effect were 'very remote to the western social classes' (p. 12-13)

Risley's detailed work argued for the racial component among India's population.²⁸⁴ For example, he identified Chamars from the lens of 'racial ancestry'.²⁸⁵ Risley's interest in tribe and caste centred on understanding physical contrasts among Indians, focusing primarily on the 'racial theory of caste'.²⁸⁶ Risley was influenced by nineteenth-century French anthropologist Paul Topinard, who developed techniques for identifying ethnic components among diverse groups in colonised nations. Topinard sought to prove the Social Darwinist nature of white European male character. Topinard was interested in demonstrating the Social Darwinist nature of white European male character. He was influenced by Paul Broca, a French anthropologist who was heavily invested in devising physical traits related to anthropology and cognition amongst different races of humankind.²⁸⁷

Drawing from the methodological approaches of Broca and Topinard's colonialist investigative anthropology, Risley posited castes as ethnically diverse units. He argued that these units formed into tribal groups, thereby developing distinct markers of difference in India.²⁸⁸ Risley proposed racial mixture as a possibility for different physical markers.

Max Müller was one of the early European proponents of the Aryan theory.²⁸⁹ Emphasising linguistic variables, Müller identified two groups who populated the European and Indian landscapes: North Aryans and South Aryans. North Aryans were invested in finding the political sense of their being, while the South Aryans wandered in search of religion and philosophy. Müller emphasised religious determinism. Ambedkar refuted this argument, claiming that Aryan religiosity was merely 'a series of observances...without any spiritual content'.²⁹⁰

Analysing hymns, Ambedkar concluded that Aryan hymns suggest an absence of spiritual basis in Aryan religion.²⁹¹ These hymns were glory songs for Indra, who wrought destruction upon the enemies of Aryans—the Anaryas—the default native inhabitants of the land. Due to the lack of ethical and pious guidance in these hymns, Ambedkar concluded they fail the test of virtuosity. They become bubbling passions of 'wicked thoughts and wicked purposes'.²⁹² After all, around 2,000 years ago, the need for food supplies was most pressing. The Aryan invasion was guided by this need and the looting of Anarya wealth, which can be traced in

²⁸⁴ Herbert Risley, *Tribes and Castes of Bengal: Anthropometric Data* (Calcutta: Bengal Secretariat, 1891); *The People of India* (Revised edition, W. Crooke) (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink, 1915 [1908])

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 609.

²⁸⁶ C J Fuller, 'Ethnographic inquiry in colonial India: Herbert Risley, William Crooke, and the study of tribes and castes', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 23, 2017, p. 604.

²⁸⁷ Androustos G, Diamantis A. 'Paul Broca (1824-1880): founder of anthropology, pioneer of neurology and oncology', *J BUON*, Oct-Dec;12 (4), 2007, pp. 557-64. PMID: 18067221; Ashok, Samantha S., 'The History of Race in Anthropology: Paul Broca and the Question of Human Hybridity', *Anthropology Senior Theses*. Paper 181, 2017.

²⁸⁸ For Risley's ethnography see, C J Fuller, 'Ethnographic inquiry in colonial India: Herbert Risley, William Crooke, and the study of tribes and castes', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 23, 2017, pp. 606-610

²⁸⁹ F. Max Müller, *Lectures on the Science of Language*, 1862; *Biographies of Words A Home of the Aryans*, 1888; *India What Can it Teach Us?* 1883; *Chips from a German World* 1884, cited in Romila Thappar, 'Theory of Aryan Race and India: History and Politics', *Social Scientist*, Vol. 24, No. 1/3 (Jan. - Mar., 1996), pp. 3-29

²⁹⁰ B R Ambedkar, *Revolution and Counter Revolution*, BAWs, Vol. 3

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 175-6.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 176.

the hymns of Aryan religion. Ambedkar found evidence of this in the chorale.

Müller claimed that fair-skinned Indo-European Aryans conquered the dark-skinned *dasas*. By bringing their language—Sanskrit—and cultural practices, including religion, the Aryans sought to establish their hegemony over the native population, purportedly of Scythian origin. Müller suggested that the Aryans were predominantly ‘upper’ caste, particularly Brahmins, whereas the *dasas* were lower castes, untouchables and tribes of India. This argument made a case for Brahminical Sanskrit influence to dominate the non-Brahmin, non-upper castes. For Müller, Brahmins represented the ‘great branch of the Aryan race’.²⁹³ The Aryan colonisation of India epitomised the earliest purity-centred state membership upheld by some contemporary Brahmin castes in India. This theory was in vogue during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Even some Indian nationalist thinkers relied on it to make claims of caste or race-based superiority, drawing inferences about racial purity.

Whilst caste was circulated in the European world, German intellectual tradition elaborated on this by exteriorising caste to Indic society. Max Weber saw caste as foundational to Hindu religious codes. Weber observed that caste was a lifeline to Hinduism, without which there is no Hinduism.²⁹⁴ Caste was, as Weber observed, a ‘ritual law’.²⁹⁵ These conversations in Europe were influential as they established a narrative of the ancient, eastern world that was mysterious and complex.

Not quite following the above proposition, but related, Louis Dumont in his celebrated work on the anthropology of castes makes a distinction in Western conceptions of understanding caste into three time zones. The first period is characterised by a predominance of explanatory attitudes; the second period, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was invested in the description of caste; and the final phase, from 1945 onwards, looked at ‘intensive studies’ that were to base the ethnographic material in the context of social divisibility.²⁹⁶

These three phases help us to locate the supposition of caste in Western notions. Dumont argues that the early identity of caste was aristocratic. The early aristocratic influences were rendered among the researchers who were not foreign to the system of hierarchy. Additionally, among the early phases of documentation of caste and tribes, it is conspicuously clear that bureaucratic records played an important role in signifying caste dynamics. Early twentieth-century census was

²⁹³ Lecture delivered by Müller in 1872 at Strasbourg. For more see, Thappar. ‘Theory of Aryan Race’, p. 6

²⁹⁴ Weber elaborated on the protestant Calvinistic ethic that relied on the hard work, moderate life, thrift, and determination that paved path for an assurance to next life. This gave rise to the ‘Protestant ethic’. Similarly, in a different context the belief in *samsara* (belief in the ‘transmigration of soul’) and *karma* (‘a doctrine of compensation’) sat at the centre of Hindu theology which in turn granted a possibility to move higher up towards the divine by successive reincarnations. Max Weber, *The Religion of India*, Gerth and Martindale (trans.) (New York: The Free Press, 1958). For an extensive treatment of the text see David Gellner, ‘MAX WEBER, CAPITALISM AND THE RELIGION OF INDIA.’ *Sociology* 16, no. 4 (1982): 526–43.

²⁹⁵ Max WEBER, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, T. Parsons trans., (London: Routledge, [1930] 1992), p. 112

²⁹⁶ Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, p. 21-23.

important in recording the signifiers of caste. Risley again was influential in recording the census. Drawing from his anthropometry theory, Risley identified seven distinct racial groups constituting India. These were: Mongoloids, Indo-Aryans, Mongolo-Dravidians, Aryo-Dravidians, Scytho-Dravidians, and Turko-Iranians.

These racial groups were clearly marked with clean, dispersed geographies with almost non-existent inter-mixing of racial components in India. This means the Mongoloids were identified in Nepal and the present Northeast region of India; the Indo-Aryans in north-central India; the Dravidians covered the majority of the south, east and central India; Mongolo-Dravidians covered the region between Northeast and Central India; the Aryo-Dravidians were above Dravidian lands; the Scytho-Dravidians covered western India; and Turko-Iranians covered present-day Iran and Pakistan. It is important to note in this 'Prevailing Races' map the minute observation of caste-cartography recorded in the racial mapping of Indian geography.

This is how the racial component was integrated to define racial caste in India. Apart from this, the census records placed diverse castes as special categories. The census of India embarked on a project to classify different 'ethnic' and racial groups. Ambedkar credits the census for splitting the diverse groups into castes and tribes. On the importance of the census, Menon suggests that it was the 'operation of market forces', driven by the modern colonial apparatus of governing mercantile capital, where the lower castes, the Ahirs in Bhojpur, recalled their assertion based on the numerical strength and status accorded in the census.²⁹⁷ In this process, lower caste mobilisation became a colonial device to impede certain dominant caste groups that were asserting their position by acquiring land and participating in the ritual process of purification.

However, to understand the complexity, one needs to consider what the racial component meant for racially sensitive colonial ethnographers who, apart from implementing colonial policy, were invested in racializing the demography. This racial profiling would inadvertently fit into the narrative of racial hegemony that European colonialism hoped to achieve. Refusing the racial appropriation of caste into Indian society, Ambedkar argued for the unification or oneness of race by placing the racial component under the radar of caste identity. Ambedkar concluded his thesis by stating: '[I]f Aryans are Nagas then Dravidians are Nagas' and vice versa.²⁹⁸ This conclusion challenged the analogy of Risley and his theory of racial-caste inter-mixtures in India. Though the findings of colonial ethnographers were clouded with presuppositions and unscientific conclusions, their continued interest led to the foundation of disciplinary enquiries. Sociology, history, and humanities dealt with them by drawing from the natural sciences.

Therefore, one can infer that simultaneous research taking place in Europe and America did aid thinking in India as well. The reverse, however, was not as

²⁹⁷ Dilip Menon, *The Blindness of Insight: Essays on Caste in Modern India* (New Delhi: Navayana, 2006)

²⁹⁸ B R Ambedkar, *The Untouchables: Who were They and Why They Became Untouchables* (New Delhi: Amrit Book Co., 1948)

popular a theory because, compared to black Africa, caste-based India was considered a resolved society. Therefore, all it needed was to explain existing streaks in society. For Africans, it needed to be discovered and arranged according to the tribal standards that Europeans understood. This was not a simple task, as African communities were separated by various kingdoms ruled by sovereign tribal chieftains. They followed internal caste hierarchies where each caste had to abide by caste rules.

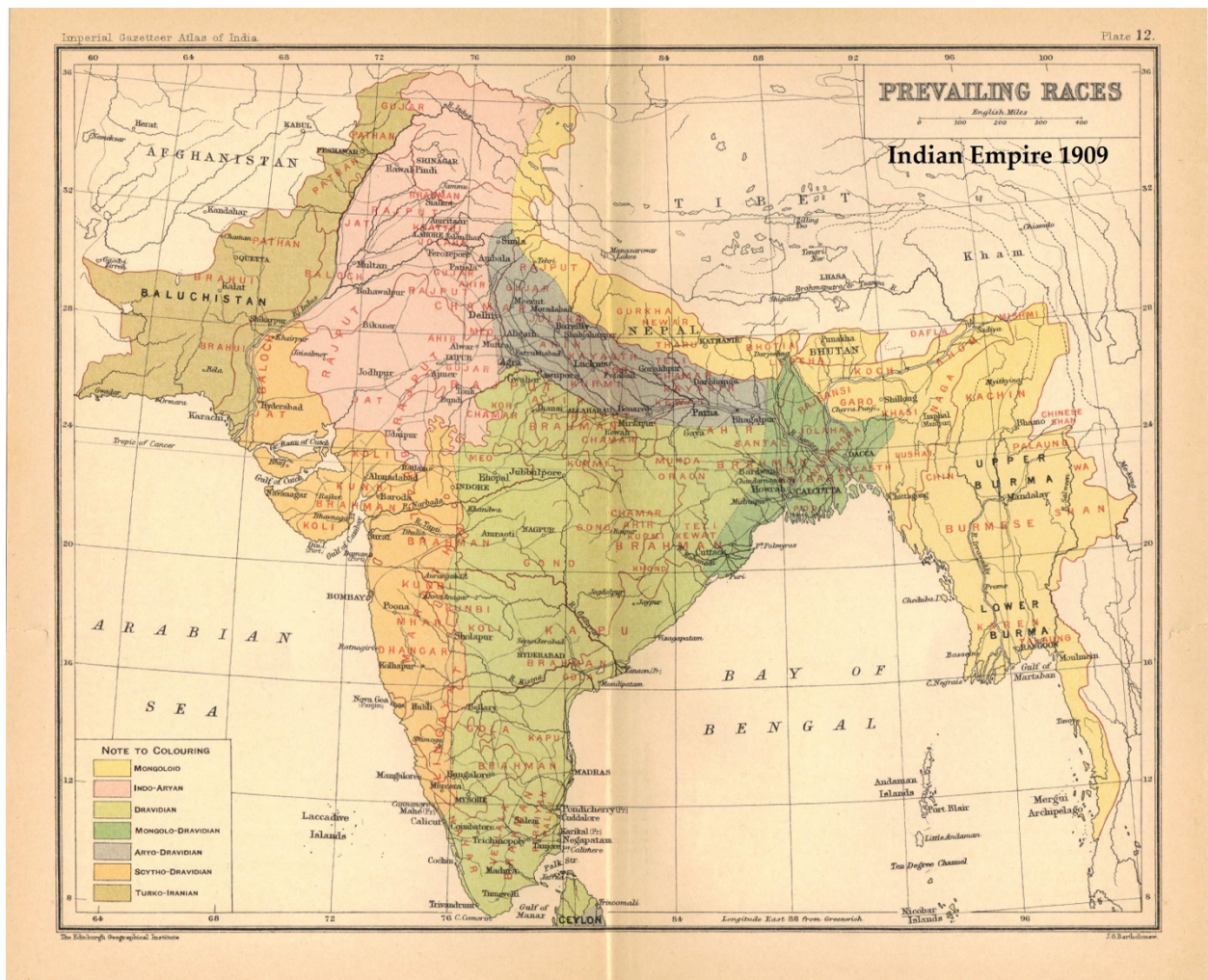


Fig 1. Prevailing Races (Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons)

Taking from this, one can ask: what are the complementary modes of identification that can relate to the suppressed races and castes? How can the formula of 'darker races' fit into India's caste narrative? And what could the caste Indian and African American/Black African achieve together?

These questions go beyond moments of historicism—the epochal development in history writing—and reify the challenges that lie in the futuristic ideals of hermeneutics. As hermeneutics is rewritten and reinterpreted, its importance surpasses historical necessity to form vanguardism for the future. The early intervention of caste scholarship placed it within an Aryan, varna (colour) narrative. Sir R G Bhandarkar, one of the leading figures of Indian studies in the

canon of Orientalism, enumerates the process of the caste system, detailing the stages of Indian society's evolution.

Africa-Asia and the Colony

Attempts have been made to extend African heritage to distant parts of Asia.²⁹⁹ The disciplines of archaeology and anthropology explain the exodus of what are now known as Africans—the Sapiens—to the rest of the world. The Africans in India were identified with the Adivasis. Runoko Rashidi, an American historian, was an early proponent of global African history. Throughout his career, Rashidi argued for the comparison of Dalits and India's Tribals with Africans. By examining 20th-century models of identifying people based on physical features and cephalic information, Rashidi claimed the existence of Africans across the world. One's appearance in contrast to society's physical features was put to examination, thereby making a claim of global African presence. Rashidi stressed that the Indian Dalit would be racially profiled in the US, thus establishing links of common 'Global African Heritage/Presence'. However, years later, he expressed his miscalculated feelings for the linkages he tried to establish with the Indian untouchable race. 'I feel bad about it. I think I oversimplified the situation of Dalits to make it palatable to a [US] Black constituency. I gave the impression that Dalits are Black people,' Rashidi confided.³⁰⁰

The arguments to develop an epidermal viewpoint—to racialise political identities of Asians into colour codes—have glaring shortcomings. Vijay Prashad argues that it was the colonial construction of caste as we see today that centred around exploitation of labour and the already functioning labour mechanism in the caste system.³⁰¹ Hence, according to him, the word 'caste', a Portuguese invention, was mainly centred around indexing the lesser inferiors, which was to formalise the social organisation already existing in Indian and African societies, the latter being heavily tribe-oriented.

DU BOISIAN LABORATORY: CASTE, COLOUR, CLASS

The efficacy of Indian and African histories needs to be anchored in the traditions of DAfricanism—Dalit African lives. The archives of the subordinated, often overlooked in the hierarchy of memorialisation and provenance given to the written, recorded word, need to be brought into focus. We should turn to theories of race that engage with political categories of black and white. Race is increasingly becoming an important identifier in realising one's belonging to the diverse, colourful world. I propose examining the societies that were at the forefront of

²⁹⁹ The popular of this being the Siddhis in India. Purnima Mehta Bhatt calls this African presence in India as African diasporic heritage. Bhatt traces the African lineage in the Indian history. *The African Diaspora in India Assimilation, Change and Cultural Survivals* (Delhi: Routledge, 2019)

³⁰⁰ Vijay Prashad, 'Badges of Color: An Afro-Dalit Story', *Z Magazine*, <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/52a/073.html>; also see, Vijay Prashad, 'Afro-Dalits of the Earth, Unite!' *African Studies Review* 43, no. 1 (2000): 189–201. <https://doi.org/10.2307/524727>

³⁰¹ Ibid, also see Vijay Prashad, *Untouchable Freedom: A Social History of a Dalit Community* (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2022)

leading the battle against caste and race in the twentieth century. As stated earlier, my aim is to explore the formation of coalition camps of the oppressed in the works of Du Bois, Ambedkar, and Fanon.

To achieve this, we need to underscore that the past century's problems have now surpassed the orientalist colonial logic. The rulers of different empires had similar rule books that relied on dualisms: capitalist modes of production and the promotion of unscientific racial antagonisms.³⁰² The present era is confounded with social factors spilt over from the past century, albeit with a different directory. The issues are no longer in the binaries of colonial and colonised but debated within the post-colonial national framework. This has brought about a change in the othering done through the apparent hierarchy of the metropole centre and colony as an orient.

This gave opportunities for the colourised world to rise against imperialism and racism. Colour was a fine line of distinction utilised to forge unity against white imperialism across geographies. Marcus Garvey's movement was one of the first of its kind that put a 'coloured cosmopolitan' lens on British imperialism.³⁰³

Du Bois was to follow suit and mature this thought in a much refined and clear way. Following his proposition that the twentieth century was entangled with the 'colour line', Du Bois worked arduously towards building solidarity among the coloured people of the colonised world. In many ways, Du Bois articulated the vision for the colonised condition from a traditionally non-colonial society—America, which had declared its sovereignty—while the likes of Du Bois identified the condition of African Americans as equivalent to an internal colony of the United States of America. In the same vein, Cedric Dover, an Indian born to English and Indian parents, found more relevance with coloured solidarity as he looked at the mixed racial 'ethnic' politics of the Half-Castes, which was an anthropological examination of 'races' that refuted the logic of biologism.³⁰⁴ There are obvious ideological and colour-coded parallels between African Americans and Indian dominant caste anti-colonialists, be it Kamala Chattopadhyay, Lala Lajpat Rai, or Jawaharlal Nehru, who were, in effect, proponents of African American freedom.³⁰⁵

Du Bois' caste prognosis to the racial problem in America is mirrored in other post-slavery societies of the modern world. Du Bois started as a scholar trying to decode the prevalence of colour caste in postbellum American society in his early years and sustained his thesis diligently. Though the term 'colour caste' features in Du Bois' writing early on, he brought forth the caste analysis to underscore the Negro problem in America. In an essay in 1930, Du Bois detailed the colour caste proposition in his essay, 'Colour Caste in the United States'.³⁰⁶

³⁰² Similar can be argued in the classical sense of caste sensibilities that make camps within each social group that stands in antagonism with each other. Cf. Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York, 1944), 676-7.

³⁰³ Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*

³⁰⁴ Cedric Dover, *Half-Caste* (London: M. Secker and Warburg, 1937).

³⁰⁵ Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, p. 82-88.

³⁰⁶ W.E.B. Du Bois, 'Colour Caste in the United States' 1933, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries. Box 211 (shelf locator)

Du Bois was clear about the systemic importance that caste had assumed in the United States. For Du Bois, colour caste is a theoretical explanation for the injunctions and prohibitions imposed on the free Negro population of the US. The black freemen lived in dependent conditions: they couldn't marry the person of their choice, buy land in the South, were made to remain subordinate at jobs or in unions, and faced competition with powerful businesses. In short, such prohibitions added to their exclusion from exercising their franchise. This was seen in trade or at jobs with lawyers, writers, artists, and clergymen, among other vocations. Du Bois' attention to the concept of purity of blood to understand caste argued that though colour discrimination might have decreased, restrictions based on caste were still alive.³⁰⁷ What he meant was that caste correctly applied to American society. The foundation of the United States of America produced two castes—one slave-owning and the other enslaved. This analysis brought forth organic capacity of immobility, continuation of social conditions, marked class status, and colour distinctions. The continuity of slavery was brought with liberal institutions' patronage.

In his stirring essay 'Evolution of the Race Problem', which was originally presented at the National Negro Conference held in New York in 1909 and published under *the Proceedings of the National Negro Conference*, Du Bois launched a serious historical enquiry into the character of the Negro problem in America.³⁰⁸ Du Bois surpassed contemporary scientific limits of identifying race by investigating the status of permanent 'Negro' subjugation. Race, which was still determined as biopolitical, was rejected by Du Bois. Jim Crow was a matter of policy and law 'surrounding facts of race'.³⁰⁹

Du Bois' methodology was intensely historical, phrasing caste in the evolutionary inventory of the US's formation from '1750 and 1800, [where] increasing number of laws began to form a peculiar and systematic slave code based on a distinct idea of social caste'.³¹⁰ Du Bois looked at caste concerning education that aptly distinguished the character of American division.³¹¹ Scholars have argued that caste worked for Du Bois to undermine the biopolitical theory which was used to explain race. Caste differed 'from other models generated from Marxist, neo-Marxist, critical race theory (CRT), and other critical social theory traditions'.³¹² This can be clearly seen in how Du Bois never gave up on the caste analytical framework to examine the condition of black people from slavery to Jim Crow. Du Bois' historical writing confirms that caste was indeed a matter of life and death for black people in America.³¹³

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁰⁸ *Proceedings of the National Negro Conference, May 31-June 1, 1909* (New York)

³⁰⁹ Du Bois, W.E.B., *The Education of Black People: Ten critiques, 1906–1960*, Herbert Aptheker (ed.) (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1973), p. 121

³¹⁰ Du Bois, W.E.B., 'The study of the Negro problems', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 11, 1898, pp. 1–23.

³¹¹ Pierce Clayton, 'W.E.B. Du Bois and Caste Education: Racial Capitalist Schooling From Reconstruction to Jim Crow,' *American Educational Research Journal* 54, no. 1_suppl (April 2017), p. 24S-25S.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831216677796>.

³¹² Ibid., p. 25S.

³¹³ Ibid., p. 42S.

As a sincere sociologist, Du Bois explicated the ‘many social problems and many phases of the same problem’. The 1909 conference hosted distinguished scholars of the time. Edwin Seligman (academic advisor of Ambedkar at Columbia University), John Dewey (another of Ambedkar's mentors) alongside Du Bois, Ida B Wells-Barnett, Oswald Garrison Villard and a host of noted scholars and activists concerned about the ‘evil of race discrimination’ were in attendance. It was hoped that the resolutions passed at the conference would invite public support and change the mood of the public by ‘becoming more and more a subject to daily interest to all classes of the American people’.³¹⁴ This conference paved a path for the legitimisation of NAACP.

To look at Du Bois is to cross-check contemporary black intellectual developments. Gilroy suggests Du Bois’ experiences, more particularly his internationalist (‘travel experiences’) exposure, is representative of the African American and Caribbean people's experience. The artists, writers, activists, and poets try to evade the restrictive mode of heaped transactions like those of ‘ethnicity, national identification, and sometimes even “race” itself’.³¹⁵ This methodological approach is relevant to the arguments of this thesis. The possibility of rebirthing into something new or trying to escape the burdened identities of euro-centric subordination grafted into creating a new black cultural space—that of Pan-Africanism, black Atlantic, Negritude or black brotherhood.

Du Bois is an ideal protagonist for our thesis not only because of his poly-interventions and hefty presence in the black and African political, cultural community but also because he was one of the leading architects of black futurism. Following Marcus Garvey's movement, Du Bois was able to forge the black American story with Africa and the African diaspora. In his approach, Du Bois sought to present the greatness of Africa and its contribution to civilisation, thereby removing the commonly held epithet of black incapacity. He wrote and organised a pageant ‘The Star of Ethiopia’ that represented innovation, arts, culture, slavery, and the status of African Americans and their life in the United States. Du Bois' trajectory was keenly observed and emulated by black thinkers across the world as well as non-black intellectual spheres in China, India, and other travails that record this rise.³¹⁶

³¹⁴ Preface by W.E.W. Nation Negro Conference Headquarters, *Proceedings of the National Negro Conference*, p. 6

³¹⁵ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, p. 19

³¹⁶ Gao, Yunxiang, ‘W. E. B. And Shirley Graham Du Bois In Maoist China’, *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2013): 59–85. doi:10.1017/S1742058X13000040.

DU BOIS: A SCHOLAR OF CASTE IN AMERICA

[The] problem of the past, so far as the black American was concerned, began with caste -- a definite place preordained in custom, law and religion where all men of black blood must be thrust. To be sure, this caste idea as applied to blacks was no sudden, full-grown conception, for the enslavement of the workers was an idea which America inherited from Europe and was not synonymous for many years with the enslavement of the blacks, although the blacks were the chief workers. Men came to the idea of exclusive black slavery by gradually enslaving the workers, as was the world's long custom, and then gradually conceiving certain sorts of work and certain colours of men as necessarily connected.³¹⁷

So begins Du Bois's speech at the convening of the National Negro Conference held in New York in 1909. Du Bois charts the position of slavery as an inheritance of America's caste system.

Du Bois had a clear understanding of caste and its operation in America as a whole and the American South in particular. He observed this institution was contrary to equality.³¹⁸ The colour line was used to divide and eventually 'dominate the Negro' who was arrested by the problem of caste.³¹⁹ Du Bois acknowledged his work and his role in knowledge production as 'a main factor in revolutionising the attitude of the American Negro toward caste' between 1910-1930s.³²⁰ This approach—of the 'stinging hammer blows' Du Bois confidently stated made 'Negroes aware of themselves, confident of their personalities and determined in self-assertion'.³²¹ This was no exaggeration as Du Bois contended his personality was 'a leadership solely of ideas'.³²²

Du Bois saw that caste was not a fully developed idea and yet it was 'consciously and persistently pressed upon the nation'.³²³ What he meant was that America was yet to become a complete caste nation. America was preparing a future 'caste programme' that was going to be 'renewed'.³²⁴ This meant imposing various social limitations and legal injunctions; the direction of the country was veering towards it. The primary locus of such an arrangement was to mentally deprive the black person of an identity of self-fulfilment. It was to 'instil contempt and kill self-respect'.³²⁵ Caste was therefore a 'new slavery of black men in America' which brought forth a 'perpetual martyrdom'. It was an extremely difficult and unliveable life for those whose life was marked as an outcaste in the caste society.

³¹⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois, 'Evolution of the Race Problem', *Proceedings of the National Negro Conference, May 31-June 1, 1909* (New York), p. 142

³¹⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935), p. 707.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 704

³²⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept*, (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 151.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

³²² *Ibid.*, p. 303

³²³ Du Bois, 'Evolution of the Race Problem', p. 144

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 145

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 144

Another landmark text of Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, became an anthem for the American public sphere, making him 'a leader of black Americans'. In many ways, it deployed wider canonical preconfigurations of polity and science. It inaugurated the genre of modernist writing that repurposed the axioms of scholastic essay writing. Gilroy looks at this corpus of literature as a seriously self-conscious polyphonic form that has people speaking in dilemmas.³²⁶ Du Bois' opus starts with varying provocations. The twentieth-century problem being a problem of the 'colour line'.³²⁷ Colour line meant a separated identity grouped together as autonomous entities. Line was the fence, the barrier. Line represented two worlds. If Du Bois had to look beyond the colour line, he would then easily sit across and be 'arm in arm' with French novelists Balzac and Dumas alongside Aristotle and Aurelius. Colour line defined the limitation, while non-colour line demonstrated the life beyond the veil wedged between truth and life. Du Bois imagined and boisterously claimed for a life beyond colour line where everyone would have a chance to mitigate. But colour line was not just about white or black; it concerned everyone. Herein lies the genius of Du Bois who proclaimed that this colour line would redefine the contours and relations on the earth. Colonisation and post-colonisation, Jim Crow, anti-caste, or progressive no-war struggles all had to take into account the ubiquity of colour line in their struggles.

The twentieth century is emphasised to usher in the dawning era of achievable and conversant resistance. In 'Souls', Du Bois uses various expressions to demonstrate the continuing lower position of black Americans. Du Bois uses 'servile caste' to demonstrate 'restriction to rights and privileges'.³²⁸ It was a flip to the high cultures and civilisations bred in modern cities of the South that retained a separate and unequal structure for black people. Servile caste was a representation of the continuing lower position that excluded black people from equal participation, though their indispensability was unquestionable. Here, the servile castes were those who were targeted by law of the land and custom.³²⁹

Du Bois' interest in chanting the latent Negro struggle with caste-d subjects appears in reflection to the influence of sociological schools of thought existing during the early twentieth century. His identification of the Negro problem attuned to the servile caste needs more explanation. Du Bois was contradicting the position of the most prominent black American leader of his time, Booker T. Washington. Washington's acquiescence with the white monopoly capital and his self-help philosophy to train and prepare black youth for industry was not taken well by Du Bois. He saw this as a continuum to their lower standards accorded in the slavery era. Thus, Du Bois was unimpressed with the unfaltering paradox of Washington's unabated interest in sequencing the black capital in the service of the white. Du Bois' challenge faces the dominating dogma where economy plays a minimal role bereft of political and social construction of 'servile caste'. Du Bois always had class and materiality at the centre of his analysis of caste and American society. The 'colour line' is not just a test of sixteenth and seventeenth-century class

³²⁶ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic Modernity*, chapter 4.

³²⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of the Black Folk* (New York: OUP, 2007 [1903]), p. 3

³²⁸ Ibid., p. 32

³²⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

exploitation, but it had the possibility to return 'to the caste of ancient days' as the inevitability of communication and the earth 'growing smaller and more accessible' helped to forge a solidarity between non-white nations.³³⁰ This is how Du Bois qualifies the colour line testament that he had delivered as a sermonistic clairvoyance earlier in his *The Souls of the Black Folk*.

In another of his scholarly statements in *Black Reconstruction* (1935), Du Bois charts a new volume in the analysis of caste and the Black condition in America. Combing through a range of state and organisational reports, such as those of the Ku Klux Klan, and a host of scholarly literature on the Reconstruction, Du Bois concludes that the Reconstruction programme was a major disappointment, a 'splendid failure' that gestured towards Black humanity but did not achieve the anticipated success. The Reconstruction failed because of violence and inequality that was carried in the essence of post-emancipation. The failure of the promises of the post-slavery era loomed in the lives of Black Americans. The nexus of criminality and lack of citizenship paved a path for the disenfranchisement of Black Americans. This produced a new condition of caste in America. Surprised as he was seeing the evolution of caste in America, he commented that caste was now revived in,

America the modern civilized land. It was supposed to be a relic of barbarism and existent only in Asia. But it has grown up and has been carefully nurtured and put on a legal basis with religious and moral sanctions in the South.³³¹

Arguments of merely race segregation or separation were not enough to present the condition of the black Americans. Because there was an added layer of economic exploitation and domination. Domination here worked in law, police, schools, courts.³³² This eventually translated into proclaiming the inferiority of black people and superiority of white people. Thus, the upper and lowest caste status in America's colour regime rationalised the black-white hierarchy. This made the black American a 'caged human being, driven into mental provincialism'. Such control on the mind of the black person contributed to creating an 'inferiority complex'. Thus, the black man did not teach his children 'self-respect', Du Bois contended.³³³

This was essentially a question of psychological morality that implicated black men in white America.³³⁴ One of the essential features of caste laws is that they condition the lower subjects of the caste system to internalise their fate as subordinates. Redemption and liberation are severely constricted. So, they try to make it through by partially following the rules to get by. Thus, in America, the black mind was captured to appease the superiority of the white man. Lying and flattery of white people by black people was essentially a question of black people's 'lack of

³³⁰ Du Bois, 'Evolution of the Race Problem', p. 156.

³³¹ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*. p. 694

³³² Ibid., p. 695

³³³ Ibid., p. 701

³³⁴ Ibid., p. 695

faith in themselves'.³³⁵ This came in all forms such as vocation, economy, sociality, and many nodes of moral righteousness. The submission to the authority of white men was not only a state question but also a trait that was habituated in the culture of white democratic America. Therefore, Du Bois argued that freed black people contributed significantly to American society—a worker-oriented democracy as opposed to the enslaved plantation economy. Thus, freedom not only in law but also in social conduct was necessary for American democracy to thrive.

The subordinated caste, vis-à-vis the untouchables, were the worst affected. Thus, the 'Negro' was subjected to the Jim Crow laws and disenfranchised from exercising citizens' rights, thereby creating in the 'Negro citizen a subordinate caste'.³³⁶ Du Bois understood caste as a barrier of social construction that restricted access to general avenues of the public realm. It is 'social caste' that Du Bois seems to be inherently interested in exploring the status of subjecthood. The sacred status of one's caste described 'race-alike' situations where the whiteness of colour determined supremacy. The designs of castes were such that they animated Du Bois' intellectual radicalism.

Du Bois looked at race not as an a priori but something that had happened to a group, a heritage of slavery. This notion de-emphasised the lineage or colour-based recognition of history, i.e., race. He found this concept to be evolving and unconvincing. The ideas of racialised sciences gave differing results with biological traits such as anthropometry of brains and nasal indices. This was a popular science about which Du Bois,

'was sceptical about brain weight; surely much depended upon what brains were weighed. I was not sure about physical measurements and social inquiries'.³³⁷

This led Du Bois towards the social construction of kinship which did not consider physical traits or the 'badge of colour' but 'discrimination and insults'. This ideal then posited a common subordination not limited to Africa but 'yellow Asia and into the South Seas' too.³³⁸ The traces of solidarity and kinship amongst the non-white groups were framed as a colonial outcome without him mentioning it. He does indicate the common history of 15th-century slavery.

Caste was a lexicon already in usage among the American gentry as seen in chapter 2. It received heightened attention through Charles Sumner, particularly his 1869 speech *The Question of Caste*.³³⁹ Caste-based social order manifested directly to maintain social stability for the colonial apparatus of biocontrol. Missionaries such as Rev. Joseph Roberts had published an account in 1847 of a Hindu convert's response to the inexcusable practices of caste in India which produced enmity

³³⁵ Ibid., p. 702

³³⁶ Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, p. 29.

³³⁷ Ibid., p. 50

³³⁸ Ibid., p. 117. I credit Kamala Visweswaran for directing to this phase of history.

³³⁹ Hon. Charles Sumner, *Lecture: The Question of Caste* (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1869), p. 7. Retrieved from the Library of Congress African American Pamphlet Collection copy

within the same classes of Hindu religion.³⁴⁰ He emphasised the religious distinction of the caste system which was not merely 'a civil distinction'.³⁴¹ Roberts was writing from a Christian missionaries' point of view and thus was perturbed by the fact that caste had penetrated into the Christian institutions in India. He also draws upon the 'energies to liberate Negro from *his* chains' (emphasis original).³⁴²

The confluence of the British empire with the colonialists in the American South and North produced a template of a Brahminised caste order that was rigid, immobile, and infertile to reproduce across cultures and intra-ethnic, subcaste groups. This arrangement was a near template of imperial Britain and other empires of the time. It was, as Du Bois observed, a European idea inherited by America. Work-based enslavement or the 'enslavement of workers...was world's long custom'. Here Du Bois is perhaps gesturing to the global adage of caste that Charles Sumner had talked about. However, work-based enslavement was eventually limited to 'certain sorts of work' to 'certain colours of men as necessarily connected'.³⁴³ This is how it was applied to the slavery of black people in the South. Caste here was placed as an occupational category that was 'preordained in custom, law and religion'. Du Bois' conception of caste also looked like the Varna caste system that functioned as ritualism via religion accompanied by the might of the law. Varna caste corresponded colour-based order with occupation. Eventually, it gained the status of custom.

However, after slavery was abolished in America, it posed a serious challenge for 'caste of work and the caste of colour' to correspond with each other.³⁴⁴ This very correspondence between caste of work and colour made it possible for black slavery to continue after the abolition of slavery. It 'enslave[d] not only slaves but black men who were not slaves'.³⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the caste system was brought back through new forms. Political disfranchisement along with limited education to a narrower vocation, and by 'curtailment of civil freedom of travel, association, and entertainment'.³⁴⁶

After the abolition of slavery, society was arranged into hierarchies that were the product of racialised occupation. By preferencing occupation to determine status and rank in society, caste was instituted in what was originally meant to be a class order. In this, black and white workers had a significant difference in their ability to climb the scale of this hierarchy. By bringing in caste norms, the black worker was further condemned for their colour and class position.

³⁴⁰ Joseph Roberts, *Caste opposed to Christianity*, in Rev. Joseph Roberts (ed.) *Caste, in Its Religious and Civil Character, Opposed to Christianity* (XXX: London, 1847)

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. v

³⁴² *Ibid.*, p. vii

³⁴³ W.E.B. Du Bois, 'Evolution of the Race Problem', *Proceedings of the National Negro Conference, May 31-June 1, 1909* (New York), p. 142.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

WHITE CASTE, WHITE SLAVERY

Caste created an artificial solidarity among those considered white in America. With it came advantages that were restricted to the lower castes—the non-whites. After the abolition of slavery, there came a system that organised hierarchies around occupations. These occupations were heavily racialised, reminiscent of the slavery habitus. However, due to the prevalence given to physical characteristics in the class order, caste was instituted to define the appropriate relations. Because it was not just class and relation based on production alone, but a system that ardently relied on the memories of the past. That is how the status of black was unalterable. This worked in two ways. The first was to order society in a hierarchy based on racial markers. Second, it prevented consciousness of the proletariat among the now declared ‘higher caste’ whites who preferred to gain a superior status at the cost of their inferiority amongst the white elites.

The history of white indentures is an interesting anecdote in the story of the American caste system. Prior to the African slaves, white indentured workers were employed to tend the plantations for decades. The English rulers sought fellow Britons to do the enslaving work in America. The bondage could be anywhere from three years to life. Among the first to arrive in America were children whose impoverished parents had sent them, while at other times it was advertised as an apprentice job when in fact they were sold to the planters.

The British Crown sought to rid itself of vagrants and petty criminals by rounding them up and shipping them to America and the Caribbean. A decree stated: ‘who would not be reformed of their roguish kind of life . . . shall be banished out of this realm and . . . shall be conveyed into such parts beyond the seas’.³⁴⁷ The white indentured servants deported as punishment or unwanted individuals belonged to the outcastes of English and later European society. They were ‘beggars, street children, prostitutes, Quakers, and vagabonds’. Vagabonds included ‘[t]inkers, gypsies, begging scholars, palm readers, wandering musicians and actors’.³⁴⁸ The Irish were dehumanised following the Anglo-Norman conquest. Kidnapping a person with an athletic physique would be compensated with £2.

Following their servitude alongside African slaves, the concept of white as a superior caste was yet to emerge. In the early 17th century, indentured whites were sometimes treated with ‘less humanity than the blacks working alongside them’.³⁴⁹ While whites could theoretically buy their freedom after a set period and seek a return passage as promised, many such promises failed, and they remained under their master’s tutelage. Some did buy their freedom and built prosperous lives. However, the initial image of the white working class was not of an ideal, superior white, but of a scrounger fit for the lowest jobs.

Over the decades, concessions were accorded to whites as colour began to

³⁴⁷ Don Jordan and Michael Walsh, *White Cargo The Forgotten History of Britain’s White Slaves in America* (New York: NYU Press, 2008), p. 30-31.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12

form an identity. This was to thwart any united rebellion of the poor castes—white and black. It was not due to a sudden realisation of white superiority, but because the large number of formerly enslaved black individuals needed to be reintegrated into the workforce. Thus, the binary between white and black was created, which came at the cost of oft-repeated black inferiority.

The limited rights granted to white workers fostered a belief among lower-caste whites that they had a chance in the new order of the American dream. They went to great lengths to protect these limited rights, which came to be known through constitutional terms such as liberty, freedom, equality and family. When the white working class began identifying with other whites, they gained a sense of superiority. However, they could not participate in the lifestyles of the white elites. Class distinctions and endogamy persisted. This bred resentment among poor whites, but it was redirected towards the black artisanal class, seen as progressing at the expense of whites. The poor whites, who shared wealth anxiety with blacks, did not openly rebel against their white protectors because they too relied on white capital.

Caste came to be identified as a model to which one must adhere. It surpassed working relations and field hierarchies—such as those on farms—and brought forth culture, religion, family and community as extensions of maintaining caste order. Physical segregation and intimacy prohibition evolved almost naturally. The punishments for those who disregarded the caste laws were severe, ranging from lynching to arson. The poor whites, who were erstwhile higher in the caste hierarchy compared to blacks yet lower than the land-owning, aristocratic whites, still had no access to the industry of traditional white Christian culture. They remained segregated and had to rely on white capital to make advances in the capitalist system.

Race emerged as a replacement for many fault lines of slavery and colour caste. It became an apparent and conclusive determinant to biologize the difference. Religion also offered a narrative of the lowly, disgusting representation of the black body. Along with this, it was a powerful tool that could advance caste discrimination without requiring justification. Thus, race, like caste, acted to prevent an alliance between the poor by semi-permanently creating gaps that could engulf the difference through legislation, policy and culture. Modern capitalism, which birthed America by making it one of the most agile capitalist countries, was built through assimilation of the world's oldest form of hierarchy—caste—into its formative stages. Therefore, the American story of capitalism is a story of caste assimilation and racial caste order.

