REVISITING B.R. AMBEDKAR'S *ANNIHILATION OF CASTE*: A CRITICAL STUDY OF ITS CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY



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submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts (Honours with Research) in Political Science, to MIER College of Education (Autonomous), is an authentic record of my own research work carried out under the supervision of Dr. Nandini Puri.

I further declare that the work embodied in the present dissertation:

a) Is my original work and has not been copied from any research journal, dissertation, thesis, or book; and

b) Has not been submitted by me for the award of any other Degree/Diploma/Certificate of any University or Institution.

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LIST OF ABBREVATIONS

B. R. Ambedkar –	Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar
AoC –	Annihilation of Caste
SC –	Scheduled Castes
ST –	Scheduled Tribes
OBC –	Other Backward Classes
EWS –	Economically Weaker Sections
GOI –	Government of India
NCRB –	National Crime Records Bureau
MGNREGA –	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
PMAY –	Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana
UGC –	University Grants Commission
GDP –	Gross Domestic Product
Art. –	Article
Const. –	Constitution of India

ABSTRACT

The dissertation re-examines B. R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) not as a historical text, but as a living and analytically powerful framework for interpreting caste in twenty-first-century India. Moving beyond conventional readings that treat Ambedkar as a moral critic of inequality, the study foregrounds his work as a rigorous theory of social transformation that integrates religion, ideology, and institutional structures into a unified critique of caste. Adopting a qualitative and interpretive methodology grounded in close textual analysis, the dissertation advances a thematic reconstruction of Ambedkar's argument through five key dimensions: the religious foundations of caste hierarchy, caste as a self-reproducing system of social control, the limits of reformist ethics, education as a mode of emancipatory consciousness, and a democratic vision rooted in the lived realisation of liberty, equality, and fraternity. By synthesising these themes, the study demonstrates that Ambedkar offers not merely a critique of caste, but a comprehensive blueprint for its annihilation. A central contribution of this dissertation lies in extending Ambedkar's framework to critically evaluate contemporary constitutional provisions, legislative measures, reservation policies, and welfare schemes. It argues that while these interventions have achieved measurable progress in addressing legal and economic inequalities, they remain insufficient in transforming the deeper ideological and social foundations that sustain caste. The analysis reveals that caste has not declined but reconfigured itself within modern institutions, adapting to democratic and developmental frameworks without losing its structural logic. By directly connecting Ambedkar's theoretical insights with present-day policy outcomes, the dissertation fills an important gap in existing scholarship. It repositions *Annihilation of Caste* as an indispensable analytical tool for evaluating India's democratic project. The study ultimately argues that Ambedkar's insistence on the inseparability of social and political democracy remains not only relevant but essential, offering a critical standard for reimagining equality, dignity, and justice in contemporary India.

Keywords: B. R. Ambedkar, Caste, Constitutional Provisions, Dalit Rights, Endogamy, Social Democracy, Social Exclusion, Untouchability

Chapter I

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, popularly known as Babasaheb Ambedkar, stands as one of modern India's most profound thinkers and social reformers. Born on 14 April 1891 in Mhow, Madhya Pradesh, into a Dalit Mahar family, Ambedkar's early life was marked by the brutal realities of untouchability (Jha, 2019). Denied access to basic rights such as education and water, he experienced caste discrimination from childhood. Rather than succumbing to these oppressive circumstances, Ambedkar's experiences forged his determination to dismantle the system that relegated people to inequality based solely on birth.

Ambedkar maintained that substantive social transformation required more than legislative reform; it necessitated the embedding of equity within the structures and practices of everyday life. His academic formation across two major intellectual centres, first, Columbia University and the London School of Economics, shaped a corpus of thought that drew on economics, constitutional theory, and jurisprudence. Immersion in the democratic traditions and rationalist discourses of New York and London proved formative, providing conceptual frameworks for democratic governance, institutional balance, and reasoned deliberation that stood in stark contrast to the hierarchical social order he encountered upon returning to India. Ambedkar systematically applied these frameworks to challenge institutionalised oppression, amplify the political agency of marginalised communities, and advance a vision of society in which individual worth was determined neither by caste, nor social position, nor religious affiliation. In his view, genuine progress was contingent upon the equal recognition and dignity of all persons (Jha, 2019).

This conviction found its most systematic articulation in *Annihilation of Caste* (1936). Originally prepared as the presidential address for the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal, a Hindu reform organisation, the text was deemed too radical by the organising committee, which subsequently cancelled the conference rather than host it (Jha, 2019). Ambedkar declined to revise the manuscript and published the address at his own expense, distributing approximately 1,500 copies to scholars, activists, and political figures of the period. In this seminal text, he argued that caste was not an incidental feature of Indian society but a system that systematically denied personhood and dignity. Equality, he maintained, could not be achieved through incremental

reform; only the structural dismantling of caste could produce substantive social transformation (Ambedkar, 1936/2024).

1.2 Understanding Caste: Etymology and Structure

Understanding caste requires consideration of its etymological origins and historical development. The term "caste" is not indigenous to Indian languages; it entered English through the Portuguese *casta*, meaning lineage, race, or breed, a category applied by Portuguese observers to describe the hereditary social divisions they encountered in early modern India (Patel, 2021). Long before European contact, however, hierarchical social divisions were already deeply established across the subcontinent, structured through the Sanskritic concepts of *varna* and *jati.* The varna order distinguishes four broad categories: Brahmins, who performed priestly and pedagogical functions; Kshatriyas, who exercised political authority and military responsibility; Vaishyas, who engaged in trade and agriculture; and Shudras, who performed manual labour and service occupations. However, everyday social life was organised more directly through the operation of *jati*. Over time, occupational divisions consolidated into hereditary categories, transforming flexible functional groupings into a rigid stratified order transmitted through lineage. This process progressively foreclosed individual agency, as social position became determined at birth rather than through conduct or achievement. Caste, therefore, constitutes more than a system of hierarchy; it operates as a normative framework in which identity and worth are ascribed according to descent rather than individual capacity or contribution. Social existence is thus circumscribed by boundaries established before individual volition; these constraints are reproduced through inherited custom and legitimised, over generations, as the natural or divinely ordained order of things.

Ambedkar directed his most sustained critique towards the *Manusmriti* as a text that codified social roles by birth and assigned individuals to fixed ranks within a graded hierarchy. It articulated a normative order that placed certain communities outside the boundaries of dignified social existence and presented this arrangement as religiously sanctioned. The text not only marginalised those classified as untouchable but also imposed substantial restrictions on women, framing such inequalities in the vocabulary of moral and spiritual authority. For Ambedkar, the *Manusmriti* functioned not as scripture in any morally authoritative sense but as a doctrinal scaffolding through which graded inequality was sustained across generations. His public burning of a copy of the text at the Mahad Satyagraha in 1927 was therefore not a symbolic gesture of protest alone; it was a deliberate act of doctrinal repudiation, signalling that meaningful social transformation required a decisive break from the religious authority that legitimised caste hierarchy.

1.3 The Meaning of Annihilation

The term “annihilation” denotes complete and irrevocable elimination. Ambedkar’s deliberate use of this term in the title of his 1936 address signalled the analytical and political weight of his argument. Rather than treating *caste* as a defect amenable to gradual reform, he conceptualised it as a structural condition embedded in the moral and religious order itself. The system assigned individuals to fixed positions on the basis of birth and foreclosed the possibility of social mobility through merit or conduct. By framing the project as one of annihilation rather than reform, Ambedkar argued that incremental adjustment was insufficient and that meaningful transformation required the dismantling of the foundational logic of caste itself.

Ambedkar articulated his position powerfully: "You cannot build anything on the foundations of caste. You cannot build up a nation; you cannot build up morality. Anything that you will build on the foundations of caste will crack and will never be a whole" (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 74). Ambedkar thus contended that systems built upon graded inequality lacked the moral and structural foundations necessary for enduring social or political stability, irrespective of their democratic or ethical claims. To Ambedkar, a true democratic life could not exist without dismantling caste thinking at its root, not simply addressing its outward expressions.

1.4 The Persistence of Caste in Contemporary India

Despite constitutional protections, legal prohibitions, and decades of affirmative action policies, caste continues to operate in subtle yet measurable ways across Indian society. Multiple empirical indicators demonstrate this persistence. Perhaps the clearest sign that caste continues to shape social life can be seen in marriage practices. Only 5.8 per cent of marriages in India take place between people of different castes, meaning that the vast majority still occur within caste boundaries (Ray et al., 2017)**.** This pattern has remained largely unchanged for decades. Even among young and educated Indians who claim that caste no longer matters to them, caste often becomes an important factor when choosing a life partner. This suggests that caste consciousness remains deeply embedded within social relations and continues to influence personal decisions, even when people believe they have moved beyond it.