Jim Crow caste

In Jim Crow, Du Bois noticed caste rules at play. Du Bois argued that racial distinctions were holding the society backwards than class lines. If vertical racial hierarchies are torn away, then therein lies 'greater opportunities of human betterment than in the case of class lines' he held. Du Bois was clear that class line operated as an outpost of slavery-era social caste system. The racial isolation

sought by the American caste system was not going to sustain as rapid transportation was changing the social relations and world would co-mingle easily than now. Thus, Du Bois said if people still want to hold on to the colour line it will take the society not only backwards to the 'absurdities of class as exhibited in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' but also 'to the caste of ancient days'. It is not clear what ancient qualifies in this case, however, if looked at the preceding statement he is gesturing to India's caste system that had primeval, barbaric connotations that enslaved shudra to no bound.

Du Bois was clear that the 'abolition of class distinction' alone would not eliminate socio-racial differences, nor guarantee intermarriage and social mixture.³⁵⁰ Thus, it was evident that class was one of many factors, and certainly not the paramount one, that would overcome the problem of social and racial inequality. Scholars have made a case for Du Bois's analysis of the caste research approach, offering a 'robust bridge between race and blended race/class analyses of inequality'.³⁵¹ This is an accurate assessment of Du Bois's research programme. His analysis often conjoined race with class and therefore had a strong caste agenda.

Du Bois saw caste not only as a system that produced slavery but also as a conduct in American life. Colour had caste, which became his primary identity. Thus, wherever a black person went, he was judged by the merit of his caste. Therefore, 'caste of work' became synonymous with the black person's ability to negotiate with the capitalist world. However, the 'caste of colour' regulated on plantation sites could not sustain the caste of work principle because the depreciation of the black person along caste lines could not work as religiously in the free market. Many skilled black people sought economic independence, which limited the implementation of caste of work. However, caste of work did not limit the free spirit and confidence ushered in by the Negro. 'They thought, they dreamed, they aspired, they resisted', and they found ways to escape and challenge the system, either by running away to the North or revolting. In this process, Du Bois correctly argues that formerly enslaved people undermined the 'slave assumptions' of the black castes and instead attributed human qualities.³⁵²

Non-biologism of colour-caste

Due to his disbelief in the biologism of racial difference, Du Bois found an apt analysis to link colour difference with class dynamics. For Du Bois, caste was an attempt to explain the 'new slavery of black men in America', which related social conditions to physical characteristics. This made the life of 'thinking black men a perpetual martyrdom'.³⁵³ The free black population was making impressive inroads in culture, education, art, science and industry, in addition to gaining economic freedom and 'accumulating property at a rate that is simply astounding'.³⁵⁴

³⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 154-5.

³⁵¹ Clayton, 'W.E.B. Du Bois and Caste Education', p. 40S

³⁵² Du Bois, 'Evolution of the Race Problem', p. 143

³⁵³ Ibid., p. 144.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 144-5.

Kamala Visweswaran states Du Bois found the term caste to represent the conditions of 'racism, slavery and Jim Crow'.³⁵⁵ She reiterates this throughout the chapter to emphasise the maturity of caste to exist alongside other resources of power and control. Thus, even though Du Bois had launched racial analysis through material and value-based caste order, later scholars disowned or 'bypassed or rejected' this medium of analysis.³⁵⁶ Myrdal, on the other hand, confidently asserted that '[t]he caste system has inherited the defence ideology of slavery'.³⁵⁷ Visweswaran further argues that Du Bois' understanding of caste as race moved beyond the abolitionist agenda and antebellum understandings of caste. Here she argues Du Bois was looking at the 'black social condition', which edged a nuanced 'sublated, but generative lexicon' that grounded the caste assumptions.³⁵⁸

Caste was a historically tight and resonant category for someone like Du Bois. It covered a broad graph of the seventeenth-century problem infused through slavery and continued via legalised protectionism of modern laws that refused the black body to be anything but a lower caste—a permanent identity locked in a chamber without keys. Caste reasoned the subordinate status of black personhood in whatever epoch and conditions they were in. How slavery survived after slavery, how it was managed through interlocking social conditions, legal protectionism, and economic form can be understood through the caste theory. Du Bois remarkably worked with the 'colour-caste' theory as it covered global imperial order, class, nation, and hardened distinctions of society. Visweswaran argued that Du Bois' enunciation of caste as race as 'colour-caste' posited the 'ideology of imperialism'.³⁵⁹

I slightly disagree with Visweswaran in the framework of limiting colour-caste to a simplified duo-frame of imperialism and slavery. As seen so far, Du Bois' conception of caste was historical and wider. Du Bois qualifies imperialism to a larger and more intense order, one that can only be replaced by another caste order. Imperialism was observed not only as a manifestation of colonisation. It was not a system of subjugation of one nation by another. One could subjugate an entire population within a nation without attributing to the logic of imperialism. What did caste order do in such a society? In his study of nineteenth-century American South, particularly Georgia, Charles Flynn Jr. observed that the values of caste in the American South continued on and off plantation sites, thereby creating state-wide poverty across the caste and colour lines.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁵ Kamala Visweswaran, *Un/common Cultures: Racism and the Rearticulation of Cultural Difference* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 111. There is also another forms of subjugation known as 'Black Codes' that was brought through series of laws after the American Civil War to essentially restrict and penalise the black people in the South to replicate quasi-slavery.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 112-3.

³⁵⁷ Myrdal, Gunnar, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1944), p. 88.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 114. Visweswaran looks at the topic of caste and race through culture and society, a theme central to Anthropology. She looks at race, caste, gender, sexuality, and nation to advocate for a conceptual and historically representative idea of race which is also caste like in different contexts. We shall return to her in the next chapter.

³⁵⁹ Visweswaran, *Un/common Cultures*. p. 114.

³⁶⁰ Charley L. Flynn, Jr. *White Land, Black Labor Caste and Class in Late Nineteenth-Century Georgia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983)

To curb this, Du Bois observed that a class-caste order needed to be subjugated. That is why he is 'not a communist', although he admired Marx for putting his finger on the right spot—the economic foundation that based 'development of civilization'. And that is why an imperial argument was Du Bois' 'conviction' wherein he had to 'express or spiritually die'.³⁶¹ This is a fact that caste is a complete order of class, civilisation, and religion. Although the latter rarely features in Du Bois' outstanding critique, it very much remains a strong web cast along many advances of his critiques.

For Du Bois, the colour caste system meant continuance of 'legal and customary race distinctions and discriminations, having to do with separation in travel, in schools, in public accommodations, in residence and in family relations'.³⁶² To keep the black permanently lower, it devised a strategy to disenfranchise voters by introducing various tests and restrictions to register. Then came the introduction of discrimination in basic civil rights to access education, or in state industry such as jails and courts. Finally, to contain all of this, there was further lynching and mob violence.

This concept of colour caste as a theoretical position to locate the black condition in America was continued by Du Bois. Then in 1947, in his popular joint submission, '*A Statement of Denial of Human Rights to Minorities in the Case of citizens of Negro Descent in the United States of America and an Appeal to the United Nations for Redress*', Du Bois contributed an introduction to the statement. He was also a lead writer of the 155-page report that was a damning indictment of American white hypocrisy from slavery to political institutions, and the church that validated this discrimination. In it, Du Bois referred to the enslaved African group that was brought to the United States over the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³⁶³

Irrespective of the timescale, black people in America remained 'a segregated caste, with restricted legal rights, and many illegal disabilities'.³⁶⁴ So begins Du Bois's statement on page 1 of the UN petition. There was a system that unleashed restrictions upon its lowered citizens. These were injunctions that restricted the mobility—social and otherwise—of black people. In the UN petition, Du Bois noted that America was witnessing the rise of 'race hate and caste restriction in the United States'.³⁶⁵ And these tendencies were 'dangerous not simply for the United States but for all nations'. This was a phenomenon easily observed in the Asian and African colonies as well. Du Bois juxtaposed the themes of colour with caste.

This conceptual intervention was to push back on the singular ideology of

³⁶¹ Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn*, p. 151.

³⁶² W E B Du Bois, 'The Negro Citizen', in Herbert Aptheker (ed.), *Writings by W.E.B. Du Bois in Non-Periodical Literature Edited by Others*, p. 159

³⁶³ W E B Du Bois, Early B. Dickerson, Milton R. Konvitz, William R. Ming, Leslie S. Perry, and Rayford W. Logan, '*A Statement of Denial of Human Rights to Minorities in the Case of citizens of Negro Descent in the United States of America and an Appeal to the United Nations for Redress*', 1947, p. 4

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20

blood purity that was proposed as a plausible explanation for colourised violence in the US. The very first paragraph of Du Bois's submission stated that the descendants of Africans brought to America were 'reduced to slave labour' and they had,

no complete biological unity, but varies in color from white to black, and comprises a great variety of physical characteristics, since many are the off-spring of white European-Americans as well as of Africans. Similarly, there is an equal and perhaps even larger number of white Americans who also descend from Negroes but who are not counted in the colored group nor subject to caste restrictions because the preponderance of white blood conceals their descent.³⁶⁶

Du Bois notes the unfounded ideals of a singular descent that makes one group superior or upper to another. This defined group status in white or black America.

'Colour-caste', a theme matured by Du Bois, was later expanded upon by his mentee, anthropologist Allison Davis.³⁶⁷ Davis saw 'colour-caste' as the 'largest system' addressing the complicated concepts pertaining to social castes and hierarchies in America. It prevented integration and intimate social interactions. Endogamy and negative connotations implied as a taboo upon the coloured groups made it 'more inviolable' than Hindu castes, Davis stated.³⁶⁸ The existing studies of the time were closely observing this phenomenon in relation to caste studies.³⁶⁹ The unchanging nature of rigid practices (occupation, marriage, intimate partnership, religion) unwilling to evolve made the American caste system extraordinarily striking compared to other societies with caste systems worldwide, as it received legal and customary sanctions.³⁷⁰ Class and caste differed because caste was unchanging due to 'physical birthmarks' assigned to individuals, whereas class could offer changes more easily.

The concept of 'colour caste' was further explored by scholars and researchers. Colour and caste were essentially one and the same according to Myrdal. The colour line was another name for the caste line, which explained the widening gulf between the castes of many classes within intracaste groups that not only enforced discrimination but also engendered mortal conflicts. The colour line of caste meant that maintaining caste was the responsibility of the white group, whose role was to keep black people in their caste line and prevent them from thinking outside caste injunctions.³⁷¹

³⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 1

³⁶⁷ Kamala Visweswaran records a host of prominent African American scholars who were influenced or mentored by Du Bois. 'E. Franklin Frazier, Charles Johnson, Allison Davis, St. Clair Drake, Horace Cayton, and Ralph Bunche' (Visweswaran, 2010, p. 111). Although we cannot say if Du Bois directly mentored Davis. There are references in his biography when Davis is in contact with Du Bois and is also closely following the trail of the most influential black intellectual of his time. It is reported that Davis was annoyed with Du Bois taking more time to review Davis' work. David A. Varel, *The Lost Black Scholar Resurrecting Allison Davis in American Social Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

³⁶⁸ Allison Davis, 'Caste, Economy, and Violence', *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Jul. 1945), p. 7, 12, fn. 2.

³⁶⁹ W. Lloyd Warner and Allison Davis, 'A Comparative Study of American Caste,' in Edgar T. Thompson (ed.) *Race Relations and the Race Problem* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1939), pp. 219-29.

³⁷⁰ Here it clearly meant not only India but other societies perhaps Latin America which was also engaging in critically examining their caste sociologies.

³⁷¹ Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, p. 677.

Slavery Untouchability

Taking a different position from caste, class complementarianism, economist and sociologist Gunnar Myrdal in 1944 after studying the American social problem, presciently argued that 'Caste and class are *never the only* bases for cleavage in a community' (emphasis added). Myrdal drew from black studies. For Myrdal, the Howard University young radicals such as economist Abram Harris, Ralph Bunche, and E. Franklin Frazier, as well as the older generation of Du Bois, were equally important.³⁷² Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction* was a reference guide. He was a close observer of Du Bois' sociological work and larger corpus of his politics. Du Bois was a senior, well-respected black academic in America at the time of Myrdal's research trip.

While Myrdal's study agreed that caste and class are 'important tools for the study of American communities', it argued that adding other 'ordering concepts' such as age, sex, personality, racial philosophy, and rural and urban backgrounds are important concepts to study 'any Negro community'.³⁷³ This is reminiscent of Du Bois' methodology seen in *The Philadelphia Negro*.³⁷⁴

Myrdal saw caste as a 'remnant of outmoded slavery system' which has been 'even more important impediment to progress and economic adjustment than slavery itself could ever have been'.³⁷⁵ This, aided by the liberal market principle of owning labour itself, granted slavery to survive as opposed to the 'surviving caste system'.

There is no doubt that, compared with the contemporary caste system, slavery showed a superior capacity to effectuate economic adjustment, even if the slave owners and not the slaves reaped the profits. Even to many Negroes themselves slavery, again in certain limited respects, was a more advantageous economic arrangement than the precarious caste status into which they were thrown by Emancipation.³⁷⁶

In a similar tone, Ambedkar had argued about the pernicious system of untouchability within the caste system, which he deemed 'worse' than slavery. 'In untouchability there is no escape. Once an Untouchable always an Untouchable.'³⁷⁷

On the inescapability of untouchability, Ambedkar emphatically argued,

...an Untouchable has no option. Once he is born an Untouchable, he is subject to all the disabilities of an Untouchable. The law of slavery permitted emancipation.³⁷⁸

³⁷² Walter A. Jackson, Gunnar Myrdal and America's Conscience Social Engineering and Racial Liberalism, 1938-1987 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), p. 101, 103.

³⁷³ Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*. Appendix 8. Research in a Negro Community., p. 1131.

³⁷⁴ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (Philadelphia: U Penn Press, 1899)

³⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 221-2.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 222.

³⁷⁷ B R Ambedkar, 'Slaves and Untouchables', in Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings & Speeches, Vol. 5 (Mumbai: Govt of Maharashtra, 2008), p. 15

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

Although, Ambedkar contended throughout the essay that slavery was worse because it was supported by the legal system that endowed upon it a value of property owned by someone else, and the one who is not a person—non-human rights of the slaves. In a poetic move he observed that '[N]either slavery nor untouchability is a free social order.'³⁷⁹ But what disadvantaged the untouchable was the limitation that free social order imposed upon the labourers to fend for itself which 'depends upon fair start, equal opportunity and square deal'.³⁸⁰

This is not accorded to the untouchable due to the stigma attached to the untouchable body, even though he may be free. Ambedkar curtly concludes that the free social order doesn't advantage untouchables because 'they can claim none of the advantages of an unfree social order and are left to bear all the disadvantages of a free social order'.³⁸¹ Therefore, throughout the essay he repeats '[O]f the two orders, untouchability is beyond doubt the worse'.³⁸² Surprisingly, anthropologist Kamal Visweswaran in her analysis of untouchability and slavery avoids this part of the passage and instead abruptly ends Ambedkar's quote that helps her make a case that untouchability is slavery by wrongly attributing it to Ambedkar. However, she later comes around to posit Ambedkar's static position on the status between untouchables and slaves as *de jure* and *de facto* where Ambedkar is making a case for untouchability as a worse system compared with slavery.³⁸³

Here Ambedkar was not competing for the desired victimhood but refuting the allegations of the Hindus and benevolent whites who had devoted their intellectual work to highlighting the greatness of Hindu civilisation. By stating the *de facto* condition of the untouchables, Ambedkar highlighted jealousy and inflexibility among the Hindus to grant any sense of dignity, pride and freedom. Even if the institution of slavery was wretchedly degrading compared to the untouchables, the slaves at least had public approval, although condemned. In contrast, the untouchables had no acceptance at all. That is why even if there were notable Dalit figures in the past, their contribution was shunned, stolen and censored. This closed the doors for Dalit descendants to claim a past with pride. While, for slaves there was certain mobility. Slavery here meant to describe the commerce that operated in an unfree social order. However, it could also be freely adjusted to suit the needs of the free market. Untouchability, in contrast, meant a closed order that is a dark dungeon closed from the world.

However, these distinctions hold weight for further analysis on the common struggle against casteism and racism. From 1930 onwards, the African American public sphere was relatively cognisant of the anti-caste activities in India. Sometimes they were enthralled by the religious piety of Gandhi and at other times it was Ambedkar's work. Ambedkar remained a point of reference for a longer

³⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 17.

³⁸¹ Ibid., p. 18.

³⁸² Ibid., p. 15.

³⁸³ Visweswaran, *Un/common Cultures*. p. 159.

duration.³⁸⁴ Much of America was religiously engrossed with Christian values. Both white and black Americans looked up to the word of God. Thus, a godlike, 'Jesus' figurine (Gandhi) in India helped them to not only frame their thoughts in a globalist historical parlance of ancient religions but also to tell the white people in their own country to follow the religious preaching to the word rather than discombobulate it with racist tropes. Religion did become a topic of contestation and an element of liberation. With the limitations of dogmatic Christian values, Islam came to the fore as an alternative with more forthright views on racism and discrimination. Islam from India was a feature of the early decade of the twentieth century American politics. In the next section, we will take a look at the cross-border transmigration of religion, ideologies and political protest.

Islam's Counterculture: Ahmadiyyas Caste

While the cross-cultural exchanges were taking place between the African American Christian leadership and Indians, there was another movement in action in the league of US-India relations. From 1920 onwards, an alternative to white man's Christianity came from within the Abrahamic tradition. Islam was offered as an apparatus and a spiritual force that would subvert white man's dogmatic faith espousing white supremacy into Islam's universal brotherhood. Many black activists turned to Islam away from the white man's 'slave religion'—Christianity. An outfit of the Islamic faith, Ahmadiyyas, originated in North India, were a missionary Islamic organisation. Within a few decades of its formation, the Ahmadis took the word of God and established missions. One such mission was sent to the USA in 1919 led by an England-based missionary, Hazrat Mufti Muhammad Sadiq.³⁸⁵ Sadiq travelled widely in the US establishing missions. In 1921, a Moslem Mosque of Highland Park in Michigan was built with Sadiq appointed as its first imam. At his inaugural speech, Sadiq maintained that though the mosque was built for the followers of Islam, it was open for people from all faiths for 'rest, prayer and meditation'.³⁸⁶ This clearly indicated the openness and cosmopolitan appeal that Sadiq made. By invoking rest, prayer and meditation, Sadiq indirectly connected with the non-interested or agnostic people. With prayer, he hinted at those religions that believed in prayers and worship. And with meditation, he welcomed those to exercise their activities without being bothered about their choice of worship.

A year later in 1922, the first Ahmadiyya Muslim Mosque was built in Chicago. Sadiq's activities were reported with interest by local newspapers, discussing his missionary zeal. The Ahmadiyya connection with America is probably one of the continuing archives of US-India history. An interesting aspect of the Ahmadiyya missions was that they were able to convert African Americans in the Midwestern region. Sadiq was able to find an audience in influential black circles, in particular,

³⁸⁴ Suraj Yengde, 'Ambedkar's Foreign Policy and the Ellipsis of "Dalit" from the International Activism', in Yengde S and Teltumbde A (eds.) *The Radical in Ambedkar Critical Reflections* (Gurgaon: Allen Lane, 2018) p. 86

³⁸⁵ Mubashar Ahmad, Nasir A. Jamil, *Ahmadiyyat in America* (Washington D.C.: Ahmadiyya Movement in Islam, 1992)

³⁸⁶ Sally Howell, *Inventing the American Mosque: Early Muslims and Their Institutions in Detroit, 1910-1980* (Doctoral Thesis submitted to the University of Michigan, 2009), p. 67.

the Garveyites. A few of them converted to Islam.³⁸⁷ The Ahmadiyya movement had roots in the anti-colonial and anti-Christian campaigns in India. With Sadiq, who was an influential speaker and a well-mannered person, the task to attract African Americans naturally became easier. Besides, Sadiq was a scholar and a polyglot who spoke seven languages, which made his appeal approachable. But all was not as anticipated. African American Ahmadiyya Muslims raised issues of not being appointed to higher positions. Part of this interpretation could be that the Ahmadiyya movement was still engulfed with caste values that existed as colour divisions in America.

However, since the advent of Nation of Islam (NOI) in the same precincts of America, conflicts arose due to their differing approaches. NOI was more confrontational, while the Ahmadiyyas were inward-looking and less public. Nonetheless, the Ahmadiyya interpretation of religion as having a universal character encouraged NOI to repudiate nationalism, challenging the very idea of America.³⁸⁸ This provided them with a subtle appeal against the oppression of the American state. Those who were tortured and harassed by the state sought an avenue that would provide a space to vent their struggles and find spiritual solace through justice. Islam became the position from which to cultivate an anti-racist movement.

The Ahmadiyya movement galvanised its support base by critiquing the structure that brought suffering to black people while also relegating white as Christian colonial tenets. The founder of the Ahmadiyya movement, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, was a confirmed anti-colonialist in India. Like him, his congregation was fully aware of caste divides in India. He had scorn for the caste-oppressed and despised the outcastes. In the census report, the commissioner had referred to Mirza preaching to the Chuhras—the manual scavenging caste. Mirza took serious offence to this. He wrote to the census commissioner that the reference to him preaching to the Chuhra community was grave. Mirza went on to write that the Chuhra community was considered a *jarain pesha qaum* or 'criminal class' and a *zaleel* (degraded, despicable, morally base or impure) community; therefore, associating him with them was 'an insult' to him.³⁸⁹ It had damaged his 'reputation immensely'. As he was a spiritual head, that injury extended to his thousands of followers. The impure, dirty Chuhras would not have a place in his communion. His principles and teachings were guided by 'sophisticated manners and attainment of such high spiritual stations' that the lowly Chuhras were incapable of attaining.

To impress upon his high-bred origin and the vanity of his philosophy, Mirza confided to the census commissioner that his followers include those of 'akhlaq e fazlah' (praiseworthy morals and manners), '*faheem*' (wise, intelligent), '*shareef*' (noble, exalted), '*pakeezagi*' (pure, chaste, clean), '*aala maratib roohaniyat*' (high

³⁸⁷ Aysha Khan, 'Ahmadi Muslims Have a Storied American History—And a Legacy That Is Often Overlooked', *Religion & Politics*, Nov. 20, 2018, <https://religionandpolitics.org/2018/11/20/ahmadi-muslims-have-a-storied-american-history-and-a-legacy-that-is-often-overlooked/>

³⁸⁸ Moustafa Bayoumi, 'East of the Sun (West of the Moon): Islam, the Ahmadis, and African America', *Souls*, 3:3, 39-49, 2001. DOI: 10.1080/10999949.2001.12098167, p. 45.

³⁸⁹ *Al Hakam*, February 28th, 1903, pp. 12—13, also can be found here, <https://archive.org/details/alhakam-qadian-1899-to-1912/alhakam1903/page/n93/mode/2up>

or elevated degree of spirituality), and '*fazil ulama*' (accomplished scholars). Mirza was concerned about his PR and reputation. He kept emphasising that such erroneous news would spread and bring disrepute to him. It seems he was afraid of the consequences, but more importantly, he was convinced in his belief that he was high-caste bred, '*rausa*'—'a family of nobles'—and therefore, it was a calamitous mistake to associate him with the '*zaleels*'—the Chuhras.³⁹⁰ He reproduced the letter in his newsletter *Al Hakam*.

Many Baniya and middle-caste communities found a natural home in the Ahmadiyya faith. Though Ahmadiyyas continued to face rejection from fellow Muslims due to their belief in the existence of a new prophet, Mirza, in America, the Ahmadiyya missions were successful in their intended mission of establishing missions and mosques and converting people.

Inter-cultural romance

To explore more on the question of caste, India and colour, I now turn to Du Bois' another landmark text which he mentioned as being one of his finest creations of all time—*Dark Princess: A Romance*. The novel, set in India, migrates from America to Europe, Berlin in particular. Du Bois' answer to racialism can be seen through the possibilities of co-mingling, mixed blood categories. India (being the epicentre of the Brahminic caste system) informs the imaginary locus for Du Bois. The novel is filled with possibilities. It is an imagination freely exercised through an 'artistic demeanour'.³⁹¹ Furthermore, it also dispels the myth of mixed-race profanity by giving Matthew, the central character in the novel, an authority to what the *New York Times* 1928 book review called the 'theme of miscegenation'.³⁹²

The connection of suppressed spatiality intensifies the regional domain—the American South and the Indian landscape, invigorating what Dohra Ahmad calls 'Du Bois's strategic deployment of genre...into a mystical and expanded global South', offering a prehistory of the region of the coloured folk remained in the depiction of South America, Africa, and Asia.³⁹³

There is an interesting connect which scholars like Ahmad find in the envisioning of *Dark Princess*. According to the author, Du Bois' engagement with nationalist Lala Lajpat Rai and their conversations over issues of colonialism fared well for some time. So much so that, Du Bois sent his version of *Dark Princess* to Rai to solicit his comments. Rai was the only consultant on the manuscript on matters related to India, in contrast to the eight individuals whom Du Bois sought for comments on Chicago where the novel sets its foot. Though, he identifies the novel with Du Bois' aspirational task surrounding sensuality and politics exposes a juxtapositional contradiction to Bhabha. The terminological confiscation of colour

³⁹⁰ I am grateful to Abullah Azam for his help in translation.

³⁹¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dark Princess: A Romance*, Introduction by Claudia Tate (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, [1928] 1955)

³⁹² NYT, 'Race Discrimination', *DARK PRINCESS* By W. E. Burghardt Dubois.

<https://www.nytimes.com/books/00/11/05/specials/dubois-dark.html>

³⁹³ Dohra Ahmad, "'More than Romance": Genre and Geography in *Dark Princess*', *ELH* 69.3 (2002), pp. 775-803.

was not singular but rather multiple.

The Dark Princess, perhaps, is an Indian Parsee woman, Madame Bhikaji Cama, who was living in Paris. Cama, the daughter of a wealthy Parsee businessman, had lived in exile since 1902. Her working ground was Europe. Here, she attended the International Socialist Congress in Stuttgart in 1907. The same year, Du Bois was in Europe. She had unfurled the tricolour, as the newspaper put it, 'displayed a silken tricolour, the banner of the oppressed, then the cheers of the International would not end'.³⁹⁴ It may be possible that Du Bois witnessed this or heard about this act of defiance by a coloured Indian woman. This episode may have added to the fascination of Du Bois' expanding interest in the East and his coloured solidarity. Bhabha wonders if it was Rai who introduced him to her or that Du Bois caught news about her from his sojourns in Europe in the summer of 1907.

The common enemy is the white-appearing person focused on control and commerce. However, this revealed the many formations of colour societies with inbuilt syncretic elitism and cultural formations of various societies that were labelled as 'coloured races'. The juxtaposition here is about inequality on the one hand and the aspirational elite power seduction that Du Bois is framed into.³⁹⁵ The other that surfaces is the race-man of the US and his revolutionary wife from India.³⁹⁶ Bhabha brings forth the history of the Universal Races Conference in 1911, which acted as a precursor to Du Bois's thinking of the cross-worlds depicted in this novel. That is how Rai comes into the picture as a cultural agent in the politics of anti-colonial thinking. Homi Bhabha stated that his attempt to find the established correspondence between Rai and Du Bois was not available regarding the novel.³⁹⁷

The comradeship between Rai and Du Bois developed to a level where they even lectured once. In the joint lecture, Rai related Indian problems as Hindu problems in relation to the negro and world problems. 'The problem of the Hindu and of the negro and cognate problems are not local, but world problems'.³⁹⁸

Du Bois looked at India admirably and 'as a guiding force for the anti-colonial struggle'.³⁹⁹ Perhaps due to his anti-colonial stand and larger communistic anti-capitalist ideals, there was a resonance with the civilisational force of India that the mighty empire had to reckon with. During the 1920s and onwards, India was positioning itself as a leading anti-imperialist opponent. The symbolism attributed to India plays a significant role in the global struggle of 'darker races'. Ahmad observes that the columns produced by Du Bois during the 1910s and 1920s are 'extolling Indian victories'.⁴⁰⁰ His admiration for the Indian struggle moves beyond

³⁹⁴ The *Leipziger Zeitung* in Homi K Bhabha, 'The Black Savant and the Dark Princess', *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 50, no. 1 (2004), p. 142-3

³⁹⁵ Homi Bhabha, Introduction, *Dark Princess A Romance* (The Oxford W. E. B. Du Bois) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. xxx

³⁹⁶ Homi K Bhabha, 'The Black Savant and the Dark Princess', *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 50, no. 1 (2004): 137-155. <https://doi.org/10.1353/esq.2004.0014>.

³⁹⁷ Homi Bhabha Guest Lecture, *Du Bois and His Critics*, class led by Henry Louis Gates Jr., March 24, 2024

³⁹⁸ Quoted in 'Explosion of Asia as Menace to Peace,' New York Evening Post, 22 September 1917, p. 14.

³⁹⁹ Ahmad, 'More than Romance', p. 791

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 785

geographical boundaries in which, as mentioned earlier, the symbolic significance plays an important role in determining the protagonist of his novel. This influence, it is claimed, led Du Bois to declare black America as an internal colony in the US. In his *The New York Amsterdam* column in 1946, Du Bois stated, 'the greatest colour problem in the world is that of India...[R]emember the American Negroes are the bound colony of the United States just as India is of England'.⁴⁰¹

However, Du Bois' primary link to India, Rai, was not the internationalist that Du Bois wanted him to be.⁴⁰² Du Bois had intended for the mixture of diversity. He hoped to extend black people's ontology with that of Indian identity. Whereas Rai was nevertheless a caste Hindu who was instrumental in forming Hindu Mahasabha, a right-wing Hindu group. Notionally, being an Arya Samaj member and a leader of the outfit, he was anti-caste. Rai also bemoaned caste in the Hindu faith. However, over time he found comfort in the Hindu right template of nationalism. Rai, like Gandhi, was comfortable prioritising the Hindu-Muslim binary as opposed to 'black-like' solidarity vis-à-vis caste that Du Bois and others in the movement hoped to establish. There was an acceptance of the passive struggle that was rooted in the principles of satyagraha, fasting, disobedience and non-cooperation. These methods did not promote the apparent use of bloody violence. It was not considered right and therefore it had to be discarded.

Rai's work on America included a separate chapter on 'Caste in America'. Here, he stated that the principle and reasons on which caste was founded in Hinduism were by no means exclusive to Hindus. Caste was found elsewhere too. Rai equated the term caste with colour, justifying this with the connotation of varna, which translates as colour. Rai reports that caste was more prevalent in American texts than the colour line.⁴⁰³ Writing in the second decade of the twentieth century, Rai was certainly examining this hypothesis in Jim Crow states. Literature on castes in America had been in circulation since the mid-nineteenth century (see chapter 1). Castes in India and America could have the same considerations and causes for their arousal, i.e., to subjugate a population group to the bottom of society.

FANON AND CASTE NATION

Departing from the invocations of political praxis and sovereignty of the ethical self, let us now move into the alley of the theory of violence and theory of the oppressed. To deal with the concepts of violence, dignity, pride, and global solidarities, I engage with the leading Africanist and thinker of the oppressed, Frantz Fanon. In the many interpretations of Fanon's thoughts and circularity of his ideas, one can find assurance of identical expressions in Ambedkar's project of sovereignty. Writing in colonial times prefaced with the Brahminical system, Ambedkar elucidates an imagination that gives reasons for the future—our present a valid opportunity to protest.

⁴⁰¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, 'As the Crow Flies' *The New York Amsterdam News*, 26 Feb. 1944, p. 10

⁴⁰² Ahmad, 'More than Romance'.

⁴⁰³ Lala Lajpat Rai, *The United States of America: A Hindu's Impressions and a Study* (Calcutta: R Chatterjee, 1916), p. 387

By providing a nonconformist intervention to the Indian colonial problem, Ambedkar professed the post-colonial and post-caste situation. Looking at the 'traditional' bourgeoisie, or to use Hobsbawm's caution⁴⁰⁴ and instead deliberate on the customary beneficiaries of India, Ambedkar debunked the overwhelming notions of colonial slavery. He cautioned the natives—the oppressed castes and tribals, the ideal subjects of the colonial state—that their position is secondary in the line of subjectivity. The first is to the sacrilegious domain of religion and that is to the Brahmin who authorises his position by virtue of sanctions from religion.

Fanon prescribed an analysis of the colonised. He observed the biologically infused but socially dominant dogma that placed the black race as inferior. Fanon's emphasis lay in the 'objective gaze' that is forced upon the oppressed to determine and behave in a way that is not a natural condition and lifestyle of the coloured person.⁴⁰⁵ He argues,

In the white world, the man of colour encounters difficulties in elaborating his body schema. The image of one's body is solely negating. It's an image of the third person.⁴⁰⁶

Fanon saw violence and oppression as interrelated. For the oppressed to thrive, the 'practice of violence' is a habitual organic manifesto, where the oppressor must be reduced to a 'rotten corpse'.⁴⁰⁷ In his most direct treatise, *The Wretched of the Earth*, published in the year of his death, Fanon advances the theory of violence as 'the only work' of the colonised people that needs to be used as a source of energy. This energy can be used after the departure of the coloniser. In this act, the tribally separated groups that colonialism had created are united.

Fanon spoke from personal experience. His blackness was apparent, a 'proof' of his blackness being 'there, dense, and undeniable'.⁴⁰⁸ However, Fanon's position is characterised as one of 'bitterness'. Edward Said found that violence and bitterness overrode Fanon's indictment.⁴⁰⁹ Albert Memmi found that his position in Algeria and Tunisia was mediated by interpreters who offered access to their culture and language, reflecting his intellectual position.⁴¹⁰

Fanon's personal biography was a complicated colonial story. He was a child of mixed-race parents in the colony of Martinique. Fanon grew up thinking of himself as white and French. His departure from Martinique for work and studies set him on an enduring quest for national identity. He tried to identify as Algerian, which was not well received, and some Algerian revolutionaries were irritated by the attention paid to Fanon as an interlocutor of their struggle. However, his departure from Martinique did not preclude his possibility of return or even staying in a

⁴⁰⁴ Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction: Inventing Traditions', in E. Hobsbawm & T. Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 2012), pp. 1-14. doi:10.1017/CBO9781107295636.001

⁴⁰⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008 [1952]), p. 92.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 90.

⁴⁰⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Groove Press, 1963), p. 93-4

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 96.

⁴⁰⁹ Edward W Said, 'Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors,' *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1989, pp. 223-4.

⁴¹⁰ Memmi in Gates Jr. 'Critical Fanonism', p. 468

location concerned with this research tableau—that of colonisation, violence, and the inferiority of black personhood.

In the politics of Dalit beingness—the state of human existence—the conditions of behaving in society are predetermined by Brahminical world cultures and their enforced legal doctrines, which, as Fanon would state, are 'dissecting me'. It is a personalised experience that cannot be masked with abstract notions of philosophical guilds. The dominant oppressive culture is deserting the man/woman of the oppressed society, forcing them into a new type of person which will fit its own narratives—a new Dalit or a 'new Negro, in fact!'⁴¹¹

However, Fanonian violence needs contextual and theoretical observance which challenges the career of philosophy as the final arbiter of humanism.⁴¹² In this act, Fanon displaces and slowly occupies the same role as 'twentieth century's foremost philosophers' from a black point of view.⁴¹³ Yet his philosophical position was not idealist; it was more pragmatic. He wanted to add wheels to reality so they could be put into action.⁴¹⁴ That is why the concept of violence manage to occupy dominant position. However, I argue we need to think about action and geography as a moment of departure in the Fanon's analysis. Fanon eked violence not as a thesis of idle thinking but was examining it through the profundity of philosophical enquiry. Foucault, for example observes violence as an infrastructure of power.⁴¹⁵ It is an interrelation nature of networks operating on the levels of society which seek social project as freedom.⁴¹⁶

On Fanon's violence, Mbembe argues that Fanonian lexicon is often used in haste that has led to many misunderstandings of the concept.⁴¹⁷ Fanon's role as a psychiatrist offered him a unique perspective to deal with the theory of violence. It directed his methodological concern to the political project of violence. Violence for the colonised was non-ideological, at least in the first instance. Violence was meant to be a productive 'offer' to the coloniser that was vested with 'emancipatory' potential 'endowed with attributes of value, reason, and truth'.⁴¹⁸ It was an opportunity for the crushed, subjugated human to live 'himself up to his full height and to that of other humans'.⁴¹⁹

Fanon sees violence as intrinsic to the project of dominance. His understanding of violence transcends the materiality of violence as seen in the everyday context, outside of colonialism. It simply means expression of violence in the colonial diary is conditioned by various factors other than the violence expressed outside the spaces of colonialism. It is worth noting that for Fanon it is

⁴¹¹ Ibid., p. 95.

⁴¹² Lewis Gordon, *What Fanon Said A Philosophical Introduction to this Life and Thought* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2015), p. 3.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

⁴¹⁵ Michel Foucault, 'The subject and power', in In H. Dreyfus & P. Rabinow (Eds.), *Michel Foucault: Beyond structuralism and hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 208–226

⁴¹⁶ See Hannah Arendt, *On violence* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970)

⁴¹⁷ Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, p. 162.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., p. 166.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., p. 167.

the vested interest of the native elite and the native intellectuals who are part of the new 'bourgeois caste' culture to toy with violence.⁴²⁰ They form the discourse of the post-colonial state order reflecting and mimicking the master's (i.e., the colonisers') intent. Hence, the coloniser tries to partner with the native elite so that the project of decolonisation is delayed and, if succeeded, the economic interests still remain under control of the managers of colonialism. Fanon becomes the strict and piercing observer of the detrimental postcolonialism. Therefore, the arguments for non-violence must be created, or they are twisted as 'a creation of the colonial situation'. The emphasis on this new caste that was a product of the colonial-caste culture is almost a permanent fixture endowed by the colonial regulations of native societies.

Castes & Nation

Violence is caste. It transfixes the members of the caste order and acts as a deterrent. Whilst violence is also a casual exchange for those unwilling to stay in caste, it is traded as a law and juridical necessity for the unruly caste society to maintain order. Any liberal or gentle intervention must still meet with the force of violence because caste is a sharp-edged circle. Anyone inside it or outside trying to influence caste is going to be a casualty. Therefore, one has to commit to the inevitability of violence. Someone is going to be hurt; it is just a matter of time. This violence is not bio-centric but a communal hazard. Therefore, a mass of people disciplined in the arc of law and governance are yet the subjects of caste. It might be new caste values, rules and norms. Nevertheless, caste is the rule, and it is applicable for the colonial or post-colonial management of society. Fanon explores these dimensions in his treatises, one of which is *The Wretched of the Earth*, an expository statement on the features of national castes—elite, bourgeois, ruling class.

The Wretched of the Earth comes across as a plaid, a covering jacket for the duelling impact of violence inflicted upon the communities' lives in or outside the arc of colonisation. Fanon is concerned about the treachery of the native elites whom he calls the 'new caste', which is 'insult and an outrage'.⁴²¹ These, according to him, are a group of 'acquisitive, voracious, and ambitious petty caste, dominated by a small-time racketeer mentality, content with the dividends paid out by the former colonial power'.⁴²²

Fanon is anguished and therefore unsparing in his indictment of this caste – the national bourgeoisie who he argues has done nothing to contribute to the progress of newly independent society. And if it is revealed as to who they are then all the work will have to be 'started over again from scratch'. This caste will be 'swallowed up [in] its own contradiction' to be then 'eliminated'.⁴²³ 'This caste has done nothing

⁴²⁰ Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004) p. 113

⁴²¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Groove Press, 1963), p. 134; also, the same translation of caste was enumerated in Richard Philcox's version, see Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004) p. 113

⁴²² Ibid, p. 119

⁴²³ Ibid, p. 120.

else but prolong the heritage of the colonial economy, thinking and institutions'.⁴²⁴ This new caste is an extension of imperial desires that inherited the maxim of exploitation and profit. They are otherized into domestications thereby becoming what Spivak calls 'domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self'.⁴²⁵ Domestication has running force in Spivak's imperial vernacular. These are local—as a space of domesticity and as a formative exercise of 'domesticate[ing]-society-through-sexual-reproduction cathected as "companionate love".'⁴²⁶

Du Bois, Ambedkar and Fanon do not look at caste as a remnant from the past doomed to pass away but a truly modern form of oppression that also belongs to the future. Because caste easily interacts with modern forces by regulating the caste codes through state and culture. Though, these men dealt with cultural axioms like race, colour, caste, and society to better understand their condition. They also explored other archives that have been intimately interacting to find appropriation solutions. This was in relation to the advent of European capitalism. It was not the question of either culture or class, but rather a complicated picture wherein both the factors were identifiable. All three men have healthy criticism to the overarching Marxist take on social justice. The historical teleologies of a classical working-class distinction was extended. Here in this case, Fanon he is as Marxist as one can get but also someone who narrates the class identity, the bourgeois as a product of existing caste differences.

Fanon's treatment of imperialism operates on dualism. It has an extensive address. Benita Parry draws our attention to the Fanonain project of grounding the 'cartography of imperialist ideology' that is not hygienically located only in the cordon of the colonialist space. It is also working in the 'conception of the native as historical subject and agent'.⁴²⁷ Because, the colonialist bourgeoisie was invested in 'implanting the minds of the colonized' the 'native intellectual accepted the cogency of these ideas and deep down in his brain you could always find a vigilant sentinel ready to defend the Greco-Latin pedestal.'⁴²⁸ Fanon's resentment with the imperialism, therefore, cannot be risked in the vacuum of his 'bitterness' of the imperialism but his extension of the analogy to the native, the new man, the nu-agent who is drawing his position of subjectivity in neo-colonial or postcolonial moments.

Neocolonial New Caste

Fanon's idea of neocolonialism surpasses postcolonialism's limitations that overlooked caste as a meditating factor. He uses caste in a form to represent a group that is part of the national elite. It is pejorative in that this caste is minority who uses the statement and status of nationalism to advantage itself without any

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism,' *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (1985), p. 253

⁴²⁶ Ibid., p. 244, 246.