It demonstrates that formal legal equality has not translated into substantive equality. While constitutional provisions matter, they have proven insufficient to dismantle the foundations of caste. Laws against discrimination exist but remain poorly enforced. Reservation policies provide opportunities but cannot overcome centuries of accumulated disadvantage or transform entrenched social attitudes.

1.5 The Origins of the Text of *Annihilation of Caste*

The circumstances surrounding the creation of *Annihilation of Caste* illuminate the resistance Ambedkar faced even from those claiming to be reformers. In 1936, Ambedkar received an invitation to address the annual conference of the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal, a Lahore-based Hindu reform organisation whose name translates to "Caste-Breaker Forum." The group sought Ambedkar's perspective on caste reform, anticipating his reputation as a powerful orator and social critic.

Ambedkar accepted the invitation and engaged with the task in characteristically rigorous terms. When the organising committee received the manuscript, their response was unequivocal. The text departed substantially from the prevailing reformist consensus by advancing a structural critique of caste rather than recommending incremental change. Ambedkar argued that caste constituted a system of embedded and institutionalised violence, and he challenged the scriptural authority used to legitimise it, thereby calling into question its normative foundations. Within this framework, *varna* was not treated as a reformable social arrangement but as an inherently hierarchical and unjust system. Ambedkar thus advanced the argument that meaningful social transformation necessitates a departure from the religious doctrines that sustain caste-based inequality, a position that would become central to *Annihilation of Caste.*

1.6 Ambedkar's Intellectual Formation

To fully appreciate *Annihilation of Caste*, one must understand Ambedkar's intellectual journey and the influences shaping his thinking. Ambedkar was not simply a social reformer responding to immediate circumstances but a systematic thinker who synthesised insights from multiple intellectual traditions.

After completing early education in India despite considerable obstacles, Ambedkar received a scholarship from the Maharaja of Baroda to study abroad. He attended Columbia University in New York beginning in 1913, earning a master's degree and later a PhD in economics. His time at Columbia proved transformative, exposing him to a society where people were ostensibly judged by abilities rather than birth. He attended lectures by John Dewey, whose ideas about democracy, scientific thinking, and social change profoundly influenced him. Dewey emphasised that democracy was not merely a form of government but a way of life based on equality, freedom, and participatory decision-making, ideas that resonated deeply with Ambedkar's experiences and aspirations. From Columbia, Ambedkar

proceeded to the London School of Economics, studying with Harold Laski and Edwin Cannan while earning another doctorate. These qualifications provided intellectual authority difficult to dismiss solely on the basis of caste background. Throughout his time abroad, Ambedkar read extensively in philosophy, history, sociology, and religion, studying the French Revolution, engaging with Marx, examining the American Civil War and slavery abolition, and exploring Buddhist philosophy.

What emerged was a distinctive intellectual approach combining several elements: commitment to rationality and empirical investigation, understanding that social change required both intellectual critique and political organisation, recognition of symbolism's power in public discourse, emphasis on education's centrality, and insistence on the interconnection of different forms of oppression. All these elements converge in *Annihilation of Caste*.

1.7 Rationale and Significance of the Present Study

Several considerations motivate this study. First, although considerable scholarship exists on Ambedkar, much of it frames him as a historical figure of limited contemporary relevance. Instead, this study takes *Annihilation of Caste* seriously and treats *Annihilation of Caste* as a text of continuing contemporary relevance, seeing it not as an archival text but as a work of continuing analytical force. It examines how his ideas illuminate persistent forms of social stratification. Endogamous marriage patterns have not disappeared; they have merely changed form. Policies designed to address inequality frequently fall short of their objectives.

His analytical framework helps explain why. On one hand, scholars often honour Ambedkar yet domesticate his most radical arguments. This work examines how uncompromising he truly was. Second, it asks where that kind of intellectual fidelity might lead today. Third, this research examines what genuine transformation might entail, assessing progress through Ambedkar's analytical framework rather than diluted benchmarks, thereby revealing the considerable distance that remains from substantive equality.

Fourth, it examines how Ambedkar's vision relates to contemporary policy frameworks, interrogating where constitutional aspirations fall short in practice and exploring why caste persists despite repeated interventions, suggesting deeper structural roots beneath surface-level solutions. Finally, this study carries pedagogical significance, encouraging students to question naturalised assumptions, to view social structures as historically contingent products of power, and to envision alternative futures.

1.8 Objectives

1. To explore the key ideas Ambedkar presented in *Annihilation of Caste*, especially how he

challenges the religious and social reasons behind the caste system.

2. To examine Ambedkar's emphasis on education as a means of social and moral emancipation leading to equality and self-respect.
3. To examine Ambedkar's ideas about equality, liberty, and fraternity as the foundation of a truly democratic and humane society.
4. To study the various major government policies and constitutional provisions introduced over time to tackle caste discrimination

1.9 Research Questions

This study is organised around several specific research questions:

1. How does Ambedkar connect religion, ethics, and education to his call for the *Annihilation of Caste?*
2. How does Ambedkar link caste to religion and social hierarchy?
3. What do equality, liberty, and fraternity mean in Ambedkar's vision of a democratic society?
4. How have government policies and constitutional provisions addressed caste discrimination?

1.10 Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative and interpretive methodology centred on close textual analysis. The primary text, *Annihilation of Caste* is read systematically to identify key arguments, rhetorical strategies, and philosophical foundations, attending not only to what Ambedkar says but to how he says it.

The study engages with secondary sources, including scholarly commentaries on Ambedkar's work, historical accounts of social reform movements, sociological analyses of contemporary caste, and critical discussions of Hindu religious texts. These sources contextualise Ambedkar's arguments and assess their continuing relevance.

Relevant constitutional provisions and legislative measures addressing caste-based discrimination are considered to connect Ambedkar's theoretical insights with institutional frameworks of equality and justice. The methodology is interpretive, seeking to understand Ambedkar's ideas from within his framework while remaining critical in engaging with tensions and limitations. The study aims to be rigorous while committed to the values of equality and justice animating Ambedkar's work. The study reconstructs Ambedkar's theoretical framework

while critically engaging with its implications and limitations. The study does not involve primary empirical research such as fieldwork, interviews, or surveys, as its central concern lies with political and social theory derived from focused textual analysis.

1.11 Theoretical Framework of the Study

The present study is guided by an Ambedkarite theoretical framework, supplemented by insights from Critical Theory, to examine caste as a structural and ideological system rooted in hierarchy, exclusion, and denial of human dignity. Rather than viewing caste as merely a social identity or cultural practice, the study conceptualises it as a historically embedded structure of graded inequality reproduced through religion, endogamy, social conditioning, and institutional arrangements.

The framework draws primarily upon B. R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), in which caste is analysed as a system sustained through scriptural authority and inherited hierarchy. Ambedkar rejected reformist approaches that treated caste as a distortion of Hindu society and instead argued that caste was integral to its social and religious foundations. Central to this study is Ambedkar's concept of graded inequality, which explains how caste operates through layered hierarchies that fragment social solidarity while normalising domination and exclusion.

The study further engages with Ambedkar's conception of social democracy based on liberty, equality, and fraternity. Ambedkar maintained that political democracy cannot survive without social democracy, since constitutional rights remain limited within a society structured by caste hierarchy. His idea of constitutional morality therefore becomes significant in evaluating the gap between formal legal equality and lived social realities.

Insights from Critical Theory further strengthen the framework by enabling an analysis of ideology, domination, and social power. Critical Theory emphasises that systems of inequality sustain themselves not only through institutions but also through beliefs, cultural norms, and forms of consciousness that make hierarchy appear natural. This perspective is particularly relevant to Ambedkar's critique of Brahmanical authority and religious legitimisation of caste.

By combining Ambedkarite social theory with Critical Theory, the study develops a framework for analysing caste as a social, political, ideological, and institutional phenomenon. The framework also provides a basis for critically evaluating constitutional provisions, reservation policies, anti-discrimination laws, and welfare measures in light of Ambedkar's vision of substantive equality, social justice, and human dignity. Through this perspective, *Annihilation of Caste* is interpreted not merely as a historical text but as a continuing framework

for understanding caste and democracy in contemporary India.

1.12 Research Gap

Although a substantial body of scholarship exists on B. R. Ambedkar's critique of caste and its historical significance, contemporary research still exhibits notable limitations. Much of the existing literature prioritises theoretical explanations of caste but provides limited insight into the actual functioning of present-day policies intended to reduce caste-based inequality. Furthermore, scholars have not sufficiently examined the role of prevailing social attitudes, everyday practices, and cultural mindsets that continue to sustain caste boundaries despite constitutional safeguards. The intersection of caste and gender, particularly the lived experiences of Dalit women, remains underrepresented within current academic discourse. In addition, there is a noticeable gap in studies that critically evaluate the effectiveness of reservation and affirmative action policies beyond their legal intent, especially in terms of long term social mobility and dignity. Finally, contemporary research rarely engages in direct analysis connecting Ambedkar's arguments with current policy outcomes, leaving an important space for inquiry that this study seeks to address.

1.13 Chapterization

The dissertation comprises five chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the study by providing biographical and historical context for Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*, documents the persistence of caste in contemporary India through empirical indicators, contrasts Ambedkar's vision with Gandhi's reformist approach, establishes the rationale and significance of the study, and sets out the research questions, methodology, scope, and delimitations guiding the investigation.

Chapter 2 undertakes a thematic review of existing scholarship on Ambedkar's *AnnihilationofCaste* and the persistence of caste in contemporary India, organised around seven interconnected themes: Ambedkar’s foundational critique of caste; religion, ideology, and the moral foundations of caste; caste, democracy, and constitutional limits; endogamy, marriage, and social reproduction; development, welfare, and policy-based approaches; knowledge, humiliation, and lived experience; and the caste–class theoretical debate. It identifies a significant gap in the literature, namely the absence of sustained engagement with *Annihilation of Caste* as a normative framework for evaluating post-independence policy.

Chapter 3 undertakes a detailed thematic analysis of *Annihilation of Caste*, exploring

central themes that include religion as a root cause of caste hierarchy, caste as a mechanism of social reproduction and control, the limits of an ethics of good intentions, the Gandhi–Ambedkar debate on reformist ethics, education as a means of emancipation, Ambedkar's normative vision of liberty, equality, and fraternity, the limits of reformist proposals, and the contemporary relevance of his critique.

Chapter 4 examines government policies and constitutional provisions addressing caste discrimination, analysing constitutional protections, major legislation, reservation policies, and welfare schemes, assessing alignment with Ambedkar's vision and identifying shortcomings.

Chapter 5 synthesises findings, reflects on *Annihilation of Caste*'s continuing relevance, discusses implications for understanding democracy and social justice, offers policy recommendations, and reflects on Ambedkar's thoughts' broader significance for struggles against oppression.

1.14 Delimitations of the study

This study focuses specifically on *Annihilation of Caste* as its primary text. While Ambedkar wrote extensively on economics, constitutional law, labour issues, and Buddhism, this study does not comprehensively survey all his writings.

The study does not attempt a systematic comparison with other thinkers, though figures like Gandhi are discussed where relevant. The temporal scope emphasises contemporary India, particularly from 2000 onward, while the geographic scope is limited to India.

While examining major policies and constitutional provisions, the study does not provide exhaustive accounts of all government programmes related to caste. As noted, this is not an empirical study based on original field research; claims about contemporary realities draw on existing data and research.

1.15 Conclusion

This chapter has established the groundwork for detailed analysis to follow. It has introduced Ambedkar as a thinker and activist whose life and work were shaped by caste discrimination and determination to fight for equality and human dignity. It has explained the circumstances surrounding *Annihilation of Caste* and outlined its central arguments.

Crucially, the chapter has demonstrated that caste remains not merely historical but continues to structure Indian society significantly. Despite constitutional protections and policy interventions, caste shapes marriage patterns, representation in power positions, access, and everyday interactions. This persistence makes Ambedkar's call for the complete *annihilation of caste* not an outdated slogan but a continuing imperative.

The chapter has clarified this study's approach and methodology. By combining close textual analysis with examination of contemporary policies and data, the study assesses Ambedkar's ideas' continuing relevance and contributes to ongoing debates about achieving genuine equality in Indian society.

The subsequent chapters engage more deeply with both Ambedkar's thought and contemporary realities, examining how his philosophical arguments illuminate present problems and how his vision of social transformation invites a more radical understanding of meaningful change. Through this engagement with Ambedkar, the study seeks to contribute not merely to academic understanding but to the practical project of building a more just and equal society.

Chapter II

Review of literature

2.1 Introduction

This chapter looks into past writings about B. R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* and assesses whether his arguments retain analytical relevance for understanding caste in contemporary India. Scholarship on caste extends across multiple disciplines, including political science, sociology, history, economics, gender studies, cultural studies, and law. Given the volume and diversity of this literature, the chapter adopts a thematic rather than exhaustive approach. The review is organised around the central concerns of *Annihilation of Caste*, which serves as a lens shaping how related writings are seen and weighed.

Earlier and more recent scholarship, together with peer-reviewed research, is examined in relation to Ambedkar's central concerns in order to demonstrate the continuing analytical relevance of his framework. Three interconnected propositions inform the structure of this review: first, that caste persists primarily through religious and moral reasoning rather than through routine social practice alone; second, that political democracy cannot remain stable in the absence of social democracy; and third, that economic redistribution alone cannot dismantle caste unless it is accompanied by transformations in social relations, everyday practice, and ideological belief. Organising the literature along these thematic lines establishes a connection between normative claims about justice and empirical evidence concerning the persistence of caste.

This thematic structure enables an examination of how Ambedkar's core arguments continue to inform scholarship across multiple disciplines and how they bear upon contemporary social conditions. By engaging with diverse perspectives, the review extends beyond a purely institutional or legal analysis to consider the ideological, experiential, and historical dimensions of caste-based domination, dimensions that Ambedkar himself emphasised throughout his work. While some scholars have argued that caste is gradually weakening, the literature examined here suggests a more complex picture: one in which caste persists in adapted forms, retaining its hierarchical logic despite changes in political frameworks, market structures, and everyday practice.

Positioning Ambedkar at the centre of this review challenges scholarly tendencies that either confine his work to its colonial context or selectively engage with his arguments while overlooking the more radical dimensions of his critique. His framework remains analytically relevant rather than historically dated, and is treated here not as a subject of commemoration but as a body of political thought essential to understanding contemporary caste relations. This orientation also informs the assessment of post-independence policy in subsequent chapters, where welfare provisions and state interventions are evaluated against Ambedkar's vision of dignity and democratic association.

2.2 Ambedkar's Foundational Critique of Caste

B. R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* (1936/2024) constitutes a sustained and systematic critique of caste within India's intellectual tradition. Rather than treating caste as a system of occupational classification, Ambedkar conceptualised it as a structure of social separation in which individuals are assigned to inherited roles, bound by endogamous marriage, organised through graded inequality, and legitimised through religious authority. In his analysis, reform efforts directed at the surface manifestations of caste left its underlying logic intact. Caste, for Ambedkar, was not an incidental defect of an otherwise functional social order; it was a constitutive feature of that order, one that systematically restricted equality, fraternity, and dignity. As long as caste was sustained through religious doctrine and everyday practice, he argued, legal and ethical appeals alone would prove insufficient. This position distinguished his approach from contemporaneous reformers who pursued incremental change rather than the structural transformation he advocated.

The historical context surrounding *Annihilation of Caste* is itself analytically significant. The text was composed in 1936 as the presidential address for the annual conference of the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal, a Lahore-based Hindu reform organisation that opposed caste restrictions. The address was, however, never delivered. The organising committee found portions of the manuscript unacceptable and requested that Ambedkar moderate his arguments. Ambedkar declined to revise the text, and the conference was consequently cancelled. He subsequently published the speech at his own expense on 15 May 1936, thereby ensuring its circulation among a wider public (Jha, 2019). The decision to publish without modification was itself a substantive intellectual position: it indicated his refusal to compromise his critique to accommodate reformers unwilling to challenge the foundational authority of Hindu tradition.

Jha (2019) examines *Annihilation of Caste* within its specific historical context of 1930s colonial India, situating the text within the political conditions that shaped its composition. Her analysis demonstrates that Ambedkar's refusal to moderate his position, in contrast to the

gradualist approach favoured by many contemporaneous reformers, is integral to the analytical force of the text. Each argument is constructed to undertake a systematic critique of scriptural authority and the structural mechanisms through which caste operates. Ambedkar grounded his analysis in the religious texts that legitimised caste hierarchy, particularly the Manusmriti and the Dharmashastras, and on this basis rejected efforts to dissociate caste from its religious foundations. Jha demonstrates that the text combines rigorous textual analysis with political engagement, contributing both to scholarly discourse and to anti-caste activism. The correspondence between Ambedkar and the conference organisers, examined by Jha, reveals the substantive disagreement between gradualist and structural approaches to caste reform.