⁴²⁷ Benita Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse,' *Oxford Literary Review*, 9 (no. 1/2 (1987), p. 44-45.

⁴²⁸ Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004) p. 11.

recourse to the will of the majority.⁴²⁹ It is scandalous and by veneration of patriotism turns its back on the very people by constituting a leadership of dictatorship. This is essentially a New Man who is invested in identity politics and difference.⁴³⁰ This condition has to be supplemented by many compromises which is the only ideal way to stop aggressive masses from turning the cities into ashes, Fanon cautions. Compromises are seen as ways to protect mutual interests leaving the popular uprising or native's grudges at bay.

The New Man of Fanon's description is also observed in the African American context as the New Negro who uniquely utilised the space of culture and politics and advocated for dignity and justice. This New Man was uncompromising in his quest for equality. He would even take arms and not overlook violence should the need arise to protect democratically given liberal rights.

Ambedkar is also sincerely invested in deciphering the complexity of new nation or independent nation. He is aware of the contradictions that the new native rule might bring to the caste oppressed people. That is why he is petitioning to the British to not leave too soon before ensuring the rights of the oppressed are guaranteed and protected in the Constitution. Ambedkar was suspicious of the nationalist Congress elite, a la Brahmin as the New Man of Indian republic. Jawaharlal Nehru, the Kashmiri Brahmin ruled India as a Prime Minister for 16 years. Thus, this new identity of the nation was still a reserve of the privileged elite who crafted a new man into himself as a representative of the new nation.

The neocolonial caste—the nationalist bourgeoisie which is a construct of the colonialist apparatus performs to the rules of the colonialist. Sartre in a preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* describes the holographic design of non-violence, state, and oppression which needs to be functioned in history. Fanon observes,

'the whole regime, even your non-violent ideas, are conditioned by a thousand-year-old oppression, your passivity serves only to place you in the ranks of the oppressors.'⁴³¹

This logic ascends into the colonial project of Brahminical Vedic castes as a prelude to the horrific lived realities of the oppressed. One might as well replace the colonial with Brahmin in India.

Fanon's description can fit well into the post-colonial and post-modern situation in colonies like India. Fanon regularly challenged the nationalisation project led by the newly formed post-colonial elite—the nationalist caste whose idealised claim over the state wealth was held as deeply problematic, a theft of the masses. Fanon finds no difference between the colonialist and the newly formed native elite castes who are invested in nationalising the robbery of the nation.⁴³² The native elites who were shielded by the colonial administration regained the control in the post-colonial event. These elites were nonetheless beneficiaries of

⁴²⁹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p.167

⁴³⁰ Gates Jr., 'Critical Fanonism', p. 469.

⁴³¹ Ibid., p. 21

⁴³² Ibid., p. 37-8

the traditional caste system that protected their interests as groups of classes and tribes opposed to a homogenous *religious* identity.

Fanon notices that religion in the colony became a safe escape to shift the blame on the godly structure. Religion was a driving mechanism for the colonial state to have a soft power through cultural organisations like church. Like in the African American context where Islam contra Christianity played a part, the Dalit condition was yet unresolved in the Hindu belief system. Fanon notices the desire of religion and thus he enters this space to argued that,

The Church in the colonies is the white people's Church, the foreigner's Church. She does not call the native to God's ways but to the ways of the white man, of the master, of the oppressor. And as we know, in this matter many are called but few chosen.⁴³³

Furthermore, the natives' values are projected as the 'absolute evil'.⁴³⁴ Hence, by withdrawing the ethical stronghold of the native, their norms and traditional practices are delegitimised. This glimpse of the African situation reflects our imagination in the colonial state in India. Like, Ambedkar and Du Bois Fanon's reservation with the appropriated Marxism in the African context has largely to do with the undertones of racialised objectives that was not singularly economical.

In the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem.⁴³⁵

Ambedkar had argued something similar in his unfinished thesis on Marx. Ambedkar had undertaken an independent writing project to comment on India and Communism.⁴³⁶ Much like Du Bois, Ambedkar found the ideals of parliamentary democracy deficient towards the end of their life. Both figures were well versed in German and had access to the German public culture. Therefore, their fascination with Marx or labour as a subject becomes apparent. Ambedkar was a committed socialist who chose to ally and support socialist candidates in elections.⁴³⁷ However, he was not a Marxist. Though, in 1953 he found communism as an alternative to parliamentary democracy in India that was not fully protecting the wishes of the electorates. Further in 1956, three weeks before his death, Ambedkar endorsed Buddha's creed as an alternative to the Marxian dogma.⁴³⁸ Because, Ambedkar was not committed to the violent measures proposed by the communists. He believed in the twin necessity of material upliftment and spiritual *sin qua non* for the masses. Especially, the ones he was leading who were materially and spiritually deprived.

⁴³³ Ibid., p. 42

⁴³⁴ Ibid., p. 32

⁴³⁵ Ibid., p. 31

⁴³⁶ B R Ambedkar, *India and Communism*, Introduction by Anand Teltumbde (New Delhi: LeftWord Books, 2017)

⁴³⁷ Ambedkar preferred to back Mehta, a socialist leader in Bombay elections. His Republican Party of India was modelled on the mix of socialist ideas. For more on this see, Suraj Yengde, 'Brahminizing Ambedkar, Dalitizing Ambedkar', in Ravinder Kaur and Nayanika Mathur, *Political People How Power Plays Out In India* (Gurgaon: Penguin, 2022) (forthcoming)

⁴³⁸ B R Ambedkar, 'Buddha and Karl Marx', Prasar Bharati Archives, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GRlSkZ59ko>; *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 3 (Bombay: Maharashtra Government), pp. 441-463.

However, after Ambedkar's death in 1956, post-Ambedkarite phase consists of Fanon like sentiment which demands the Brahmin Marxists to harmonise dialectical materialism with caste situation in South Asia. This emphasis might reveal the undertones of structural inequalities wherein also lie an antidote to people's suffering that is both traditional and modern—Hindu caste and caste modern. Fanon's position is basically that of adialectical which simply means to highlight the black body that is muted, considerably rendered invisible and illegal too.⁴³⁹

Colonialisations before colonialisms

For Fanon the 'governing race is first and foremost those who come from elsewhere, those who are unlike the original inhabitants, "the others."' Can this logic be extended to the theory of Aryan invasion advocated during the colonial times and rejected by Ambedkar in his *Who were the Shudras?* If at all, it has to do with the outside settler question then the emotion surrounding the Other's control capture the mass' attention to unify in an abstract concept of nation state.⁴⁴⁰

Ambedkar was speaking in terms of racial component of castes that was yet to see a serious response from the sciences. The racialised science, sponsored by the colonialists was happy to endorse the inferiority of darker races. During the near end of Slavery, the slave owners of the American South had devised a 'caste program' that was to encode the 'future social development of America'.⁴⁴¹ Under this pretext it was assumed that the 'Negroes are better off' in slavery than in freedom. Because the freed black man was incapable to 'mental development', a Louisiana Senator commented when he saw the first Negro school.⁴⁴² This meant that no matter what advances we make one cannot change the laws of the nature 'when you've an inferior stock of men...with deficient cerebral development'. The social aspect of nature was fixated into caste programs.⁴⁴³ This worked as a recipe to internalise inferiority among the black people as discussed earlier.

Identically, in India the colonial expansion drew parallels from Pax Britannica. If white is a superior race how to emphasise it with non-African race, India in particular? The answer to this opens the pandoras box of caste complexities. Divided over 7000 caste and sub-caste groups distributed over 700 ethnic and linguistic units the caste question was too complex to easily describe.⁴⁴⁴ Easier option was to ascribe a 'race' status to India's overtly racialised past.

However, new research developments argue for the intermixing of Eurasian with Harappans. The Eurasians—mostly originated in the Steppe region who

⁴³⁹ Gibson, *Fanonian Practices*.

⁴⁴⁰ In India, the metaphors like freedom, liberty, anti-colonialism gained popularity among the Dalit and backward castes who united under the metonym of Bahujan Samaj or Moolnivasi—the indigenous native.

⁴⁴¹ Du Bois, *Proceedings, 1909, New York*, p. 145

⁴⁴² Du Bois, *Proceedings, 1909, New York*, p. 148.

⁴⁴³ Ibid., p. 148.

⁴⁴⁴ Michael Balter, 'India's Fragmented Society Was Once a Melting Pot', *ScienceMag*, <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2013/08/india-s-fragmented-society-was-once-melting-pot>

migrated to north India and displaced the Harappan civilisation (2600 to 1900 BCE)⁴⁴⁵ by bringing Vedic tradition into practice. The Vedic tradition was not only an invasion of culture but also of language. As a result, multiple language sources developed in India's complicated past. Vedic invasion brought with it shifting of the Harappa population downward to the south. In addition to it, horses and pastoral lives of Eurasia were brought along with. This created political economy of new cultures.⁴⁴⁶

Taking from the Y Chromosomes, and mitochondrial DNA, a study entitled, 'Genetic Evidence for Recent Population Mixture in India', argued that Ancestral North Indians' (ANI) ancestry can be traced in the Middle East, Central Asia, and Europe; and Ancestral South Indians (ASI), who were native to the region rarely intermixed. ANI simply means Western Eurasians and ASI as Dravidians.

ANI and ASI were a compromised terminology between the team of Indian collaborators co-author, geneticist David Reich of the Harvard Medical School reported in an interview. He preferred to use 'Western Eurasians' to describe the Ancestral North Indians—which is a perplexing misnomer and does not place attention to the mobility patterns.⁴⁴⁷ This emphasis on ANI embraces the nationalist nativism of the Eurasian population in India. The Harappan civilisation had strong indigenous roots without little outside influence. This native population groups were advanced in tool makings and farming paving a path for newer inventions in culture and society.

By paying attention to the racialised human body and its relationship with the dominant psyche, Fanon advances his argument to reconsider the 'negrification' domain as a starting point. Which is to not necessarily engage with the dynamics of white construction of the world but to critique the very aspects that normalise white culture. To simplify, one has to change the view from the dominant gaze which is often to undermine the rightful positive agency and not to be in the negative domain of being stereotyped. This is to say that black as an identity should develop a novel narration devoid of the European or white caricatures. Paul Gilroy argues that the lineage of western epistemology that relied on reason developed a tradition that could be understood throughout. Or as he put it 'discerned by rational means.'⁴⁴⁸ This tradition of rationality lost its true sense when it made slavery an internal project of the western civilisation by rationalising racial terror. Notwithstanding this the black people strove to find 'best possible forms of social and political existence'.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁵ Shinde et al., 'An Ancient Harappan Genome Lacks Ancestry from Steppe Pastoralists or Iranian Farmers', *Cell*, Vol. 179 (3), P729-735.E10, (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cell.2019.08.048>

⁴⁴⁶ For a composite picture of the Indian history especially in relation to the foundation of Indus cities (ca. 3000 BCE), the first Aryan invasion (ca. 1700 BCE), followed by completion of Veda, *Yajurveda* in 800 BCE, to the Alexander's invasion to India (326 BCE) and establishment of various Indian kingdoms from Satvahanas (200 BCE) onwards to diverse vignettes of historical developments see D D Kosambi, *An Introduction to the study of Indian history* (Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1956)

⁴⁴⁷ Shoib Daniyal, 'Two new genetic studies upheld Indo-Aryan migration. So why did Indian media report the opposite?', *Scroll.in*, <https://scroll.in/article/936872/two-new-genetic-studies-upheld-aryan-migration-theory-so-why-did-indian-media-report-the-opposite>

⁴⁴⁸ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic Modernity*, p. 39.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid.

Du Bois and Fanon correspond, although for varying reasons, on the status of black politics. They relate to each other on the ranking of phenomenology, argues philosopher Paget Henry. Phenomenology here is not only a subset of a broader discipline of Africana philosophy—developed under the influence of black Caribbean thought encompassing African and colonial histories of black people—but operates on two levels. One asks for action and the other for submission. The former as a 'self-reflective description' and the latter displacing Africana egos by 'decentring techniques practised in these cultures'.⁴⁵⁰ Cultures are central posits in the making of reason and self. It is also a historical process and an ethical project.⁴⁵¹ This is how European universalism advanced itself as an idea rather than a mere anthropological site. We can see this in the philosophical necessities of Hegel, Heidegger, Habermas, and Sartre; the ontological telos is made to find rationality as objective. We shall deal with them in subsequent chapters. Henry believes to make a case for the non-European, more specifically Africana phenomenology, 'the exclusive relationship between reason and European culture has to be pulled apart'.⁴⁵² It needs to be looked at through similar axioms but added with everyday experiences and frequent reconstructions of ethical phenomenologies: 'rescuing reason, writing, or racial equality'.⁴⁵³ The quality of self-reflection is different in the context of Africana experiences. It is mostly negation. It is 'burnt out, exploded and blackened', that is excluded and a misfit character.⁴⁵⁴

If phenomenology is to be departed from the understanding of experiences that evoke emotive responses and demand a sensorium of desire and imagination, then the relational location of the subject precedes racial barriers that often consume the abstract denomination of power. For Fanon, the phenomenology of race is superimposed by the filters of white norms and cultures. This results in having a contaminated version of black in white perspective. Lewis Gordon substantiates the Fanonian breadth as an original 'existential phenomenological social analysis' that is concerned with redefining the understanding of human possibilities through 'radical criticism'.⁴⁵⁵ This exercise aims to challenge and subvert established protocols of theorising descriptive experiences.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we examined how caste was a crucial factor of analysis for Du Bois, Ambedkar and Fanon. Whilst they differed in providing a common or uniform definition of caste, their scholarship and activism advocated for a caste prognosis. They dedicated their lives to understanding their societies better. To gain a nuanced picture, they looked elsewhere to draw from theories and experiences. However, their analysis was highly original and contemporary. Though race, caste,

⁴⁵⁰ Henry Paget, 'Africana Phenomenology: Its Philosophical Implications', *C.L.R. James Journal*, 11(1), Summer 2005, p. 98

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 83

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 81

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 82

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 84, 85

⁴⁵⁵ Lewis Gordon, *What Fanon Said A Philosophical Introduction to his Life and Thought* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2015), p. 2, 3.

colour and class animate throughout their reading of the subject (i.e. state, violence, discrimination), they were also cognisant of the increasing influence of Marxism. They were indeed sensitive to labour and working-class ideals, but they were not blind believers of the Marxist doctrine. They stretched class analysis to culture and society. This formed a unity of the unmet trinity. Whilst doing this, coloured nationalism and race categories had a strong hold in the making of the new society where white became the ultimate factor of hierarchy.

White European characteristics as a dominant category of defining race did not necessarily offer a biological explanation, but it certainly justified capitalist expansion of European empires. The colonisation of non-Europe as a white supremacist project went on for more than three hundred years. However, whiteness was not a common category with a settled definition. Its description changed as it interacted with European enlightenment concepts of race and native. An example of this can be found in Kant's opus.⁴⁵⁶ Colour of the exteriority—the apparent skin—became the only reducible identifier for the non-European, 'a state of enforced negritude which colonised African people lost their earlier cultural identities and became identified by the colour of their skin'.⁴⁵⁷ This can be seen in the US and Afro diaspora. Paget Henry looks at this phenomenon as a corresponding thesis of 'Double Consciousness and Fanonian Phenomenology', an experience of psycho-somatic and existential extinction.⁴⁵⁸ This can be seen applied in the postcolonial occupied territories as well as in the diaspora.

However, when whiteness faced egalitarian, subaltern forms of pushback, it adopted an aggressive superior white theory—Aryanism as a source of purity, esteem and natural strength came to its defence.⁴⁵⁹ This invites us to rethink the intransigent categories of the past century that continue to invite influence and contempt. The starkness between white as an 'übermensch' falls short if looked at through the history of white heaven—Europe and its amazingly complicated tribalism. In Europe during the Great Wars, whiteness was enjoying dividends abroad while infusing new forms of racialism in its own geographies. The arbitrariness of race can be better understood with caste angles of colour prejudice. The Western European colonial advantages were exemplifications of class, caste and tribal sensibilities that Europeans were trying hard to master. That is why the immense diversity and fight over whiteness was discredited by its own lowered castes.

Foucault identified these differences when the aristocratic elites commissioned the lower-caste peasants to go to war with other peasants in foreign

⁴⁵⁶ Robert Bernasconi, 'Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Racism', In Julie K. Ward, Tommy L. Lott (eds.), *Philosophers on Race Critical Essays* (Malden, MA.: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), pp. 145—166.

⁴⁵⁷ Paget Henry, 'Africana Phenomenology: Its Philosophical Implications', *C.L.R. James Journal*, 11(1), Summer 2005, p. 96

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 97-8.

⁴⁵⁹ That is how Nazi occupation of 'Slavs'—fellow whites as lower 'inferior race' and 'sub-humans' were justified.⁴⁵⁹ These occurrences complicate the theories of melanin whiteness that were construed by the colonial authorities to seek more favors in their illogical whiteness. John Connolly, 'Nazis and Slavs: From Racial Theory to Racist Practice', *Central European History*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (1999), p. 2.

lands.⁴⁶⁰ Yet at the same time, the fluidity of being white profited over non-white subjugated peasants, drawing extraordinary surpluses for the white worker in a white settler society. The otherwise lower-class whites who were considered 'fleabags' by the ruling castes of their society, after arrival in the US, South Africa, Australia, Canada, New Zealand or the Americas, became accomplices in the expansionism of the empire. The state of the white republics provided support and rations for white protectionism. The South African apartheid government in Africa established relief measures for Europeans escaping the Congo in the 1960s.⁴⁶¹ Even though moral conflict persisted in Europe amongst whites, there remained a general white solidarity to establish legitimate white rule abroad. Whiteness, and the ability to self-reflect on aggressive historical moments, effaced intra-societal group differentiations. Caste remains the spirit that works in the invisibility of para-identity of white but assuages its presence. That is why caste analysis has paid inadequate attention to the spiritual, theological and traditional worlds.

The reason Du Bois, Ambedkar and Fanon are becoming more relevant to our times suggests that we have not succeeded in solving problems they wrestled with. Their prognosis seems to be more in demand now than at any other time. South Africa, India, America, France and the United Kingdom have risen anew what Adolph Reed Jr. calls 'race reductionism' politics.⁴⁶² If reductionism is adopted in the calls of new age politics, we are evolving aged beliefs into phenomenologies of self-reflective rationalisation in forms of neoliberalism, market fundamentalism and cultural commodification. Body, exteriority, race, colour, class, gender are becoming the only indicators of politics in anti-black societies, pro-caste societies.

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⁴⁶⁰ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* Selected Interviews & Other Writings 1972-1977

⁴⁶¹ Passermiers Lazlo, 'Safe-Guarding White Minority Power in Southern Africa Through External Coercion: The South African Government and the Secession of Katanga, 1960-1963', *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (2016), 70-91.

⁴⁶² Hope Reese, 'Adolph Reed Jr.: The Perils of Race Reductionism', *Daily JSTOR*, April 28, 2021, <https://daily.jstor.org/adolph-reed-jr-the-perils-of-race-reductionism/>

Chapter 4

TOWARDS DALIT- AFRICAN CONSCIOUSNES: AMBEDKAR AND BIKO

‘Consciousness extends beyond the now’
– Immanuel Kant

An obvious question arises: why should Ambedkar and Biko be compared, especially when building a theoretical argument for Dalit and Black Consciousness? Many contenders fit the bill and are well qualified to take up these positions. The reason Biko becomes part of this dialogue is strategic and epistemic. For the latter, I will draw parallels between the philosophies of ‘heritage relationality’ and the culmination of thought in a thinker. Kant would describe this practice as ‘unity of consciousness’—an intuitive response. Consciousness, typically perceived through bodily senses, integrates multiple sensory inputs simultaneously into a singular

experience. The lay mind is on the search. It has the capacity to register constant changes. In this light, the Buddhist canon has a deeper interaction with the changing senses and objects of consciousness manifested to the beings. We shall return to it later in the chapter.

Biko represents a character unifying the Black mould of consciousness that presupposes the primacy of the controlled body of the Africans. This invocation may not necessarily correlate to the intra-African, tribal, caste, ethnic, colour, and national cleavages. He is simultaneously contemporary as well as faithful to antecedent. His thought draws upon his own ancestors, the Xhosa people, but also on the history of the region inhabited by San and Khoi ethnic groups in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. At the same time, the Bikoist response to the anti-black oppression is drawn from witnessing European invasions and co-opting European modernity and language to produce 'African Modernity'.⁴⁶³ While Biko is cognisant of Du Bois's theoretical framework, his philosophy is primarily grounded in Fanonian thought. However, as his biographer Xolela Mangcu cautions, it would be reductive to view Biko as solely influenced by Fanon. Biko's ideology is further shaped by the Black Consciousness Movement in the United States, thereby combining various racial cosmopolitanisms.⁴⁶⁴

Thus, to estimate the larger and historically rich canon of Black Consciousness thought, a possible route is to those I view as its most articulate thinkers. Biko is one of the widely accepted thinkers who synthesises the Black Consciousness legacies of his predecessors with his own philosophy, translating theory into praxis. The strategic reason for these comparisons is to articulate the Black thought that distances itself from the supposed liberal ruling party ethics of compromise of the government and its unfulfilled promises to act in the interest of its people. Biko tears away from this co-opting politics of assimilation that 'conservatives' such as Tiyo Soga, often referred to as the 'Father of Black Consciousness,' and John Dube, the inaugural president of the South African Native National Congress (later renamed the African National Congress) espoused. Biko is also not on board with the submissive Xhosa politics of Ngqika and Ntsikana, and the defiance of Ndlambe and Nxele.⁴⁶⁵ Like Aime Cesaire, Biko also drew from a long line of Black intellectual criticism⁴⁶⁶—an extraordinary position that situates the Black people in an in-between transitional phase—much like the Dalit situated in the mid-stage of securing complete freedom in the present epoch.

This chapter, like others, is looking at empty material archives. There have been no direct relationships established between Black Nationalism, the Black Consciousness movement, and the Dalit movement. There have been distant solidarity frameworks working under the rubric of internationalism, anticolonialism and anti-oppression⁴⁶⁷, but no concrete call of action for Dalit and Black movements to organise together by way of a conscious effort, least of all between Dalit and

⁴⁶³ Mangcu, *Biko: A Life*, p. 12, 39.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 14, 33.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 64, 70.

⁴⁶⁶ Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 157.

⁴⁶⁷ One example here is of Dalit Panthers formed in 1972 which was directly influenced by Black Panthers.

African groups, to develop a coherent common agenda against oppression. There are many reasons for this, but one major reason must be due to the localised nature of the struggles of subaltern groups and the solidarity between the elites of these geographies (Indian elites and African elites), which prohibited a subaltern struggle. Colonial administration produced native elites took upon themselves to contest the colonial domination. The anti-colonial movement was thus observed as a global move thereby making a coloured identity of non-white groups. This identity of black, brown, yellow forged an alliance of the colonised nations.

The ancestral inheritance of Dalit and subordinated black groups predicated on the humanity of the outcastes, sharing a viewpoint of caring and fraternity. The subordinated black caste experience in Africa originates from a history of intra-tribal divisions and community warfare, followed in the modern epoch, by colonisation by distant external forces that reigned great control over their lives. The Dalit experience of being subject to repeated colonisation and invasions sympathises with groups who have been subjected to identical oppressions and who have been limited from freely exercising complete human rights. Repression and oppression exerted by power entities and indirect forces such as culture and society, which act to negate the autonomy of groups, are a shared feature of the histories of the Dalit and Black groups. I shall build on the communities' expression and experience archives.

Both the African and Dalit activism must reckon on two fronts while gauging the power dynamics of the struggle. The first is to resolve the internal contradictions that are part of the creation of the unequal, historic structure that they've inherited and part of the external forces they wrestle with. The second manifestation is having a collective pursuit of justice for issues beyond their immediate experience but concern others in several forms like them. Caste and colonisation are the twin towers of metaphysical—as cultural and material—as governmentality. The two enter into an ambitious partnership where the relationship is not decided by the guarantees of praxis but remains still an exploratory exercise. This may create a possibility for collective action, or it may well become a ground for turning against each other. This aids in the creation of complex political choices rather than simply tabling the proposal for collective struggle against simplified decolonisation or third world state politics.

BIKO AND AMBEDKAR

Stephen Biko (18 December 1946–12 September 1977) was born in South Africa in King William's Town in the Cape Provinces. He grew up in Ginsberg, Eastern Cape. He went on to study medicine at the University of Natal. During this time, Biko became increasingly actively involved in the politics on campus and beyond. Along with his friends, Biko co-founded the South African Students' Organization (SASO) in July 1969, serving as its founding president. In July 1970, he became SASO's publicity secretary, a role through which he began analysing and critiquing the hypocrisy of the white apartheid government. Due to his political activities, Biko was detained for 101 days under Section 6 of the Terrorism Act in 1976. A year later, he was detained again under the same law. During the detention, Biko was

prohibited from participating in socio-political activities and was murdered in cold blood while still in prison.

In an earlier epoch, B.R. Ambedkar brought caste consciousness to the oppressed caste groups in India. His greatest contribution to the Dalit rights struggle was building a Dalit identity separate from the Hindu order. Ambedkar argued that the concept of a 'good' or 'bad' Hindu was inherently contradictory.⁴⁶⁸ For him, no Hindu was a good Hindu, because the caste system was a fundamental pillar of the Hindu belief system. Offering scathing critiques of the caste system, Ambedkar aimed to transform the oppressive caste regime. Biko's analysis of the race problem can be understood as modern revivalism of the oppressed consciousness. These two thinkers and leaders, separated by time and space, sought to appeal to their respective communities using powerful vocabularies of liberation. In this chapter, we will examine some of the critical contributions of Ambedkar and Biko in the construction of a theory of consciousness in Indo-African subaltern spaces.⁴⁶⁹

This chapter analyses the metaphysics and nature of consciousness in the Dalit and Black life worlds. To understand this, we shall look at subaltern social and cultural movements that have shaped the identity of the oppressed in the two contexts. The chapter aims to add a perspective to the cross-sectionality of organising under institutions, resistances, social movements, and political change. Ambedkar and Biko become important interlocutors to examine these social constraints critically in a society that is enamoured with racist and casteist feelings built over fictional identities of superiority, although they never met nor knew about each other. The reason for this can be attributed most obviously to their age difference and hence the times they lived in. Ambedkar was born in the last decade of the nineteenth century. At the time of Steve Biko's birth in 1946, Ambedkar was already known worldwide for leading the fight for India's oppressed peoples. Steve Biko was born in a formalised racist regime that practised open discrimination based on colour difference.

Ambedkar was a systematic thinker, scholar, and leading anti-establishment organiser. Steve Biko too was a remarkable thinker, scholar, and leading anti-establishment activist. The conception of pragmatic thinking—voluntary submission to humanistic ideals and engaging with the power in the most radical, reformative terms—informed Ambedkar's strategy. Ambedkar did not rely on the traditional rulebook of pragmatism but overhauled it and gave it an edged meaning through his downward-up approach by handsomely loosening the elitism attached to 'humanism' in a Western framework that is often hierarchical and institutionally oppressive. Biko believed in the praxis of finding middle ground to bargain, adopting a three-fold strategy of standing firm on one's demands, explaining the status of their ongoing work and finally, enunciating the expectations from the

⁴⁶⁸ He made a comment about the secular and orthodox Brahmins, calling them two arms of the same body, cited later in his essay.

⁴⁶⁹ Shobhana Shankar's latest book foregrounds the subaltern identities of the African and Indian geopolitical spaces by drawing on what he calls 'Afro-Dravidians'. Shobhana Shankar, *An Uneasy Embrace: Africa, India and the Spectre of Race* (London: Hurst, 2021).

other.⁴⁷⁰ Ambedkar and Biko were determined to get Universal Adult Franchise for their people without qualification from the State. As Biko put it, ‘one man, one vote, no qualification whatsoever’.⁴⁷¹ Ambedkar’s first proposal to the British Southborough Committee in 1919 was related to such franchise, emphasising the essential need for granting franchise to the Dalits.⁴⁷²

Ambedkar, masterfully, decodes the communal question of political formation. He proposes representation—of opinion and persons as an ideal form to establish a popular government.⁴⁷³ This is evident in his examination of the relationship between ‘touchable’ and ‘untouchable’ groups, highlighting how the former establish exclusive social norms and set of rules that marginalise the latter. For a group to be constituted there has to be ‘like-mindedness’, i.e., ‘interests, aims, and aspirations’ as opposed to ‘caste-like-mindedness’ which is the primary learning and understanding influencing the Hindu activities.⁴⁷⁴ Thus, the Hindu group has to be constituted between touchable and untouchable Hindus as a separate category. He found proportional representation as an inadequate method because it concerned giving representation to particular views and it assumes that voters vote a candidate for their views and not persona.⁴⁷⁵ One can go further and notice that along with persona, one’s social history, common story, descent, and shared identity plays an important role in voter’s attitude towards a candidate. This is very well seen a hundred years later in contemporary Indian politics.

Ambedkar wanted a quality representation. This could be remedied by reserve seats or communal electorates. His interest lay in making special provisions for the untouchables whom he describes, drawing from the definition of Plato as slaves, ‘who accepts from another the purposes which control his conduct’.⁴⁷⁶ Then, providing the state of affairs of the untouchables and their life in social, educational, political space, Ambedkar demands the representation of Dalits as a matter of self-determination through communal representation. He makes the case by bringing in comparisons with other communities who stood to lose from the hegemonic Hindu majority, such as Muslims, Christians, and Parsees. However, their material interests united them as, ‘landlords, labourers, capitalists, free traders, protectionists’ had common interests.⁴⁷⁷ This was unavailable to the untouchables due to their disabilities.

Ambedkar had a much more nuanced understanding of the principle, ‘one man one vote’. Seen in a majoritarian context, it might seem to appease the dominant community. However, Ambedkar viewed this proposition with serious concern, seeing it as a grave threat in this proposition that would easily pave the path to the *Hindu Rashtra*—the state of Hindus sans plurality. To remedy this,

⁴⁷⁰ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, p. 150 in Mangcu, *Biko*, fn. 186, p. 151.

⁴⁷¹ Biko, *ibid.*, p. 150.

⁴⁷² B R Ambedkar, *Evidence Before The Southborough Committee Written Statement*, in Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings & Speeches, Vol. 1 (Bombay: Government of Maharashtra, [1979] 2014), pp. 248-278

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 248

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 248-9.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 252

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 255

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. 250

Ambedkar advocates for various political protections, such as additional rights to the non-numerical minority rights, separate electorates to non-majority groups, and reservations through quotas in the state services, politics, and education. His position was to equalise and mainstream the minorities at par with the majority, which he termed a 'communal majority'. He argued that communal majority politics, determined by group membership, were less flexible than a political majority that could be altered through general voting.⁴⁷⁸ Thus, Ambedkar is a minoritarian with a philosophical dispensation to carve a unique frame of rights and politics.

In his short life, Steve Biko provided a radical discourse for the Black movement in South Africa. He established a structured thesis that firmly established the importance of a Pan-African identity. Biko's activism primarily focused on student- and youth-led movements, which resonated with the rebellious spirit of his generation. Biko's approach could be understood in the context of his efforts to reconcile African unity between black, white, coloured, and Indian groups. Biko's early moves included his split from the white-led National Union of South African Students (NUSAS). After wider consultation with his comrades, Biko formed a new student body separate from NUSAS, the South African Students' Organization (SASO), in 1968, with him as its founding president.

Along with SASO, Biko was also an active member of other Christian bodies and churches—this gave him an easy outreach into the community.⁴⁷⁹ Biko gained leadership experience in youth and student organisations. He became involved in student movements and got elected to the black student representative body affiliated with the National Students' Union, a white-majority organisation. The whites were 27,000 in number at the time, whereas the blacks were a mere 3,000. The stark demographic disparity played a pivotal role in deciding the fate of student politics. Biko advocated for support of the newly formed student body, which challenged the mainstream (caucused) white organisation. SASO was a multi-racial organisation with clear objectives of non-racialism that were centred on advancing the rights of the marginalised.

SASO also planned to launch a national political movement and trade unions. They extended alliance in forming the Black People's Convention (BPC), a body for organising religious, social and political movements in South Africa. While the BPC did not evolve into a mass organisation, it served as a strategic liaising outpost, effectively communicating its objectives to the public through adept use of available media.⁴⁸⁰

There are, of course, many differences between Ambedkar and Steve Biko. However, there are similarities in their struggles which could be identified by the

⁴⁷⁸ 'A political majority is changeable in its class composition. A political majority grows. A communal majority is born. The admission to a political majority is open. The door to a communal majority is closed. The politics of a political majority are free to all to make and unmake. The politics of a communal majority are made by its own members born in it.' B R Ambedkar, *Thoughts on Linguistic States*, in *Dr Babasabheb Ambedkar Writings & Speeches*, Vol. 1 (Bombay: Government of Maharashtra, [1979] 2014), p. 169.

⁴⁷⁹ Mangcu, *Biko*, p. 175.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 190–1.

present-day manifestations of their movements, carried on by their followers. The followers' interactions with the power structures could be treated as a continuation of the legacy of their leaders' movements. The purpose of drawing such a parallel is to revisit the ramifications and outcomes of the living ideals of dead leaders.

Ambedkar and Biko adopted a theological approach to offer constructive definitions for their movements. Ambedkar emphasised the Buddhist metaphysics and social action (some call it Socially Engaged Buddhism),⁴⁸¹ whereas Biko talked about Christianity through the Black Liberation Theology of James Cone in the United States that spoke of social injustices through the life of Christ, which was appealing to radical Christian believers.⁴⁸² Black consciousness was premised primarily on the ethical reckoning of 'political life' from personal advantage.⁴⁸³ It intended to be a 'joint culture' prefacing African modernity of progressive values with European modernity.⁴⁸⁴ The ushering of political life into the consciousness of the oppressed, radicalised them. Ambedkar, too, worked on the political front to elevate the political status of the Dalits. One of the common criticisms in separate geographical contexts comes from the Left, accusing Ambedkar or Biko's movement of being petit bourgeois in nature and composition. Much like Biko, Ambedkar believed in political praxis. To achieve their mission objectives, they worked out action plans which involved creating alliances and drawing an action plan based on their own life experiences, rather than fissiparous theories resulting in self-isolation. This brings us to the question at the centre of this chapter: how and where is consciousness constructed? What are the implications and how is the genealogy of consciousness manufactured?

MAKING OF CONSCIOUSNESS: BUDDHA–KABIR

I trace the genesis of consciousness in the heart of a Dalit mind. Siddharth Gautama, the Buddha, remains undisputed as a pioneering propagator of the idea of the consciousness, making it a tool accessible to lay people. Following Buddha's trajectory, other traditions that investigated consciousness were the Ajivikas, Siddha, Nath, and Bhakti schools of thought. All these schools were developed in relation to one another and shared the ideal of serving the common people and

⁴⁸¹ Teltumbde brilliantly argues that for Ambedkar, Buddhism was an option that satisfied spiritual hunger. But also, for a man leading a movement of the untouchables, existential questions remained a real threat. The untouchables were a minority; they did not possess wealth, and they were rendered to humiliation, which undermined their confidence to take on the oppressors. However, as things proceeded in his life, he kept toying with the existential question be it considering Islam, Christianity, or Sikh faith to join the sizeable band of population. Towards the end, his spiritual hunger overpowered his existential need. He preferred the faith as a radical response to his politics of faith and ushering in confidence to the native Dalits who could find a source of history and pride in their sense of belonging to the nation. Ambedkar's praxis to work with theology as an option was elucidated in his faith that religion is essential for people and doctrines are important for organising a society. Buddhism was meant to inject the converts 'with a radical consciousness, marked by solidarity with the oppressed and disgust against the oppressors, the spirit of enquiry vis-à-vis tradition and customs, and so on.' It was also a faith that could be challenged against the principles of rationality and modern science. Anand Teltumbde, 'Strategy of Conversion to Buddhism: Intent and Aftermath', in Suraj Yengde & Anand Teltumbde (eds.), *The Radical in Ambedkar: Critical Reflections* (Gurgaon: Allen Lane, 2018), p. 222, 224, 239.

⁴⁸² Ibid., p. 173–4.

⁴⁸³ Gordon, 'A Phenomenology of Biko's Black Consciousness', p. 89; Mangcu, *Biko*, p. 173.

⁴⁸⁴ Mangcu articulates that Biko's elegance lay in fusing the two, as opposed to their being one thing or the other. *Biko*, p. 12.

freeing them from the burden of mental suffering that was heaped upon them by the hegemonic, corrupt religious and social institutions.

The mind faithfully manipulates conception from perception and assumption in varying measures. Due to the inherent attachment to formations found in the senses of all human beings, images and figures are created to help in the development of a self. In the Buddhist canon, there is no self. The Buddha separates the Non-Self (*anatta*) from the Self, labelling the latter as a mere perception.

Six sensations (in Pali *Vedanaakkhandha*) are experienced through physical and mental contact. The six sense organs—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—correspond with external objects such as visible forms, sounds, odours, tastes, tangible items, and ideas. These together give birth to consciousness, developed in reaction to outside objects.⁴⁸⁵ Consciousness, understood as *vinñāna*, is not concerned with comprehending the existence of external objects but only in being aware of them. This is the primary stage of underscoring basic life. For consciousness to arise, the Buddha explained that it required certain conditions that form the foundation upon whose basis one attempts to make sense of the world.⁴⁸⁶ Consciousness is ‘dependently originated’, that is, it needs a cause or stimulus.⁴⁸⁷ It cannot be a monosyllable consciousness but dependent consciousness which is interrelated. As per the Buddha’s explanation, consciousness needs factors to arise, which is decidedly a complex process that relies on human desire, craving, greed, hatred, and aversion.⁴⁸⁸ Building on this definition of foundational consciousness, I will now focus on Buddha and the phenomenology of consciousness through Kabir, then move on to examine Black consciousness developed in the context of colonisation in South Africa.

KABIR—CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE FULLY FORMED

Kabir is one of the three gurus that Ambedkar paid obeisance to in his life. The other two were Buddha and Jyotirao Phule. Through Kabir, we can potentially arrive at the idea of consciousness of the outcastes. Kabir was profoundly influential in Ambedkar’s life, whose family was Kabirpanthi—the ones who follow and practice spirituality as prescribed by Kabir. Kabirpanthis organised under the tutelage of Kabir and his thoughts. They formed a sect around his name, preserving, singing, and propagating his radical, humanistic, poetic sermons through congregations and ballads. The Kabirpanthis also established themselves through their own attire, names, and identifications that marked them as a separate and independent religious group. Kabir came to Ambedkar through his father, Ramji Sakpal, a military officer in British Army. Ambedkar was born in central India when Ramji was posted in Mhow, central India. Kabir's influence must have been through his stays there. In

⁴⁸⁵ Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (London: Gordon Fraser, [1959] 1978), p. 23.

⁴⁸⁶ In conversation with one of his disciples, Sati. *Mahātaṇhāsāṅkhaya Sutta*, (MN 38), Ibid. p. 24.

⁴⁸⁷ ‘The Longer Discourse on the Ending of Craving’, *Middle Discourses*, 38. Available at: <https://suttacentral.net/mn38/en/sujato>.

⁴⁸⁸ I observe, Ambedkar interpreted Buddha’s biography and his Dhamma through the cradle of consciousness as right view, right aspiration, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration—the eight-fold path.

Maharashtra, the contemporary tradition of rejection of caste and Brahmanism was also seen through Dnyaneshwar, Tukaram, and Namdev, among others. Yet, Kabir remained Ramji's sought-after saint in whose *dohas* he found encouragement and spiritual comfort. Ambedkar grew up knowing this tradition, immersed in Kabir's cultural insistence on radical rejection of pessimism and one's inability to attain complete freedom—*nirgun*.

The powerful poet deciphered esotericism and uprooted the ludicrous caste differences out of forms of worship. Kabir and Ambedkar were separated by 500 years, yet they were united in their commitment to the liberation of the oppressed in a society that had not made remarkable social progress on that front by Ambedkar's lifetime.⁴⁸⁹ Their critiques were directed at the oppressive priestly class. Their fate in the caste society as the unwanted and untouchable made them genuine interpreters of the consciousness of the deprived. Thus, we will investigate in detail how Dalit consciousness is evolving into the universalist sense of brotherhood and compassion, from the registers of Kabir and Ambedkar.

Kabir is probably the closest marker to begin tracing the genealogy of Dalit, anti-caste social consciousness in India. Kabir was born in the fifteenth century into a lower caste of weavers—*julahas*—the untouchables in the highly charged, Hindu city of Varanasi—a spiritual place of resting in the Hindu-Brahminical cosmology. Kabir's biography is uncertain. He claimed to be unlettered; his verses were delivered orally and later compiled by his disciples and admirers over a longer span of time. Some of these find a place in *Adi-Granth*, compiled by Nanak who established the Sikh faith. It is said that Nanak was highly influenced by Kabir who younger in age to Kabir and had witnessed Kabir's influence.⁴⁹⁰ It was even argued that Nanak's thoughts were essentially Kabir's that helped him to salvage the multiplicities of spiritual guidance available in most non-Brahminic traditions. It was not only Nanak's Sikh, but 13 other sects and religious denominations that were directly influenced by Kabir such as Kabirpanthi (not established by him directly) Radhaswami, Sufi, etc.⁴⁹¹ Kabir is a prophet not of soul, or sole (individual) but he is interspersing the personal, that is directly in command of itself with the social, public and polis. Kabir does not complicate things that requires simple explanation. His subjects are everyday people who breath the same air and occupy the same space.

That is why he places the guru—the teacher—above all institutions, as the ultimate source of authentic knowledge. His famous verse is often seen recited in multi-religious, diverse caste gatherings.

Guru Govind dono khade, kake lagu paay
Balihari Guru aapki, Govind diyo batay.