This foundational critique acquires further analytical depth when situated within Ambedkar's wider intellectual project. A. Deshpande. (2011) conceptualises caste as a multidimensional system of inequality operating simultaneously across economic, social, political, and educational domains. For Ambedkar, caste was not a static hierarchy but a dynamic structure capable of adapting to changing historical conditions while retaining its hierarchical logic. Caste constitutes a graded system of injustice in which occupational roles are inherited, intergenerational mobility is constrained, and disadvantage is reproduced across generations. Conventional economic analysis, Deshpande argues, is inadequate to capture this pattern. The rigidity of the caste system restricts occupational choice, generates persistent wage differentials, and confines entire communities to subordinate positions, thereby contradicting the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity that Ambedkar advanced as the foundations of a just society. Deshpande demonstrates that Ambedkar rejected incremental reform in favour of structural transformation, a project he ultimately associated with the egalitarian principles of Buddhist thought.

This analytical position is supported by subsequent scholarship across multiple disciplines. Omvedt (1994) situated Ambedkar within a broader tradition of democratic transformation, arguing that the dismantling of caste was a necessary condition for substantive democracy. In her reading, Ambedkar's conception of democracy extended beyond electoral participation to encompass the structural reorganisation of social relations. Jaffrelot (2005) examined Ambedkar's thought within the context of colonial rule and nationalist mobilisation, demonstrating that his structural critique was marginalised in favour of Gandhi's emphasis on individual moral reform rather than systemic transformation. The exchanges between Ambedkar and Gandhi, examined extensively in subsequent scholarship, reveal a fundamental disagreement concerning the appropriate response to caste. One position held that caste could be reformed gradually within an inherited religious framework; the other maintained that structural dismantling was required. Gandhi defended a reformed conception of varna,

distinguishing the original system from its later corruptions and arguing that the framework itself was not inherently unjust. Ambedkar rejected this distinction, contending that the principle of varna was inseparable from the hierarchical logic of caste, and that attempts to reform varna without abolishing it would reproduce the same structures of inequality in modified form.

Patel (2021) extends Ambedkar's analysis by focusing on the spatial dimensions of caste, a dimension that has received comparatively limited attention despite its significance for understanding the persistence of caste. Drawing directly on Ambedkar's writings, Patel demonstrates how village settlement patterns and ritual norms governing behaviour function together to sustain caste-based exclusion. Residential location, the configuration of pathways, and the placement of dwellings are not socially neutral; they actively structure patterns of social separation. This spatial separation is not incidental but is systematically embedded in everyday practice and religious doctrine. In this analysis, geography functions as an instrument of hierarchy, although it also indicates dimensions of caste that any project of transformation must address. The regulation of land use and movement derives from religious sanction, which invests physical boundaries with normative authority. The spatial organisation of the village, therefore, does more than separate; it reproduces caste hierarchy across generations. Spatial separation is thus not merely correlated with caste but constitutes one of its foundational mechanisms, embedding inequality within the everyday material conditions of village life. Patel demonstrates that Ambedkar's critique extended beyond textual and doctrinal analysis to encompass lived spatial arrangements, suggesting that the project of emancipation entailed transformation of consciousness, social practice, and the material organisation of space. Zelliot (2013) further contextualised these spatial and social dimensions by tracing Ambedkar's intellectual formation through his early encounters with exclusion in Baroda and Bombay, demonstrating that the uncompromising tone of *Annihilation of Caste* emerged from embodied experience rather than abstract theorising.

Recent scholarship continues to engage with and extend Ambedkar's foundational arguments, recontextualising them for contemporary analytical purposes. A.Deshpande (2011) conceptualised caste as a form of deep structural grammar, which is an organising logic that, like the implicit rules governing linguistic competence, silently conditions behaviour across modern institutional settings. In this formulation, caste establishes tacit norms, regulates social relationships, and reproduces hierarchical ordering, frequently without conscious recognition by those subject to its effects, yet with measurable consequences for individual agency and freedom. Guru and Sarukkai (2018) further demonstrated that caste sustains itself through the systematic exclusion of particular voices from processes of knowledge production. Rather than locating its persistence solely in economic domination, they foreground epistemic erasure that,

specifically, the delegitimisation of Dalit lived experience as a central mechanism of reproduction. Where mainstream intellectual and institutional discourse dismisses or marginalises such experiential knowledge, hierarchical structures are effectively sustained within academic settings, policy frameworks, scholarly publications, and the everyday negotiation of what counts as credible evidence or legitimate truth.

Considered together, these works substantiate Ambedkar's central argument that caste is not a remediable defect within an otherwise just social order but an entrenched normative system that persists despite changes in formal law. Although the Constitution guarantees equality and reservation policies have expanded access to education and public employment, structural power continues to be distributed along caste lines (A.Deshpande, 2011). Reform has produced significant changes at the level of formal institutions while leaving the underlying social order largely unaltered. In education, employment, health, and wealth, disparities between upper and lower castes have not consistently narrowed, and in several domains have widened. New forms of caste-based discrimination have also emerged within contemporary institutional contexts, often operating in ways that are less overt but no less consequential. The persistence of caste under these conditions explains why Ambedkar called for its annihilation rather than its incremental reform, an argument that retains analytical force in the present. Contemporary scholarship and political discourse must engage with the structural radicalism of his critique rather than appropriate his arguments in support of gradualist positions.

A significant development in the contemporary reception of *Annihilation of Caste* was the publication of the annotated critical edition by S. Anand (Navayana, 2014), which made the text newly accessible to an international readership and situated it within a broader framework of anti-caste intellectual history. The edition included an extended introduction by Arundhati Roy, '*The Doctor and the Saint*,' which generated considerable scholarly and public debate. Roy (2014) reads *Annihilation of Caste* as a text that exposes the foundational violence of caste not merely as a historical inheritance but as an ongoing structure of domination, one whose persistence is enabled by the complicity of liberal and nationalist frameworks that acknowledge caste as a problem while refusing to confront its roots in religious authority. Her intervention is significant for this study because it demonstrates that *Annihilation of Caste* continues to provoke interpretive engagement that goes beyond academic commentary, functioning as a living text capable of illuminating contemporary structures of power. Roy's reading, while contested by some scholars who questioned her authority to interpret Dalit intellectual traditions, nonetheless succeeded in bringing Ambedkar's arguments to audiences that had not previously engaged with them, confirming the text's capacity to speak across contexts and generations.

Anand's editorial apparatus itself constitutes an important scholarly contribution. By providing extensive annotations, contextual notes, and appendices including the Gandhi–Ambedkar exchange that followed publication, the edition enables readers to trace the argumentative structure of *Annihilation of Caste* with a precision that earlier editions did not facilitate. The annotated edition thereby underscores a methodological point relevant to this study: that close textual analysis of Ambedkar's primary text, rather than reliance on secondary summaries, reveals the full force of his structural critique, including dimensions that are frequently domesticated or diluted in popular and academic reception alike.

2.3 Religion, Ideology, and the Moral Foundations of Caste

One of the most contested arguments in *Annihilation of Caste* is Ambedkar's claim that caste is not a distortion of Hindu thought but a constitutive element of it. Rather than treating hierarchy as a later corruption of an originally egalitarian tradition, Ambedkar argued that scriptural texts such as the Manusmriti explicitly codified unequal social ranks as religiously sanctioned. The dismantling of caste, on this analysis, required the rejection of the scriptural authority that legitimised it, rather than selective reinterpretation. This position was at odds with nationalist reformers who sought to preserve Hindu unity while opposing untouchability. By identifying caste as integral to religious doctrine, Ambedkar advanced a critique that extended beyond social reform to a sustained interrogation of the normative foundations of Hindu tradition.

Jha (2019) reinforces this position by examining Ambedkar's sustained engagement with religious doctrine. Ambedkar treated religious ideas not as symbolic abstractions but as material forces shaping social life and hierarchical relations. Through systematic textual analysis of scriptural sources, he demonstrated how moral categories were constituted through and bound to caste structures. His critique extended beyond social custom to challenge the normative authority of religious doctrine itself. In contrast to contemporaries who pursued gradualist reform within an unchallenged scriptural framework, Ambedkar adopted a more radical position. Jha argues that Ambedkar's textual method was explicitly purposive: it sought to demonstrate that caste could not be reformed from within the religious tradition that legitimised it.