⁴⁸⁹ Kanwal Bharti, 'Kabir's 'Nirgunvad' influenced Ambedkar', *Forward Press*, 1 July 2017. Available at: <https://www.forwardpress.in/2017/07/kabirs-nirgunvad-influenced-ambedkar/>.

⁴⁹⁰ F E Keay, *Kabir and his followers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931)

⁴⁹¹ Bulla Sahib, Yaari Sahib were among the Muslim doctrinal seers who are noted as influenced by Kabir. Cf. Dwarka Bharati, 'Introduction', F E Keay, *Kabir Aur Kabirpanth* (trans. Kanwal Bharati) (New Delhi: Forward Press, 2023), p. xvii.

(My translation: If guru and God both appear now, who will I pay my respects to first? Certainly, the Guru, for it is he who helped me realize God in the first place.)

This heterodox move of placing the mortal guru above the immortal God remains one of the most celebrated discourses in Indian spirituality. The guru is given precedence over the almighty, the metaphysical force that supports the delirious state of mind that is the nature of human being's existence—suffering. It is held that the guru is the one who lends their hand and guides the disciple towards the path to salvation. This is also an anti-Brahmin move, in that Kabir expunges the Brahmin who has declared himself as a born guru, the knower of the path to learning, and therefore, the only path to God. The Guru can be Kabir, Ravidass or Meera—he is a mere embodiment of the protection and support desired by the disciple.

Kabir's indication of gaining accessibility to the metaphysical through a heightened consciousness of self makes the subaltern a part of this movement. Kabir has many forms because he evokes oneness with all sentient beings—he is of everyone, and no one can singularly claim him to be theirs. The many personas of Kabir have been developed by the followers of his tradition. Whoever accepted him has incorporated a Kabir consciousness into their life. At its core, Kabir consciousness revolves around the yearning for the divine Beloved. Love is a constant throughout Kabir's phenomenology.

However, consciousness requires unfiltered concentration—raw and original. Kabir wants to rid the mind of illusions and therefore, asks one to live a lonesome life. Loneliness is the path to realisation. It is essential for one to start thinking about self—the lowercase self, not the Self that the Buddha mentioned—because that is where the consciousness can begin to mature. This is the site to delve into without getting attached to anything or anyone. Kabir explains his conception of the ultimate truth in following shabda:

A man's wife goes with him to the door,
 his friends go a few steps more.
 At the corpse-ground, there's only the stretcher.
 After that, swan, you're on your own.⁴⁹²

As a lover of art and the world, Kabir focuses his devotion upon the totems of tradition that divest the occult from spiritual and social existence. The idea of ridding society of stigma and intolerance is vested in Kabir's consciousness of the 'Nirgun', the formless. The idea that one is a sentient being having all the characteristic of both the lowliest of the low and the supreme beings, is upheld in a society where divisions feature as treated as sacred. Therefore, everyone—the Sufi, mendicant, weaver, Nath panthi, Buddhist, Vaishnavite, Tantric and God—is

⁴⁹² *The Bijak of Kabir*, trans. Linda Hess and Sukhdev Singh (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), here after, *Bijak* Shabda 73, p. 65-66.

included in this unique consciousness, available to everyone.⁴⁹³ In all conditions, the consciousness of self-being is undergoing change, a transformation.

In a famous Doha of his, Kabir departs from the hermeneutic cleavages of the qazi or the brahmin. Naturally, the brahman and qazi plotted against him, even physically assaulting him.⁴⁹⁴ Kabir advocated for a vocation to deal directly with the supernatural without subscribing to the codes of caste. A doctrinal stand of Kabir does not concern with what is not shown and to judge the spirits of the Holy. Some argue that Kabir's emphasis on God was overtly Orientalised by European scholars who wanted to build an image of God in articulating Kabir's iconoclast image as somewhat related to the biblical contexts. The saint patron, *Nirgun* bhakti poet image of Kabir, R.P. Singh argues, is 'artificial'.⁴⁹⁵ God is equated to the intellectual faculty of discrimination, i.e., asserting that discrimination is not an action of the ignorant but a deliberated response characteristic of heightened mental faculty.⁴⁹⁶

man mamta ko thir kar laaun-ji
 paancho tat milaunga ...
 shoonya shikhar par anhad baaje-ji

I'll make the mind and feelings still
 The five elements one ...
 I'll make the mind and feelings still
 The five elements one ...⁴⁹⁷

Notice the connection to Buddhist doctrinaire as we shall see shortly. There are multiplicities of consciousnesses that Kabir proposes, which is evident from his autobiographical draft. He is viewed as a patron saint, 'sant', a yogi, an originator of modern Hindi literature, and a mystic. Similarly, he draws followers from every strain of orthodoxy and radical rebellion—illiterates, literates, musicians, classical artists, ascetics, businesspeople, etc.⁴⁹⁸ Kabir lies in transcendence, betting on time. In doing so, he eloquently queers the sexuality of a Lover to a homo-centric norm, enabling a constant encounter with the He—the beloved 'Soul of the soul', the Supreme One. He details this interaction in the verse that follows.

With Thy Light
 my Beloved Come into My eyes,
 I shall adore you Forever
 To contain you Inside me
 I'll lower my eyelids

⁴⁹³ Sehdev Kumar, 'Kabir: Communicating the Incommunicable', *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 2, MEDIA: response and change (JUNE 1983), pp. 206–215.

⁴⁹⁴ Linda Hess and Sukhdev Singh, 'Introduction', *The Bijak of Kabir*. Trans. Linda Hess, and Sukhdev Singh (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 4.

⁴⁹⁵ R.P. Singh, 'Kabir: The Articulator *Par Excellence* of Indigenous Indian Modernity', *Social Scientist*, May–June 2019, Vol. 47, No. 5/6 (May–June 2019), pp. 71–2.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 73.

⁴⁹⁷ Kabir, 'Nirgun Nirbay'. Translated by Linda Hess, available at: <http://www.vedanth.in/nirbhay-nirgun.html>.

⁴⁹⁸ Linda Hess, and Sukhdev Singh, 'Introduction', *The Bijak of Kabir*. Trans. Linda Hess, and Sukhdev Singh (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. xi.

So you won't look at another
And I shall behold Only.⁴⁹⁹

Kabir's consciousness demands one to be in the process of envisioning the truth. During this process, Kabir wants us to be prime witnesses and not subjects to Brahman's interpretation—who acts as the mouthpiece of supreme truth and being—Brahma. Kabir gives the seeker and seer desirable respect, granting them independence of thought and decision. To witness is to be the 'eye of wisdom'.⁵⁰⁰ Kabir's approach to consciousness is not learned through instruction, but rather gained through experience and reflected upon using reason and intellect.⁵⁰¹ That is why the dispossessed, the unappreciated, the decayed, and the dead—all of them can witness Kabir's vision that was not preached unto them by anyone particular, but rather, it sought spirituality and answers in simple things available to everyone.⁵⁰² Kabir's insistence on closing the gap between the mediator of faith and the faithful, his emphasis on finding oneself within the self, are testaments to his view of the immense capacity of a layperson. The truth, according to him, is close—closer than close—ghata ghata me.⁵⁰³ Thus, instead of wandering without, foolishly, one needs to find oneself closer to home—within. Kabir's superior indictment lays emphasis on making your 'experience concretely your own'.⁵⁰⁴

Kabir's meta-bliss lays in death. For death is not a 'terrifying' object of reality. Rather for him, death is a 'supreme bliss', a heightened spirituality.⁵⁰⁵ Kabir adduces spirituality with death and distinguishes between the philosophy of spiritual death and natural death. The transition from clinging to lifeworlds is transmuted into a state of lifelessness. This process is a meeting point of a salvation. The eradication of illusions—maya—to see clearly, causes even the Lord to seek the individual.

Kabir, my mind has become immaculate like the Gange's water. The Lord follows me saying 'Kabir, O my Kabir'.⁵⁰⁶

This scenario is a snapshot of the moment the hermit Siddhartha becomes the Buddha. In Buddhist Suttas, this image is made alive with a glittering, busy spatial metaphysics. The devas, celestial beings, and higher powers are shown to witness this very important moment of a human transcending into the phase of *nibbana*. The Gods descend upon the prescient of human dwellings to salute and bow to the achievement of this human who has surpassed the mortality and

⁴⁹⁹ Kumar argues that Kabir is yearning for his embrace of his Beloved. There is a desire to be united with the far-flung Beloved. The dohas emphasise belonging, longing, separation, laughter, tears, anguish. Sehdev Kumar, 'Kabir: Communicating the Incommunicable', *India International Centre Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 2, Media: Response and Change (June 1983), p. 208.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 210.

⁵⁰¹ R.P. Singh, 'Kabir: The Articulator *Par Excellence* of Indigenous Indian Modernity', *Social Scientist*, May–June 2019, Vol. 47, No. 5/6 (May–June 2019), pp. 71–78.

⁵⁰² A.K. Ramanujan, 'Men, Women and Saints', *The Collected Essays of A.K. Ramanujan* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁵⁰³ *The Bijak of Kabir*, trans. Linda Hess and Sukhdev Singh (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 5.

⁵⁰⁴ Hess and Singh, Introduction, *Bijak*, p. 31.

⁵⁰⁵ I have taken much of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib translation from the following text. Jasbir Singh 'Sabak'(ed.), *Sri Guru Granth Sahib and Bhagat Kabir Ji*, trans. Joginder Singh (Amritsar: Dharam Parchaar Committee).

<https://www.hemkunt2.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Bhagat-Kabir-English.pdf>

⁵⁰⁶ Original reference of Sri Guru Granth Sahib, Page. 1367, hereafter SGGS.

ascended to the higher realm. Here the Gods realise the supreme perfection of Siddhartha that they ascribe to the attainment of enlightenment. They are aware of the fallibilities of humans and their impure being. However, this person overcame the realm of quotidian impurities to cleanse himself of the *sankharas* and thus became Samyak-Sam-Buddha. It is to this ideal that Kabir so easily enters and binds the higher powers to his human stature who has the ability to become Buddha.

Offensive Consciousness

Kabir is not the leader of the fully conscious. That is why he is keen to bring about the realisation of existential rationality as a strategy to engage with consciousness. He summons various theories, diverse actors, and prophets to serve the needy. The needy do not just include subalterns, but rather anyone visiting the shores of Kabir's thought. Consciousness, for the purpose of this argument, needs to be freed from the stranglehold of the occult or the 'mystical experience'.⁵⁰⁷ It is not what many in spirituality describe as stilling of rational consciousness. Consciousness in this sense is what allows the mind to wander and come to terms with the obviousness of the feeling—the feeling of rationality—an essence to the heightened mind. However, in thinking through Kabir, an effort is made to see how he advocates for dissolving the self into devotion to attain enlightenment. To assess enlightenment, in this case, is to test if it is possible to learn how to live and die.

Dying, dying, the world keeps dying, but none knows how to die.
No one dies in such a way
that he won't die again.⁵⁰⁸

Kabir's consciousness is not fully formed. It, instead, acts as a guidebook for seeking one for which he proposes various methods. The process of realisation of consciousness is a time captured to work oneself. He says it without hesitation.

Maya and mind are one,
maya permeates mind ...⁵⁰⁹

Kabir dwells in the consciousness of the unconscious. His is a model of non-consciousness. He doesn't claim to know the final answer, but rather, he advances conflicted consciousness into the mind of the seeker. Mind here is not always the answer, but rather, the 'trickster' that constitutes 'the problem'.

Consciousness exists from moment to moment, which means each moment involves a certain depth of consciousness. For example, singing is involved in the tradition of Kabir and the majority of 'truth-seeking' traditions. The temporal nature of singing consciousness demands devotion and concentration. I argue we need more emotion and vulnerability to mark a phase of concentration that will lead us towards accepting consciousness and life. Both are interrelated with time and

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 22.

⁵⁰⁸ Shabda 324, *Bijak*, p. 155.

⁵⁰⁹ Shabda. 105, *Bijak*, p. 153.

moment of stillness. To find the place of consciousness, one needs to meditate. What is the location and where to meditate? Kabir eases your task. It is within you. Your personal journey thus far has been intimate, reflecting your sensibility and fears. ‘Wherever you are is the entry point’.⁵¹⁰ That’s it. No further explanation is required.

The mind is a nervous thief,
the mind is a pure cheat.
The ruin of sages, men and gods,
the mind has a hundred thousand gates.⁵¹¹

Therefore, one needs to find a source of developing a mind force. Kabir doesn’t placate his philosophy to appease the dominant, but he is convicted in his role to elevate the subalterns—this is reflected in his disregard for traditional form and structure adopted and furthered by the liturgical elite. This is an act of defiance against the snobbish, selfish attitudes of the Brahmins and Mullas, Yogis, Pandits and Qazi. Kabir’s philosophy, as Hess and Singh observe, is not meant to be prescriptive suggestions born out of leisurely thinking, but in fact, ‘a direct assault on the structures of belief and self-image.’⁵¹² Kabir is invested in ‘radical honesty’ to expose the lies, cheating and greed of the Brahmins and Qazi.⁵¹³ He is not worried about the potential assault or attack on him in return. He addresses the Listener directly and not the mediator, hustling a commission of good fortune on behalf of the unfortunate.

Say not that the Vedas and Muslim books are false. False is he, who reflects not on them.⁵¹⁴

Kabir’s invitation to not rely upon the liturgy and thereby the guarantor of the prophecy is to examine autonomy. He is examining the brilliance of the words of wisdom while deliberating on the prowess of time and interpretation which becomes the cause of falsity. Kabir’s primary message is an attack on caste and untouchability. He ridicules Brahmins and Shudras alike.

It’s all one skin and bone,
one piss and shit,
one blood, one meat.
From one drop, a universe. Who’s Brahmin? Who’s Shudra?
Don’t get lost in false pride.⁵¹⁵

Pandit, look in your heart for knowledge. Tell me where untouchability
came from, since you believe in it.
Mix red juice, white juice, and air—a body bakes in a body.
As soon as the eight lotuses

⁵¹⁰ Shabda 42, *Bijak*, p. 35.

⁵¹¹ Sakhi 96, trans. Hess and Singh, p. 100.

⁵¹² Hess and Singh, Introduction, *Bijak*, p. 19.

⁵¹³ Ibid., p. 21.

⁵¹⁴ SGGS, Page 1350.

⁵¹⁵ *Ramani* 26, *Bijak* p. 83.

are ready, it comes
 into the world. Then what's untouchable?
 Eighty-four hundred thousand vessels decay into dust, while the potter keeps slapping clay
 on the wheel, and with a touch
 cuts each one off.
 We eat by touching, we wash
 by touching, from a touch
 the world was born.
 So who's untouched? asks Kabir. Only she
 who's free from delusion.⁵¹⁶

Kabir challenges the fear of touch by universalising and humanising the concept of touch itself. Nothing can take place without touching, he argues. Two people need to touch to give birth to a new life. The genius of Kabir lies in empowering the lowest and the outcaste by conveying the emotions and repressed thoughts of those whose tongues and minds are stitched shut permanently. By maturing the apparatus of reflecting on a social condition, Kabir asks everyone to meditate on a thing that would remove the self from selfhood and establish a firm consciousness with actual experiences. It is not a metaphysical experience of the mystical that he draws power from, but something that encourages one to plunge into action and fight for themselves, instead of relying on the mercy of others to come to their rescue. Consciousness is medication for curing oppression, according to Kabir.

Ambedkar inherits this legacy not only by being born into a family of Kabirpanthis, but also by actualising his legacy through his actions in his own life. Kabir was born in untouchable caste *kori*, which when they converted to Islam, were known as *julahas*.⁵¹⁷ It is no accident that Kabir's scorn and distaste towards caste and untouchability stem from his genealogy. However, one can only guess if Kabir experienced untouchability as a child, because the weaver family converted to Islam.

Ambedkar noted that he was a 'devotee' of Gautam Buddha, Kabir and Phule.⁵¹⁸ Kabir was not just viewed as a revolutionary but also a mystic, which attracted Ambedkar to him. Ambedkar was religious and derived most of the philosophies of social revolution, liberty, equality, and fraternity from 'religion and not political science'.⁵¹⁹ Ambedkar takes the same stand as Buddha, Kabir and Phule, advocating for a vehement attack to be launched against the orthodoxy and hypocrisy of religious traditions. Kabir sits in the middle of one of the holiest cities of the Hindus—Banaras—which was surrounded by a Muslim kingdom. For him, the age-old traditions had not proven their worth, for they remained aloof to people's everyday miseries. Thus, Mussalmans (who cry 'God! God! like a cock') and Hindus

⁵¹⁶ Shabda 4, Ibid., p. 55.

⁵¹⁷ Gail Omvedt, *Seeking Begumpura: The Social Vision of Anticaste Intellectuals* (New Delhi: Navayana, 2011), p. 91.

⁵¹⁸ 'I am a devotee of Gautam Buddha, Kabir, Mahatma Phule and worshipper of learning, self-respect and character' in Ambedkar, *BAWS*, vol. 17, no. 3, p. 505.

⁵¹⁹ Ambedkar, 'My Philosophy of Life', *BAWS*, p. 50.

(‘Saints, the Brahmin is a slicked-down butcher’) are both at the receiving end of his acerbic remarks.⁵²⁰

Kabir was in the business of trading insults and causing offence. He saw no other way to talk directly to both the audiences—the ruling class and the oppressed as can be seen below.

Son of a slut!
There: I’ve insulted you.
Think about getting on the good road.⁵²¹

Kabir is invested in societal change. He wants to utilise the available resources and turn society upside down so he can expose the macabre violence that lurks beneath so the battle for equality may be instigated. He wants to engage with the people to shake them up and bring them onto the right path and fight for their due. Kabir’s prime targets are Pandits and Brahmins, who are responsible for creating the caste system and now propagate purity and impurity, touchability and untouchability. Kabir’s address is always to the ‘Pandit’—the crafty priest who claims to be a preserver of tradition and great religion.

‘The pandits’ pedantries are lies.⁵²² Mocking the supreme pandit, Kabir advises the pandit to, ‘do some research and let me know how to destroy transiency’.⁵²³ ‘Hey pandits, who didn’t die? If you find out, tell me’⁵²⁴ ‘Throw out your holy scriptures, pandit, those fantasies of your mind’. Kabir exhorts the Brahmin: ‘All this is your own doing’.⁵²⁵ Kabir calls to the world to examine the smartest in the room or the one who claims to be it without adequate evidence. He wags his finger at the Brahmin’s idolatry and broadcasts the greatness of his virtues so the people can rethink their upholding of those at the top of the caste hierarchies. Kabir’s purpose is to make people think—he says, ‘I go on shouting, and the pandits go on thinking’⁵²⁶—at which, he is successful.

Kabir remains a complex web of ideas that believes in genuine subversion. He scolds the Pandit who chants the Vedas but as soon as he comes to touch a ‘lower caste’, he promptly runs away.

Tell me who could be lower than you.
Proud of your quality,
Great with authority,
Such pride never brought anyone good.⁵²⁷
We eat by touching, we wash
by touching, from a touch

⁵²⁰ Hess and Singh, Introduction, *Bijak*, p. 20.

⁵²¹ Shabda 102, *Bijak*, p. 75.

⁵²² Shabda 40, *Bijak*, p. 54.

⁵²³ Shabda 42, *Bijak*, p. 55.

⁵²⁴ Shabda 45, *Bijak*, p. 57.

⁵²⁵ Shabda 47, *Bijak*, p. 58.

⁵²⁶ Shabda 53, *Bijak*, p. 59.

⁵²⁷ Ramani 35, *Bijak*, p. Ibid., p. 85.

the world was born.

So who's untouched? asks Kabir. Only she
who's free from delusion.⁵²⁸

The semiotics of body and thought carry touch and untouch as an imaginative project. How to think of psyche and site as creative apparatus to extend the life of pain. The vocabularies and alphabetical nuances of suffering bring a disjointed relationships between theory, theorising and theorised. Can an inexperienced narrator profess to know reality? Exoticisation has often been undermined by the logicians and dramatists who have abandoned the cause of examining the subject's experience. This anthropological necessity makes the inexperienced narrator a secondary synthesiser, if not entirely irrelevant. One cannot rely on the interpreters of mind and logic if they are unwilling to put to test their many metaphors of self and delve into criticism of their own bodies as creators of the problem. Unless culpability is acknowledged and not outsourced to a familiar other—same caste, colour, or identity—we cannot apply a litmus test to universalist ideas and their efforts to bring sensibility and sensitivity to fractured issues of contested feelings.

Kabir's ability to put across a message that would offend everyone equally gained him a following in the very quarters he criticised. Therefore, to work with Kabir is to gain a sense of reality and control the timespan of human actions. Kabir is not history. He is not the future either. He only lived in the present—the state of breeding consciousness. Kabir's invocations are for now, and his solutions apply only to the current time. Therefore, Kabir cannot be easily translated and simply transliterated. To grasp Kabir, one must give up many things, be willing to accept the offence laid at one's door and be ready to be insulted at the internal and public levels. One needs Kabir's skin to flow in the current of his words and swim in the ocean of uncomfortable thoughts. There is no other way to reach the stage of consciousness that Kabir has set. Certainly, there is no easy way out. We all need a Kabir within us. This heralds the next stage of drawing out the radical consciousness of liberation which begins with the notion of Being.

The Revival in Polyphony

Kabir, like Ravidas finds a place in Sikh faith as one of the devotees—the Bhagat. Ravidas is credited as 'the greatest saint-poet' of the bhakti tradition.⁵²⁹ While some have found is second in the rank of 'important sants (saints)' after Namdev.⁵³⁰ Ravidas' is assessed as the contemporary of Kabir. Some argue that Kabir was junior to Ravidas and would offer his respects to the elder. While some work state that Ravidas was younger to Kabir. There are many speculations around this time as it was a phase that did not have written tradition, but rather oral expressions constituted the standard form.⁵³¹ The biographical information of Ravidas and

⁵²⁸ Shabda 41, *Bijak*, p. 55

⁵²⁹ Peter Friedlander, 'Ravidas', Vol. IV. *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism* (BEH), Knut A. Jacobsen et al (eds), (Brill: Leiden, 2012), pp. 371-378.

⁵³⁰ W.H. Mcleod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968)

⁵³¹ Friedlander, 'Ravidas', p. 1

Kabir, both born to untouchable communities remain an exploratory exercise.⁵³² However, both these figures give primacy to the individual and their merits discarding the preconceived notions of caste and religion. They appear to follow the lineage of Buddhist ethics.⁵³³

Their work is pruned and carefully edited by Arjan Dev, the fifth Gurus of Sikhi. The compilation of the texts is itself a success story as their works are proposed in the formation of their self through devotion. Kabir is cited within the frames of how to meditate with the almighty and that is his purpose to bring many vocations to align with his politics.

‘People deem it to be a song, but it is meditation on the Lord.’⁵³⁴

The Granth is an anthology of various schools of thought, Gurus, Saints, Bhagats across caste and religion, that commonly placed a regular human as a concern of its own making. It supports the spiritual hunger and quotidian advisories on living a good, respectable life. The first Guru also the one who founded Sikh panth, Nanak, was revolting against the dominance of hegemonic Brahminism. The Brahminism that he was concerned with had become a feature of social and agrarian relations. Thereby, to attack the nerve of Brahminical myth of purity, Nanak launched inter-dining, sharing, and water initiatives. These were a direct appeal to the ruling class that had subordinated to the dominance of Brahminism. Nanak challenged this by using his own caste position and converting that into a place of spiritual sociality—which is to debase social constructs of a refined order.

The marvel of the Granth is that the polyphonous visibility of many tones are arranged in a way to appear in line and without losing the tempo. It is no accident that a text that was imagining a heterodox intervention to the old problem relied on Kabir to provide guidance and affirmation. Kabir strikingly poses issues to those that have not contemplated truth with guidance. The Gurus, whose job was to do both, found an immediate fraternity with the rationality of Kabir. Kabir is thereby represented over 243 shlokas, also known as shabdās, or shabads.

Kabir’s easy style of drawing allegories to make a case stands out as a radical statement.

Creation is in the Creator and the Creator is in Creation. He is fully filling all places. Pause. Clay is but the same, but the fashioner has fashioned it in various ways. There is no fault with the vessel of clay, nor is there any fault with the potter.⁵³⁵

Formation of the Being in Liberation

The measurement of the self through someone else's perception, laden with unfamiliarity, results in a two-ness of identifications—the Other and the Otherised.

⁵³² Darshan Singh, *Sant Ravidas and His Times* (Delhi/Ludhiana: Kalyani Publishers, 1977)

⁵³³ Rajendra Prasad Singh, *छिपाये रैदास बाहेर आए* (Hidden Ravidas is Now Out) (New Delhi: Samyak Prakashan, 2023)

⁵³⁴ SGGs, Page 335.

⁵³⁵ SGGs, Page 1349-50.

The Other stems from a position of self-isolation, whilst the Otherised is a forced injunction imposed upon the Other. Power relations separate them from the politics of self-representation.

The discovery of self with the Other is found in the living consciousness of mysticism. The Other is usually the One—the supreme divine. The Other and the One are two distinct personalities: the Other is human, whilst the One is superhuman. However, there is not much difference between the two. The divine is located in people's aspirations. It is neither a figurehead nor a ritual. It cannot be realised through the posturing of spiritual practices. The entire process of the divine is manifested not in metaphysics but in the human. As Ravidass, the seer and interpreter of human sensibility—a contemporary of Kabir (some say an indirect Guru of Kabir)—notes: 'In all things, lord exists, assuming countless shapes...he is nearer than my hand'.⁵³⁶ Ravidass made an otherwise inaccessible god available within the reach of every human. This distanced the ritual acrobatics performed by the Brahmins in Vedic mantras.

The divine is just a name it is *Nirgun* (formless) but it is difficult to capture the essence until one is ready to become one—meet with the divine. He is just a word but also someone incomprehensible in the world. This world necessitating immediate freedom and cheap liberation cannot find this easily. Some attempting *samadhi*—a state of concentration and meditation found it to be connected with the divine. However, Buddhist ethics go further and ask to root out the pain through practice of gaining insight wisdom—*pañña*.

What Ravidass and Kabir attempt to do is create mental friction through countless thoughts. They allow humans to wander in the marketplace of spiritualism, letting questions, manifestations and revelations guide the seeker. However, what one comprehends through mediation is not the same as that acquired through meditation. Ravidass and Kabir dovetail word, essence, experience, mysticism and meditation into a language of confusing paradoxes, challenging the perplexed mind to recognise its mannerisms. If the formless does not exist anywhere, and time moves everywhere, where should the divine be sought? This is the realisation one needs to arrive at. They argue that the divine is within us, so why search elsewhere? This doctrinal stance of transverberation emanates from the discovery of enlightenment within oneself. The Buddha found this lost path and gave it to the world. Many traditions worked around this and proffered their interpretation of salvation. Some called it divine, while some *mukti*—ultimate liberation.

Ravidass identified himself as a tanner—a Dalit caste—without hesitation or shame. He embraced the beauty of his work, which was enmeshed in the contested histories of community. Caste distinctions cannot diminish the sanctity of saintly beings. Yet, how do Ravidass and Kabir feature in the apothegm of Dalit and outcaste religiosity and rationality? Both were practitioners of liberation. Their endeavours were engaged with society, wherein the solitary exercise of asceticism

⁵³⁶ Nirmal Dass, *Songs of the Saints from the Adi Granth* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), p. 2

graduated into the solidarity of the commune. That is why in modern Dalit ethics of life and insight, community-engaged practices as a means to achieve liberation attune to social salvation. Society and humankind are the path towards levitating senses of pleasure and pain. In them lies one's liberation and the achievement of one's sense of Being.

Before we address the epistemological question of what Being a Dalit means—an oppressed individual caught in the politics of hierarchy—we need to understand the philosophical foundations of Beingness. To begin, I consider Being and Beingness in a tautological sense. Being connotes existence but also the fatality of non-existence. It is to both be and not be. We, as human beings, have a vitality beyond non-existence. However, non-existence is the demur of one's doubts of being. Ambedkar draws from the Tripitaka, a compilation of Buddha's doctrines in the Pali canon, to explain how Buddha saw Beingness. Buddha's theory relied on impermanence. Limitation connected everyone—the living and the lifeless—in unison. To be is to accept the laws of change. Therefore, by being, we become, through enduring that change.

'Being is becoming' or the impermanence of all the compound things, is *Dhamma*—the law of the universe.⁵³⁷ A being is not static as it is constantly undergoing change. The four elements, water, earth, fire and air, help transform mass into our bodies, which still remains ever-changing. No identical moments are the same on a deep, experiential, subconscious level. The past has been lived and won't repeat itself in the future. The present is living, yet it has never existed in the past and will not exist in the same way in the future; similarly, the future has not yet been lived nor is currently existing. Each moment of the being is peculiar and unique to its circumstances and environmental factors. Buddhist doctrine describes *sunyata* that which underscores changes happening every moment, moment to moment as the path towards ultimate liberation. A realisation of this principle is difficult to attain as it insists a pearl of extraordinary wisdom.⁵³⁸

Ambedkar was emphatic about the idea of Being as an impermanent state that constantly undergoes a process of change. Again, relying on the Buddhist experiences, he stated, 'Being is *always* becoming' (my emphasis).⁵³⁹ The rule of being is to become, which also emphasises the role of one's agency and its infinite potential to establish a new rule of law or ward off any inconceivable things. The question of beingness is characterised in the rule books of European modern thought, graded by the altar of the Age of Reason and Enlightenment. However, pre-colonial ancient archives have depth and fortitude of lived rationale—guidance led by experience that remained alive in many groups.

If Beingness is adhered to presentness—as Aristotle and Heidegger would observe—then agency, space and time become central to the problem in discussion

⁵³⁷ Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*.

⁵³⁸ 'Sunyata (Emptiness) in the Mahayana Context', BuddhaNet. Available at: https://www.buddhanet.net/cbp2_f6.htm.

⁵³⁹ Ambedkar, *Buddha or Karl Marx*, in Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings & Speeches Vol. 3 (Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra), p. 442

here. One would know that Heidegger was not as interested in ‘a problem’ as he was in ‘*the problem*’. To add to the presentness—which is the ongoing now—the continuity of stability brings attention to Beingness. The ‘*Da-sein*’ in the Heideggerian sense is a relative conception of the Being-in-the-world rather than being outside the realm of it. This is true for the Dalit who is acting in the world, which is why there is a quest to survive amidst unrelenting atrocities. The Dalit being is a manifestation of the present as well as absence.

The definite principle of *ousa* (Greek for ‘I am’) in presentness is very striking. For Aristotle, the meaning of being is fundamental to establishing the significance of society. The central aspect of one’s Beingness is the quality of its ability to be compared analogously with the Other *ousa*. It is an effort to bring consciousness to the dialectic of Beingness. To build a parenthesis of Beingness in a parallel context, one has to imagine a parallel world to bridge the *pros hen* (literally, analogical) set of worldly structures. Therefore, the Being has to be formed out of Beingness—the all-encompassing, enabling the structure of uni-Beings or united/one metamorphosis of Being.

The presentness and stability of an existing order is a conceptual framework of the Aristotelian model of Beingness. For Aristotle, the retirement of human souls and the outcome of their actions remain core to his understanding of Time and Beingness. The Time for Aristotle is the present, the ‘I am’, the *now*. However, philosopher Thomas Sheehan argues that human translocation is absent in Aristotle’s vision. Human movement, according to Sheehan, gives the measurement of Aristotelian calculations of Beingness in Time more sense. This, unfortunately, is unclear and therefore remains unmeasured. But as Heidegger puts it rather interestingly, juxtaposing Time with Beingness implies that the existence of one’s rationality is tied to the time, from which emerged the concept of the Time-Being—a hyphenated term to describe the relation of the human to its surroundings, the social context.

The question then remains, what about the humans who have no accurate registers to note the presence of temporality or the passage of time? The time (in its hideousness) notices the beings to authorise Beingness, a character of the person. The *idée-fixe* (desire for an idea) for ownership of time is a discretion available only to privileged beings. The Aristotelian being that is composed in relation to, and along with Hegel and Nietzsche’s position on the spirit, is characterised by these privileges of the privileged being.⁵⁴⁰

⁵⁴⁰ In order to make sense of the contexts of commonalities in light of the overemphasis directed towards modern European thought one must gesture to the domain of philosophy. One can look at Immanuel Kant, who brings suggestions to this topic. Kant argues for the consciousness to develop there needs to be a unity and that unity needs identical subjects. The subject in our case is identical yet in two forms—the Dalit with its historical registers or tamed unconsciousness while the Black—recovering from the racist gaze of inferiority. The manifolds of consciousness—the unexperienced but occurred to our senses are held strongly by the conviction of its possibility to change. The instability of objective reason in finding the empirical self is the reason of developing consciousness that develops reaction. Kant sees a problem with the discontinuity of consciousness rooted in its temporal character of self that is why he advocates for a transcendental solution. This is based on the supposition that the subject’s objectivity is impure which is ever changing and evolving, thus it is difficult to correlate with the unity of objectives.

RECLAIMING THE SUBJECTIVITY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Consciousness is a pathway to reclaim lost subjectivity and establish novel citizenship based on new rules and newer universalisms, for consciousness matures into effective responsiveness by being in correlation with time and being, *Da Sein*. This thesis is a central concern of critical philosophy; that is why consciousness has to be treated as a temporal development that could result in the formation of lasting perceptions that govern the fate of forthcoming generations. The internal struggle with time consciousness is evolving. Therefore, to develop consciousness, Kant thinks there have to be faculties for imagination. Because imagination develops content and character for sensorium and makes it possible to think beyond the abstract and develop an image, this imagination then needs to be reproduced. ‘The first thing that is given to us is appearance, which, if it is combined with consciousness, is called perception’, a stage which enables the unification of intuition with apperception to give rise to ‘Pure imagination’, which is a fundamental faculty of the human minds.⁵⁴¹ This is the crux of this chapter that aims to dignify pure imagination as the real consciousness of the self. Kant argues that for the unity of consciousness to reach its pinnacle, we need empirical evidence and *a priori* theoretical deduction. There are seven types of consciousness identified by Kant.

The notion of consciousness is a long-held belief. Going back to the ideal representation of consciousness, one might check in the registers of Hegel, who described consciousness in terms of subject and object. The ‘object’ being the negation of the self. This negation of identity is due to *the unequal power relations*. To make his point, Hegel brings in the dialectic of ‘lordship and bondage’, master and slave. The slave exercises his agency by offering productive labour but he struggles to gain subjectivity like his master. Because the master treats the slave as a non-self, someone devoid of the currency of consciousness. He denies the slave that specificity—which is the being of the self. The slave, who is an object turned subject, also has a strong command on deciding his agency. It is by investing in productive forces, by developing something, for example, a product, that the slave derives his sense of genuine human self-consciousness. The object here has its own character; therefore, the labour and the output of its value govern its formation of self.

In the dialectics of master and slave, the master realises that ultimately, he is not entirely independent but rather, dependent on slave institutions and the slave. However, Hegel posits that the institution of slavery is mutually constituted by the master and the slave’s investment in his labour, with the latter choosing livelihood over liberty. Whilst the slave’s personality is indeed recognisable, when freedom is not claimed, the slave has yet to attain an ‘independent self-consciousness’—the consciousness of self essential to liberty.⁵⁴² Hegel argues that slavery is temporal-conscious, meaning the slave has the right and consciousness

⁵⁴¹ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, edited and translated by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), A120–125, p. 238, 241.

⁵⁴² Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, p. 233 in Morss, ‘Hegel and Haiti’, p. 849.

to contemplate freedom. This is an inherent quality of the slave; therefore, there is no permanency to the thought and spirit of the slave, indicating that it is not an eternal bondage. The slave's position and status can change.

Hegel qualifies slavery in Africa by belittling Africans (literally referring to them as 'children') and terming the freedom of slaves—*à la revolution*—as uncalled for. He stated that the gradual abolition of slavery was 'wiser and more equitable than its sudden removal'.⁵⁴³ This has led to unabashed Marxist criticism of Hegel. However, that critique has also not acknowledged the social and cultural vanguardism in each society. The consciousness of self is not independent of society and its attendant values. So whilst the slave can think of himself as a subjugated self in the economy of slavery, akin to a lower caste, the thought of collective action and protest remains present in the slave's mind. He might express it in ways different from what the master defines as rebellion, his culture and knowledge being far removed from that of the slave. As far as the master and slave are concerned, they are not bound by the commonality of recognising each other by individual personality but rather through the social and economic forces at play.

I shall build upon this notion of conscious universality in the addendum. There is a significant derivative of finding self-consciousness by offering agency to the 'other' subject in its reflection. 'This self-consciousness is the basis of all virtues, of love, honour, friendship, bravery, all self-sacrifice, all fame', argues Hegel. This, for Hegel, is the spirit that governs the mind and the evidence for the evolution of the human species. As the evolution of spirit adapts to changing circumstances, so does self-consciousness, and in the larger scheme of things, how society partakes in evolution. Self-consciousness does not exist without desire—Hegel classifies self-consciousness as a desire.

The project of consciousness and self-consciousness determined in a caste or colour society deprives the subject anatomy of their resigned life. The master, like a slave, is a product of time, and both have an equal desire to gain each other's recognition. The master can only be a master if he is given recognition. When the slave gives that recognition and develops his position through the use of his agency, the master seeks recognition from non-slaves.⁵⁴⁴ It is almost analogous to seeking acceptance in the club of equals or class of equals. The slave eventually begins to define himself through production that contributes to the transformation of the world by finding meaning in his work. While doing this, he realises his worth as a human being and inevitably concludes that his position in the slavery society was not natural, not a predestiny. He can change it. This is a realisation of consciousness that comes through the interaction between nature and labour. The material-producing slave changes his position by changing the world around him, i.e., by staking a rebellion against slavery.

Sartre thinks of consciousness similarly. He contends that consciousness is a measure of possibilities—to either create or annihilate. Sartre sees the human

⁵⁴³ Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, p. 96, 99 in Morss, 'Hegel and Haiti', p. 859.

⁵⁴⁴ Alexander Kojève in Eric Gans, 'Hegel's Master and Slave', *Anthropoetics*, 19 October 2022. Available at: <http://anthropoetics.ucla.edu/views/vw273/>.

imagination as a cardinal determinant of human relations. It is a possibility to put one into the *position* of action. Thus, it is consciousness (abstract: Hegel, revolutionary: Marx) that catapults the body-politic of the slave labour into the spirit of productive labour that contributes to the making of a new society. Marx goes a step further and looks at the graduation of civil society as a ‘battlefield of private interests’—a political economy where interests between capital and human are mediated by dominance and control.

The consciousness of the subordinated

Black as a figurative has been often deployed to act as a representative of humanity. The thread of self-realisation of the matter is somewhat related to the movements of the untouchables. Fanon observed that anti-black racism tended to degrade the human status of the representative black individual, while the white categorisations of the self represented an *Übermensch*, an epitome of humanity. Lewis Gordon argues that Fanon’s articulation on this precise point delves much deeper than the binaries of the Hegelian dialectic.⁵⁴⁵ Giving a brief history of the origin of the etymology of race, Gordon suggests that the Hegelian model was premised on a somewhat hybrid constitution of the term or identity called race, that depended on the ‘dialectics of struggle for recognition.’⁵⁴⁶

Susan Buck-Morss examines Enlightenment thought espousing rationality, freedom, and liberty in the face of slavery. She argues that European ideals of Enlightenment thought were paradoxical in practice, as even though freedom and liberty were espoused at home, they did not encourage similar projects elsewhere outside their motherland. To support this, she goes to the diaries of Hegel to review his notes which formed his thinking.

From the sixteenth century onwards, European powers—be they Dutch, English, French, Danish or German—were earning some part of their national wealth from the profits generated through slavery. Thus, the chronicles and news about slavery and its increasing importance in the economy of the European powers were widely reported at the time. Not only that, but ‘black’ as a figurative term was part of their own quotidian life. Yet, Morss takes to task the titans of Enlightenment thought from Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau to Hegel. What is of particular interest about the Hegelian experience is that there is evidence to support that the metaphor of ‘lordship and bondage’ had historical influences, even though it was played down as Hegel’s own musings on the ancient Greek world, or a mere abstract idea in the discourse over his work.⁵⁴⁷ Buck-Morss excavates through the archives and reveals the paramount influence that the Haitian revolution and uprising against slavery had on Hegel’s philosophy.⁵⁴⁸ Lordship and bondage continued to feature in Hegel’s thinking for a significant period of time.

⁵⁴⁵ Lewis Gordon, ‘A Phenomenology of Biko’s Black Consciousness’, in Leswin Laubscher, Derek Hook, Miraj U. Desai (eds.), *Fanon, Phenomenology and Psychology* (New York: Routledge, 2021), pp. 83-93

⁵⁴⁶ *ibid.* p. 85.

⁵⁴⁷ Susan Buck-Morss, ‘Hegel and Haiti’, *Critical Inquiry*, Summer, 2000, Vol. 26, No. 4 (Summer, 2000), pp. 821–865; Marx’s critique of Hegel was premised on the fact that his dialecticism always began in abstract.

⁵⁴⁸ Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

Political theorist Gopal Guru references Westphal, where the Hegelian understanding of ‘the notion of recognition’ that ‘moves from *asymmetrical* relationship between master and slave to the *inter-subjective* relationship between person qua person’ comes to the fore.⁵⁴⁹ The inter-subjective is an internal, intra-mode of control governing the phenomenology of mistrust. The caste principle offers profound insight into how distrust and lack of fellowship lead to an interconnected world, at whose core lies a fundamental mistrust in the Other. This is further illustrated by how relations are governed and defined by distance and suspicion in the caste society. There is always a climate of unknown fear. The unknown fear—distinct from the fear of the unknown—is prescribed by religious texts and inculcated by communities. The punishment for overcoming any such fears is met with threats of bad karma, which might even result in a resigned state of delirium.