Ilaiah (2005) examines how Brahmanical thought systematically marginalises Dalit-Bahujan ways of knowing through the regulation of language, ritual, and cultural practice. Restrictions on temple access and exclusion from religious ceremonies operate as everyday mechanisms of social control. Ambedkar and Rege (2013) extend this analysis by foregrounding the relationship between Brahmanical patriarchy and caste hierarchy,

demonstrating that caste based and gender-based oppression are mutually constitutive rather than analytically separable. Their work documents Ambedkar's engagement with intersecting forms of subordination, particularly his recognition that patriarchal norms intensify caste-based harm against Dalit women. They examine his advocacy for women's legal rights, including rights to property and divorce, exemplified in the Hindu Code Bill, and argue that the dismantling of caste necessarily entails the transformation of patriarchal structures.

Subsequent scholarly research provides further theoretical and empirical support. Ilaiah (2005) demonstrates how religious belief continues to structure caste dynamics through ritual practice and public observance. Rege (2000) examines the specific experiences of Dalit women, identifying gaps in mainstream feminist analysis that fail to address the intersection of caste and gender. Patel (2021) analyses settlement patterns in Hindu villages, arguing that spatial segregation reinforces caste hierarchies grounded in concepts of ritual purity. This pattern of segregation continues in contemporary rural India, where lower-caste households are frequently located apart from the main settlement and are denied access to basic services such as drinking water and sanitation.

Caste-based residential segregation extends from rural to urban contexts, although it operates in less visible forms within cities. Slums, peripheral settlements, and segregated residential clusters house disproportionate numbers of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, a pattern that persists despite legal prohibitions on discrimination. Research by Thorat and Newman (2010) documents systematic discrimination against Dalit applicants in urban rental housing markets, demonstrating that caste-based exclusion operates through informal mechanisms within ostensibly neutral institutional processes. These findings substantiate Ambedkar's analysis of caste as a structural rather than merely interpersonal phenomenon, requiring transformation that extends beyond the prohibition of individual discriminatory acts.
Contemporary scholarship has further corroborated Ambedkar's central claim that caste cannot be understood independently of its religious foundations. Doniger (2009), in her comprehensive study of Hindu textual traditions, demonstrates that hierarchical social ordering is not an incidental feature of classical Hindu literature but a constitutive element of its normative vision. While Doniger's approach differs methodologically from Ambedkar's, her textual evidence supports his argument that the Shastras actively prescribe rather than merely describe social hierarchy. Similarly, Thapar (2018) traces how the relationship between Brahmanical authority and social stratification was consolidated over centuries through the selective codification and canonisation of particular textual traditions. These findings are significant for the present study because they confirm, from within the discipline of religious studies, the analytical claim that Ambedkar advanced in *Annihilation of Caste*: that meaningful engagement with caste requires

confrontation with the doctrinal and scriptural foundations that sustain it.

2.4 Caste, Democracy, and Constitutional Limits

As the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar consistently maintained that formal political rights alone could not address structurally entrenched inequalities. He argued throughout *Annihilation of Caste* that legal provisions could not eliminate caste in the absence of social transformation, including changes in household practices and patterns of political representation. The gap between formal constitutional guarantees and lived social experience has subsequently become a sustained focus of scholarly inquiry, particularly with regard to how caste-based hierarchies undermine the operation of formal equality provisions.

Galanter's (1984) examination of affirmative action demonstrates that legal interventions designed to redress historical exclusion frequently encounter resistance from dominant groups, who often frame such measures as a deviation from merit-based selection. In practice, these provisions can generate political contestation that operates to preserve existing hierarchies under the discourse of fairness. Although anti-discrimination law formally opposes caste-based privilege, dominant groups often reframe inherited advantage as individual achievement, thereby diluting the redistributive intent of such legislation. Chatterjee (2004) develops a related argument through the concept of "political society," in which excluded populations rarely secure inclusion through formal legal claims alone. Marginalised groups frequently rely on informal channels of negotiation with state authority rather than on rights-based legal claims. Access to basic services, including water and housing, is often mediated through informal community arrangements rather than through enforceable legal entitlements. illustrating the persistent gap between constitutional guarantees and the conditions of everyday life.

Empirical research substantiates Ambedkar's concerns regarding the gap between constitutional ideals and social reality. Jodhka (2012) demonstrates that caste continues to shape patterns of leadership, employment, and market access despite universal adult franchise. Rather than receding under democratic governance, caste has been reconfigured as a mechanism for political mobilisation. Jeffery and Jeffery (2006) document how the expansion of voting rights has not eliminated disparities rooted in caste lineage, particularly in rural areas where established hierarchies remain entrenched. Desai and Dubey (2012), drawing on extensive survey data, demonstrate that caste continues to structure access to education, employment, and life outcomes despite sustained economic growth. Decades of legal protections have produced limited change in this underlying pattern, and intergenerational mobility for Scheduled Castes

and Scheduled Tribes has remained constrained.

Desai and Dubey (2012) reassess Ambedkar's framework in the context of contemporary India, arguing that although legal frameworks have developed substantially, caste remains embedded in everyday social practice and consciousness. Beyond formal legal reform, they identify the role of education in enabling individual transformation among members of marginalised communities, who frequently use educational access to challenge inherited hierarchies. Nevertheless, more subtle forms of exclusion continue to operate within workplaces, urban environments, and political institutions, the principal sites at which power is exercised. These patterns indicate that caste has been reconfigured rather than eliminated within the democratic framework. Ambedkar's analytical categories therefore retain explanatory force in identifying these contemporary adaptations.

Some scholars, however, qualify the more pessimistic assessment of constitutional democracy's capacity to address caste. Some argue that reservation policies in education and employment have facilitated political organisation within Dalit communities, even while entrenched power structures have remained substantially intact. In a related argument, Jayal (2013) demonstrates how constitutional principles strengthen modes of resistance by transforming moral claims into legally enforceable demands. The implication of these analyses is that, although the Constitution alone is insufficient to dismantle caste, it provides important institutional resources for political contestation. Read alongside Ambedkar's framework, such perspectives reinforce the argument that democracy cannot operate substantively while caste persists, while also recognising that legal instruments retain strategic significance despite their limitations.

2.5 Endogamy, Marriage, and Social Reproduction

Ambedkar's earliest substantive analysis of caste, formulated in 1916, identified endogamy, the practice of marriage within one's own caste group, as the central mechanism through which caste reproduces itself. Endogamy maintains group boundaries and is transmitted across generations through inherited social practice. This argument received its most developed expression in *Annihilation of Caste*, in which Ambedkar advocated intermarriage as a direct intervention into the structural foundations of caste. Substantive change, he argued, required transformation of everyday social practice, particularly with regard to patterns of marriage and family formation; legal reform alone could not alter practices embedded in personal and household life. Endogamy, in this analysis, was not merely a behavioural pattern but an ideological commitment sustained by social sanction and the internalisation of hierarchical

norms. Inter-caste marriage therefore constituted a structural rather than a personal intervention, with the capacity to disrupt one of the central mechanisms of caste reproduction.

Srinivas (1962), although working within a reformist framework, observed that rigid marriage norms operated to preserve caste structures. His concept of "Sanskritisation" described how lower castes adopted the practices of dominant groups, including endogamous marriage, in efforts to achieve upward social mobility, thereby reinforcing the hierarchical structures they sought to navigate. Contemporary empirical research substantiates Ambedkar's analysis of endogamy as central to caste reproduction. Ray, Chaudhuri, and Sahai (2017) found that only approximately 5.8 per cent of marriages in India occur across caste boundaries, even in contexts where education and urbanisation might be expected to weaken traditional norms. These patterns have remained remarkably stable across decades of social and economic change.

S. Deshpande (2013) demonstrates that caste continues to operate within the private sphere even when individuals publicly maintain that caste is no longer significant in everyday life. Urban professionals, in particular, may treat caste as irrelevant in workplace contexts while continuing to observe endogamous marriage practices. Marriage thus remains one of the most resilient sites of caste reproduction. Hnatkovska, Lahiri, and Paul (2013) draw on survey data to demonstrate that inter-caste marriage rates remain low, even among highly educated populations in major urban centres, indicating that urban residence and educational attainment alone are insufficient to alter long-established marriage norms. Their statistical analysis identifies family expectation and community pressure as continuing determinants of marriage decisions.

Empirical evidence supports Ambedkar's argument that caste cannot be dismantled without transformation in kinship and household structures. The persistence of endogamy demonstrates that caste operates not only through public hierarchies but also through intimate relations governed by emotional, interactional, and familial norms. Inter-caste marriages continue to provoke severe forms of backlash, including instances of homicide framed as "honour killings," which illustrate the consequences of transgressing this central mechanism of caste reproduction. Such acts of violence, typically perpetrated by family members or local figures of authority, support Ambedkar's analysis that caste is sustained not only through economic relations but also through ideological commitments that regulate personal and intimate life.