Literary scholar Gangadhar Pantawane reinserted the phenomenon of consciousness into the Dalit discourse in order to ascertain and identify the existence of the Dalit being.⁵⁵⁰ He added consciousness as a linear norm to the very definition of Dalit. Instead of being fragmented, Dalitness was discovered to be aimed at achieving a cultural identity. It is the ‘source of confrontation’ in Dalit history. In many ways, Dalitness is the ‘potential of one’s total being’ that has given rise to ‘social and cultural freedom’ because the consciousness of the Dalit that was crushed, later elevated to self-identify with an agency that was rendered agency-less.⁵⁵¹

The Dalit being is a social modicum to fully realise a society in a caste habitus. Society is not formed as a unified, governing structure. It is always tense. The Dalit being, by nature, a discarded and outcasted body feared by the dominant forces of society, is made to live with its guards up against the attacks of the dominant castes. Dalit being, therefore, constitutes in opposition by shaping a rigorous society. It is an energy that plays a part in the formation of caste society.

Hegel made a similar point in the context of slavery institutions and the society that gave rise to oppositional forces. The dominant force—slave-owning—creates value for itself by making slaves a perpetual oppositional figure. As a result, the slave only has one way to gain value, and that is through mounting revolt against slavery. In this process, the slave might have to embrace death or give death to their oppressor. However, be it a Dalit or an oppressed black person, their consciousness is not *always* in opposition. Once they win equality, they go back to their roots to live a life of ‘ancestral relationality’, that is, in kinship and harmony with the forces and energies surrounding them. They do not lose their individuality despite being characterised by the dominant oppositional forces in caste society. Rather, they invest in themselves as a praxis of inherited knowledge.

⁵⁴⁹ Gopal Guru, *Theorizing Humiliation* in Guru G (ed.), *Humiliation Claims and Context* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 2. Emphasis mine.

⁵⁵⁰ Gangadhar Pantawane, ‘Evolving a New Identity: The Development of a Dalit Culture’, in Barbara Joshi (ed.), *Untouchable! Voices of the Dalit Liberation* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

Differing Consciousness

There is a significant difference between the consciousness of the slave and that of the untouchable. Ambedkar's essay, 'Slavery and Untouchability', is pivotal in this context.⁵⁵² The slave in the Roman era and in American history was a 'protected' category of people, compared to the untouchables, argued Ambedkar. The possibility of ownership of a slave carried with it an inherent sense of responsibility towards them; the master had to keep the slave alive and well enough to effectively extract profitable labour from them for as long as possible. Although the slave had enough resources at their disposal to make ends meet, they were not necessarily a burden on the master except by way of requiring payment. The slave's health and food were the master's primary concerns. Therefore, slaves in the Roman era, for example, were accorded a recognisable reputation for conducting their duties to the satisfaction of their masters.

Ambedkar cites the example of a slave from the Roman world, Marcus Verrius Flaccus (first century AD), who was highly regarded as a grammarian and even served as a teacher. He established schools for classical teachings in Latin and literature. Similarly, the skilled slave in the instance of America provides us with ample evidence of the slave as a 'fellow worker' dogma theory. Slave labour was considered to carry respectable value; therefore, racism was an outcome of the fear of white labour under threat by the competitive metrics of productive slave labour. Highly skilled black slave artisans were recognised for their resourceful labour; trained for various industries, the slaves were in a position to produce and act as partners in the production cycle. Slaves were taken care of as a domestic necessity.

Therefore, the care and well-being of the slave was important to the master. If the slave died or lost a limb, their essential value was destroyed. As a result, the master had to suffer. Ambedkar makes a clear distinction between slavery and untouchability: the access to education, virtue, happiness, wealth, and more importantly to the formation of culture, that made slavery a 'hundred times better' than untouchability.⁵⁵³

Untouchables were not respected or recognised as legitimate labourers; no formalised institution accorded them any value. Through this devaluation of untouchables, their humanity and productivity—the value of labour were diminished, rendering them wretched beings on earth. They were viewed as a noxious *thing*. Consequently, the more hatred the touchable castes harboured for

⁵⁵² Vasant Moon (ed.), Chapters 1–3, *Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings & Speeches*. Available at: https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_05.pdf. For an extensive compilation of Ambedkar's comparisons between Slavery and Untouchability, see <http://velivada.com/2017/04/06/which-is-worse-slavery-or-untouchability-dr-ambedkars-own-words/>.

⁵⁵³ This theme of the importance of a cultural protest was aptly picked up by the post-Ambedkar generation of intellectuals, who saw theocracy as a continuance of the historical problem. Cultural myths were weaponised to strengthen the Brahminical Hindu narrative of hereditary hierarchy. Dalit scholar Vasant Moon argues that the Dalit movement's objectives were aimed at a two-fold destruction: one of culturally defined inequality and of economic inequality. Vasant Moon, 'Dr B.R. Ambedkar: The Man and His Teachings', in Barbara Joshi (ed.), *Untouchable! Voices of the Dalit Liberation* (London: Zed Books, 1986), p. 27.

them, the less plausible it became for an untouchable to think otherwise. Access to culture—with regard to the material world, civil liberty, arts and civilisation—was out of the purview of the damned untouchable.

The untouchable was considered a burden to the spiritual because they carried impurity. Thus, the untouchable was hated as a pollutant of the religious order, requiring to be hounded to death to maintain that order. Religion operated as an autonomous entity exercising sovereignty over caste-d bodies. It controlled and mastered the state and acted as a jurist by articulating laws. Religion, being the guardian of state interests, dictated various provisions for governance. Here, labour was ordained according to one's birth in a certain caste. There were no contractual relations, nor was it considered a professional activity for the outcaste to provide their labour. Thus, in the absence of a formal contract or an informal recognition of the labour of the untouchable, care—a necessity of the master, the guardian—does not become a responsibility. Religion represented non-responsibility towards labour. Untouchability constituted a different experience from the intimacy of labour contracts present in the post-slave economy in America. The 'care' was not an appeal for equal citizenship for the ex-slave in America. The black person was still defined purely by the prejudice of colour and caste that dictated their terms of relationship with the republic of the United States. This remains the difference between caste religiosity of untouchability and the secular labour market of slavery.

Nietzsche brings the dimensions of pure and impure into this conversation. He argues that these connotations were essentially protected entities that secured the privileged aristocrats as they carried out their project of governing the commoners. However, Nietzsche adds that the pure, impure, noble, good, and bad as ideas and labels were exploited by 'priestly castes' who used them to categorise and extract spiritual revenge of the highest order.⁵⁵⁴ Therefore, the priestly aristocracy believed in the didactic techniques of subverting social order for their personal welfare. The ideas of impurity and pollution were imposed upon 'lesser beings'.

⁵⁵⁴ Shruti Kapila's interventions on the 'dispersed monarchy of the Brahmin' through Ambedkar's reading of history is important. Kapila interprets Ambedkar's exegesis of looking at the Brahmin figure as a monarch governing with 'total control of violence'. What Ambedkar noticed about intracaste warfare was the formal alliance of Kshatriyas with Brahmins that closed ranks to other classes who were also just as noble and formidable warriors. But with the downfall of Buddhism which had protected various caste groups, and the subsequent rise of Brahminism, Shudras were deprived of power. The Brahmin-Kshatriya alliance produced complete monopolisation of Brahmins over ritual and violence. This is when the Kshatriyas lost their sovereignty to Brahmins. By examining Ambedkar's treatment of the past, Kapila makes an argument that 'repositioned caste as political doctrine' concerned with violence, rather than a social institution with vested economic interests. This is probably a new take on Ambedkar's political thought. Thus, the argument needs further qualification—as much as violence was a cause of caste and the relations between them, it was nevertheless a product of systemic inequality. Though Ambedkar has a similar viewpoint from which Kapila draws her thesis, we need to foreground that the version of caste that emerged in the wake of Brahminism was putatively different than the one that evolved in the colonial context which combined interests of caste with imperial desires. Thus, the difference between caste modern and caste ancient produces examples that are different than is often assumed. Shruti Kapila, *Violent Fraternity Indian Political Thought in the Global Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), p. 170, 177, 180.

Nietzsche focuses on moralities—master morality (knightly-aristocratic caste) and slave morality (priestly-aristocratic caste).⁵⁵⁵ Priests harbour a dislike for masters due to their obvious subordination to them in the hierarchy. Meanwhile, the knightly caste looks down upon the priestly caste, viewing them as incompetent to earn respect within their worldview, which values war, adventure, hunting and other such displays and applications of physical prowess. The warriors and priests represent two extremes that cannot meet because of their independent, opposing and antagonistic views. In contrast to a lavish life replete with excesses, the priests (whom Nietzsche refers to as Jews in this context) find piety and blessedness in poverty, suffering and, sickness; they are seen as God's own children. This philosophy gives rise to Christianity. Here, priestly morality nurtures the development of slave mentality through their hatred for the warrior caste. Thus, a slave caste is produced, which distorts the conceptual formation of an ideal society by dwarfing the consciousness of its slave-kind. Nietzsche uses 'priestly aristocracy', whilst Du Bois uses 'social aristocracy', and Rajishri Shahu, a subaltern caste monarch, uses 'religious bureaucracy' to refer to the Brahmin-controlled management apparatus. To this list, we can add 'spiritual dictatorship'.

SLAVERY OF UNTOUCHABILITY

Consciousness is central to the question of slavery and untouchability. Ambedkar argues that unlike untouchability, slavery is part of the dialectic of master and slave. The slave is aware of their slavery and thereby their agency to weigh themselves with the non-self-material. There are various reasons for this. First, it is a documented commercial exchange. The taxation of the slave is formalised, and they are made aware of their worth. Therefore, when self-worth is pronounced, the idea of revolt becomes a causality. A slave can think of rebelling against the structure or find ways to buy their freedom. When compared to untouchability, the notion of agency is absent, as is the challenge of determining ownership. The person outcasted as an untouchable is not owned formally but indirectly, through rituals, customs, religion, and culture, in a state of psychological and social bondage.

The untouchable is recognised only through their subjugation. This subjugation is registered in the feudal economy, wherein the labour-providing body is identified as having sinned in a previous life and thus lowly due to its karmic or past life miseries. Therefore, to secure the prospect of a respectable next life, the untouchable-turned-serf has to repent in this life by sincerely doing justice to the work heaped upon them. However, the untouchable is not entirely convinced about the perpetual enslavement, so to validate the caste hierarchy, dominant castes in the feudal economy are compelled to draw upon spirituality to convince the untouchable not to rebel. In Hindu-Brahminic metaphysics, to commit to the *dharma*, i.e., the caste system, is to ensure one's place in the circle of life. The genius of India's caste system is that it relies on the vast literature of Hindu dogma and has evolved with the times to suit the needs of every era. Based on these two factors, untouchability has undergone no significant change. The ethical question of

⁵⁵⁵ Ambedkar also dealt with Nietzschean ideas about forming a new society as a single race while in the caste society, people's concerns were limited to maintaining the Brahmin supremacy.

repentance and faith has been repeated in the karmic fate of the untouchable. The untouchable revolts, but the revolts are overturned by appropriating their revolutionary discourses, and neutralised in a way that serves the interests of those above them in the hierarchy.

The higher-ups in the hierarchy manage the caste system by owning the fate of the untouchable. This inability to mount a rebellion is the desirable quality of the untouchable, a reflection of their devotion to rid themselves of the sins attributed to them. The owner is not only limited to the ritual of higher and lower ranks but also a state authority over the untouchable's character. In this, the labour of the untouchable transcends from being untouchable to struggling for acceptability, but the body of the untouchable is still treated as polluted. The difference here between slavery and untouchability is that in untouchability, the duration of ownership is not fixed. It is not a contractual transaction wherein certain factors of subjugation emerge as a consequence of a formalised institution like slavery. Because the slave is auctioned in the open market, the master takes good care of the slave to get suitable returns from their purchase, either through the slave's labour or by selling the slave further.

In the process, the slave becomes conscious of their importance in the slavery economy. Thus, the slave keeps searching for ways to escape the shackles of slavery. The slave was a product, an item whose value was decided and put down in quantifiable terms. If skilled, the slave's labour could generate good revenue and draw more wages. The wage system differed according to the labourer's physique and skills. Hence, training the slave was important to enhance profits in the value-based system.

Slaves could also negotiate their terms of life post-slavery due to the consciousness generated from their labour and production. The surplus value produced by slaves was a negotiating feature of slavery. The industrialised class system had roots in this form of commerce which eventually gave rise to the racial caste system. When race was instituted as a system across the world, class played a fundamental role in its operation. This acted as a kernel to invoke systemic oppression of a coloured or racial group—the non-European ethnic groups.

The primary motive of the slave economy was extraction of surplus from the enslaved body. Herein, the landowning class of predominantly Western Europeans devoted much attention to the physicality of their slave. The landed class became brutal as the demand for slaves was increasing and indispensable to plantation production. The slave became valuable commodity and thereby its control through subordination was the pathway to register the validity of slavery and production. Thus, stricter laws were passed, and the slave was thrust down upon as an inferior, lower caste being.

The untouchables, on the contrary, had none of the privileges that were granted to slaves. It was the formless human subconscious that ruled the minds and actions of untouchables. Ambedkar argued '... if a man is deprived of his liberty indirectly, he has no consciousness of his enslavement', which is what the case with

untouchables was.⁵⁵⁶ Granting untouchables rights did not guarantee freedom, especially when there are obstacles placed deliberately in their path to leave them no opportunity to realise their full potential. It was, in effect, enslavement without the untouchables being conscious of their enslavement.⁵⁵⁷

Compared to the subordination and servility accorded to slaves in the master–slave relationships, Guru argues that in addition to servility, it is the shared belief in karma that deigns the untouchable bodies to keep away from rebellion. Because the slave is aware of their productive capacity and their labour is freely bargained over, the slave is on a moral plane governed by physical quantities and hence enabled to demand nay fight for their due. On the contrary, the untouchable is tied to the karmic theory, which essentialises an ‘attitude of resigned fate’. This approach ‘arrests the growth of moral insight into the experience of humiliation’.⁵⁵⁸ The moral insight that could potentially become an important factor in identifying servility as a moral wrong being done unto them, which would inevitably arouse rebellion in the everyday. Karma theory effectively launches into various manipulations, pushing for a universal acknowledgement that the untouchables’ lowly and contemptuous being was a part of the ‘natural social arrangement’.⁵⁵⁹ Naturalising social hierarchy is tantamount to presenting and passing on the caste system as an orderly and accepted social phenomenon. The gradation of untouchables into lowly ranks is cited as a ritual of imposing moral order, which is further supported by religious epiphenomenon. And therefore, it becomes a flirtatious signifier to obtuse humiliation.

Thus, in the caste system, Ambedkar argued that untouchables were not treated with fairness and were deprived of equal opportunity. Therefore, a prerequisite for the untouchables to start afresh was a certain kind of ‘unfree social order’. In slavery, the subject and owner carried acknowledged dependability, while in the case of untouchability, the acknowledgement is far from an interdependent relationship between the lordship and bondage. The untouchable is left to his own fate. There stood no fair chance of securing a job due to the overemphasised stigma and prejudice. Ambedkar concludes,

... the Untouchables unlike the slaves are owned by the Hindus for purposes which further their interests and are disowned by them, when owning them places them under burden. The Untouchables can claim none of the advantages of an unfree social order and are left to bear all the disadvantages of a free social order.⁵⁶⁰

The paradox of slavery and caste society is that intimacy and touch change positions depending on contractual relations. In the slave system, intimacy, and closeness of work in hierarchies and ranks is necessary to produce an output. Thus, the slave, though lower, is not deprived of touch. Touch here is analogous to

⁵⁵⁶ Ambedkar, ‘Slaves and Untouchables’, in *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings & Speeches*, Vol. 5 (Mumbai: Govt of Maharashtra, 2008), p. 15.

⁵⁵⁷ This is not to deny the formal slavery of the nineteenth century in Kerala where Dalit peasants were enslaved as chattels.

⁵⁵⁸ Guru, *Theorizing Humiliation*, p. 4.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵⁶⁰ Ambedkar, ‘Slaves and Untouchables’, p. 18

embrace and relationship on one side, and distance and contempt on the other. The slave is marked in the hierarchical caste order of slave economy according to their labour-based ranking, which is decided on the plantation, according to which various roles must be perfected, viz. slaves, managers, owners. As soon as the slave was free, the question changed to: where would the New Man fit? There existed two possibilities. Either to continue existing practices in civil codes or construct a society that would assimilate slave-economy into a civic-political economy wherein subordination and hierarchy of order remains. Either way, the New Man must be conditioned to perpetuate the rituals of economic exploitation. Thus, civil society is formed in a way that the slave would continue to be subordinated, but through stricter and more pernicious codes. Because slavery demanded mutual exchange, post-slavery determined the liberty of everyone, and that is why—due to institutionalisation of their subjugation through social and political rules—former slaves may be viewed as a new caste of untouchables.

The slave assumes the role of an untouchable where he is forced to reckon as unfit to belong to society beyond the plantation. Post-slavery conditions in the American South were thus identified as colour caste. The slave is only valued for as long as they contribute through their labour. Once the slave is emancipated, their independence is not accounted for, which is why there is no social relation based on mutual exchange, no care, no service, or association in the society amenably available to them.

For the caste society, untouchability is a prerequisite to employing Dalit labour. Unlike slavery, where the body is merchandise that carries a price tag, the untouchables are not bound by contractual obligations. That is why their existence is beyond the purview of commerce. Thus, they operate in a 'free' labour market, but their restraints are already mapped in a caste society. They fulfil designated roles that not only bring condemnation to their identity but also invite the spite of society. This gives society more reasons to qualify Dalits as unworthy of receiving equality. For example, the Dalit is not only given a hard job but one that would not assist in any way in raising their status. Manual scavenging, slaughtering and cleaning are associated with filth, which then equates Dalit presence as absence because Dalit imaginary is pre-imagined in negation. The clean-filthy, pure-impure dialectics operate in relation to the Dalit as a worker and the Dalit as a non-worker. Due to these supposed injunctions, Dalit labour robs them of their dignity as human beings. With the occupation being enmeshed with social approval of caste qua status, the Dalit's hope to be granted equality does not register as a matter worthy of consideration in the caste-sensitive society.

Caste body-polity is an economy fading into the formation of labour relations into freedom. The bondage tied to 'free labour' of the ex-slave in the US was yet again a legislated move to prevent their complete freedom. In the Indian context, contractual relations were not featured as a necessity. Unlike the US, where war and slavery produced a formalised stature of economic exchange, India did not have a war-like situation concerning the untouchables. Caste is a product of 'free labour' before and after the making of capitalism's epoch that designates society into ranks

and holders of status. Class, untouchability and slavery are the retainers of caste law that make the society.

Ambedkar points to the quality of difference meted out to untouchables as opposed to the Other in the Hindu-Muslim or Hindu-non-Hindu dichotomies. The chasm between religious groups is not necessarily as social as it is purely religious, as it struggles to establish the supremacy of one group over another. An outcome of conflict between a Hindu and non-Hindu is that of 'estrangement', whereas the relationship between the Hindu-Untouchable is 'widest and [...] deepest' because it is that 'of the master and slave', Ambedkar argues.⁵⁶¹ The relationship between two warring factions typically results in a 'political disaster'. Caste was a political entity that remarkably carried the weight of inequality and hierarchy. The relationship of untouchability was that of distanced inevitability, unlike slavery, wherefore intimate production guaranteed to stabilise the order of the plantation economy and global trade relations that relied upon it. With untouchables, the touch was termed a sin that could result in one losing status. The sovereignty of the various castes modelled immobility and defined the nature of interactions that could take place among these castes, which resulted in their turning into perpetual enemies on two sides of the barbed wires of the caste system. The Brahmin, as convenor of caste power relations, organises the system into hierarchical inequalities and isolation to make Dalits outcastes in relation not only to Brahmins themselves but also everyone else in the hierarchy. Separation constitutes the basis of the caste system.

Ambedkar pointed this out in the context of intimate relations and forced endogamy that was imposed upon the other castes by Brahmins.

*Castes exist only in the plural number. There is no such thing as a caste, there are always castes. To illustrate my meaning, while making themselves into a caste, the Brahmins, by virtue of this, created non-Brahmin caste; or, to express it in my own way, while closing themselves in, they closed others out (emphasis mine).*⁵⁶²

The distinct nature of the caste system was that it deprived the untouchables not only of rites but also rights. In the modern political context, it is the absence of sovereignty in the caste system, particularly for the outcastes, that denied freedom of expression to the Dalit viewpoint. The lowness attributed to Dalits is preserved through the moral order of society wherein their labour is not just lowly but is also tied inextricably with sin. That is why Ambedkar remarked that only the disadvantages of a free social order are available to the Dalit, even if they were to be freed from bondage and rendered autonomous. The *idea* and *metaphor* of the 'Dalit' occupy the minds of people in a caste-believing society. Attempts made by Dalits to claim any form of equality are received as an affront trying to destabilise the society. The need for a rational explanation for Dalit castedom—a position of being trapped in an inescapable system of ranking—is done away with by religious

⁵⁶¹ Ambedkar, *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables* (Bombay: Thackers & Co., 1945), emphasis original.

⁵⁶² Ambedkar, 'Castes in India Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development', in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol. 1. (Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1979), pp. 3-22.

codes. Thus, the moral defence for the caste system is drawn from the communal doctrines of religion. The worst of freedom and the best of enslavement is given to Dalits as apposite responses to their condition. What does the Dalit do then? It is hardly possible to challenge an irrational system with rationality and reason.

The affluence of Dalit consciousness is to celebrate the Dalit mind of reason. Reason as a European Enlightenment era's leitmotif was used to identify and other the non-rational—the native, animist or the scandalous traditionalist. The Dalit sense of reason appeals for humanity to return to our senses and operates under its strictly humanist ideals, albeit with struggling optimism given the state of their ongoing suffering. Dalit consciousness makes us part of a collective that is premised on differing unities. The untying of the heavy threads of imposed oppression allows us to breathe freely and without self-doubt.

Once Dalit consciousness manages to establish its normative, it allows for metamorphosis into many adaptive, naturalised reproductions, thereby giving rise to multiple Dalit consciousnesses. It becomes available to everyone open to sharing the space but also eliminates the belief that the Other must be suspected on account of social and economic differences.

Because Dalits are meant to be the permanent subjects of historical assault, they are conscripted to templates of dehumanisation, wherein purity, moral superiority and evolving hatred determine their status. There are no spaces that are left uncontaminated. The co-opting of the human sense instinctively desires to exist in safety. However, Dalit reason demands an honest review of the difficult conditions that characterise their everyday existence. This would mean creating actual talks as negotiating catalogues to establish the sense of caste time—the aeonic metaphor of subjugated Dalit reason. The Dalit reason is a planetary exercise situated in the document of the commune. It does not desire divisive memberships or erect boundaries on the superiorities of the spiritually weak who maintain their position through covert brokerage of power and status. If at all, it is a letter from the past written to the future as we wrestle with the membership of egosphere that is cataclysmic.

THE BENEFIT OF CONSCIOUSNESS IS TO CONTEST CONSCIOUSNESS: A BIKOIST METHODOLOGY

Now I shall examine what it takes to deploy new consciousness against the established, lowering consciousness. So far, we have seen that consciousness is not only an exercise of the universal subject but also mutually constitutive. Kabir helps us foreground the meaning of consciousness and theorise prospects of liberation through social and spiritual criticism. Kabir's ideas remain potent to uncover strangled interrelationships harmonised by local and regional social custom. The Enlightenment thinking also looks at this through lenses of capitalism, slavery and colonialism that labelled black as a caricature of the lower caste and white as the upper. However, which white and which black in particular was not revealed.

African philosopher and political theorist Achille Mbembe attempts to define the humanity of blackness in the light of glaring socioeconomic contrasts. Mbembe looks at what some would define as 'Afro-pessimism'. 'To be black,' Mbembe argues, 'is to be stuck at the foot of a wall with no doors, thinking nonetheless that everything will open up in the end.'⁵⁶³ The black figure was essentially an inauthentic human.⁵⁶⁴ Their hopelessness is an outcome of the acceptance or carrying of a name that is not of their creation and has no particular investment in securing their future. 'The Black Man cannot even see himself'.⁵⁶⁵ Mbembe equates black to death, injustice, and brutality. I have argued elsewhere about the Dalit condition paralleling a synonymous death.⁵⁶⁶

Mbembe's primary concern is the imposition of his own consciousness or the interpretation of his beingness in the world as a black person by 'someone else'. This someone else had not given him any opportunity to negotiate or adjudicate his position. He had to accept that identity as an 'inheritance' was a falsified pretence. Race produced the fiction of black as an Othering, 'obscure colour', which wasn't as significant a century ago in European colonial societies. Thus, history produced race wars to understate the savagery of the supreme *Übermensch*. How does the black man or colonial subject return to its authentic self? Thinking with the Fanonian complex in view, Mbembe suggests that by unleashing violence, instead of 'becoming its victim, the colonised returns to himself'. The beingness of the oppressed character is encapsulated within the act of fighting back. In the process of fighting, taking the highway of violence, the subject reclaims its position in the hierarchy of humanity. Therefore, for the oppressed, to live is to exist, Fanon states. Every day alive is a 'victory felt as a triumph for life'.⁵⁶⁷

Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement worked on principles of originality athwart alterity. It was proposed to entirely delineate and disassociate with power structures and thus do away with repressive ideology. That is why two different worlds existed, that of the whites and blacks, in South Africa. How was one to contest the domination of the oppressor then? The easiest way was to not recognise the oppressor. Thus, the student body SASO did not recognise the apartheid government.⁵⁶⁸ Doing that closed any channel of communication that might then entangle the black humanist project in democratising or multi-racializing South Africa. The BCM relied on themselves as a representative episteme than on the colonial white people,⁵⁶⁹ though this did not mean that the possibility of coexistence was off the table.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶³ Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 152.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 155.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 152.

⁵⁶⁶ Suraj Yengde, *Caste Matters*.

⁵⁶⁷ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p. 308.

⁵⁶⁸ Mokgethi Motlhabi, *Theory and Practice of Black Resistance to Apartheid: A Social-ethical Analysis* (Durban: Skotaville Publisher, 1986).

⁵⁶⁹ Tshepo Madlingozi, 'Transitional Justice As Epistemicide: On Steve Biko's Pluralist Co-Existence 'After' Conflict', Lecture delivered at *Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research in Johannesburg*, 27 July, 2015, p. 12.

⁵⁷⁰ Biko, 2004, p. 55, in Madlingozi.

By detailing the concept of black consciousness as representation, Biko indicated his reservations about the concept of representation. He did not care about the 'morality test' constructed to defend against accusations of organising around racial lines. It was not merely a representation of the community; the stakes were higher for the leadership position than mere representation. This was evident in the formation of the SASO distinctly from NUSAS. Representation was contextualised as having a credible leadership position, which was being deliberated upon by the students' union. Although the white organisation claimed to speak to the non-whites, its credibility regarding its ability to attain non-white leadership was low. There was no non-white leader in the decision-making positions who could champion the cause of their constituency.

The ascending range of patronage offered to the non-white groups was decided by the white leadership. For Biko, this was a paradoxical position. He was so annoyed that he was willing to walk out over the cause if challenged by the non-white groups. 'To think for themselves was a crime', Biko blasted. The patronising attitude that stemmed from the belief that blacks were being taken care of by the state and liberals was a fallacy. It was an extension of the teacher-pupil relationship between the modern Euro teacher and backward Bantu African. The liberal doctrine of post-apartheid South Africa produced non-whites.⁵⁷¹ This meant that the ulterior dogma retained white as the reference point for all discourse. Biko was opposed to this dichotomy as there existed pre-European epistemologies that were workable for delivering social justice to the colonised-oppressed.

Achille Mbembe sheds light on the participation of the state and liberal society in strengthening apartheid ideology. In his article, 'Biko's Testament of Hope', Mbembe argues that it was the social movement and not only the state-inspired initiative that aimed for economic upliftment of the black community, along with intellectual and cultural improvements. Opting to organise and think for themselves as a community was considered rebellious and unwelcoming. It was termed as 'militant' behaviour. Thus, this attitude of treating black people as if they were incapable of thinking for themselves was the result of the oppressive white supremacist thinking that was a colonial inheritance. To challenge this order, Biko formed a strategy for cutting across to separate non-white groups and then initiated a self-consciousness movement, as part of which non-white student groups could discuss and negotiate their terms in their own space. The organisational strategy was ideological, so they could change the course of divisions in society and, more importantly, society itself. The inherent difference between white organisations like the NSUSA and SASO was the 'dichotomy between principle and practice',⁵⁷² as a consequence of which actualised results of the ideal goals were not produced.

Blackness as a Reflection of Mental Attitude

Biko's essays were profoundly psychological in that they aimed to inform a cultural, social, and political opinion through the lens of Black consciousness as a broader

⁵⁷¹ Madlingozi, p. 29.

⁵⁷² Biko, 2004, p. 5.

humanitarian category fit to include all oppressed without seeking to apply disqualifying filters summarily.⁵⁷³ His essays were later compiled in a bestselling book that remains to this day a guiding document for South Africans, *I Write What I Like*. The first publisher of Biko's essay in book form was Bowerdan Press in 1978, which was later subcontracted by the African Writers Series in 1987.⁵⁷⁴ James Currey, a British publisher with Heinemann who was responsible for publishing the African writers along with Chinua Achebe, told me that Biko became an immediate sensation after his death. His tragic death led to the awareness of the killing of the young leader, and eventually, awareness of his work and ideas. Upon asking why Heinemann chose to publish Biko, Currey replied, 'because he was already a name'.⁵⁷⁵ This resulted in the international prints of Biko's text becoming available to the public at large.

The book became popular because, politics and liberation were the bedrock of Biko's thesis. Biko was unwilling to compromise for any lesser alternatives. Liberation for Biko was of paramount importance in the context of Black consciousness. For Biko, it was paradoxical to be in bondage and at the same time, be conscious of one's self, for it was consciousness of self that was an essential element to help one break free of the shackles they were forced into. This clarity and call to action through a united and diverse coalition led to the path towards freedom.

Xolela Mangcu contends *I Write What I Like* 'remains the most authoritative collection on Black Consciousness in South Africa'⁵⁷⁶. Biko's inclusive Blackness was not xenophobic, nor colour-centric or ethnically confined. In his landmark paper titled 'The Definition of Black Consciousness', Biko did not define black as a pigmented racist category. He subverted European colonial categories and prioritised his epistemology over them. For Biko, being black reflected a certain mental attitude. He adds, 'by describing yourself as black you have started on a road towards emancipation'. Biko seeks to empower black folks who were suppressed by the sense of their being, which was further aggravated by racist tendencies. In offering a psychological boost to black consciousness, Biko departed from the relegated identity imposed upon black people. Differentiating between those blacks who surrendered to white dominance and those who didn't, Biko suggested the formation of a community of *real* black people—who 'manage to hold their heads high in defiance rather than willingly surrender their souls to the white man'.⁵⁷⁷ Black included not being 'not white'—and there is a difference between not white and non-white, which is that the latter aspires to whiteness. The etymological difference embodied social history and politics.

Biko experienced South Africa in the context of the liberations spurring across its borders from the mid-1960s onwards. The festivity of liberation—as Biko

⁵⁷³ Biko worked as a head of publications for SASO. Here, he wrote hard-hitting and influential columns under the pseudonym 'Frank Talk'.

⁵⁷⁴ Email communication with James Currey, the publisher of the African Writers Series, 12 January 2022.

⁵⁷⁵ Interview with James Currey, 14 January 2022, Oxford, U.K.

⁵⁷⁶ Mangcu, *Biko*, pp. 177–8.

⁵⁷⁷ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, pp. 48–9.

observed from South Africa—was not in celebration of real independence. He measured the exploitation of blacks by the whites as incomparable to any other form of oppression. Nowhere, he observed, were whites oppressed by other whites on a scale similar to the whites oppressing blacks in South Africa. Thus, the imperialist desires of whites persisted even after the independence of African countries. Biko argued, ‘black independent countries are not attaining any real independence’.⁵⁷⁸ With the virulent racism plaguing these societies, the potential for class consciousness and inter-race-class bonding was not an attainable praxis, as even the most downtrodden white worker would still have too much to lose if the racist regime of apartheid were to change. Because the racist regime protected the white person for being white, rather than their utility or role as a labourer. Therefore, class solidarity that could disturb the apartheid regime protected labourers at work from interracial competition. This led to less capable whites using legal measures to seize competitive work opportunities and occupy business places dominated by non-whites. An Australian report at the Pacific Relations Committee of 1943 pleaded to not allow the ‘orientalists’ into colonial Australia for fear of competition. They themselves admitted to the incapacity of white workers in comparison to non-white workers. ‘The White Australia Policy’ was in effect prohibiting ‘Asiatics’ into the white colonial land.⁵⁷⁹

Ambedkar embarked on a similar project of removing the untouchables from the fixed thralldom of the caste framework. He was inclined to remove untouchables from under the influence of mental slavery imposed upon them by repeated casteist treatment and practices. It damned the untouchables to harbouring inferiority complexes of an extraordinary order, which made removing them from that position much more difficult, albeit a highly important task. Ambedkar commented that the materialistic approach to the removal of untouchability would not yield results; instead, it would create norms compelling them to rely on the oppressor to lead them out of their enslavement. This approach would not only bar a radical upsurge but also mentally shackle the untouchables to the whims and wishes of the oppressor castes. Ambedkar believed in the dedication of resources for mental upliftment that would eventually liberate untouchables and prepare them for the post-liberation phase. Therefore, he contrasted liberty with slavery as follows:

... to object to this kind of liberty is to perpetuate slavery. For slavery does not merely mean legalized form of subjection. It means a state of society in which some men are forced to accept from others the purposes which control their conduct. This condition obtains even where there is no slavery in the legal sense.⁵⁸⁰

He observed on another occasion:

As a matter of fact, a Hindu does treat all those who are not of his Caste as though they were aliens, who could be discriminated against with impunity, and against whom any fraud or trick may be

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 49.

⁵⁷⁹ Sydney, ‘The White Australia Policy’, *Foreign Affairs*, 4, no. 1, October 1925, pp. 97–111.

⁵⁸⁰ B. R. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, in *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings & Speeches*, Vol. 1 (Mumbai: Govt. of Maharashtra, 2008), p. 57.

practised without shame. This is to say that there can be a better or a worse Hindu. But a good Hindu there cannot be.⁵⁸¹

For Ambedkar, Hindu society is not a communion. It is not yet bonded. Each labourer is living off the work of the other. The ideal free market is literally ‘free’ in Hindu society from the rationale of market principle. The ‘free’ ideal is a negative term in the form of labour. Here, each caste is ‘free’ from considering its duties to any other caste. The higher one goes in the hierarchy of caste, the more freedom one has from performing labour for another. The lower one is in the hierarchy, the more the distribution of labour and powerlessness increases towards those on the ascending rank. Here being ‘free’ attributes to the caste purity and social labour. One can be free by not depending on the other, which otherwise would invite sharing of space and increase the possibilities for bodily intimacy. This would void the merit of isolation and endogamous sociality advocated and celebrated in the Hindu caste canon.

Organisational strategy as a constitution of consciousness

Ambedkar maintained an affectionate relationship with the socialist political parties in India. He was an ardent labour advocate who launched India’s first labour party, Independent Labour Party (ILP). Labour transcended caste, religion, and regional divisions. Thus, Ambedkar allied with the socialist parties to launch a manifesto of hope. His was among the first labour parties in India that was rooted in the working-class struggle.

In the 1937 provincial elections conducted under the Government of India Act, 1935, the ILP secured 14 out of the 17 seats contested for in the Bombay Provincial Elections. They bagged 11 reserved (out of 13) and 3 general seats (out of 4). ILP also rallied with other pro-labour parties for ensuring the rights of the labourers, including the Congress Socialist Party (a house of communists).

With his experiences of caste politics diverging from labour politics, Ambedkar decided to focus solely on the Scheduled Castes—otherwise known as Dalits—as his central command and the backward classes as his constituency. We can see the evolution of Ambedkar’s thinking from Fabian models to Social Democracy, wherein change was viewed as part of an evolutionary process rather than one achieved through revolutionary means.⁵⁸² Ambedkar was influenced by the Fabians of America and the UK, with his trusted teacher John Dewey being one of them.⁵⁸³ However, Ambedkar oriented his philosophy towards a bloodless democratic socialist revolution, drawing from the model of socialism.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., p. 89.

⁵⁸² Fabianism was a gradualist movement that rejected aggression and violence as a revolutionary doctrine to achieve their ends. It was among the progressive socialist groups of the time. Harold Laski and George Bernard Shaw, among others, were its most prominent members.

⁵⁸³ Anand Teltumbde and Suraj Yengde, ‘Reclaiming the Radical in Ambedkar’s Praxis’, in Suraj Yengde & Anand Teltumbde (eds.), *The Radical in Ambedkar: Critical Reflections* (Gurgaon: Allen Lane, 2018), p. xxvi

With the launching of the Scheduled Caste Federation, Ambedkar proposed a comprehensive agenda keeping in view issues of labour, gender, colonial condition, Brahminism, industrialisation, social welfare policies like national insurance, linguistic provinces, and reduction of expenditure on army and foreign policies. The manifesto considered population pressure and surplus labour that relied heavily on agriculture to be the central causes of the degradation of the social health of the Indian economy. While it continued to proposed reliance on Indian agriculture, it also promoted rapid industrialisation to tackle the problem of surplus labour in rural areas.

The Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF) manifesto appealed to 'the Men and Women of India', not just those of scheduled castes. This was a larger appeal made to the general public from a Dalit perspective. The SCF enjoyed moderate success in the 1946 and 1952 by-elections. However, despite its limited constituency and Ambedkar's efforts to incorporate other backward classes into his party, its attempts failed. Consequently, he decided to disband the party and launch a new political party called the Republican Party of India, which aimed to unite other oppressed groups to fight against the hegemonic Congress party and contest for democratic governance with a broader appeal to the Indian masses.

Ambedkar's organisational experimentation with the Independent Labour Party and All Indian Scheduled Caste Federation, and Biko's experiment with the SASO and Christian bodies—predominantly the United Christian Mission (UCM), which broke away from conservative politics and became affiliated with the radical vision of World Student Christian Federation⁵⁸⁴—are evidence leadership moments that aided the construction of their theories, alongside building sophisticated social organisations aimed at challenging perpetual oppression. The apartheid regime's defence of Black Africans' unfreedom in South Africa, based on the claim that Black people were unfit to govern themselves, served as a justification to the world and, more importantly, to white people around the world. The parameters for deciding someone else's future, confined within the rubric of national freedom, relieved individual politics of its own agency, and the resulting nation-defined human personality managed to disconcert certain oppressed groups. As Biko succinctly observed, the group's experiences were privileged at the expense of others.

Observing integrated nationhood premised on principles of adaptability and 'mutual respect' would yield a way for each group's rise. This mutuality was aimed at enhancing the rate of progress without hatred and avoiding sabotage by another group. The demand for 'complete freedom of self-determination' calls for true integration. If not, then integration would merely be lip service, and those advocating for true integration would have inbuilt complexes of difference and prejudice.

Superiority and inferiority continue to manifest in the non-racial logic that many discuss within the nationalist project. The superior/inferior dynamic is an

⁵⁸⁴ Mangcu, *Biko*, p. 153.

outcome of centuries of oppression practised against non-whites and, in the Indian Brahminical context, against non-Brahmin groups. Therefore, the idea of integration without providing adequate facilities to various faculties concerning human endeavour is worthless. During the process of integration, people with superiority complexes believe that progress is occurring, while the artificially integrated circles remain indifferent to Black progress in the systems because they are white-centred. Black people caught in such systems need to extricate themselves from their situation, whereas whites seek to merely quell the problem, which is a low priority as far as their own existence is concerned. The Black person, like the Dalit, speaks with urgency due to the everyday sufferings that plague their lives.

Thus, with this premised understanding, repeated questions may be asked by the oppressor group: 'So what can I do?' One thing that can be done is to subvert the order. People who lack training in empathetic dogmas, condoning imagining being on the other side—the suffering one—impose integration, while structures of oppression and hierarchy are proposed to stay rather than end. If you ask to take away all privileges and start anew, the privileged group, often the oppressor, refuses the suggestion and might even laugh aloud in its insecurity at your irreverence. No matter what a white person or a Brahmin does, the colour of one's skin and the location of one's caste is like a destiny they cannot escape. In Biko's analysis, 'no white person can escape being part of the oppressor camp'.⁵⁸⁵ Biko focuses on people who share common time and space. Thus, the responsibility for the wrongdoings of society must be shifted onto the people who are not actively protesting against injustices and crimes. The Burden of Proof principle, wherein passive silence is an active act, also applies to this case.

The integrated dogma of the liberal in revolting consciousness

In Biko's view, liberals are to blame for many of the problems faced by black people. Even the vocabulary 'the Black world has been looking at' is 'inherited from liberals'. When asked, 'Who are the liberals in South Africa?' Biko explains they are, 'the bunch of do-gooders that goes under all sort of names—liberals, leftists etc.'⁵⁸⁶ These people defend white racism in the country by neutralising white as an oppressive category. They entwine their pain with the oppressed through their overt investment in the black struggle, to the point where they too feel oppressed by the wrong type of whites. 'In short', Biko says, 'these are the people who say they have black souls wrapped up in white skins'.⁵⁸⁷

Rather than addressing racism in white society, liberals spend considerable time proving to black people the merit of their liberal position. In this process, white liberals effectively place the blame for the problem on the black person. Thus, liberals play a deceitful role in diverting attention away from the actual and definite cause. Biko suggests white liberals take care of the problem that lies within them and in their backyard.

⁵⁸⁵ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, p. 23.

⁵⁸⁶ Biko, 'White Racism and Black Consciousness', in Van der Merwe and Welsh (ed.), *Student Perspectives*, in Mangcu, *Biko*, p. 179.

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

The privileged hegemony includes liberals as well, with ample resources to supplement its epistemology. They can choose whether to be truthful or betray rationality. Since they are in the position of negotiation and deciding what the best avenues for others' freedom might be, the oppressive hegemony is in the position of 'choosing'. The only option left to the oppressed is the one-way road to salvation. Therefore, the onus of upholding morality rests upon the shoulders of broken humanity, which is watchful of the mendacious techniques of the oppressor. The burdens of Western dogma or the native oppressor are merely to conduct business as usual. Their ultimate aim is to remain in the position where they are the ones distributing the power. They strategically choose to align themselves with various causes, depending on the circumstances of their time. They don't have to be correct—just relevant. This is the cardinal programme of the liberal hegemony.

On the liberal or secular Brahmins, Ambedkar has something similar to offer:

Is it reasonable to expect the secular Brahmins to take part in a movement directed against the priestly Brahmins? In my judgement, it is useless to make a distinction between the secular Brahmins and priestly Brahmins. Both are kith and kin. They are two arms of the same body, and one is bound to fight for the existence of the other.⁵⁸⁸

Ambedkar reminds us about the communists and liberals in India who get involved in the metaphysics of caste relationships. He suggests that means of emancipation like communism, nationalism, or Gandhism are unsuccessful methods to liberate the Dalits. The Dalit becomes an afterthought in their political agenda, and their liberation is reduced to a mere fetish.

The emphasis on the demands and feelings of the Black world was decided, executed, and performed by the white hegemony power structure—liberals and conservatives alike. Biko argues that it was not until the 1950s that Black leadership took command and demanded 'to be their own guardians'. Until then, it was whites' patronage that manoeuvred the course of black sensibility. Biko calls it 'whites doing all the talking and blacks the listening'.⁵⁸⁹ If blacks challenge the white liberal's patronage; the liberal spitefully retorts by calling the black racist—'the morality argument' that we examined earlier in the chapter. Biko notes that if blacks do things for themselves without the control, supervision, or 'trap' set by the whites, the liberal's insecurity becomes amplified.

Racism is a means of asserting power and the subjugation of other groups. Blacks, Biko argues, were merely reacting to the unjust situation and not claiming to trade the subjugation of other non-black groups for their own. If liberals aimed for the emancipation of blacks, there would be no cause for resentment unless the objectives were either untold and unexpressed or hidden and disguised. Therefore, if the fear of black consciousness is treated as a threat, then whites need to be educated and better informed about the nature of their oppression. Regarding class

⁵⁸⁸ B R Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, p. 70.

⁵⁸⁹ Biko, *I Write What I Like*, p. 20.

in racial politics, one cannot undermine the influence of the urban, educated BCM—these motifs represent a petty bourgeois aspiration of non-revolution.

There have been legitimate critiques of the class provenance of leaders and organisers of the BCM.⁵⁹⁰ South African Marxists levelled these accusations. This thought did not occur as something new or unique to non-Marxist, indigenous revolutionaries whose praxis was based on lived experience rather than succumbing to the pressure of hegemony. Many in the BCM believed that they would commit ‘class suicide’, as Amilcar Cabral thought, where the coloniser-bred native petit bourgeois class would get tired of being given only subordinate positions and eventually turn into an (unexpected) revolutionary.⁵⁹¹

However, BCM cannot be assumed to be merely an organisation trapped in the web of liberal middle-class aspirations. Its character must be examined through what it represented and how it translated a philosophy into a linked cultural sphere for black people in apartheid South Africa. Marcus Morgan makes a case for analysing BCM on the basis of its ‘strategic intentions’ and ‘motivations’ through collective struggles.⁵⁹²

CONCLUSION

Each political project has an investment in defining the frontiers of its struggle. Those frontiers are para-projects of mega-consciousness transmitted to the public. I analysed consciousness as a foundation for political struggle. Starting with framing and understanding of the consciousness of Dalit thought, I examined Kabir’s interpretation of society through his position of consciousness. Kabir is scathing in his criticism and ready to blow open the artifice. This is the reason he remained one of the most interesting figures of study for each generation.⁵⁹³ They picked him as they found it relevant to their sense of complexities. These terrains of vagabondism provoked deferred consciousness.

For consciousness to hold its position as the primary, all-important altar, the idea of Being and the subject’s Beingness need to be understood. That is how we approach modern European thought in contrast to that of Black modernity through African slave revolts. There are generalisations applied to the critical thinking of the Dalit or black communities, which seek to fragment the overall progress of their protest cultures. Biko was cautious not to generalise singular black achievements as wholesome Black experiences. When a black representative is seen on the national stage, they are treated as a symbol of Black progress, while the suffering of the masses goes unnoticed. In the Indian political context, we can see the rise of

⁵⁹⁰ R. Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa: The dialectics of ideological resistance to white supremacy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).

⁵⁹¹ The South African Marxist who was critical of BCM was Baruch Hirson. Cf. Mangcu, *Biko*, p. 232, pp. 240–1.

⁵⁹² Marcus Morgan, ‘Movement Intellectuals Engaging the Grassroots: A Strategy Perspective on the Black Consciousness Movement’, *The Sociological Review*, vol. 68, no. 5 (September 2020), pp. 2–3.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0038026119900118>.

⁵⁹³ Dwarka Bharati, ‘Introduction’, F E Keay, *Kabir Aur Kabirpanth* (trans. Kanwal Bharati) (New Delhi: Forward Press, 2023), Second edition, p. xii.

individual Dalit leaders often being cited as evidence of the progress made by caste Indian society. At the same time, violence and humiliation continue to damage the subordinated caste groups en masse. The ambition to lead a struggle for *swabhimaan* (self-respect) by granting dignity to conscious self and its labour marks the beginning of the inclusive Dalit Black consciousness.

That is why the architects of consciousness from different epochs tried to inculcate responsibility in individuals to take charge of executing a desired change. What does revolution mean if it is not backed by moral and spiritual force? It is a blank society without expressive desires that stales the future.

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Chapter 5

CASTE IN TRANSITION

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CASTE MOVEMENTS

As seen in previous chapters, caste is not an isolated phenomenon experienced by a few groups confined to particular geographies. The history of caste is as old as the politics of race. However, only a handful of countries have built their movements by exclusively focusing on caste.⁵⁹⁴ In other countries where race was used to fight discrimination, historic values of caste were also present. The movement that was built to contest caste in the Indian context was not limited to India only but had a solid international presence. The history of such organising is now seven decades old. However, with regard to colonial registers, an indirect protest has been occurring amongst the indenture societies since the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this chapter, we shall confine ourselves to the second half of the twentieth century. The reason for this is that active and robust anti-caste efforts in the name of Ambedkar started to take shape with a clear agenda against Brahminism. It was invested in influencing the politics of Dalits back home and acting as an emissary to the world on behalf of the deprived outcastes in India. Following the twentieth century, we will look at anti-caste, Dalit organising worldwide in the twenty-first century.

⁵⁹⁴ A section of this chapter is published as 'Iterations of Shared Dalit-Black Solidarity', *Seminar*, 737, Jan 2021, pp. 83–96.

INTERNATIONAL CASTE CASE STUDIES

Caste and diaspora have been widely studied by scholars through various lenses. Two scholars and their treatment of the topic will be examined. The first is Gopal Guru's take on the internationalisation of the Dalit cause and its limitations. His analysis suggests that neoliberal and Western modalities of the Dalit cause present hindering anecdotes. The second, Vivek Kumar's introductory statement, provided critical information on caste formations and their organisations in the diasporic society.⁵⁹⁵ Although there are various works covered through historical, sociological, anthropological, and economic lenses.⁵⁹⁶ A recent work in this line of enquiry is by Kurien, who studied anti-caste Dalit activism in the US.⁵⁹⁷

Diasporic Activism

In this chapter, I will present case studies of anti-caste, Ambedkarite international organising that have contested caste-based discrimination over the past six decades. It is a social history of activism in the UK and US. I have experience of organising and working with various anti-caste bodies in both countries. Drawing from my notes as a participant observer, and ethnography aided with structured interviews and archival data, I present the nature of organising, its position in history and how newer articulations of shared solidarities shape Dalit anxieties. To do that, I examine activities of Dalit-black literary innovations undertaken by Dalit writer, M N Wankhede.

In the process of theorising the epistemology of activism, I will analyse field notes to examine how solidarities are created, or not envisioned. I will explore how Dalit groups view solidarity and what factors strengthen or weaken their position in international activism. Do we look at activism only through the perspective of shared solidarity, or can solidarity be articulated without getting under the skin of

⁵⁹⁵ Vivek Kumar, 'Dalit Diaspora: Invisible Existence', *Diaspora Studies*, 2:1, 53-74

⁵⁹⁶ Purvi Mehta's Ph.D. dissertation on Ambedkarite movement in America presented historical as well as ethnographic insights on the organising aspects on anti-caste movements, Purvi Mehta, *Recasting Caste: Histories of Dalit Transnationalism and the Internationalization of Caste Discrimination*, Unpublished PhD dissertation. University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 2013; Raj Kumar Hans' work in the British Columbia in Canada provided a caste narrative to the history of Sikh migration, Raj Kumar Hans, 'Gurdwara as a Cultural Site of Punjabi Community in British Columbia, 1905-1965', in Sushma J. Verma & Radhika Seshan, *Fractured Identity The Indian Diaspora in Canada* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2003), pp. 217-233; One of the earliest works in this direction was covered by Schwartz in an edited collection aptly titled 'Caste in Overseas Indian Communities', Schwartz, Barton Morley, eds. *Caste in Overseas Indian Communities*, (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1967); Work in Africa especially in light of the indenture but also the settled immigrant caste formation of society was done by an excellent ethnographic collection of Agehananda Bharati, *The Asians in East Africa: Jayhind and Uburu* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Co., 1972); Following this I took upon the task of articulating caste structures among Indian communities in Africa, Suraj Yengde, 'Caste among Indians in Africa', *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. L (37), pp. 65—68; Surendra Bhana's meticulous documentation of names on ship's list, Bhana, Surendra, *Indentured Indian Emigrants to Natal, 1860–1902: A Study Based On Ships' Lists* (New Delhi: Promilla, 1991); Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed's broader historical stroke cover the history of Indian indenture in Southern Africa is also detailed with scope, Desai, Ashwin and G Vahed, *Inside Indian Indenture: A South African Story, 1860–1914* (Pretoria: HSRC Press, 2010); and finally, Chakravorty et. al's work on Indian Americans referred to the Dalit population while its focused remained on demographically profiling the immigration aspects of Indian immigrants over the highly selective group of Indians in America of the past fifty years.

⁵⁹⁷ Prema A. Kurein, 'The Racial Paradigm and Dalit Anti-Caste', *Social Problems*, spac035, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spac035>

other oppressed groups to evoke syllogism and similar slogans? What conditions are needed to exemplify a unique Dalit position that is no longer an 'internal problem' of India? These are some of the challenges through which Dalit activism organises in a foreign country. Gopal Guru argues that caste overpowers colour as a marker of solidarity.⁵⁹⁸ To prove his point, he refers to the dominant caste diaspora in white-dominated countries who, despite being non-white Indian, still don't forge a solidarity with Dalits. There is another reason for this, and it is the non-sociality among various castes. This nature of difference and distance is easily translated because it does not require one to invent new subjectivities in a country that has advanced segregation and an impurity complex within its culture and social frameworks.

There are a few events that are not covered in this chapter due to the evolving scope of the legal considerations:

1. The socio-legal analysis of Cisco caste discrimination case where I am an expert advisor to the petitioning team.
2. The statement of Dalit women against casteism in the tech industry highlighted by The Washington Post.
3. The grassroots organising against caste discrimination in the US.

PIONEERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL AMBEDKARITE MOVEMENT

UK CASTE CASE

Like the United States, the United Kingdom is another geography which is equally diverse and has an intimate colonial legacy. Dalits were one of the early entrants to apply for British citizenship when the doors were opened for work and settlement.⁵⁹⁹ Of the Punjabi wave of British immigration, Dalits constituted significant numbers as the working-class immigrant force in the UK. Thus, the history of Dalit presence in Britain is recorded through various socio-cultural activities and political movements.

It began with recognising their history and establishing their equal status in the host society. This was achieved through celebrating the lives of their heroes. The first Ambedkar Jayanti was celebrated in 1962 in London by a small group of Maharashtrian Ambedkarites – Krishna Gamare, V.T. Hirekar, Shekhar Bagul, Shyam Khobragade, Dr Bhatkar, Dr Ganvir, Kardark, and S.S. Gaikwad—who were intimately connected with the politics of the Ambedkarite movement.⁶⁰⁰ These were the dashing radicals who were fearless and commanding in their wits.

⁵⁹⁸ Gopal Guru, 'What it means to be an Indian Dalit? Dalit Responses to the Durban Conference', In Balmurli Natrajan & Paul Greenough, *Against Stigma Studies in Caste, Race and Justice since Durban* (Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2009), p. 173.

⁵⁹⁹ Mark Jugensmeyer, *Religion as Social Vision: The Movement Against Untouchability in 20th-Century Punjab* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982)

⁶⁰⁰ Interview with Sat Pal Muman, Secretary of Ambedkar International Mission, London, and President of Caste Watch UK, 15 November 2020 (via Zoom).

Krishna Gamre was a builder who arrived in the early 1960s. He stayed in touch with the anti-caste politics in India. When Dalit Panthers was formed, he joined the organisation, eventually becoming one of the ranking leaders of the group. Along with Mohanlal and A. Shivanand, they started the Dalit Panthers of India branch in London. Mohanlal became the president and Gamre the secretary. When Gamre visited India, he would seek an audience with Pawar. Pawar reports that Gamre was influenced by socialist thought. He was attracted to George Fernandes and had wanted the Dalit Panthers to forge an electoral alliance with him.⁶⁰¹

Gamre was an internationalist who maintained connections with revolutionary movements worldwide. He also had contacts with Khalistani groups and Phizo of Nagaland.⁶⁰² Gamre had envisaged a solidarity of international revolutionary organisations extending to the Dalit Panthers. He became the contact person for the Dalit Panthers and reached out to various leaders on their behalf. He was flamboyant, driven by revolutionary politics. He married a Black West Indian nurse who joined the movement activities faithfully. This union of Gamre might perhaps be the first recorded incident of Ambedkarite inter-racial marriage. V T Hirekar, a staffer in the Indian High Commission, along with his spouse Madhuri Hirekar, attended the ceremony.

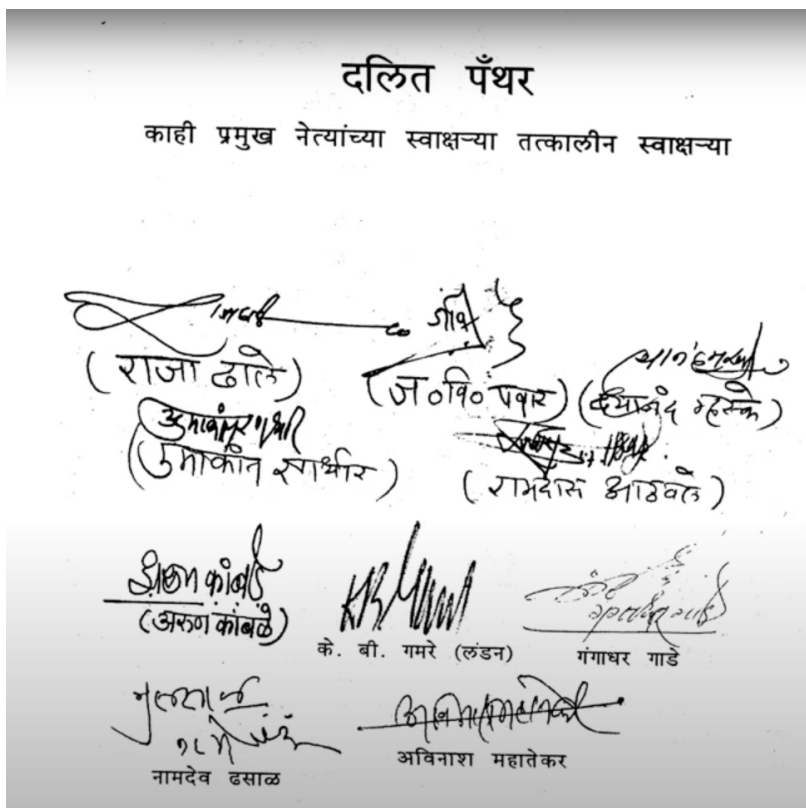


Fig 2. K B Gamre signed as 'among the few chief leaders of the organisation' (source: Dr. Ambedkar Thoughts Movement (ATM Network)).⁶⁰³

⁶⁰¹ J V Pawar, J. V. Pawar, *Ambedkarottar Ambedkari Chalwal*, Vol. 4, 1972-1977 (Mumbai: Asmita Communications, 2010] 2022) Third Edition, p. 316

⁶⁰² Ibid.

⁶⁰³ Tejvil Pawar, 'Dalit Panther Part 1', Dr. Ambedkar Thoughts Movement (ATM Network), 1 June 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmL_6H42Q-E

First Dalit Woman President of Ambedkarite Organisations

The story of Madhuri Hirekar is iconic in many ways. Madhuri grew up in a small village as the daughter of landowning Vidarbha Dalits from Chandrapur district. Madhuri was educated. She was sent to a town to pursue her studies when she was 11 years old. This early exposure in life made Madhuri bold and outspoken. This quality of hers, alongside her ability to communicate in multiple languages and her experience of witnessing the conversion ceremony in Nagpur ⁶⁰⁴, and a strong female voice encouraged the male-dominated Indian Buddhist Society, UK (IBS) to pursue Madhuri to lead the organisation. After much convincing, Madhuri accepted the offer as the inaugural president of the IBS. Her working style was focused on bringing women members of the Dalit community into the mainstream activities. Due to cultural differences and shyness amongst Dalit females who were not conversant in English, it was difficult for Madhuri to break the silence. The aim of organising was to propagate Buddhism, commemorate Ambedkar and Buddha jayantis, connect with people from the community, and offer support to new entrants and students in the UK.

Madhuri was of the generation that had first-hand information and experience of growing up in a caste-based society. She witnessed the movement to reclaim power through conversion to Buddhism. At a younger age, when Madhuri's classmate invited her to her place, she was not offered water in a glass but instead the water was poured down to catch in her palms. Agitated by this humiliation, Madhuri confronted her friend and demanded to be treated equally. She reminded her of all the things she had shared without any inhibitions. Ever since, Madhuri kept her distance from her casteist friend. Madhuri's attention to pride and honour comes from two sources. The first is that her family was unlike landless peasants. They were farmers who owned land and commanded influence. The second was her experience of conversion. That experience reassured her faith in herself as equal. 'It opened eyes in the inner heart to feel that you are no less, you are much better, you can do the best if you try.'⁶⁰⁵ Madhuri continues, 'Who would have expected the women to do anything?' But such a move empowered her.

Madhuri has experiences of 'seeing Babasaheb twice'. The first was at her village when Dr Ambedkar had visited the school. As a member of the audience, this girl was attentively observing the messiah. Dressed in their highbrow fashion, the villagers celebrated the news of Dr Ambedkar's arrival to their community. The outcastes were in high spirits to welcome their leader. Madhuri was informed by her school that Dr Ambedkar was coming to visit, and she prepared herself to participate in the event, listening carefully. Dr Ambedkar's cause of justice was discussed and, after Dr Ambedkar's speech, the microphone announced that whosoever had any donation to offer should come forward. People started donating in hundreds, and Madhuri thought to herself that her purse didn't contain 100

⁶⁰⁴ Madhuri discussed with me about her experiences of witnessing the conversion in Nagpur. The celebrations were already a month in preparations. It was a festivity and she saw how the Dalit community was compassionate and welcoming to others who travelled to Nagpur for conversion ceremony. After conversion we became 'bold and daring' Madhuri reminisced.

⁶⁰⁵ Madhuri Hirekar, Interview with the author, 20 Feb, 2022 (telephone).

rupees. She was worried that she might not be able to contribute. Upon much deliberation, the school student, Madhuri, had to finally accept that she couldn't contribute monetarily to the movement quite yet. A decade later, far removed from the dry lands of Vidarbha in the cold London, Madhuri took on the cudgels of the Ambedkarite Buddhist movement. Her spark remained within her, and she found avenues to contribute to 'Babasaheb's movement'.⁶⁰⁶

Shyam Khobragade was another iconic figure of the Ambedkarite movement in the UK. He was the brother of Barrister Bhaurao (Rajabhau) Khobragade, the legendary Scheduled Caste leader who had obtained his Bar-at-Law in London. He was one of the selected 16 students sent by Dr Ambedkar to pursue higher studies in London. Shyam Khobragade was one of the strong voices of the movement. He ran a successful business on the famous Oxford Street in London. Shyam's partner was a Mauritian woman who worked alongside him in the business. While Shyam was articulating new ways to work in the socio-political realm, his outwardly confident attitude inspired the Ambedkarite community.⁶⁰⁷

Shyam, like other Ambedkarite Buddhist contemporaries, had openly identified the enemy and declared war on them. It was no longer a fight with the Congress as an entity of political freedom, but rather with Hinduism as religious and cultural practice that influenced society, which was deemed responsible for the condition of the Dalits. As new converts, the Dalit activists embraced their anti-Brahminical position, which gave them a relatively freer hand. This also put them in the limelight for being forthright in their critique. Relying on Ambedkar's work, they found a righteous method to counteract their position against caste in India. By now, the work was confined to the happenings in India and not yet in the UK.

These individuals eventually formed the 'Indian Buddhist Society, UK' in 1973 that had a significant presence of Punjabi Dalits, namely Darshan Sarhali, Charan Dass Baudh, Prakash Chand Sondhi, Sohan Lal Leal, K.C. Leal⁶⁰⁸, Mengha Ram, Barrister V D Khade and a few others. A notable aspect of this society was that it was headed by Madhuri Hirekar who, along with her husband V T Hirekar, was witness to the conversion ceremony on 14 October 1956 in Nagpur, although they weren't aware of each other at the time.⁶⁰⁹ Madhuri was a class IX student in Nagpur who went to attend the 'pilgrimage' of people. Madhuri was pursuing her legal studies in London whilst simultaneously heading the Indian Buddhist Society, UK.

Later, the Indian Buddhist Society, UK was renamed as Dr Ambedkar International Mission in 1974, at the behest of Shyam Khobragade, to 'establish a more visionary' statement that would appeal to a larger constituency with a stated aim of organising 'the Federal Council of Ambedkarites in the UK'.⁶¹⁰ Though not

⁶⁰⁶ Madhuri Hirekar, Interview with the author, Brixton, London, 12 June 2022.

⁶⁰⁷ Gautam Chakravarty, a veteran Ambedkarite activist and Buddhist arrived in the UK 1969 who was witness to the movement narrated the stories around important events of the Ambedkarite activities in the UK. Interview, 8 Feb 2022 (telephone).

⁶⁰⁸ K C Leal was also another pioneering members. His work is curated by Nanak Chand Rattu in the *Pioneers of Ambedkar Buddhist Movement in United Kingdom* (New Delhi: Amrit Publishing House, 1999).

⁶⁰⁹ Madhuri Hirekar, Interview, 20 Feb, 2022 (telephone).

⁶¹⁰ Ibid. p. vi.

everyone agreed to this change. K C Leal expressed his disagreement about this. Madhur Hirekar said that Shyam came from a family of politicians and thus he was in tune with the political future of activism.

Nevertheless, the organisation went ahead with its activities. Dr. Ambedkar International Mission purchased a property at 84 Dacre Road, Plaistow in London. The Mission reinstalled a portrait of Dr Ambedkar at the Indian High Commission, London, in 1978, which was attended by 600 people.⁶¹¹ Around this time, the Indian Buddhist Society, UK decided to take up the cause of converted Buddhists and Dalits of India to the United Nations Human Rights Commission.⁶¹²

Purchasing properties was a way to establish their presence firmly. By owning a community organisation, the Dalits now had a place for their own congregation. Seeing temples, gurudwaras, churches and mosques, they too felt the need to work through a formal organisation. Once this was done, it boosted confidence in the members of the community. They could now think of taking up the cause to an international body of rights. This space became a meeting point for Dalits across castes, regions and religions. This encouraged people from different regions, who were otherwise shy, to start asserting themselves. The organising that started with the working class and extended to the professional class helped to galvanise more attention, as the latter were well-versed in English and held an advantage in certain circles due to their professional positions.

Another important addition to the Marathi and Punjabi Dalits was the inclusion of Gujarati Ambedkarites. This group was religiously inclined and did not wish to assert their identity or embrace their history. But to bring them into the movement, Gautam Chakravaty, who was now growing in influence amongst the dashing Ambedkarites, sought out fellow Gujaratis. They convened meetings and impressed upon attendees the need for self-assertion. As a result, along with Shashikant Solanki, Kanubhai Parmar and a few others, the Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Trust was started in 1973. Its primary aim was to support education-related activities.⁶¹³

The reason the Trust was made to focus on literate activities had to do with the nature of organising. The Gujarati Dalits were not yet ready to take on the cause of caste and Buddhism; thus, educational contribution was proposed as an alternative. The Trust aimed to provide help to students coming to the UK. They also concentrated on publishing materials relating to Ambedkar's movement. They also extended financial support to 'Bheem Patrika' of L R Balley. The Trust would print small booklets and pamphlets and distribute them in the UK amongst the community. Eventually, the Trust purchased a plot of land in Southall, UK. As the Trust expanded and its membership increased, an impressive three-storey Ambedkar Centre and Buddha Vihara was constructed. The Ambedkar Centre serves as a refuge for many Dalit students visiting the UK. It also provides paid

⁶¹¹ I am grateful to Sat Pal Muman for guiding me to these archives and also meticulously fact checking the information.

⁶¹² Leal, Introduction, p. v.

⁶¹³ Gautam Chakravarty Interview, 8 Feb, 2022 (telephone).

accommodation to students and people in need. The Centre houses a Buddha Vihara, which offers facilities for two resident monks.

In his introduction to the book, *'Pioneers of Ambedkar Buddhist Movement in United Kingdom'*, curated and edited by Nanak Chand Rattu, K C Leal, one of the leading members of the Ambedkarite Buddhist movement, chronicled the stages of Ambedkarite organising through his autobiography. It is an important clue to the history of Ambedkarite activism in the UK. The book is filled with personal anecdotes and stories of one of the pioneers of the movement. It charts out dates and relevant activities undertaken by Ambedkarites of different regions, classes, and vocations.

We could take a look at the story of the UK Ambedkarite movement through the narrative of K C Leal. Leal arrived in the UK in 1955 after having served in the Army from 1942 to 1947. Seeing the plight of the Dalit refugees coming from Pakistan, Leal started volunteering for their rehabilitation. This matter was brought to the attention of the local administration led by the committee of Delhi Scheduled Caste Federation (DSCF). A delegation from the DSCF apprised Dr Ambedkar of this impending tragedy, who promptly brought it to the attention of the Prime Minister, Nehru. As a result, the government provided relief.

Leal took up a permanent government job in Delhi in 1948, where he continued his work with the DSCF. This time, he served as an executive committee member. Leal continued the work until 1952 and resigned to take up the role of editing 'Ujala Weekly'. This publication had to be wound up due to financial constraints and a lack of advertisements to support its continued production. However, during this time, Leal was elected as the General Secretary of the Punjab state's All India Scheduled Caste Federation.

While this was going on, Leal decided to go to the United Kingdom and work for five years with the 'sole purpose of earning money and returning after five or six years' to undertake the task of publishing his own newspaper with a self-printing press.⁶¹⁴ After his arrival, he kept in touch with his colleagues from the SCF. After Ambedkar's demise, the Delhi Scheduled Caste Welfare Association (DSCWA) undertook a project to construct Ambedkar Bhavan.⁶¹⁵ As a result, a fund-raising appeal was issued. Leal took an interest in it and proposed to continue the work in England and Europe. The president of the Association, Sohan Lal Shastri, approved his suggestion and appointed him as the leader of the DSCWA, UK Branch in 1957. However, the project of Ambedkar Bhavan faced internal infighting. Along with DSCWA, UK branch, another organisation, 'Ambedkar Mission, United Kingdom', was also established in 1957.

Leal was determined to continue the work of Ambedkar's mission. Thus, he started supporting various organisations. One such endeavour was his financing of

⁶¹⁴ K C Leal, 'Introduction', in Nanak Chand Rattu (ed.), *Pioneers of Ambedkar Buddhist Movement in United Kingdom* (New Delhi: Amrit Publishing House, 1999), p. ii.

⁶¹⁵ There was an Ambedkar Bhavan constructed in 1951 in the Balmiki colony area in Delhi. Vijay Prashad, *Untouchable Freedom A Social History of a Dalit Community* (New Delhi: OUP, 2000), p.151.

publications. 'Bheem Patrika', the legendary newsletter edited and published by the stalwart Ambedkarite, L R Balley, was among these. Leal had established himself financially. He ran a travel agency in Birmingham. Meanwhile, he was also continuing to search for people to organise and spread Dr. Ambedkar's mission. Thus began a massive outreach to the Punjabi immigrant community in the UK who had not been made aware of the sacrifices and works of Dr Ambedkar. Steadily, the work of propagating the views of Ambedkar and Buddha started producing results.

As people joined, it was proposed to start a new organisation in the name of Ravidas. Leal protested this choice since he was 'a staunch Buddhist'.⁶¹⁶ Despite his protest, Leal claims he was elected to be the president of the organisation. He left the meeting frustrated. Seeing this, some of the people who agreed with his demands followed him. They decided to start an organisation for the 'advancement of the mission of Dr Ambedkar in the cause of the Dhamma'. In 1961, the 'Bharatiya Buddhist Cultural Association' (BBCA) was registered as the first anti-caste, Ambedkarite organisation outside India. This organisation was later changed to 'Bhartiya Buddhist Council' upon recommendation from the Ven. Bhikku H. Saddhatissa.

Under the auspices of BBCA, the first-ever Buddha Jayanti and various Buddhist ceremonies were celebrated in 1963. The senior monk Ven. Bhadant Anand Kausalayan was invited to officiate the function. Leal also had his daughter married in a Buddhist ceremony. This was widely circulated in various circles. Buddhism's embrace by British Punjabis can be seen as one of the earliest anti-caste responses by Punjabi Dalits. Their position as a Dalit placed them in a distinct situation, which was to neither formally join any religious organisation, be it Hindu, Sikh or Christian. Being a Buddhist meant having an upper hand in the affairs of society. It meant that there were few people willing to take the risks that came with it. The risks differed. They could be excommunicated by fellow Dalits for being part of the congregation. They could lose business and personal relations owing to a 'foreign' religion which was not native to Punjab. It also meant that they could be identified as falling into the trap of aligning with Maharashtrians and not advocating for their own native identity.

They had to strike a balance whilst still addressing the work that required attention. Thus, they incorporated the Punjabi language into their discourses on Buddhism. They also created their politics around Ambedkar's work. This way, the naysayers could at least find a way to work with their fellow-caste colleagues without submitting to the authority of their newfound religion. This resulted in some success, with many Punjabi Dalits embracing Buddhism. Those with education and an understanding of Ambedkar's movement relinquished their religious ideology and joined the ranks of the Buddhist order. The new converts became devout in their faith. They used Sundays for religious gatherings and family meetings. The Buddhist movement was slowly making an impact on politics as Buddhist organisations started to have stakes as a voter base. They attracted the

⁶¹⁶ Leal, 'Introduction', p. iv.

attention of local politicians, who began to attend events celebrating Ambedkar and Buddha.

Noticing the work done among the Punjabi Dalits, the Indian Buddhist Society, UK invited Leal to take over the helm of the organisation in 1970. They organised the first Ambedkar and Buddha Jayanti celebrations at the High Commission of India in London. The chief guest was Appa B. Pant, then India's High Commissioner to the UK. Leal continued to organise as a Buddhist Ambedkarite and associated with the Babasaheb Ambedkar Buddhist Association in Handsworth, Birmingham. Leal was introduced to the Vipassana practice in 1987, which was not received well by the community activists. Nanak Chand Rattu accused him of being a recluse like other Hindu sects who are isolated from community needs and demands. It was seen as a 'complete betrayal' of the Ambedkarite movement by the pioneer himself.⁶¹⁷

There remains a diverse and interesting mix of responses from people involved in the Ambedkarite movement in the UK. In their energetic zeal, the pioneers left a lasting archive for future generations to build upon. The UK Ambedkarite movement paved a path in a foreign country far from their homeland. In a complex and challenging nation, flags bearing the names of Ambedkar and Buddha fly atop various quarters of the UK in the twenty-first century.

The Dalit history of anti-caste protest in the UK is older compared to that in the US, which began in the 1960s.⁶¹⁸ One of the earliest anti-caste protest movements centred on epithets hurled against Dalits in a pub. A pub that was predominantly frequented by Dalits was derogatorily referred to as 'Chamar Pub'. Two additional examples, elucidated by Arun Kumar, a journalist and chronicler of the Ambedkarite movement in the UK, highlight this growing resonance of consciousness.⁶¹⁹ In 1968, around 3,000 Dalits congregated in London to protest against the Shankaracharya of Puri, who had expressed his stance in favour of caste, justifying its importance. The second example concerned an offensive statement justifying the caste system, which was reported in a local newspaper, *The Bedfordshire Times*, in 1976. The statement was made by a dominant-caste Indian in Bedford. As a result, Dalits protested against this, forcing the man to apologise for his demeaning, offensive remarks. Dalits boycotted the man's business, which led him to wind up his shop. The significant move towards Dalit activism was centred on Ambedkar's directive.

The Bedfordshire Times carried a two-part series on the social practices and religions of the Indian communities in Bedford. It looked at the diverse composition of the diaspora. Buddhism was presented as the faith of the Dalits that propagated faith in reason, science and logic as opposed to God, reincarnation and prophets.

⁶¹⁷ Nanak Chand Rattu, 'Preface', in Rattu, *Pioneers*.

⁶¹⁸ Eva-Maria Hardtmann, *The Dalit Movement in India: Local Practices and Global Connections* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

⁶¹⁹ Vidya Bhushan Rawat, 'The History Of Ambedkarite Movement In United Kingdom: Interview with Arun Kumar', *Countercurrents*, Dec 3, 2016, <https://countercurrents.org/2016/12/the-history-of-ambedkarite-movement-in-united-kingdom/>

The celebrated reporter of the newspaper, Liz Brown, aimed to decipher the religious graph of the Indian diaspora. The Hindus, Sikhs and Bahá'ís were notable features of the Bedford community. Sikhs, like the Buddhists, Brown observed, started off by challenging the caste system that intertwined social class with politics. However, the author noted that her respondents claimed that English society offered relative status based on one's merit, contrasting with the caste society's stature.⁶²⁰

Few decades later, that was to be challenged. The caste system had started to root itself in society. But the victims were fighting back. In 1990, *The Daily Telegraph* reported that casteism in social places was vivid.⁶²¹ It examined pubs, social gatherings, religious ceremonies, matrimonial sites and workplaces. The testimonials gathered from dominant castes and Dalits elucidated the growing intensity of the caste system. It was during this time that the report suggests the state policy was open to considering cases of caste-based discrimination. The Commission for Racial Equality (established in 1976) stated that it would take cognisance of cases of caste discrimination as they fell under the purview of 'ethnic origins', but they admitted to not having received any complaints yet.⁶²² The Commission was replaced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2007, which took up the caste issue a decade later. This initial interest was to culminate in the establishment of the UK Government's research project to study caste discrimination in 2010. The research study entitled 'Caste discrimination and harassment in Great Britain' found that caste discrimination was indeed present in workplaces, educational institutions, and public spaces.⁶²³

A critical analysis of the Ambedkarite organising in UK

The anti-caste, Dalit-led initiatives worked with Ambedkar's available thoughts. They had not concerned themselves with other struggles and issues at hand. The struggle was internally motivated and driven by historical contestations for power and prestige. The Dalit activism movement, by including a woman in leadership, was not necessarily aiming to establish a template for other organisations to follow. Rather, they employed this as a pragmatic strategy. They were not engaged with other solidarity movements and, therefore, the socialist or Marxist way of organising did not touch their immediate goals. Consequently, one can argue that the Ambedkarite movement saw the potential of working with gender diversity to grow the movement.

This is what makes this episode different from the feminist vantage point of the present era. The election of Hirekar to the top post of a marginal and struggling organisation set a precedent for the organisation's growth. The leaders were

⁶²⁰ Liz Brown, 'Religion – like branches on a tree', *Bedfordshire Times*, 1976. I am grateful to Arun Kumar for providing me the original scanned copies of the newspaper cuttings.

⁶²¹ Maurice Weaver, 'I thought I would escape the name...but it has followed me like a dark cloud', *The Daily Telegraph*, Oct 11, 1990, p. 25

⁶²² Cited in Weaver, *Ibid*.

⁶²³ Hilary Metcalf and Heather Rolfe, 'Caste discrimination and harassment in Great Britain', https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/85522/caste-discrimination.pdf

interested in increasing their numbers and finding more allies among women. As is the tradition today, Ambedkarite women overseas involve themselves in cultural activities whilst the social and economic aspects are managed by men. At gatherings and events, separate groups often form along gender, marital status, and regional lines. Due to the immense diversity and cultural attributes that place gender in a position of not having to deal directly with other male members, the two genders in familial relations keep interactions within the sober confines of marital rules.

The Ambedkarite organisation replicated the social and cultural models of India's newly converted Buddhist families. Mostly, members were from Vidarbha's Mahar lineage; they found it comfortable to relate to women in the organisation as sisters-in-law. Due to the proximity of village networks and caste-ideological similarity, a woman leading the organisation was not extraordinary. It was the right choice for the leaders. For if a woman is seen—not merely as a person running the organisation but also in a position of power and at the same time performing domestic duties—then other women feel comfortable, as their fate is entangled in these codes of having to take up many roles simultaneously.

The other reason was being in the company of men from other states and regions where language, culture, food and religion differed. This was one of the earliest difficulties for the organisations. The Punjabi diaspora, for example, was simultaneously organising; however, the differences made it difficult to forge a strong solidarity. Hirekar's elevation to the post signified to women from other regions that they should consider taking up leadership roles in their organisations. This also indirectly influences the habits and choices of others. If a woman is able to inspire fellow Dalit women through her actions and deeds, then the work becomes easier to communicate and lobby for their movement.

From the women-led movement to the religious work among the Punjabi community, the Ambedkarite diaspora limited their actions to fighting within the frameworks of nation-state, religio-political, and caste respectabilities.

The 1960s era

The 1960s era is a landmark decade in the history of British Dalit activism. In addition to Bedford, Birmingham and Wolverhampton were two major centres of Ambedkarite activism in the UK. Some argue these two locations were more active in promoting Ambedkarite thought and ideology in the UK. To facilitate the work, the legendary Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Committee of Great Britain, Wolverhampton (AMCGB) was established in 1969 after the protest against Shankaracharya ignited Dalits. For decades, AMCGB was host to noted Dalit thinkers and activists from India. The likes of Nanak Chand Rattu, Ambedkar's close associate for 17 years and private secretary for six, and Bhagwan Das frequented Wolverhampton whilst on their visits to the UK. Rattu donated some of Ambedkar's possessions to the

museum at the organisation. AMCGB also helped to publish Rattu's bestseller, 'Little Known Facets of Dr. Ambedkar'.⁶²⁴

The activities in the Ambedkarian path took a leap when a mass conversion to Buddhism was organised in West Bromwich Town Hall in June 1973. The conversion event was administered by Venerable Dr H Saddhatissa—a Buddhist monk who was witness to Dr Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism in Nagpur on 14 October 1956. The conversion to what was believed to be a caste-free Buddhism was an exciting event. The dominant-caste Indian diaspora was shocked to witness Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism replicated in a foreign land in a span of just two decades. This was a direct answer to the intimidations of the dominant castes. To further the efforts of Ambedkarite Buddhism, Dr Ambedkar Buddhist Society, Birmingham was established in September 1973 that continued its activities in social and spiritual.⁶²⁵

Dalits who arrived in the 1960s were mostly from Punjab's Doaba region, which had a sizeable population of Dalits. Over 45% of the region are Dalits who, by default, have a political post. In addition, the remittance has added to their assertiveness and resistance against caste-based atrocities. They do not hesitate to retaliate against the muscle-flexing, land-owning Jatts. Naturally, people from the region were well versed in the politics of caste. The uneducated, unskilled Dalit workforce was attracted to the Bedford and Luton area where brick kilns and the steel industry offered jobs. The West Midlands was among the largest recipients of migrant labour, which gained a name as the 'Black Country' that produced iron, steel, coal, and brick, among other materials. It is here migrant Indians also found jobs working with iron-melting furnaces.⁶²⁶ These people were invested in the post-Ambedkarian Republican Party of India. To consolidate their political effort, 'The Republic Group of Great Britain' was established in 1962 in Birmingham under the able guidance of Darshan Sarhali, Khushi Ram Jhumat, and Comrade Mohan Lal. Chanan Chalal was one of the active leaders in Bedford who led the Dalit rights movement in the UK during the late 1980s and '90s. They even fielded candidates for local elections.