2.6 Development, Welfare, and Policy-Based Approaches

Ambedkar supported state intervention to reduce material suffering but cautioned against equating economic improvement with social liberation. In *Annihilation of Caste*, he

warned that welfare measures could address symptoms of inequality without dismantling its structural foundations, thereby creating cycles of dependency rather than genuine emancipation. Ambedkar argued that economic development occurring within unchanged caste relations would likely reproduce hierarchy, as dominant castes would continue to capture the benefits of growth. His critique anticipated contemporary debates on inclusive development and social justice.

Teltumbde (2018) develops this critique by demonstrating how caste has adapted to neoliberal economic structures, functioning as social capital that advantages dominant groups in market transactions. Thorat and Kumar (2008) document persistent caste-based exclusion in education, employment, and markets, noting that even qualified Dalit candidates face discrimination in corporate hiring. Mosse (2018) shows that development programmes are mediated by existing power relations, allowing local elites to capture benefits and marginalise intended recipients. For example, in many rural development schemes, dominant caste village leaders control resource allocation, ensuring that benefits flow disproportionately to their own communities while Dalit beneficiaries receive inferior quality services or are excluded altogether. Khera (2011) corroborated these findings in her analysis of MGNREGA implementation, documenting how dominant-caste village functionaries exercised discretionary control over worksite allocation and wage payment, thereby reinforcing existing hierarchies within a programme ostensibly designed to alleviate them.

Weisskopf (2004) finds that while reservation policies have enabled individual mobility, they have not fundamentally altered the collective social position of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Empirical evidence indicates that poverty rates among Scheduled Castes remain significantly higher than those of upper castes, and that economic liberalisation has not reduced these disparities. This analysis suggests that market-based development strategies have, if anything, widened caste-based inequalities by favouring those with preexisting social and economic advantages.

Guru and Sarukkai (2018) provide a nuanced Ambedkarite analysis, emphasising that caste annihilation requires simultaneous economic, social, cultural, and ideological transformation. Prosperity without dignity remains incomplete emancipation. This perspective is crucial for evaluating contemporary welfare schemes, which often focus on material outcomes such as income support, housing, or employment without addressing the social relations and everyday practices that perpetuate caste hierarchy. The analytical framework developed in this section is applied to subsequent chapters to assess whether programmes like the Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana, MGNREGA, and various scholarship schemes promote

genuine social transformation or merely manage inequality within existing caste structures.

2.7 Knowledge, Humiliation, and Lived Experience

Ambedkar conceptualised caste not only as a system of economic subordination but also as a structure that produces sustained psychological and social harm through humiliation and the systematic denial of dignity. In his analysis, humiliation is not episodic but cumulative, eroding selfhood through repeated experiences of subordination. The denial of dignity operates not only through formal legal disability and economic disadvantage but also through everyday social interactions that mark and reinforce caste status. A Dalit child seated apart from other students, or labourers given water in disposable receptacles rather than the vessels used by upper-caste workers, exemplifies the routine practices through which caste hierarchy is enacted. Such practices, although individually minor, accumulate to form a sustained material and symbolic burden. Ambedkar's analytical contribution lies in recognising forms of harm that conventional analyses of poverty or institutional exclusion fail to capture: the experience of being treated as socially inferior. His framework was shaped not only by structural analysis but also by attention
to lived experiences of exclusion, including silences in conversation, refused gestures of greeting, and deliberate mispronunciations of names.

Guru (2009) places humiliation at the centre of caste analysis, in alignment with Ambedkar's position that dignity constitutes a foundational requirement of democratic life. Rather than treating indignity as incidental, Guru argues that it is constitutive of caste, shaping the reproduction and transmission of social power across generations. When individuals depart from assigned caste roles, public humiliation functions as a mechanism of social discipline, reinforcing hierarchical boundaries and naturalising structural inequality. Das (2007) develops this analysis further by tracing how harm becomes embedded in everyday life, conceptualising caste-based violence not as exceptional events but as a sustained condition within communities subjected to exclusion. The normalisation of such violence, she argues, constitutes one of the most consequential dimensions of caste. Her ethnographic work demonstrates that caste-based harm is rarely confined to overt incidents; rather, it accumulates incrementally through routine experiences of subordination.

Recent scholarship reinforces these arguments through analysis of lived experience. Paik

(2014) demonstrates that Dalit women continue to encounter isolation and surveillance within educational institutions despite formal rights of access. Institutional presence does not, in itself, ensure acceptance, and persistently hostile environments undermine substantive inclusion. Rege (2000) had earlier identified critical gaps in mainstream caste analysis, particularly its insufficient attention to the experiences of Dalit women, who are subject to the intersecting effects of caste-based and gender-based subordination. Quantitative measures of disparity, on this account, fail to capture the more subtle forms of harm produced through everyday social interaction, including marginalising glances, segregated seating, and inquiries about surnames that operate as mechanisms of caste identification.

Dhanda (2020) examines how caste-based humiliation operates within digital environments, demonstrating that online platforms have become significant sites of caste-based exclusion through coordinated harassment of Dalit users and the systematic marginalisation of their voices in public discourse. Her analysis indicates that digital technologies have not displaced caste hierarchies but reconfigured the contexts in which they are reproduced. These findings reinforce Ambedkar's argument that the dismantling of caste requires intervention beyond formal policy, extending to the transformation of everyday social interaction, ethical norms, and patterns of recognition. Contemporary welfare provision must therefore be evaluated not only with reference to material outcomes but also in terms of whether it engages with the experiential dimensions of caste-based subordination. Rao (2009) situated these experiential dimensions within a broader political framework, arguing that the caste question in modern India requires a fundamental rethinking of democratic subjectivity rather than merely distributive intervention.

More recently, Yengde (2019) has extended the analytical trajectory initiated by Ambedkar into a contemporary framework that directly engages with the twenty-first century conditions of caste. In *Caste Matters,* Yengde argues that Dalit identity in contemporary India is shaped by a double bind: the formal recognition of caste-based disadvantage through state policy coexists with the persistent denial of caste as a structuring force in everyday social relations. Drawing explicitly on Ambedkar's framework, Yengde demonstrates that the language of merit, aspiration, and individual achievement that dominates contemporary public discourse functions as a mechanism for obscuring the continued operation of caste advantage. His analysis confirms a central insight of *Annihilation of Caste*: that caste persists not primarily through overt discrimination but through the normalisation of inherited privilege and the ideological frameworks that render it invisible. Yengde's work is particularly relevant to this study because it demonstrates the continuing capacity of Ambedkar's analytical categories to illuminate forms of exclusion that have adapted to the vocabularies of liberal democracy, market

competition, and cosmopolitan modernity.

2.8 Caste, Class, and Theoretical Debates

A significant body of scholarship examines whether caste is more usefully analysed as an ideological system or as a structure of material relations, reflecting a longstanding theoretical division between idealist and materialist accounts of social inequality. Béteille (1996) and Chakraborty (2003) connect caste to class and to relations of power, demonstrating how access to land, control over labour, and economic dominance contribute to the reproduction of caste hierarchy. Chibber (2022) shifts the analytical frame toward the political economy of caste, arguing that caste persists because it serves the requirements of capital accumulation. In this account, caste produces segmented labour markets that facilitate intensified extraction while fragmenting working-class solidarity along ascriptive lines.

An exclusively economic analysis, however, fails to capture the distinctive logic of caste, which structures social interaction in ways that cannot be reduced to material relations alone. Several scholars have argued that class-based analysis is insufficient on its own, as ascriptive hierarchies long predate the emergence of market economies. Economically successful members of subordinated castes may continue to be denied access to temples, demonstrating that material mobility does not eliminate caste-based exclusion. Similarly, workers from different castes earning equivalent wages often do not share meals or develop close personal relations, indicating that caste continues to structure social interaction in ways that are not adequately accounted for within frameworks centred on class alone.

These debates inform Ambedkar's analysis, in which caste is theorised as operating simultaneously through ideological, social, and economic dimensions rather than being reducible to any single dimension. His approach is consistent with contemporary frameworks of intersecting inequalities that recognise the limits of single-axis explanations. Empirical research by Thorat and Newman (2010) supports this position. Their experimental studies demonstrate that caste-based discrimination persists in market transactions even when such discrimination is economically inefficient, indicating that ideological commitments operate independently of, and at times in tension with, economic incentives.