The Dalit activism's roots in Bedford transcended into social, cultural and sports activities. A sports club, Bheem Association, was established in Bedford in 1972. This brought youthful energies in the Dalit community to congregate in one place. Sports tournaments were organised under the banner of Bheem Association. The culmination of this activism was noticed during the 1991 golden jubilee of Ambedkar's birthday celebration at his alma mater, London School of Economics. Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Committee of Great Britain, Wolverhampton, Ambedkar Buddhist Council, UK (precursor to FABO), Ambedkar Buddhist Society, Birmingham, UK, Federation of Ambedkarite and Buddhist Organizations (FABO), Anti-Caste Discrimination Alliance, UK, Caste Watch, UK, Dalit Solidarity Network, UK, Dr Ambedkar Buddhist Organization, Birmingham, UK, Dr Ambedkar Mission Society, UK, Dalit Forum for Social Justice, UK, Voice of Dalit International, UK,

⁶²⁴ Nanak Chand Rattu, *Little Known Facets of Dr. Ambedkar* (New Delhi: Focus Impressions, 2001)

⁶²⁵ From the notes of Sat Pal Muman communicated via email to the author dated Nov. 25, 2020

⁶²⁶ BBC, 'The Black Country', http://www.bbc.co.uk/blackcountry/uncovered/what_is.shtml

(VODI), alongside around 21 Guru Ravidass Gurudwara, 8 Valmiki Temples, and 4 Buddha Viharas were established to assert rights and hold a picket against the hegemonizing Hindu or caste-dominated Sikh practices.

The rise of political consciousness among British Dalits began with the election of Bishan Das Bains as the Mayor of Wolverhampton in 1986. Bains not only became the first Dalit official elected outside India but also the first Asian to head the City Council of Wolverhampton. Bains published his memoir 'Pride v Prejudice' detailing his life as well as the work done as an elected leader. The election of Bains to the top post of the city council was evidence of the critical grassroots base that Ambedkarites managed to create. This social solidarity worked alongside the politics of being an Asian minor.⁶²⁷

During the 1980s, consolidation of the Ambedkarite discourse was starting to take shape in the UK. Buddhists and Ravidasis joined forces. This was visible during the historical 17-day visit of Kanshi Ram to the UK in 1985. Kanshi Ram is credited with forming a pan-India political party by organising Dalits and backward classes alongside converted minorities into a coalition of anti-caste alliances of disparate castes across India. His organisation, BAMCEF (All India Backward and Minorities Central Employees Federation), started in 1978 and united the white-collar non-Brahmin communities under the tagline of paying back to society. Alongside this, Kanshi Ram experimented with the Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Committee (DS-4) in 1981 to take an agitational stand against social discrimination. Following this, Kanshi Ram formally launched BSP (Bahujan Samaj Party), a political outfit, in 1984. Using the social organisation's base established through the networks of BAMCEF, Kanshi Ram spread BSP throughout India. BSP became the third largest national party in India.

The mouthpiece of BAMCEF, 'The Oppressed Indian', edited by Kanshi Ram, dedicated a special number to his '1st visit to England'.⁶²⁸ Seven UK-based anti-caste groups jointly hosted activities in honour of Kanshi Ram. The primary source of invitation came from Ambedkar Buddhist Council (ABC) of the UK, which organised an international conference in Birmingham entitled, 'To determine the true path for the salvation of the Dalits in India'. In addition, Dr. Ambedkar Memorial Committee of Great Britain hosted Kanshi Ram as a chief guest for the Ambedkar Birth Anniversary celebrations in 1985.⁶²⁹

An extensive report of this was compiled by Dr Chaman Lal Maman, vice-president of Ambedkar International Mission and General Secretary of the ABC, UK. Another report by Mohinder Badhan, publicity secretary of the Dr Ambedkar Memorial Committee, Great Britain compiled a list of Kanshi Ram's host

⁶²⁷ Santosh Dass and Arun Kumar, 'The Ambedkarite Movement in Britain' in Santosh Dass, William Gould, Christophe Jaffrelot (ed.), *Ambedkar in London* (Hurst: London, 2022)

⁶²⁸ Kanshiram, *The Oppressed Indian*, Vol. VII, no. 2, July 1985. From the archive of Uttam Shevle, Bahujan Views Center, Nagpur.

⁶²⁹ The list of organisations participating in the event were Dr. Ambedkar Welfare Trust, Letchworth headed by Hari Krishan Loi and General Secretary Prem Lal Summan, Dalit Welfare Association (UK) headed by Gian Chand (President) and Mangoo Ram Mal (Gen Secy) and Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha, Birmingham then headed by Gurmit Chand Summan, Shri Guru Ravidass Sabha of Derby headed by Haridev Subash.

organisations. Along with Ravidass Sabhas there was notable presence of Valmiki Sabha of the UK headed by Vishnu Datt Sharma.

Two historic convenings were organised at the dawn of this century. The first was the 'Caste and Human Rights' seminar at Grimsby College (about 200 miles north-east of London) in June 2000. Three community members who were victims of caste discrimination participated in this seminar and invited VODI to organise similarly affected people in the UK. This led to VODI organising the 'Dalit Human Rights' conference in September 2000 in association with the Dalit Solidarity Group, UK. Luminaries from India's and the UK's political, social, and academic backgrounds participated in this convening. An outcome of this conference was the passing of important resolutions. Two important deliberations paved the path for constructive activism: the first, to tackle caste discrimination in the UK, and second, the responsibility of 'International Aid Agencies Addressing Dalit Issues'.⁶³⁰ Participation of Sat Pal Muman, a second-generation Dalit activist who presented a paper 'Caste in Britain', gave birth to Caste Watch UK in 2004.⁶³¹

Caste Watch UK became a frontrunner against caste discrimination legislation in the UK. A coalition of Dalit groups in the UK collectively lobbied against caste-based practices, giving rise to the Equality Bill movement in the 2000s that argued to include caste as a form of discrimination. The Government of the UK proposed in section 9(5)(a) of the Equality Act 2010 to include caste 'as an aspect of race'.⁶³² However, this was later repealed in 2018.⁶³³

How does discrimination based on caste look in the UK? Kumar identifies five categories of discriminatory practices in the UK:

1. In schools where Dalit children were humiliated and bullied by caste names.
2. Limitations in the choice of inter-caste marriages.
3. In recreational facilities such as pubs and clubs that saw violence and overt practices of discrimination against Dalits.
4. Non-representation in leadership positions in Indian social, political, cultural, and religious organisations in the UK.
5. Advantaging of one's caste pride through popular cultural forms such as music.⁶³⁴

⁶³⁰ Email correspondence with Eugene Culas, Director of VODI, Nov. 26, 2020.

⁶³¹ From the notes of Sat Pal Muman communicated via email to the author dated Nov. 25, 2020

⁶³² Annapurna Waughray, 'Capturing Caste in Law: Caste Discrimination and the Equality Act 2010', *Human Rights Law Review*, (2014) 14, 2: 359–79; a further commentary on the history of the legislation and politics around can be found in Dhanda, Meena, David Mosse, Annapurna Waughray, David Keane, Roger Green, Stephen Iafrazi, and Jessie Mundy, *Caste in Britain: Experts' Seminar and Stakeholders' Workshop*. Research Report 2014 (Manchester: Equality and Human Rights, 2014), p. 92 Commission. <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-92-caste-in-britain-experts-seminar-and-stakeholders-workshop.pdf>

⁶³³ David Mosse argues this move was intended 'toward the protection of upper-caste community spaces and away from those seeking protection from discrimination'. David Mosse, 'Outside Caste? The Enclosure of Caste and Claims to Castelessness in India and the United Kingdom', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2020, 62 (1), 22–23.

⁶³⁴ Vivek Kumar, 'The New Dalit Diaspora: A Sociological Analysis', in K. L. Sharma & Renuka Singh (eds), *Dual Identity: Indian Diaspora and Other Essays*. Orient Blackswan, New Delhi, 2013, p. 239.

Caste bullying in school is not limited to Dalit students only. A woman in her 40s belonging to the Shudra community at the University of Cambridge, UK told me how her experience of growing up as a lower caste (not technically lower to Jats, because her caste was not in the lower fold) distinguished her from others. The elderly people would point to her caste name that she carried. These experiences occurred in the weekend Punjabi classes. The woman is now a mother married within the same caste to a relatively well-off family and still her family's caste is singled out in public functions and social relations. These experiences have transcended to her children in school who were third-generation British nationals.

Similar experiences of children being targeted in the name of caste have been reported in the USA too. A Buddhist Dalit in Texas reported that her children were singled out for being lower castes by other Indian students. The taunts regarding their caste, or openly expressing their own upper status to proclaim a superior position, are reported in other parts of the USA too. In California and in the New England area, parents have reported how food choices of being a vegetarian and non-vegetarian became caste markers during lunch breaks for children. Young children who are getting influenced by caste have a caste-safety net to exercise caste as a personal, religious choice. They are not trained to look at it as a reprehensible system. When an attempt was made in California to introduce caste as a system of oppression, the Hindu dominant caste lobby along with their children refuted and won. As a result, caste is still not yet a part of education for the students in the US.

In the UK, the question of caste receives a pushback by the Hindu and Sikh dominant caste groups referring to it as a colonial institution. Any attempt to legislate against discrimination on caste is called out as being racist and neo-colonialist. The conservative government in the UK has sizable influence from the Indian Hindu community that has managed to undermine the efforts towards caste legislation and caste dialogue in the UK. With the growing Dalit diaspora, an awareness of caste has been witnessed across the board in various countries. This has not gone down well among the dominant caste Indian diaspora that has been in the country for close to two generations. The debate on caste swiftly turns into a religious one. The Dalit perspective is heterodox and thus it takes time to put its point across.

Solidarity in the UK?

Despite its rich history of protest, one cannot see active efforts among Dalits to create solidarities with other oppressed groups in the UK. The Dalit organising was indifferent to collaborative forms of resistance. That is why no longer-term partnerships could be established. The fight against caste had two dimensions and perhaps because of that it had limited avenues. The first was against fellow Indians who continued to mistreat Dalits as lower castes, and second, the Indian state's assault against Dalits in India. Sat Pal Muman offered an explanation. The majority of the working force from the Dalit community was working class that barely could take time out from their everyday work and caste struggle to go out and meet other groups that were alien to their mother tongue and foreign in nature. Another reason

being caste is a 'specialist area which is difficult to articulate to other people'.⁶³⁵ It requires a learned explanation to a foreign audience which is already asking for clarity from a distant and confused position.

Muman argues that ordinary Dalits were not in a position to offer a simple explainer, especially to an audience much more educated than them. Additionally, Muman notes the lack of experts and academics in the community to be able to convey caste grievances effectively to media and other avenues. He cites his own organisation 'Caste Watch, UK' that has a dearth of such full-time experts. As he put it, 'I am an activist. I don't theorise neither speculate. I believe in doing things that are in immediate sight'.⁶³⁶

However, Muman pushed back on thinking about solidarity from an anti-caste position. There are two types of solidarity, he argued. The first kind is Institutional and the second is Pragmatic Reactionary. On the institutional solidarity, Dalit groups couldn't do much because of their preoccupation with full-time work and family responsibilities that didn't give them enough time to explore the possibilities of finding audience with other oppressed groups. On the second type of solidarity, Muman confidently asserts that they made impressive inroads. 'Whenever we organise demonstrations against caste atrocities, we can fill the streets of London in thousands.' The people who came to support were mostly progressive, left-inclined groups such as South Asian Solidarity Group, UK, but also many Ravidasis and Valmiki alongside; the Trade Unions were also aware of their anti-caste work.

There is another insight Muman offers to this condition, and that is the development of anti-caste consciousness in the UK. When Indian labourers first arrived in the UK, they were not in huge numbers and because they worked in hard labour, they didn't have enough money to lodge separately. This forced many of them to share spaces in small houses. So, caste-related consciousness was not as overt and could not find a way if it was conditioned to poverty and hustle. However, there were still incidents of casteism as found in the archives of the 1960s. This explains the convenience of caste ethic that was looked after by some groups to challenge its growing dominance.

On the question of the distant position of Dalit activism from creating solidarity with other groups, Shrikant Borkar, an anthropologist of civil society activism and social policy in the UK, commented that the perspective was often rooted in challenging the Brahminical hegemony in India and the UK. It was not meant to actively seek collaborations.⁶³⁷ During my work in the Southall area in 2012, I was tasked to connect with the cooperative unions operating in the area. Additionally, I was trying to make inroads with the black community of the area who were twinned to the racial and religious categorisation.

⁶³⁵ Interview with Sat Pal Muman, Nov 15, 2020 (via Zoom).

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

⁶³⁷ Borkar actively collaborated and organized with UK anti-caste groups for 15 years. His doctoral thesis, 'In the Twilight Zone of Aid Bureaucracy: A Study of Social Policy Entrepreneurs', submitted to the University of Sussex in 2016 looks at the growing trend of policy entrepreneurship in social exclusion policies.

One of the limitations of Dalit organising has been the absence of an internationalist perspective. Even though they lived overseas, their primary identity emanated from their country and village. Their associations were centred around regions and castes. To think of forging solidarity required investment in the idea of global citizenship as a member of a class or society. The Dalit experience was occupied with localised forms of relations that did not have any outward-facing objective. They wanted to rid themselves of the intra-group caste experiences in a non-Indian society. Whenever the possibility of a global or international identity arose, Dalits in the diaspora substantiated it with Ambedkar's image as an international scholar by singing his praises. Even in this catalogue, Ambedkar's work to build solidarity with other groups could not be successful, which is why there is little in his archive that can be followed by his supporters.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF US ANTI-CASTE ACTIVISM

Unlike the UK, North American anti-caste organising was not as robust. The archives of the era do not have much to say about caste and Dalit activism. Even if there were some activities, they remained unarchived. The US state was uninterested in recording the Dalit experience or gathering information on Dalits for policy-making through census. The Dalit experience has also not received enough academic attention to develop a theory of Dalit Americans.⁶³⁸ There isn't enough material that could foreground the Dalit presence in America, and this creates problems in articulating convincing grievances. That was seen glaringly in the CISCO caste discrimination case filed by a Dalit employee of the technological giant in a California court. The attorneys for the complainant had to struggle to make a case based on caste experience in their charge sheet for the court. The absence of authentic sources to support the claim of Dalit presence in America, and the non-availability of a credible study on the subject, has made the possibility of solidarity between Dalits and other groups difficult to establish.

Data doesn't always convey the complete truth, but it becomes a source for learning and sharing information. The process of solidarity as a currency cannot be actualised without stories of pain and politics of power play. The Dalit groups in America have not been able to develop a full-scale programme of internationalism. The Ambedkarite groups did not produce a report nor introduce solidarity efforts with other oppressed groups. There are reasons for this. The first was related to the limitation in their capacities, and second, they found no reason to advance critical solidarities. Laxmi Berwa, a Dalit American physician, co-organised an event in the 1990s connecting Dalits with African Americans via Dr Ambedkar and Dr King.⁶³⁹ This did not result in cementing more solidarity work. Laxmi Berwa told me that there were no occasions to work together and that is why his group VISION

⁶³⁸ Barring a handful of studies that exclusively focused on caste in America there isn't much on that front. See, Prema A. Kurein, 'The Racial Paradigm and Dalit Anti-Caste', *Social Problems*, spac035, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spac035>; Purvi Mehta, *Recasting Caste: Histories of Dalit Transnationalism*.

⁶³⁹ Suraj Yengde, 'The Harvest of Casteism Race, caste and what it will take to make Dalit lives matter', *The Caravan*, July 2020

(Volunteers in the Service of Oppressed Indian) worked on challenging the Indian government delegation visiting the US on reports of caste atrocities.⁶⁴⁰

Due to lack of adequate conditions, the work of creating Dalit solidarity with other oppressed groups was left to the NGO sector and its collaborations with other NGOs at the UN. The religious movement of Dalits helped to an extent to create awareness, but it did not translate into articulating shared solidarity. The Dalit Christian groups with their international church networks provided that opportunity to Dalits. The Dalit Buddhists, on the other hand, who visit Buddhist viharas purely for spiritual practices, do not develop an organised bloc. They remain a distantly connected group. The religious affinity creates a rift. One such incident I observed was in Boston when an Ambedkarite organisation was formed to lobby for Dalit rights. The group splintered in the first board meeting when Dalits of Christian background took odds with those who wanted to retain a Buddhist position. Both groups had different regional backgrounds. The Christian view was advocated by the Andhra Dalits, while Maharashtra Dalits held the Buddhist viewpoint. The Ravidasia Dalits also had their say in the ongoing debacle over religion over caste parenthesis.

Part of the reason for non-Dalit experience in America is due to the near absence of Dalit artists, intellectuals, activists, and political leaders' presence in the country. Due to obvious reasons of poverty and limited networks, Dalit leaders could not draw more attention to their cause. Additionally, language played a big role in non-translatibility of Dalit ideas articulated and debated in regional languages. The Dalit intellectuals only came to America after India's independence in an era of post-civil rights movement.

Dr Shobha Singh was a Fulbright PhD scholar at Johns Hopkins University who earned his PhD in 1957 and worked for the telephone company (AT&T) Bell Labs.⁶⁴¹ Namdeo Nimgade came to the US in the early 1960s to write his dissertation in soil science at the University of Wisconsin in 1962. After his stint, Nimgade returned to India to resume his professional work and social responsibilities inspired by Ambedkar. Nimgade wrote an inspiring autobiography detailing his lifeworld.⁶⁴² Another important Dalit figure who came to the United States following Nimgade was a literary studies scholar and important figure in the Dalit literary movement, Manohar Namdeo Wankhede. Wankhede arrived at University of Florida, Gainesville to write a dissertation on 'Walt Whitman and Tantrism: A Comparative Study' that he submitted in 1965. After returning to India, Wankhede inaugurated a new perspective that he had learned while studying in America. He caught the comparative of the African American and Dalit experience.⁶⁴³ This gave rise to the genre of 'Negro Sahitya' in Marathi language alongside Dalit Literary Movement.⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴⁰ Interview with Laxmi Berwa, June 25, 2020 (telephone)

⁶⁴¹ Interview with Yogesh Varhade, 24 June, 2020, Laxmi Berwa, 25 June 2020, Ram Gautam, 25 June 2020 (telephone).

⁶⁴² Namdeo Nimgade, *In The Tigers Shadow: The Autobiography of an Ambedkarite* (Delhi: Navayana, 2010)

⁶⁴³ Manan Desai, 'Caste in Black and White: Dalit Identity and the Translation of African American Literature', *Comparative Literature*, 67:1, 2015, pp. 94-113. DOI 10.1215/00104124-2862043

⁶⁴⁴ M N Wankhede, 'Negro Sahitya', *Marathi Vishwakosh Dnyanmandal*, <https://vishwakosh.marathi.gov.in/19657/> accessed Nov 7, 2020

Another individual, Har Dayal, came to write his Ph.D. at the University of Mississippi in 1967 via Somalia, where he taught in 1966. Dayal dropped his studies due to financial constraints and took up a job. It was at his house that the legendary organisation VISION was conceived in 1976 in Brick Township, NJ.⁶⁴⁵ Later, in 1978, at a community meeting held at Ranveer Singh's residence in Dale City, Virginia, a decision was made to officially form a group that would keep a check on caste atrocities in India. Dr Shobha Singh was selected as the first president, Dr Laxmi Berwa was made the secretary, and Ranveer Singh was made the treasurer. Dr Berwa designed the logo of the organisation. A few months after the meeting, VISION was registered in New Jersey.⁶⁴⁶

The 1970s saw the emergence of leaders who would spearhead the first anti-caste Dalit organising in the United States. Laxmi Berwa, an AIIMS-trained oncologist, arrived in June 1971, where he honourably served the US Air Force in the rank of Major before devoting himself to private practice.⁶⁴⁷ P N Arya, one of the key founding members of VISION, worked as a senior engineer at General Electric. These were the frontrunners of the organisation. Ranveer Singh from Uttar Pradesh worked for the Federal government, alongside Suraj Pal Singh, a lawyer. Har Dayal, Meera Dayal, Ram Gautam, and Martand Varhade also joined the organisation.⁶⁴⁸

M N WANKHEDE: THE PIONEER OF DALIT-BLACK IMAGINED WORLD OF LETTERS

All of the organisers whom I spoke with told me that they observed the contemporary activities of Dalits in India via Dalit Panthers activism; however, it did not influence them. Yogesh Varhade commented that, 'the Dalit Panthers should have been well-organised with a structure. But due to the absence of this, the VISION leadership could not find many reasons to connect with the Dalit Panthers.'⁶⁴⁹ He also said that since he was focused on international politics, he did not pay attention to their activities and did not get involved directly. Laxmi Berwa, in fact, said that he had not heard of Dalit Panthers in America.⁶⁵⁰ This explains the limits of Dalit Panther activism. It was not well known outside certain geographies and was extremely limited in its outreach. Talking about the coloured solidarities of the twentieth century, Nico Slate writes, 'Colored cosmopolitanism emerged primarily among artists and intellectuals, many of whom travelled widely.'⁶⁵¹ Exposing the limitations of the African American and Indian solidarity of the past century, Slate states that it was a relatively elite connection, if not entirely so. Poverty among black Americans and poor Indians did not offer them the opportunity to travel and connect.

⁶⁴⁵ Interview with Ram Gautam, founder of Dalit Literary Society, USA and veteran activist of VISION is a brother of Har Dayal. (telephone)

⁶⁴⁶ Interview with Laxmi Berwa, November 24, 2020. (telephone)

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁸ In the following years, especially in the twenty-first century, many Ambedkarite groups were formed that carried his name across the US.

⁶⁴⁹ Interview with Yogesh Varhade, June 24, 2020. (telephone)

⁶⁵⁰ Interview with Laxmi Berwa, June 25, 2020. (telephone)

⁶⁵¹ Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism*, p. 87.

If we take stock of the Dalit condition in this coloured cosmopolitan framework, Dalits are disadvantaged on many levels. Their poverty plus caste-based status did not render them time and resources to escape the feudal lord's whipcord and establish international solidarities. The ones who could tried to assert through literary connections. The Dalit literary movement was partly responsible for uplifting a shared experience of Dalit-Negro. One of the earliest works on Dalit-Black literary tradition was done by Janardhan Waghmare, who studied the works of Richard Wright and James Baldwin for his doctoral thesis.⁶⁵² Waghmare sought unity among the Dalits and African Americans, for both groups face social and cultural inequalities. They interpret the world with a social commitment, and it is this language that makes them architects of cultural revolution.⁶⁵³ Simultaneously, M N Wankhede's regular intervention on the issues of Dalit and 'Negro Sahitya' (Negro Literature) exposed the Dalit audience to the conditions of Black Americans. He reported about life in a ghetto, the Harlem Renaissance, the Great Migration, poverty on the farms, the polar question of identity of black people as being African as well as American, and American culture as being an African American culture through the literature of black Americans. Du Bois, Langston Hughes, James Johnson, Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, Paule Marshall, Gwendolyn Brooks, Chester Himes, Richard Wright, among others, feature in his articles to emphasise the rebellion of African Americans.

Wankhede observed a sense of rebellion amongst the African American writers and poets. He urged Dalit writers to follow suit in his 'Dalitanon Vidrohi Vangmay Liha' (O! Dalits, Write Rebellious Literature).⁶⁵⁴ He viewed the reliance on the Marathi literary sphere, which served as the metric of self-assessment for the Dalit print sphere, as undermining their rebelliousness. The Marathi genre was rooted in quotidian middle-class priorities that distanced the Dalit writer from rage and anger. This sentiment was evident in 'Negro sahitya'. Wankhede encouraged Dalit writers to look to African American authors such as Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and LeRoi Jones, whom he regarded as the 'leaders' of black literature. He asserted that their literature warranted attention and was 'worth studying'.⁶⁵⁵

Shaikh contends that Wankhede's appeal was not taken in form but only in spirit. As I show elsewhere, his protégés carried that mantle under his guidance.⁶⁵⁶ But largely, the literary form of novels and plays, vastly available in the African

⁶⁵² Janaradhan Waghmare, अमेरिकन निग्रो साहित्य आणि संस्कृती (American Negro: Literature and Culture) (Pune: Padmagandha Prakashan, 1978)

⁶⁵³ Gangadhar Pantawane, 'Evolving a New Identity: The Development of a Dalit Culture', in Barbara Joshi (ed.), *Untouchable! Voices of the Dalit Liberation*. Zed Books, London, 1986, p. 86.

⁶⁵⁴ M N Wankhede, 'दलितानों विद्रोही साहित्य लिहा (Dalits write a rebellious literature),' in Vamanrao Nimbalkar and Yashwant Manohar (ed.) *दलितांचे विद्रोही वाङ्मय* (Rebel Literature of Dalits) (Nagpur: Prabodhan Prakashan, 1981), from Juned Shaikh, *Outcaste Bombay: City Making and the Politics of the Poor* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021).

⁶⁵⁵ M N Wankhede, मित्रहो, बेजबाबदार लेखकांची सद्दी संपलेली आहे ('Friends! The times is Up For Irresponsible Writers'), Presidential Address, Dalit Sahitya Sammelan, 17 January 1976, in Arjun Dangle (ed.), *दलित साहित्य एक अभ्यास* In *दलित साहित्य एक अभ्यास* (Dalit Literature A Study) (Mumbai: Maharashtra State Literature-Culture Society, 1978), p. 240 (author's translations)

⁶⁵⁶ My forthcoming book tentatively titled, *Caste and the World* (London: Hurst, 2023). Also see, Desai, 'Caste in Black and White'

American literary sphere, was not fully developed in the initial stages of Dalit literature. The Dalit writers conveyed their form through poetry, autobiographies, and short stories. Though this may be true, the initial phase was also the stage of the newly educated Dalit class who were graduates of Milind College and Siddharth College, both established by Dr Ambedkar. Milind College, in particular, became a centre of Dalit activities and movement after Ambedkar.⁶⁵⁷ The young graduates were steeped in the discipline of their community responsibility and a new energy of Dalit youth from across Maharashtra. These young groups were involved in academic exercises that included writing academic treatises and commentaries that aided in shaping the standards of the Dalit literary curve.⁶⁵⁸

'Milind Sahitya Sabha' was started on 27 November 1967 by young graduates and professors at Milind College. The ceremony invited guests to honour the event. M B Chitnis, who was then Registrar of the Marathwada University, Aurangabad, inaugurated the Sabha, whilst senior Dalit writer Shankarrao Kharat was the president of the function. The advisors of the Sabha were Principals M N Wankhede, R P Nath and Shinde, while the president was Gangadhar Pantawane.⁶⁵⁹ This gave rise to the establishment of Asmita (sense of identity) quarterly, which was later changed to Asmitadarsha (Reflection of Identity) that continued under the editorship of Pantawane from 1967 until his death in 2018.

Vidroh against middle class, higher caste writers

The theme of 'vidroh' which Wankhede embraced in his writings and brought to the literary sphere is oft repeated whilst explaining to the Dalit world the importance of taking on sophistications of literary armaments and developing love and beauty (Soundarya Shastra—a theme picked by many like Gangadhar Pantawane, Sharankumar Limbale,⁶⁶⁰ Sharad Patil⁶⁶¹). Black Poetry and Black Theatre featured as important genres in Wankhede's description.⁶⁶² He also sought a formal dialectics of society and literature to be reconsidered. The static nature of caste society's limitation to change was formally held under the prowess of literature that was religious in nature. Wankhede believed that the societal nature and its change could be accelerated by literature.⁶⁶³ With all this highly important and influential work done by Dalit writers to educate Dalit public about the Black cause, there was no

⁶⁵⁷ Wankhede, 'मित्रहो', pp. 231-243

⁶⁵⁸ Gangadhar Pantawane's thesis is one such example. गंगधर पानतावणे, पत्रकार डॉ. बाबासाहेब आंबेडकर (नागपूर: अभिजीत प्रकाशन, १९८७) Gangadhar Pantawane, *Journalist Dr Ambedkar* (Nagpur: Abhijit Prakashan, 1987)

⁶⁵⁹ Arjun Dangle, 'Nivedan', in Dangle (ed.), *Dalit Sahitya*, p. 14

⁶⁶⁰ Sharankumar Limbale, *Dalit Sahityache Soundaryashastra* (Barshi: Kaanta Prakashan, 1988)

⁶⁶¹ Sharad Patil, *अब्राह्मणी साहित्याचे सौंदर्य शास्त्र* (Aesthetics of A-Brahminical Literature) (Pune: Sugawa Prakashan, 1988)

⁶⁶² M N Wankhede, 'Negro Sahitya', *मराठी विश्वकोश ज्ञानमंडळ*, <https://vishwakosh.marathi.gov.in/19657/> accessed Nov 7, 2020

⁶⁶³ Juned Shaikh, *Outcaste Bombay: City Making and the Politics of the Poor* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021), p. 122. Original citation to Wankhede's position is taken from Shaikh's research. M N Wankhede, V. L. Kulkarni, R. G. Jadhav, M. P. Rege, and M. B. Chitnis. महाराष्ट्राचे आज उद्याचे सांस्कृतिक संघर्ष आणि वाङ्मयीन समस्या ('Maharashtratil Aaj Udayache Sanskrutik Sangharsh ani Vangmayin Samasya'), in Arjun Dangle (ed.), *Dalit Sahitya: Ek Abhyas*, Pune: Sugawa Prakashan, 1998. I found the similar version published by Maharashtra State Literature-Culture Society, in 1978, pp. 1-20.

reciprocation. The appeal by Wankhede in his writings and addresses at literary conferences exhorted Dalit writers to work on the 'vidrohi' canon.

Wankhede saw Dalit writers as assets and responsible agents of social change. He wanted them to expand their scope. 'Jeevan viraat aste (Life is vast)' and to 'express the experiences Dalit writers will have to ponder and think', he advised them.⁶⁶⁴ The purpose of this exercise was to expand the thinking of Dalit writers. The earlier generation of Dalit writing was mostly bound by literary forms of expression. New writers, when they learned how to write and express themselves, took up the pen and wrote it down. It was a new medium of expression that was hitherto unavailable to their ancestors. Thus, they wrote about and lamented their experiences. They did this in a community of writers, thinkers, and poets. When they looked around, they noticed that their expressions were not received with appreciation by the established literary circles. The Marathi literary sphere was much more comfortable with romantic or entertaining literature that did not touch upon the social experiences of society. Thus, it was the Dalits who had to write down their experiences. The pandharpesha (higher classes) had set norms that were not applicable to the values and principles of Dalit life.

He differentiated between the writings of Dalits and non-Dalits. 'It is not merely thoughts that differ' but 'experience, content, subject, skill and language (anubhav, aashay, shaili aani bhasha)' all differ from the non-Dalit writers.⁶⁶⁵ This was because the characters a Dalit writer wrote about were themselves different from the characters and topics chosen by the non-Dalit pandharpeshas. Their literature was insufficient to grasp the sensibilities of Dalits. The Dalit experience was beyond the experience and language of middle-class writers.⁶⁶⁶ Thus, it was Dalit writers who had to confidently assert themselves by 'giving up' the 'values, theories, work and beauty' (mulyé, sidhant, karya, soundryä) defined by the non-Dalit writing sphere.⁶⁶⁷ After all, as Sathe had declared in his presidential address at the first Dalit Literary Conference in 1958, those who have an experience can write far more authentically than those who do not, and the latter should avoid doing so.⁶⁶⁸ While this sentiment existed, some Dalit poets like Waman Nimbalkar lamented that the Dalit never became the subject of Hindu feudal caste writers. There was a desire to be acknowledged and recognised by the dominant caste.⁶⁶⁹

On the other hand, Wankhede echoed similar sentiments as Sathe. Critiquing the depiction of Dalits in the literature of 'madhyamvarga' (middle class), Wankhede writes that, 'the real presentation of Dalits cannot happen in the literature of middle-class writers. Because mere imagination cannot present the true picture. It needs a

⁶⁶⁴ Wankhede, 'मित्रहो', p. 240

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 235

⁶⁶⁶ M N Wankhede, 'बंडाच्या यशस्वीतेसाठी आत्मशोध आवश्यक' (Bandachaya Yashasvitesaathi Atmashodh Aavshyak), in Arjun Dangle (ed.), *Dalit Sahitya: Ek Abhyas In Dalit Sahitya: Ek Abhyas* (Mumbai: Maharashtra State Literature-Culture Society, 1978), p. 24

⁶⁶⁷ Wankhede, 'मित्रहो', p. 235.

⁶⁶⁸ Anna Bhau Sathe, Presidential Address, Mumbai, 2 March 1958, in in Arjun Dangle (ed.), *Dalit Sahitya: Ek Abhyas In Dalit Sahitya: Ek Abhyas* (Mumbai: Maharashtra State Literature-Culture Society, 1978), pp. 191-195

⁶⁶⁹ Cited in Waghmare, 'निग्रो वाङ्मय व दलित वाङ्मय' (Negro Literature and Dalit Literature), p. 184

foundation of experience'.⁶⁷⁰ Wankhede was looking at those writers who had started to take interest in the lives of downtrodden and Dalits. It was during the 1970s when global activism was talking about revolution. Wankhede was cautious about the appropriation of the Dalit life done by the dominant castes who 'stay at distance or sit in a room' and write about Dalits. They were now seen as social reformers whose writing was even 'appreciated as a writing of social change'.

Wankhede provides a defence of the Dalit literature. 'The writings in Marathi language heretofore were written by madhyamvargani madhyamvargansaathich (middle class writers for middle class people) and thus, one can only see their life. Neither the writers were Dalit nor their concerns Dalit'.⁶⁷¹ Thus, Dalits found their way out because the critics, publishing houses, and literary societies were 'closed societies' for them. By the mid-1970s, the Dalit literary tradition sprung into many forms. Various literary organisations, festivals, little magazines, and journals organised and led by Dalits were visible.⁶⁷²

Wankhede's move from madhyamvarga to pandarpesha is not merely linguistic but also a noticeable change in the way dominant castes organised in literary circles. The class perspective determined the location of caste. His definition of the middle class was 'Hindus of the higher castes'.⁶⁷³ Thus, even the rebellious writers among them were part and parcel of the establishment. Though they presented their plots in urban areas or in offices (and not on farms), their protagonists may be dressed in modern clothing but still carry the ideals of 'Ayodhya, Ram-Krishna and Sita'.⁶⁷⁴ Thus, the middle-class writers represented the system.

Since they had found this newfound love of Dalit life, they painted Dalits according to their views of them. Because they were searching for 'new topics thus, they turned to slums...not to shock the system or wanting to do something'. This romanticisation by the dominant castes was refuted since Ambedkar's time when he had turned down Gandhi's patronage because he wanted change suiting his interest. Contrary to that, the rebellion among Dalit writers was because of 'their refusal against injustice. The Dalit writers wanted to tell the world about the pains in their heart'.

Wankhede is head-on in accounting for the imposition of non-Dalit standards through the imagination (kalpana) of middle classes.⁶⁷⁵ This was the time when the poor man and caste-neutral character was depicted in films.⁶⁷⁶ The fashionable revolt of elites needed a Dalit character but without a Dalit revolt. They made Dalit

⁶⁷⁰ Wankhede, 'बंडाच्या', p. 25

⁶⁷¹ Ibid. p. 24

⁶⁷² Dangle, 'निवेदन' (Statement), in Dangle (ed.), *Dalit Sahitya*,

⁶⁷³ Wankhede, 'बंडाच्या', p. 25

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 28

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 26

⁶⁷⁶ Suraj Yengde, 'Dalit Cinema', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol 41, No. 3, Sept. 2018, 503-518
DOI: 10.1080/00856401.2018.1471848

a caste-less character adopting in the feudal or urban structures merely as a worker without a political base and social heritage.

The cause of society and romanticism of rurality was a point of critique launched by Dalit writers. However, as Arjun Dangle notes, even Sathe fell to the trap of romanticism in his *Fakira*. The reason for this was ‘maybe literary as well as a-vangmayin (a-literary)’.⁶⁷⁷ This was a time when Dalits writers of 1960s were positioning their *vidroh* (revolt), a theme Wankhede proposed in the Dalit canon. Baburao Bagul, one of the most sophisticated poets and writers, wrote the following exhibiting the dominance of push back:

the ones who have made a mistake of taking birth here
They only should change it
Either by leaving the country or going to a bloody war.

Wankhede and other writers of the time were busy trying to create acceptance for Dalit literature. They protested against the existing Marathi literary sphere that was neither concerned with nor open to the ideas of social experiences. They gathered to critique this in literary conferences from the first conference in 1958 onwards, when Sathe had to explain why such a conference was necessary. This happened while they were occupied with producing their canon. They did not try to establish it as a genre but aimed to foreground it as a canon. They succeeded in doing so, but that required collective work. Wankhede, as an elder, appealed to fellow Dalit writers to work together and in unison. This required serious reflection, thinking, and curiosity. He advised that the writers and poets who wanted to lead the Dalit movement should have an interest and investment in enlightening themselves through knowledge and scholarship (*dnyanopaasnevar*).⁶⁷⁸

This required a multi-dimensional approach. One aspect was to excavate sources of pride and heroes from the epics. Wankhede advocated for Dalit protagonists: ‘Like Rama, Odysseus, Krishna, Dalits need to search for their heroes.’ These heroes could be found in ‘Buddha’s life stories, his male and female disciples, Buddhist Jataka stories.’⁶⁷⁹ In the Indian sphere, Arya-Naga warfare also provided writers with ample opportunities to create myths and legends. The references to Hindu or Graeco-Roman mythology meant that the Dalit literary sphere was not identical to or part of that story. They had their own history and unique position in the cosmology of the historical time period. The Dalits could have their own heroes brimming with pride and status. They did not have to borrow someone else’s and make it their own. Instead, they had to create their own kind, who would administer morality and a sense of belonging to the Dalit source of history.

Wankhede was responding to V. L. Kulkarni, another noted figure in the Marathi literary world, who felt the creation of new myths was not an ‘uneasy

⁶⁷⁷ Dangle, ‘निवेदन’ (Statement), p. 8

⁶⁷⁸ Wankhede, ‘मित्रहो’, p. 240

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 241

task⁶⁸⁰ because they were society's past memories. Since this was a memory, one could not recreate a new one. Wankhede wanted to reject the myths that advocated anti-Dalit sentiments. But Kulkarni believed that instead of rejecting them, one should 'debunk' them, like Iravati Karve and Durga Bhagwat, who were working on debunking the epic Mahabharata.⁶⁸¹ Kulkarni was concerned with disassociating from the Indian texts. He compared this with Western writers who rely on Western mythologies. Wankhede debated with Kulkarni about the difference between these traditionally held myths and the group that wanted to revolt against them. The Dalit writers had no place to hold them dear. Kulkarni took an accommodationist position that would not completely displace the historical myths but find a place within them. He said Dalit writers should not feel that they 'don't belong' in myths. Instead, they should assert, 'I do belong, and this is my interpretation of Mahabharata and Ramayana' (sic).⁶⁸²

The stature of the Dalit community was due to the imposition of caste norms through religious mythologies and the acceptance of their fate also through religious dogmas popularised through mythical stories. The Dalit and Shudra mind were arrested in these popular lores, and thus, they had to be freed. The only way was through conversion out of the faith. Religious conversion to Buddhism was a path in that direction. However, regular people's mindsets had to be converted. The appropriate medium to effect that change was by subverting the influence of existing mythologies. Despite the new identity of a Buddhist, the Dalit was caught between two worlds—that of the old beliefs and the newly adopted Buddhism. The contradiction here was presented as that of Hinduism being a retrograde, backward religion and Buddhism, a modern scientific faith. For these ideas to be rooted in the minds and hearts of people, they needed a parallel belief system.

Black subjects of black writers

In an article advocating for 'band' (rebellion), Wankhede examines the converted Dalit writer. Due to habits, rituals, beliefs, and mythologies, the Dalit writer was unable to produce new rituals and mythologies, he argued. This led to an identity crisis for the writer. Wankhede draws an analogy with new black writers who were also searching for their identity. They were like the 'wandering Jew', but at least 'Jews got Israel', so why should not the 'Negro and the Buddhist writers have the same?' he asked.⁶⁸³ The Dalit, Negro, and Jew were in a state of historical subjugation. Their status had partially improved through new advances in social and political domains. However, the cultural paradigm had to align with the new identities and meanings of the particular group. With persistent efforts, the Dalit could also achieve a respectable identity. In the case of Jews, their religious mythologies and structures provided them with an identity. In the case of black Americans, the biblical message was inverted to make the gospel a black liberation doctrine. Similarly, Dalits were in the first phase of being converted to Buddhists.

⁶⁸⁰ Wankhede et al, 'महाराष्ट्राचे आज उद्याचे सांस्कृतिक संघर्ष', p. 19

⁶⁸¹ Ibid.

⁶⁸² Ibid., p. 20

⁶⁸³ Wankhede, 'बंडाच्या', p. 28

This meant they had to equip themselves with literary imaginations to complete their conversion task. A mere change of faith without a change of heart would not bring a complete transformation. Thus, he proposed a model for this change. He urged the abandonment of the content of old tropes. So long as the 'new Buddhist writer does not change the old literature's archetypes, myths, images, symbols', he argued, they would not succeed in finding the self; instead, they would end up in 'bewilderment'.⁶⁸⁴

Like African Americans who took over the institution of church and liturgy in their practice at churches, creating new forms of musical experiments known as gospel, they preached the word of God, heroizing Jesus as a liberator. The Dalits, in their post-Buddhist stage, started to advocate for their identity by praising their hero, Ambedkar, and substantiating his homage to the Buddha. The Buddha-Bhim Geete, a genre established by the Dalits after a conversion in 1950, is a musical blend of regional dialects, folk songs, and expressions of classical vocality. Dalit writers contributed to this vision through their poetry and writings. The musical performers took these words and performed in villages and urban ghettos, inspiring listeners to be confident and contest oppression. The older heroes, Rama and Krishna, were immediately dropped and replaced with Ambedkar and Buddha. The Dalits had found their heroes, who were the prophets of their new religion, which they assiduously venerated.