Lerche (2013) advances an integrated analysis in which caste and class are conceptualised as mutually constitutive rather than as separate axes of stratification. Dominant groups in rural India, he argues, have used control over land and economic resources to maintain caste hierarchy; capitalism has not eroded caste but has, in significant respects, reinforced it. Caste, in this account, constitutes a distinct form of inequality that is not reducible to class, although the two interact in ways that produce specific configurations of disadvantage. For the present study, this combined framework provides a basis for assessing whether welfare and development policies address both material deprivation and the ideological structures of caste.

2.9 Synthesis and Conclusion

The literature examined in this chapter confirms that caste remains a structurally embedded and ideologically sustained system of inequality, one that has adapted to democratic governance, economic liberalisation, and social reform without losing its foundational logic. Across the seven thematic domains reviewed, a consistent finding emerges: Ambedkar's central arguments in *Annihilation of Caste* continue to hold analytical force. His insistence that caste is religiously sanctioned rather than incidentally associated with religion (Section 2.3), that political democracy cannot function without social democracy (Section 2.4), that endogamy constitutes the primary mechanism of caste reproduction (Section 2.5), that economic redistribution within unchanged social relations reproduces rather than dismantles hierarchy (Section 2.6), and that caste inflicts its deepest harm through the everyday erosion of dignity (Section 2.7) each of these claims finds substantial corroboration in contemporary scholarship.

Read together, the literature reviewed across these themes does more than confirm Ambedkar's diagnosis; it demonstrates that the explanatory power of his framework increases, rather than diminishes, when applied to contemporary institutional and social conditions. The continuing relevance of *Annihilation of Caste* therefore lies not in its historical interest but in its capacity to render visible the ideological and structural mechanisms through which caste continues to operate within ostensibly democratic institutions. This conclusion sets the conditions for identifying the specific gap that the present study seeks to address.

Chapter III

Thematic analysis of *annihilation of caste*

3.1 Introduction

Annihilation of Caste, written and self-published by B. R. Ambedkar in 1936, represents a foundational intervention in Indian political and social thought. The text was drafted originally as an address for the annual conference of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal in Lahore, a Hindu reform organisation whose name translates as the "Caste-Breaker Forum." The invitation, however, was subsequently withdrawn. When the organising committee read the manuscript, they found that Ambedkar had gone considerably further than they had anticipated. Rather than advocating practical reforms within the existing religious and social framework, he had directly challenged the scriptural authority that underpinned caste hierarchy, arguing that the Vedas, the Smritis, and the Manusmriti were not incidental to caste but actively constitutive of it. This was more than the committee was willing to endorse publicly, and the conference was cancelled. Ambedkar published the speech at his own expense and distributed it independently. That decision was itself consequential: it signalled that the argument was directed not at a sympathetic reform audience but at the broader public, and that its author was unwilling to moderate its terms to accommodate prevailing sensibilities.

Ambedkar's intervention begins with a fundamental claim: caste is not a superficial social custom but a deeply embedded system of graded inequality, what he described as a hierarchy in which groups are arranged in a descending scale of reverence and an ascending scale of contempt. It is neither an accidental by-product of history nor a moral flaw that can be remedied through goodwill alone. Instead, it is a religiously sanctioned and socially reproduced structure that organises hierarchy, exclusion, and humiliation. What makes *Annihilation of Caste* analytically distinctive is that Ambedkar shifts the debate from reforming caste practices to interrogating the ideological foundations that sustain them. He insists that caste survives not

because people misunderstand religion, but because religion, as interpreted through Hindu scriptures, legitimises caste. The text thus marks a turning point from social reform discourse to structural critique.

This chapter undertakes a close thematic analysis of Ambedkar's speech, tracing how religion, caste, ethics, education, and democracy are conceptually interlinked in his argument. These are not separate topics that happen to appear in the same text. They are deeply connected, and Ambedkar weaves them together throughout the speech in a way that builds, step by step, toward a single conclusion: that a society built on caste cannot be a good society, cannot be a democratic society, and cannot be a just society, and that the only way forward is to dismantle the system at its roots rather than modify its expressions.

The analysis moves through the major themes of the speech in sequence. Each section attempts to explain not only what Ambedkar argued but why he argued it, what he was responding to, and why it retains relevance. The aim is not to summarise the text but to engage with its arguments and understand why they were, and continue to be, significant for anyone who takes seriously the question of what equality actually requires in practice.

3.2 Religion as a Root Cause

The argument that generated significant opposition in 1936 and continues to provoke debate is Ambedkar's position that the caste system is not a distortion of Hinduism but a product of it. Most reformers of his time preferred to argue that caste was a later corruption of the tradition, that the original spirit of Hinduism was egalitarian in character, and that the scriptures had been misread or selectively applied. Ambedkar firmly rejected this position. He engaged directly with scriptural sources such as the Smritis and the Manusmriti and argued that these texts not only permitted caste distinctions but explicitly prescribed them, laying out in considerable detail what each caste could and could not do, what punishments awaited those who transgressed caste boundaries, and why this arrangement was divinely ordained and therefore beyond legitimate question.

This had significant implications for debates on reform. Ambedkar contended that the reason many adherents accepted and enforced it, and were reluctant to challenge it, was that it was presented to them as divinely sanctioned and socially binding. In such a framework, appeals to compassion or moral sentiment were unlikely to produce structural change, since those very sentiments had been shaped within a religious worldview that affirmed hierarchy. Ambedkar argued that paternalistic benevolence could coexist with caste hierarchy, but structural equality could not. Reformist appeals to treat lower-caste individuals with dignity, while ethically meaningful in isolation, did not, in his view, confront the doctrinal foundations that sustained

inequality.

Ambedkar, therefore, shifted the focus of critique from individual behaviour to the normative structure of religion itself. This statement marks a significant shift in the locus of critique from individual conduct to religious doctrine: "People are not wrong in observing Caste. In my view, what is wrong is their religion, which has inculcated this notion of Caste" (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 76). His critique is directed at the underlying religious framework rather than individual practitioners. Reform efforts that failed to confront the religious foundations of caste would, in his view, remain structurally ineffective.

Ambedkar further distinguished between what he described as a "religion of rules" and a "religion of principles." The former, which he associated with Hindu Dharma as expressed in the Shastras, functioned in a manner that subordinated reason to scriptural authority, operating as a detailed code governing social conduct, including matters of marriage, occupation, ritual practice, and social interaction. In such a system, moral action consisted primarily in obedience to prescribed rules. The structural limitation of such a religious framework, according to Ambedkar, is that it minimises the scope for independent moral reasoning, since ethical conduct was defined by conformity rather than reflection. If the rules themselves were unjust, which Ambedkar regarded as unjust, the framework provided little internal mechanism for questioning them, and the possibility of moral transformation became severely constrained.

By contrast, a "religion of principles" would be grounded in general moral ideals such as liberty and equality, requiring individuals to exercise judgment and assume responsibility for their actions. As he observed: "Doing what is said to be good by virtue of a rule and doing good in the light of a principle are two different things. The principle may be wrong, but the act is conscious and responsible" (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 87). This distinction formed a central element of his critique of scriptural Hinduism.

He also argued that the religious tradition, as codified in the Shastras, functioned in a manner that subordinated reason to scriptural authority, thereby limiting critical engagement with inherited norms. Practices such as prayaschitta (ritual atonement), while appearing to allow flexibility, operated as a mechanism that stabilised the system by containing internal dissent. At a superficial level, this practice appears to provide procedural flexibility. They enabled individuals to restore ritual status after transgressing caste rules without encouraging examination of the legitimacy of those rules. The effect, however, was system-preserving rather than transformative. In this way, dissent was absorbed rather than transformed into structural critique.

Ambedkar consequently concluded that meaningful reform required rejecting the

authority of the Shastras altogether. He argued that caste-affirming elements of the tradition were not peripheral distortions but integral to its normative order, and that reform efforts that attempted to work within the tradition while leaving its basic authority unchallenged would ultimately perpetuate structural inequality. This conclusion was the proximate cause of the conference's cancellation. He maintained it despite the opposition it generated, because intellectual honesty required confronting the problem at its actual source rather than at a more convenient location. As he argued: 'You cannot build anything on the foundations of caste. You cannot build up a nation; you cannot build up morality. Anything that you will build on the foundations of caste will crack and will never be a whole' (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 74).

This argument finds significant support in scholarly literature. Jha (2019) demonstrates that Ambedkar's engagement with scriptural texts was not rhetorical but methodologically rigorous: he analysed the Manusmriti and the Dharmashastras as primary sources and showed systematically that their prescriptions for caste hierarchy were not incidental to their normative framework but central to it. This analysis directly undermined the claim, common among reformers of the period, that the religious tradition could be purified from within. Similarly, A.Deshpande (2011) argues that caste functions as a “grammar" of social relations, operating through religious and ideological mechanisms that shape conduct and self-perception at a level that legal reform alone cannot reach. Both scholars thus confirm, from within contemporary scholarship, the structural argument that Ambedkar had advanced in 1936.