Wankhede had noticed the rise of black literature in America as well as the Western literary figures who had announced change through their writing. In his presidential speech at the Dalit Sahitya Sammelan delivered in 1976 in Nagpur, Wankhede recalled Western white writers and poets as well as black writers from America. For him, these writers did not just indulge in literary writing but also commented on political matters. They did not shy away from participating in mass movements by offering leadership. He wanted Dalit writers to also consider scholarly pursuits by producing knowledge. This was the gap he had noticed that was limiting Dalit writing to certain circles only. He recommended that they study writers such as Sartre, Camus, Günter Grass, Hermann Hesse, and Norman Mailer, who could assist them in their thinking. The look to the West was not taken with as much stride as it happened with African American literature and the Black Panthers movement. It was brought into the lingua of the Dalit movement by Dalit writers through social movements such as the Dalit Panther.

Negro Sahitya

In the article 'Negro Sahitya', Wankhede provides a compact history of African American literature, starting with the history of the slavery that brought Africans to America. The slaves were subjected to a different 'culture, religion and life'.⁶⁸⁵ Before the emancipation of slaves, they composed 'spirituals that expressed their life's sorrows, hopes, aspirations, mercy, pull towards God and attraction to death'. The review of black literature begins with the poems in Phillis Wheatley's collection

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁵ M N Wankhede, 'Negro Sahitya', *Vishwakosh Marathi*, <https://vishwakosh.marathi.gov.in/19657/>

of 1773. The early rendition of black people in white literature is that of ‘dancer, joker, lazy, disloyal, noble savage’. However, Harriet Beecher Stowe and Mark Twain’s novels make a space for the ‘sympathetic Negro’, so there are variations in how the black subject continued to occupy a position in the American imagination.⁶⁸⁶

Wankhede was educating Dalit writers about what he learned in black literature. He introduced them to various *dwands* (contradictions) in the black world. He noticed that ‘black literature has received acceptance, but the black writer has not managed to come out of the circle of love-hate contradictions’.⁶⁸⁷ These dynamics of hate were purported through the black nationalist movement.

The reviewer, Wankhede, appears agnostic. He is writing with a sense of impartiality. He is a bystander who has to report honestly to his public, who are keen to grasp the morality of black life in literature. Through the decades of the Harlem Renaissance, Wankhede introduced the ‘ghetto’ life of the southern migrant groups who had settled on the south side of Chicago, and in Harlem, New York. This concept was appealing to Dalit writers. They embraced the ghetto, which was also their reality. Many writers in the urban areas of Maharashtra were products of the labour migration undertaken by them or their parents. In desperation, Sathe walked to Mumbai from his village in Sangli district. The Dalit migrants to urban centres had to face similar issues as the black writers. Wankhede brought Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Richard Wright into the discussion. These writers were sensitive and critical of the class consciousness among black Americans. However, these dimensions remain untouched in Wankhede’s review. When he introduces Cullen’s *One Way to Heaven*, he summarises it as a novel that declares the black person as the inheritor of American culture.

The purpose of ‘Negro Sahitya’ was to review the existing corpus within the literature field. He also reviewed several important plays in the ‘Black Theatre’ genre. In all of this, black literature defied white critics’ dominance. Even their language, as observed by Amiri Baraka, was from the streets. Wankhede argues this language was ‘not representing the illiterate people of America, but it was indeed a new language representing the revolt against white America. Besides, this language is an incomparable weapon to tear down the façade of fake civilisation.

The various trends that guarded black culture and literature also had seething contradictions. Wankhede observed that Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin’s approach was considered more American than that of other radical writers. Reviewing the generation of Baldwin and onwards, Wankhede brings to attention the theme of ‘varna sangharsh (racial struggle) and kranti (revolution)’ that was advocated by black writers when their movements faced a setback. The murder of Martin Luther King Jr. made black writers more militant, forcing them to give up on ‘mawaall vichaarpranali (soft system of thinking/thought)’. The ‘negro youth started to identify as black Muslim or joining the Black Panthers started by

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid. The references in this section are primarily drawn from the above article. It was a direct introduction to black literature by a Dalit writer given to Dalit writers.

Bobby Seale'. Wankhede refers to the Black Panthers as a terrorist group. He was repeating the narrative popular in America and the liberal public sphere. Wankhede picks up the threads of a state narrative while also observing the situation of black life from an Indian perspective. The many traditions that evolved over the years culminated in black writers defying white values and instead writing on 'Negro life for Negroes only'. This is how 'Black literature, Black Poetry and Black Theatre was born'. The move from Negro to black is beautiful was a new renaissance in America. Wankhede was privy to it as a scholar of the 1960s decade in America and a follower of American culture from afar in India.

Wankhede was indirectly giving birth to a genre of comparative literature. He was the first scholar from the Dalit community to do a literary analysis and bring the experience of the black subject to a Dalit audience. He was slowly injecting black resistance into the Dalit discourse. His approach to introducing writings, poems, and theatre from black literature was giving suggestions to the budding writers of the Dalit community. They learned from him and picked up theories of resistance. When they embraced the Black Panther tradition, Dalit Panthers also had background work done by Wankhede to rely upon. We do not see a direct correlation of reference hailed to Wankhede. Wankhede died shortly in 1978 in Houston, Texas. This was the time when new Panther coalitions such as 'Bharatiya Dalit Panther' were being formed and the references to the 'Negro' were made widely known to the Dalit writers and activists.

Even as I was growing up, I was aware of the 'Negro' problem in America. Dalit activists and households knew about this due to the important works done by Dalit scholars. However, the actual work of solidarity did not take effect. Black Panthers remained oblivious to the existence of Dalit Panthers and its leadership. This is evident with the absence of the Dalit archive from the Black Panthers and the related black activists of the era. Barring new names such as Runoko Rashidi and Kevin Brown, there is hardly anyone one can point to as an inheritor of the Dalit-Black legacy.

The Dalit literary sphere was yet to make a large impact. This phase of Dalit literature was mostly confined to the Marathi canon. The point of reference and critique was directed against the panderpesha system operating in the Marathi literary tradition. The complaints against Marathi writers revolved around content and program. How much literature and its impact create a resounding movement is still a matter of enquiry. However, the Dalit literature in Maharashtra did provide a foregrounding for the Dalit movements to sprawl. As literature, the general public did not consume it in letters only but rather through poetry, performance, and prabodhan (awakening) in the masses. This was done by artists. Their role is essential in spreading the discourse to the audience for whom literature was being written as a subject. They managed to diversify the content and form of the message. Poor, illiterate, peasant Dalits and Shudras gathered to listen. They were entertained with a savvy dosage of movement knowledge.

Still, the earlier phase of Dalit literature in Marathi remained. People like Wankhede, who drew analogies with other cultures, provided that. The Dalit writer

looked at the racial experience of black people and related it to his own. However, it was not a popular form in Dalit literature. There was an acknowledgement of the black literary genre, and education in that space was well known, but it did not produce newer writings in the tradition of Dalit-Black literature. The Dalit writers also did not continue for long. Their sharp critiques were softened as they became institutionalised.

A senior commentator, B. V. Jondhale, observed the rise of Dalit literature movements and their downfall. He stated that the rise of class consciousness among the urban educated Dalit who started to distance themselves from the community.⁶⁸⁸ This urban class began to make an issue of the noun 'Dalit' itself, a point he repeats in another article eight years later.⁶⁸⁹ They made a distinction between Dalit and Buddhist or Phule-Shahu-Ambedkar identities. The class urbanity brought in the question of an identity crisis. Thus, this organised small, localised festivals where individual literary figures became revered, resulting in the 'rebellion cooling down among Dalits'.⁶⁹⁰ Jondhale notes how those who were critiqued and 'rejected' by Dalit writers were now being asked to write forewords to their literary creations. Dalit literary figures eventually ended up 'becoming the pontiffs of abbot'.⁶⁹¹

THEORISING DALIT SOLIDARITY

Organising and solidarity require two essential components for them to work. The first is education, and the second is similarities. Due to the immense diversity of the caste issue and its provincial (localised) hold on victimising caste-oppressed people, the oppressed subject is invested in the immediate freedoms to rid the intimate oppressor. It is the genius of caste that has managed to create 'graded hierarchies' at each level, thereby making the passage of casteism easy without hinging on any fold of caste groups in the hierarchy. Even those who have more relation and commercial purpose to retain caste affinity with Dalits have managed to invent reasons to establish a violent supremacy. It is in these capable standards of caste atrocities that Dalit victims are limited in their prospects to actively work with other groups located beyond their physical borders in a foreign land.

The other groups do not share an identical relation that is easily visible and vocal to their suffering, like those based on race, gender, nationality, or ethnicity. Caste oppression requires sophisticated language to explain its temerity, and it is often located in the vernacular. These obstacles, plus the lack of awareness in the host society, further disadvantage the cause of Dalits due to the burden of proving their oppression as a regular occurrence to an already oblivious, unconcerned

⁶⁸⁸ B V Jondhale, 'दलित साहित्य संमेलने कुठे गेली?', *Maharashtra Times*, 23 February 2014, <https://marathi.indiatimes.com/editorial/ravivar-mata/dalit-sahitya/articleshow/30867381.cms>

⁶⁸⁹ B V Jondhale, 'पँथर'मधील वादविवादांकडे पाहताना...', *Maharashtra Times*, 10 April, 2022, <https://marathi.indiatimes.com/editorial/samwad/the-discussion-on-the-role-of-dangles-the-work-of-panthers-and-the-ambedkar-movement-in-the-book-dalit-panther-/articleshow/90754961.cms>

⁶⁹⁰ Jondhale, 'दलित साहित्य संमेलने कुठे गेली?'

⁶⁹¹ Ibid.

audience. Added to this is the world activism against racism that did not do much to advance the cause of Dalits because it was not an external, physically distant group that was oppressing. Thus, caste was always maintained as ‘an internal problem’ that needed to be solved by Indians.

The culturalism of caste played another important role in spiritualising caste without explicitly mentioning it. The culturalising of caste is based upon ‘heterophilia’—which is not to be feared but to ‘require’ difference as a legitimate form that gives rise to cultural casteism.⁶⁹² Or if the host society opens up to discuss the caste problem, then it is rejected by the caste groups, as happened in the UK, as a misrepresentation and racist idea. David Mosse calls this ‘externalisation of caste’.⁶⁹³ This framework allowed the Hindu sentiment to be genuinely hurt and to assume a broader and complex identity alongside Sikhs and Jains under the auspices of ‘Dharma Sewa Purvapaksha’ to rebut any inquisition of caste as a colonial-Christian plot devised to avenge innocent Hindus.⁶⁹⁴ It blatantly stated, ‘Caste discrimination claims [are] legal threats to businesses, public authorities and Dharmic community organisations’.⁶⁹⁵ It ploys to undermine the ‘Hindu’ claim and replace it with ‘Dharmic communities’ for an identity of ‘British Asians’.⁶⁹⁶

It is in this light that the Hindu lobby in the UK tried to appropriate Valmikis (Dalit Hindus) as part of their broader Hindu coalition to refute the claims of the anti-caste groups. This move exposed to the world the sinister intentions of dominant caste Hindus. The head of Bhagwan Valmiki Sabha, Southall, expressed his irritation over the Hindu temple’s misguidance:

They took our signature without explicitly mentioning to us the reason for it. We were kept under the dark. Only after we found our name was mentioned in a petition refuting the charges that caste discrimination does not exist, we were angered. This was in total opposition to our position. We rectified it but knew that they try to use us under the name of Hindu but deny any respect in their institution.⁶⁹⁷

Mosse argues that such deceitfulness among Hindus stems from a fundamentally different social position than that occupied by Dalits. He suggests, drawing from Zavos’ claims, that Hindu identity prefers to exist outside the national space to easily invest in retaining the internal differences of caste.⁶⁹⁸ If successful, the internal dimensions of frictions and fractions are not accountable to civic

⁶⁹² Balmurli Natarajan, *The Culturalization of Caste in India Identity and inequality in a multicultural age* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p.

Balmurli Natarajan, ‘From jati to samaj’, *Seminar* 633, May 2012, p. 56

⁶⁹³ David Mosse, ‘Outside Caste? The Enclosure of Caste and Claims to Castelessness in India and the United Kingdom’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2020, 62 (1), pp. 15-20

⁶⁹⁴ Press Statement, ‘UK General Election - Its decision Time STANDING COALITION OF SIKHS, HINDUS AND JAINS’, <http://patniconnection.com/Events/DharmicCommunity-UKGenElection2015-GoldDustVotes.html>

⁶⁹⁵ Dharmic Ideas & Policy Foundation, ‘Dharmic Ideas’, <https://dharmicideas.wordpress.com>

⁶⁹⁶ David Mosse, ‘Outside Caste? The Enclosure of Caste and Claims to Castelessness in India and the United Kingdom’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2020, 62 (1), p. 21.

⁶⁹⁷ Interview with the president of the Bhagwan Valmiki Sabha, Southall, June 2012.

⁶⁹⁸ David Mosse, ‘Outside Caste? The Enclosure of Caste and Claims to Castelessness in India and the United Kingdom’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2020, 62 (1), p. 21, Zavos, John, ‘Small Acts, Big Society: Sewa and Hindu (Nationalist) Identity in Britain’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 38, 2 (2015): 243–58.

probabilities provided in the UK protection laws, in short they are not held liable. The trick lies in the idea that as long as caste is institutionalised within the Hindu Dharmic faith and maintained as an exclusive aspect of the diasporic Hindu identity, it cannot be held liable for faults and crimes committed within Hindu society.

Therefore, to assert a positive identity, Hindus need to rid themselves of negative aspects and present a benevolent image as patrons of welfare institutions providing food or services to the nation and communities in need.⁶⁹⁹ It is a logical quest to accept caste as an associational and normalised part of the Hindu Dharmic community, yet not fully accept it to avoid meriting responses from those who argue against caste. This issue is also related to East African Indians whose migration to the colony under British rule paved the way for organisational castes to exist as part of the minority Hindu identity.⁷⁰⁰

Building solidarity among oppressed peoples requires deep learning and counterarguments to go hand in hand. The theoretical description of the problem needs added support from field views, which are ubiquitous in action and thought. Counterarguments often take two positions: one of subjectivity and the other of defensive rationality. Those who deny the problem redirect queries to ahistorical catalogues that absolve them of culpability. Similar dynamics were seen in the Equality Act activism in the UK, where counterarguments accused committee experts of vicarious belief—misrepresenting caste logic and Dalit reasoning—as a form of British colonial, Christian voyeurism into the sacred, private sphere of Hinduism.

Another argument that confuses the nature of caste in its originality questions its composition—whether regressive, progressive, Gandhian, or endorsed by other dominant castes. By casting an upper gaze on caste as a harmonising order that 'prevent[s] competition and class struggle and class war,'⁷⁰¹ dominant elites dismiss the suffering and victimhood experienced by Dalits. In his exposition of Gandhi's views on the Varna order in Gujarati, in a book entitled 'Varna Vyavastha,' Ambedkar reproduced their translation in his devastating chapter 'Gandhism: The Doom of the Untouchables.'⁷⁰²

Gandhi found 'no harm if a person belonging to one varna acquire[d] the knowledge or science and art specialised in by persons belonging to other varnas.'⁷⁰³ This perspective often aligns with dominant castes who have no fear in choosing from available 'pure' occupations, unlike Dalits whose attempts to acquire anything 'pure' from their impure location are unwelcome and remain despised. Gandhi continued, '[B]ut as far as the way of earning his living is concerned, he must follow the occupation of the varna to which he belongs, which means he must follow the hereditary profession of his forefathers.'⁷⁰⁴ This is a caste Hindu

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁰ Agehananda Bharati, *The Asians in East Africa: Jayhind and Uburu* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Co., 1972)

⁷⁰¹ Gandhi's 'Introduction to Varnavyavastha', *Harijanbandhu*, 23 September 1934, in *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatama Gandhi*, Vol. 3, ed. R. Iyer, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1987, pp. 559–65.

⁷⁰² Ambedkar B R, *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables*, in *BAWS*, Vol. 9, p. 277-8.

⁷⁰³ Ibid., p. 277

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 278.

hypocrisy that Ambedkar contended found its articulation through the likes of internationally placed Gandhi. The UK's defence of caste stands in a similar line, thereby blurring a significant distinction among pro-caste Hindi, Punjabi-speaking conservatives, or rights-believing liberals defending their pride through rationalisation of caste.

The refusal to legislate caste was a moment of preserving dominant caste pride. Religion as a broader category was used to present a larger, acknowledged coalition among the Hindus, Sikhs, and Jains as 'Dharmic communities', a charge that Sikh groups do not align with. In an open letter, Pandit Satish K. Sharma, General Secretary of the National Council of Hindu Temples, UK, clubbed Hindu, Sikh, and Jain communities through their scriptures against the Evangelicals. He stated that the anti-caste legislation was 'tantamount to religious persecution of Hindus, Sikhs & Jains and is in breach of the human rights of the minority Dharmic communities'.⁷⁰⁵ The desperation to claim minority status as well as a religious group with a rich history presents diasporic groups with impetuous challenges. There is a certain affinity towards the land of heritage that was always brought into dialogue and question as part of their vulnerable identity in the diasporic land. The memories of ancestral land are interpreted through the greatness and vastness of its unquestionable superiority. This is pitted against the local racist society whilst also establishing a superior self over the native society's downward gaze upon them. I have noticed this in the Western and Caribbean societies more prominently than in South Africa. In this defence, the experience of the subject is assumed to be absolved under the stories of superior religion.

As a result, the Dalit as an object of enquiry but also as a reasoned human who could experience pain and grief is withdrawn from the Brahminical constructions of caste debate. Meena Dhanda refuted the charges of orientalism that are usually held against narrators of caste genocide. Dhanda contrasted orientalism with Ambedkar's critique of Brahminism and focused on caste through the lens of the oppressed and not the subjective view of dominant objects.⁷⁰⁶ Therefore, the category of caste as being 'indeterminate' because of its unclear position from unique vantage points of caste does not disqualify the experiences of the victims for whom hermeneutical interpretation matters less as opposed to the everyday psychic and physical violence they receive.⁷⁰⁷ It is not as significant to divulge into true etymology of 'caste' to relate with the 'identification of the pattern of behaviour that can be identified as casteist'.⁷⁰⁸ What is then essential is not the intent but the execution. And how this execution manages to dehumanise the Other in the process of revealing its true nature that results in singular victimhood—non-transactional trading of insult and power. The victim is one-sided and forced to reckon with his own condition without resorting to rescue.

⁷⁰⁵ Cited in Mosse, 'Outside caste', p. 16

⁷⁰⁶ Dhanda Meena, 'Anti-Casteism and Misplaced Nativism: Mapping Caste as an Aspect of Race', *Radical Philosophy*, 192, Jul/Aug 2015, pp. 33-43.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 41.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid.

The old debate of interpretation of the written word and its meaning as opposed to action and experience on the other has held the oppressed in a repetitious warning. The oppressed are asked to act according to the meaning and convenience of the dominant class. In the diasporic society, caste is a personal order for Hindus in the UK, which needs preservation from the orientalist colonial damnation of British society. The British wrongly translated the meaning of castes that appear in the context of jaati, varna or baradari. They had a harmonious meaning and content. It was a rationalising principle of an ideal society that cannot be looked down upon. It is written down in the text that is sacred in nature. Thus, the questionability over this formulation is blasphemous and attacks the cultural sanctity of the society. The inevitable superiority of the Indian civilisation is the Indic nature of society that holds it together and triumphed against the odds. Caste is, therefore, not a problem; the British colonial rule made it into a problem and divided the society by imposing its understanding of the European system. Caste is part of the Dharmic theological practice, and the colonial society need not interfere with it. Colonialism, orientalism, Christianity, and racism work as arsenals held against the avatar of caste question in the UK.

The host society, thus, decorated its walls with cultural diversity by giving provenance to the dominant caste cultures under the garb of India's colourful diversity. In a multicultural society like the UK, religion becomes a negotiator par excellence to stabilise the multiculturalism on behalf of the state. It is not that the host society is unaware of the caste brutalities and sensitivities around caste-based oppression. The English colonial society embarked on sophisticating caste into quotidian vocabularies. Therefore, it cannot claim learned innocence. Looking at the rising protests in England around Englishness—as a cultural metaphor Paul Gilroy argues that race and ethnicity remain central contesting tropes in the maintenance of post-colonial pluralistic British society.⁷⁰⁹ We may add another rising experience to England's Englishness looking from post-World War II's prism: caste. As this manifests in the growing settler South Asian society passing over three generations, it evolves into a hybrid form of British casteism.

The host society played well into the hands of dominant castes—its loyal old allies in India—instead of solving the problems their homeland created. Even though it was an 'internal problem', it was a problem nevertheless that was composed and exercised on their land, which makes the host society equally complicit for providing a safe environment and confident attitude to impose casteism and victimise Dalits. Thus, the hypocrisy of the host society in treating caste as an outsider or alien problem becomes internalised into its democratic social framework. The caste issue then does not remain a non-societal issue but de facto assimilates into making the host society a caste haven. The liberal axioms of rights and protection guaranteed the existence of caste irrespective of the resistances.

The very arbiter of religious protectionism as a defence to not intervene in the 'internal' problems gets further life when put into sight the Dalit position. Dalits

⁷⁰⁹ Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic Modernity*, p. 11.

also visualise their self within the contours of religion as in 'ever-more-generalising frameworks' and not the juridically complicated ones.⁷¹⁰ The question of preserving diasporic caste is not isolated from India. The politics there and the cultural movements registered through religious events give the dominant caste Hindus an additional foot to step into Indian politics. The celebration of Narendra Modi and his thumping Hindu pride while maligning Congress and the Muslims go hand in hand. The heart of this critique is in the espousal of anti-caste politics by Modi's opponents. Pandit Sharma's questionable approach to the Dalit situation was situated as 'poor low caste Dalits', a fact that he seems to dissociate with. He tweeted against Rahul Gandhi's appearance at the launch of an edited book, *The Dalit Truth* in which I also contributed a chapter. For the Pandit, caste was a privilege for Rahul Gandhi. Otherwise, 'he would be a waiter, like his immediate antecedents, cleaning tables at Cambridge (sic)'.⁷¹¹

The limitation of NGO activism

The Christian-led, urban-based, cosmopolitan Dalit rights activism led by NGOs that Gopal Guru has been critically examining for two decades continues to be witnessed in current times.⁷¹² Apart from India-based Dalit NGOs, there are also American-born NGOs who have now chosen to appropriate the cause of Dalit rights. Their position in the anti-caste activism is often received with hostility and suspicion. The many Ambedkarite groups in America have a focus diametrically different from the NGO perspective, whose solidarity work is to create partners to convince donor agencies as a hallmark for their existence. Creating solidarity is the fuel for the NGOs to stay relevant to America and thereby tag on with the causes of American racial and social inequities. These NGOs are neither grassroots nor people's movement oriented. Guru observed similar patterns a decade ago. He argued for Phule and Ambedkar's theoretical and ideological argumentation as opposed to the rhetorical and symbolic embrace of the neoliberal order.⁷¹³ In current times, the NGOs are not always Christian-led but have diversified to embrace female partners of Phule and Ambedkar by calling out the latter's male privilege. This move presents a challenge to Guru's articulation that pretends a commitment to the cause through social media spectacle, but equally reproduces distrust and harm on the community it declares it is protecting.

Guru's analysis still holds weight, especially in pointing out the limited tolerance of internal criticisms. Many such NGOs prefer silence from internal criticism while pulling the punches of feminist or other marginal identities in the politics of appropriating victimhood. During Guru's time, there were 'extra-intellectual methods' that were aimed to create 'moral intimidation'⁷¹⁴ for a short-lived euphoria of international-based activism. If this pattern continues, then the

⁷¹⁰ David Mosse, 'Outside Caste? The Enclosure of Caste and Claims to Castelessness in India and the United Kingdom', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2020, 62 (1), p. 23.

⁷¹¹ Tweet by @thebritishhindu: <https://x.com/thebritishhindu/status/1733341813384044696>

⁷¹² Guru, 'What it means to be an Indian Dalit?', p. 178

⁷¹³ Ibid. p. 179

⁷¹⁴ Ibid.

current hyper-activism will also see its end with no significant improvement in the quality of the Dalit struggle.

Similarly, two leaders of the UK anti-caste movement, who wished not to be named, told me that the NGO thrust has created a divide in the groups. This splintering then paved the path for disgruntled members to form new NGOs in the UK anti-caste activism space. 'I still don't know what the reason was. I still think to this day', a president of an anti-caste organisation who has been at the forefront of anti-caste legislation expressed in a saddened tone over the fallout of the united front.

Nepali Dalit diaspora has also been subject to caste discrimination at the hands of the dominant caste Rai, Bahuns, Chhetris, Gurungs, Brahmins, Magars. Pariyar documented the role of caste among Nepali diaspora in the UK. Drawing from various caste studies, he concludes that more caste associations of varied caste members will flourish, which will make it 'easier to maintain the boundaries between groups'.⁷¹⁵ The reason he observes has to do with the non-acknowledgement of British society that makes it easier for such caste sensitivities to go unheard or unseen. Unlike the dominance of the top castes, Pariyar notices the trend in the rise of middle-ranking castes such as Gurungs, Magars, Rais, Limbus who, in spite of their challenge to the Brahminical hegemony, continue to assert caste so as to assert their position upon the lowered castes by marginalising them.

Notwithstanding these, Pariyar also observes caste among Nepalese in Australia, a trend common to Hindu and South Asian society writ large. The ethnographic study, comprising participant observation and qualitative data gathering with Nepalese migrants, demonstrated that caste functioned within family, social, and ritual contexts.⁷¹⁶ Pariyar had experienced caste in Nepal and overseas; thus, his approach to the topic stemmed from an experiential methodology that sought to investigate societal validations of caste dynamics. The profile of the Nepalese migrants in Australia is overwhelmingly dominant caste. About 80% of them are Bahuns (Brahmins), Chhetris (Kshatriyas) and some middle castes such as Newar and Gurungs. The reason is identical to the Indian experience of caste migration. Western, developed countries' demands for skilled, English-proficient individuals with good academic records benefit those who are privileged with these resources in their societies. The majority of the lower castes do not have access to all the above resources, thus prohibiting their ease of entry into western metropolises.

The testimonials reported in Pariyar's research enumerate the efficiency of caste values and the validity of beliefs to function among Nepalese society. It is in their private spheres, cultural avenues, religious practices, marriages, and even online where caste has found a way to legitimise its existence. Caste as a practice of domesticity and shared custom functions as a rightful reason for the higher

⁷¹⁵ Mitra Pariyar, *Cast(e) in Bone: The perpetuation of social hierarchy among Nepalis in Britain* (University of Oxford, Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, 2011), p. 17

⁷¹⁶ Mitra Pariyar, 'Travelling castes: Nepalese immigrants in Australia', *South Asian Diaspora*, Vol 11 (1) (2019), pp. 89-103, DOI: [10.1080/19438192.2018.1523091](https://doi.org/10.1080/19438192.2018.1523091)

castes to maintain it. It is part of ‘parents’ tradition’ and ‘honouring religious traditions’ that obscures the scrutiny of the caste system and its normalised practice.

With the caste angle pronounced within the character of Nepali tradition and social ethic, one question demands further investigation: do such migrants participate in any caste-related projects, or even protests? Do we see enough Nepali Dalits in the diaspora campaigning against caste like their Indian counterparts? Barring a few honourable exceptions like Prem Pariyar, a student at California State University who was instrumental in lobbying to outlaw caste from its campuses, there are no visible Nepali Dalits.⁷¹⁷ Similarly, the caste-believing Hindu Nepalese are also not seen in public sight at events concerning caste, especially when it is pronounced in public debates. The latest installation was at the Seattle City Council that was voting to outlaw caste from its campus. Another was at the Toronto school board; both cities have populations of Nepali people.⁷¹⁸

Another of the networked activism seen in the US recently is the pronounced Ambedkar-Periyar group and Periyar International. Tamilian activists from the Dalit community, as well as those inspired by the movement of Periyar, have been actively seeking an anti-caste, anti-north Indian domination programme. I have interacted with two such Periyarist groups. One was headed by a shudra caste, Dravida Kagzam affiliate in the San Francisco area, whilst the other by a Dalit person who runs a joint initiative of Periyar-Ambedkar thought. The social justice model of Dravidian politics runs deep and appreciative through the diasporic connections, especially in Southeast Asia. In the West, the Sri Lankan Tamil refugees and recent Tamil professional class have situated their ideological anchor through the politics of Tamil nationalism. The heroes and heroines of these movements have exclusively had Tamilian roots. However, of these, the anti-caste, mostly Dalits have reinserted Ambedkar and non-Tamil actors into the identity of their movement.

The most prominent of the anti-caste Tamil groups that I have come across is Ambedkar King Study Circle (AKSC). The group is California-based and has reach across the western belt of the US. The majority membership of the group is of Tamil origin and Dalit, but it is not limited to this demographic. It is a multi-caste group that has people from across the castes. Its approach is that of working-class, progressive politics that attracts liberals from Indian and non-Indian backgrounds. This group has a prominent position in the tech workforce. Their investment in Tamil culture is palpable; however, its political position is that of Ambedkarism and left values. AKSC's working style has been one of allyship and coordination. It has taken an active position on caste and anti-RSS, Hindutva politics. Perhaps it is the only Ambedkarite organisation in the US that has officially affiliated with

⁷¹⁷ Prem Pariyar, ‘Why did CSU add caste to its discrimination policy? Because apartheid was hiding there in plain sight’, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 31 Jan 2022
<https://www.sfchronicle.com/opinion/openforum/article/Why-did-CSU-add-caste-to-its-discrimination-16815211.php>

⁷¹⁸ Kanishka Singh, ‘Toronto school board becomes first in Canada to recognize caste discrimination’, *Reuters*, March 10, 2023
<https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/toronto-school-board-becomes-first-canada-recognize-caste-discrimination-2023-03-09/>

progressive movements led by the dominant castes. This has been unconventional for Ambedkarite organising in the US. Part of the reason for this is due to the oversight by Indian progressive movements and the non-value they accorded to Dalit organising. Secondly, it is due to the left affiliation of some members of AKSC who directed the organisation towards progressive causes.

While there has been appreciation of Periyarism and its impact, the Dalit members of AKSC make no reservations about the casteism perpetuated by the Periyar-supporting groups and political parties. At an AKSC Ambedkar Jayanti event in Cupertino, California, an International Tamil association coordinator who was in attendance was influenced by Periyar. He was reporting to me about the political work done by Periyarists in Tamil Nadu and their work. The Dalit members who were witness to this conversation immediately refuted the pointers pursued by the Periyarist. Nonetheless, the ideology of Periyar and Ambedkar becomes a moment of reckoning for anti-caste activism in the Tamilian network.

Traditional Tamil associations, though, operate in an ethno-state worldview confined to the Tamilian perspective; an Ambedkarite perspective ejects it out of state-centrism and gives it a national overview. However, nationalism is not a strong sentiment amongst Tamilians across castes. The issues that Tamilian anti-caste activists have been invested in are wide-ranging, from preservation of Tamil Dalit history to reviving the historical memory of anti-caste movements originated in Tamil Nadu. An intellectual approach to the problem of caste has been the cornerstone of international Ambedkarite organising, and Tamilian activism is no exception to this. Several conferences and seminars are hosted online and at in-person events. Tamilian activism is firmly rooted in the politics of self-respect, hinting at the influence of the Periyar movement. Though Periyar is one of the central actors, pre-Periyar figures who are Dalit and non-Dalits—the ones who arouse a strong sentiment of equality—are embraced by anti-caste Tamil activism. There are not many anti-caste Tamil groups with recognisable names and sizeable numbers. The progressive Tamil groups operate without explicitly adhering to anti-caste language. However, their work remains that of anti-caste politics.

The non-Dalit, anti-Brahmin Periyarists have an uncertain approach towards the Dalit question and Dalits in general. The conversation concerning Dalits is seen as separate and different from their version of anti-caste politics. Here, the dimension is framed around the hegemony of castes clubbed into ritualised groups. For example, Brahmin as a ritual chief heads and dominates the sources of the caste order. However, the ones considered lower are not prioritised as subjects qualified to receive the treatment of honour. Due to the ritualised hierarchy, a Shudra does not escape its position. Therefore, the debate lies between the lowered castes and upper castes. The lower castes, as opposed to the outcastes, have resources that they channel to mount an attack on the system they consider oppressive. Hence, Brahmins are scorned for closing the doors of natural progress by forcing caste values upon them. This is the case with all the other non-Dalit, non-Brahmin castes.

The Periyarists' preference to talk about caste politics by centralising Brahmin instead of Dalit generates a distinct purview of the fight against the caste

system. This irrevocably marginalises the Dalit and Dalit question. If at all Dalit becomes a subject of enquiry, it is an uncomfortable one, because the Dalit not only challenges the Brahmin but also the lowered castes who are dominating over their lives. Another problem with Dalit's inclusion as a central figure is that Dalit history locates them as victims of untouchability and social boycotts, which has not been the case with other castes in general. Therefore, the Periyarists work in collaboration with Dalit groups so as to represent the clear distinction between the lived experience of Dalit and non-Dalit. Dalits can be part of the caste dialogue but cannot occupy a central position. The centrality is defined by the political power-wielding caste. Dalits are treated as auxiliaries to the agenda against caste. Dalits are thus part and yet apart from the agenda of Periyarist organising seen in the United States.

CONCLUSION

This chapter aimed to present a historic snapshot of UK and USA Dalit organising against caste-based exclusion and discrimination. The activism in the UK began in the 1960s, whilst in the USA it took shape in the 1970s. Whether the activists in these countries knew about each other as organisers is unclear. Some of these organisations operated on a national level, although they had a strong international presence. Cross-border solidarities do not exist as robustly as expected in the UK, US, and Canadian context. There are various reasons for this: firstly, language; secondly, the difficulty in explaining caste to a Western audience; and thirdly, no active histories of relations that the current generation can build upon. It is precisely because of these reasons that the culpability of Dalit oversight rests more on the current generation of rights-based activists. Dalits need to frame a new image that is palatable and approachable for groups wanting to share solidarity and develop an international camaraderie. Although the solidarities as we expect in a theoretical sense might not exist, there exists a relational pragmatic, issue-based solidarity which is neither lasting nor has an established programme. Due to this, there is a dearth of active academic investigations and international movement to hold South Asian countries—mainly India, Nepal, Pakistan—responsible for their atrocities upon their most oppressed victims.

The historical analysis of the Dalit diasporic movement merits a newer approach and a refined methodology. The data presented in this chapter elucidate minute details. The purpose of this was to foreground the recorded past and archive unwritten oral history. That is why we spent more time on the UK, which has notable Ambedkarite organisations. It is also the country with the greatest number of Dalits who have taken cues from Ambedkar's history in the country and continued his struggle. An example of this is the book *Ambedkar in London* that chronicled Ambedkar's and, in continuance, the Dalit movement's feat in British politics and social movements. The movements sometimes take the shape of NGOs or non-profit organisations due to the nature of organising in the Western world. The case study of USA is also an important highlight of North American Dalit activism. The Canadian case of anti-caste activism is also a unique model that predates the US Dalit movement by four decades.

The activism in these countries is not initiating any direct intervention into the state policies of their host country and India. Still, the work they are doing now will bear fruit in the future. However, that chain of future work remains uncertain. The younger generation is uninterested in their parents' activism. The first-generation immigrants and their children have been brought up with a strong Ambedkar identity and background. They take their children to social and cultural activities. Their offspring are aware of the history and are practitioners of Ambedkar's advice on Buddhism. Jai Birdi is confident of the activities he is doing now. It is a slow process, and it is multi-governmental diplomacy. He is aware of the potential difficulties, so he keeps his hopes by collaborating with both governments, for which he has received his fair share of criticism.

The NGO activism of the Western world has limitations of working within a set framework of civil rights. This works for those whose rights are recognised, but what about those whose identity has not been codified to weigh a rights-based approach? That is why the focus on solidarity and organic interrelationships is brought to light. Even in the many forms of solidarity, the cross-border, intersectional relationalities are forged mostly through intellectual bandwidth. One such example is of the 'Negro Sahitya' literary sphere advocated and articulated by leading Dalit literary figures like M N Wankhede and his protégé Janardhan Waghmare. Identically, the Black public sphere has also on rare occasions taken note of the Dalit people and their culture. Barring a rare instance of Black Panthers who acknowledged the work of Dalit Panthers, they noted the revolutionary stance of the literary 'men of talent' and published their poems in their newsletters.⁷¹⁹ The review of the Dalit Panthers was apt with on-ground empirical information about the activities of Dalit Panthers being centred in Mumbai but known across the country due to its mobilisation. It also carried the report of elections in India and the role of Dalit Panthers during that time. With this introductory stab, the Black public sphere and political class continued its struggle domestically. The next work on forging international relationships remained skewed and was left to the next generation to carry forward. The next generation of activists in the US and India have started to organise Dalit-Black solidarity initiatives. I inaugurated this work in 2015 in the US. To commemorate the Dalit Panthers' golden jubilee, I hosted a Dalit-Black Panthers event in Nanded along with local Panther organisers in India. The work has started, and the theorisation of such an episode will be instrumental in understanding the epochal developments of Dalit-Black freedom struggles.

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⁷¹⁹ 'B.P.P. Greets Dalit Panther Party of India's Untouchables', *The Black Panther*, Saturday May 11, 1974, p. 11. I am grateful to Mr. J V Pawar for sharing the paper clipping with me.

Conclusion

The thesis was concerned with exploring many dimensions of the concepts of caste and race as they are understood and experienced today. To do this, two approaches were used:

1. Etymological origins and the philosophical foundations of these terms experimented in medieval Iberia.
2. How were these terms complicated and dealt with as organizing principles to challenge the hegemonic power structures by the victims of the system?

To do this, it dived into the intellectual positions proposed by four important key actors of the twentieth century in diverse geographies: W.E.B. Du Bois, B R Ambedkar, Frantz Fanon, and Steve Biko. Their selection was intentions. Du Bois and Ambedkar have been studied briefly through philosophical inquiries. Du Bois, Fanon and Biko also have been studied through the critical black lens. Ambedkar and Fanon have also been examined as protagonists of social movements. However, not all four of them were thought of as possible anchors to excavate ideas that commonly contest against hierarchies and power.

This is where the concept of race was complicated. Upon further investigation, it was realised that caste as an unbreakable, vertical hierarchy had been the parlance of the colonial and neocolonial state apparatus in Africa, the US and other settler colonial societies.

The inadequacy of racial terminology and epistemology of the race science that has been challenged over and over still gets a new life by the system that assesses the other by the lack of definitional realities. Caste is a secular norm terminologically conditioned to societies arrested in the virtue of the past.

These societies are visible almost everywhere. In the first half of the twentieth century, American sociologists and anthropologists discovered racial caste system operating in the post-slavery, Jim Crow American South. The monumental study titled *Deep South*⁷²⁰ as seen in chapter 1 was a detailed

⁷²⁰ Davis et al, *Deep South*.

ethnographic examination of the colour-caste system in a deeply segregated society (more on this shortly). Other studies of the era focused on the emergence of caste paradigms. As discussed in chapter 1, American sociologists were divided over the relevance of caste to the American racial study field. One of the chief opponents of this theory was Oliver Cox, who had argued that a certain ‘harmony’ existed in India’s caste system because the caste system was of spiritual relevance to the Indian person.⁷²¹ Whereas in America, the white-negro conflict demonstrated the inapplicability of caste.⁷²² This was a profoundly unmeasured reading by a scholar who had neither experienced the impact of nor empirically examined his own claims. While proponents of this theory were ethnographers who had reported on the social structures of the American caste system, scholars such as W. Lloyd Garner, Allison Davis⁷²³, John Dollard,⁷²⁴ Gerald Berreman⁷²⁵, and Gunnar Myrdal⁷²⁶ articulated the viewpoint that the colour-caste dynamics helped to underscore the importance of social and economic hierarchies developed as a result of the horrid experiment of slavery.

Anthropological, sociological, and historical studies in America, Africa, and Latin America examined caste in the twentieth century. However, these works were largely ignored and did not make any major intervention in their respective societies. The rise of anti-colonial struggle worldwide gave a reason for colourized solidarity to form. As a result, race became a unifier against a common threat of whiteness. Besides, other adjacent disciplines, such as law and political science, did not yield, leaving a gap in policy framing and human rights work. Thus, I propose looking at such caste studies. The itinerary would encompass revisiting culture-specific determinant factors behind the structuring of societies that do not have a solid framework of race.

The itinerary of such would encompass revisiting culture-specific determinant factors behind structuring of societies that do not have a solid framework of race. It is in this light that we have to explore the dimensions of Global Caste and its conditioned hierarchies that practise endogamy in the context of various societies. Global Castes are preserved through the provenance of ‘tradition’ responsible for reproducing discrimination and descent-based hierarchy in the society. I argue that Global Castes are part of historical societies that have guarded indigenous social and cultural practices. These can be observed through the lens of intra-cultural, indistinguishable paradigms formed through a convergence of religion, community norms and regional bases that guide the structure of caste society. A Global Caste thesis will help to historicise the colonial/postcolonial conversations around society, capital, class and division.

Caste as a hereditary system is not unique to India; it is global—inflexible forms of hierarchies exist elsewhere too. However, they have not received the same intellectual response as the Indian caste system. Reasons for this may vary, but the

⁷²¹ Cox, ‘Race and Caste: A Distinction’, p. 364.

⁷²² Cox, *Caste, Class, and Race*.

⁷²³ Davis and Dollard, *Children of Bondage*.

⁷²⁴ Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*.

⁷²⁵ Berreman, ‘Caste in India and the United States’.

⁷²⁶ Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*.

logic of superiority of the dominant castes bears resemblance. Perhaps postcolonial native elites were amassing cultural capital and wealth to distract their coloniser superiors and solidifying their higher caste statuses by portraying themselves as the uber victims of the colonial mission. Under such circumstances, the historically doubly oppressed (by the colonial state machinery and the native elite) could never have gained equal standing. The social status permanently fixated on one's descent is a hallmark of caste. World over, societies that have undergone colonial reconstruction can be found grappling with the European models of ethnicity, tribe and nation.

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