3.3 Caste as a Mechanism of Social Reproduction and Control

Once the religious foundations of caste are established, Ambedkar, in the third part of his speech, talks about how the system actually operates in practice, how it reproduces itself from one generation to the next, and why it has proven so resistant to change. His analysis here is concrete and at times disturbing, as he argues that caste does not persist passively but is reproduced through structured social mechanisms that shape not just what people can do but what they believe about themselves and their world.

One of the most cited formulations in this section is Ambedkar's response to the argument that caste represented a rational division of labour. This defence of the caste system was frequently articulated in reformist discourse: proponents argued that differentiated roles and specialised skills ensured the functional coordination of society. Ambedkar challenged this justification by arguing: "Caste System is not merely division of labour. It is also a division of labourers. It is a hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other" (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 46).

Ambedkar also strengthened his critique of caste by referring to concrete historical

incidents that revealed how hierarchy operated in everyday life. He discussed the Balahis of Central India, an oppressed community subjected to degrading restrictions by dominant castes. They were denied basic civil rights and were expected to perform compulsory services while remaining socially segregated. Ambedkar used this example to show that caste was not merely an abstract religious doctrine but a lived system of humiliation enforced through routine social practices. Similarly, he referred to the Chakwara incident in Rajasthan, where members of an “untouchable” community were violently opposed when they attempted to assert ordinary human dignity by organising a public feast and using ghee in their food, something upper castes considered beyond their social status. For Ambedkar, such incidents demonstrated that caste policed even the smallest acts of self-respect and consumption, revealing its everyday cruelty and its resistance to equality (Ambedkar, 1936/2024).

The distinction between these two concepts is analytically significant. A division of labour refers to the functional organisation of work within a society. A division of labourers entails the hierarchical classification of individuals, assigning differential status and social worth, and restricting mobility and fixing occupational roles by birth. As Ambedkar stated directly: "The caste system is not a division of labour. It is a division of labourers fixed by birth" (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 47). Ambedkar also rejected the argument that caste originated as a rational system for preserving racial purity or purity of blood. He noted that defenders of caste often claimed that endogamy protected distinct biological communities. Ambedkar dismissed this claim by drawing on ethnological evidence, arguing that no society existed in conditions of racial purity and that historical mixture characterised populations across the world. India, he maintained, was no exception. Referring to the work of Dr R. G. Bhandarkar, he observed that there was “hardly a class or caste in India which has not a foreign strain in it,” including groups such as Rajputs, Marathas, and even Brahmins who imagined themselves untouched by outside influence (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 48). The caste system therefore could not be defended as a mechanism for preserving race or blood purity. For Ambedkar, such claims were ideological myths used to legitimise hereditary separation and social hierarchy rather than historically credible explanations of caste origins.

Occupational roles were inherited rather than chosen, without reference to individual aptitude, preference, or changing social conditions. Individual suitability or capability was structurally irrelevant within this framework. A person born into a particular caste was expected to perform its prescribed occupation irrespective of aptitude or alternative capacities. This arrangement was economically inefficient. More fundamentally, it undermined individual autonomy and human dignity, treating individuals as functionally fixed components within an inherited social order. The caste system significantly restricted occupational mobility.

A more central dimension of Ambedkar's analysis concerned caste as a mechanism of social regulation. He argued that caste shapes not only social behaviour but also self perception and belief. The durability of the caste system lay in its ability to reproduce compliance; it did not depend solely on coercive enforcement. Rather, it drew legitimacy from religious doctrine. By teaching individuals from birth that their position in the hierarchy was the expression of karma accumulated across previous lives, this framework contributed to the internalisation of hierarchical status. Subordinate groups frequently internalised the legitimacy of their assigned status. This internalisation, in Ambedkar's view, was structurally produced rather than individually chosen. Those at the bottom of the hierarchy did not merely experience external pressure; they had frequently, through the process of religious and social conditioning, come to accept their position as legitimate. This internalisation, in Ambedkar's view, was structurally produced rather than individually chosen.

Caste operates through the epistemic exclusion (Guru & Sarukkai,2018) .When the experiential knowledge of those at the bottom of the hierarchy is systematically discounted or dismissed, the mechanisms of internalisation that Ambedkar described are reinforced through the denial of cognitive and normative resources necessary for sustained resistance.

Caste also constrained the development of cross-group solidarity, which helps explain the difficulty of organising collective resistance. The system did not simply create a division between a privileged group and an oppressed group. It created a complex hierarchy of graded distinctions, with each group structurally positioned to preserve its relative status and each group deeply concerned with maintaining its own standing. Shared experiences of marginalisation did not necessarily generate collective unity, because each group defined itself partly by its distinction from those below it. As Ambedkar observed: "Each caste not only dines among itself and marries among itself but each caste prescribes its own distinctive dress" (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 77). Ambedkar argued that Hindu society lacked cohesive social unity and instead operated as a collection of relatively insular caste groups, characterised by internal cohesion within caste boundaries and limited inter-caste integration. This structural fragmentation made it extremely difficult to build the kind of collective solidarity that would be necessary for organised resistance to the system as a whole.

The primary enforcement mechanism through which caste norms were maintained was excommunication: the withdrawal of social recognition and communal participation from individuals who violated caste rules. This sanction was not merely a minor social inconvenience. In a social order structured around caste affiliation, access to marriage networks,

economic opportunities, religious participation, and community life all depended on membership within one's caste group. As Ambedkar observed: 'The penalty of excommunication is the heaviest penalty which the caste can inflict' (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 59). The threat of this penalty discouraged individuals who recognised the injustice of caste from openly opposing it, not due to an absence of moral awareness, but because the anticipated social costs were prohibitive. The system was structured to impose disproportionate costs on dissenting individuals while preserving the stability of existing authority structures, with a design logic that helps explain the extraordinary stability of the caste order across centuries.

3.4 Ethics and Why Good Intentions Were Never Going to Be Enough

A central concern in Ambedkar's analysis was why reform grounded in moral intention had failed to produce meaningful change. He engaged with reformers, nationalists, and religious leaders who articulated commitments to dignity and fraternity. Yet the structural position of subordinated castes remained largely unchanged across generations. He identified a structural misdiagnosis: a fundamental misunderstanding of what was actually causing the suffering, and therefore of what kind of intervention could address it.

The dominant reform strategy assumed that behavioural change among upper-caste Hindus, achieved through moral persuasion and the example of individual reformers, would gradually transform social relations. This approach had obvious appeal: it was less disruptive than structural transformation, and it placed the problem in the realm of individual moral improvement, which appeared more immediately manageable. Ambedkar acknowledged the appeal of this approach but argued that it was structurally inadequate. The conscience of the average upper-caste Hindu had itself been formed by the very tradition that endorsed caste. Their moral intuitions — their sense of what was normal and natural and right — had been shaped by centuries of religious teaching that presented hierarchy as sacred and ordained. To appeal to that conscience as the instrument of reform was therefore to rely on precisely the mechanism through which the system reproduced itself. As he had argued in the preceding section of the speech: 'People are not wrong in observing Caste… what is wrong is their religion' (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 76). If the problem lay in the religious framework that formed moral consciousness, then appeals to that same moral consciousness could not constitute an adequate solution.

What was often described as tolerance was frequently weakness, indifference, or unwillingness to resist injustice. In support of this argument, he invoked the words of Morris, describing a society where “the great treading down the little, the strong beating down the weak, the cruel man caring not, kind men bearing not, and wise men caring not” (Ambedkar,

1936/2024, p. 58). The reference captures Ambedkar's view that caste survived not only through direct oppression but also through passive acceptance and moral silence. Reform based solely on appeals to conscience was therefore inadequate when conscience itself had become accustomed to inequality.

He directly addressed the argument that the existence of great saints and moral exemplars within the Hindu tradition — figures such as Chaitanya and Ramakrishna — demonstrated that Hinduism contained within itself the resources for genuine moral renewal. The question, he argued, was not whether a tradition could produce a small number of exceptional individuals who transcended its dominant tendencies. It was why, if the tradition was genuinely moral in its spirit, it had simultaneously produced and continued to sustain a society in which millions of people were subjected to systematic degradation from birth to death. As he asked: 'The question remains why the worst number is so many and the best so few?' (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 62). Exceptional individuals, he argued, do not validate the normative structure of the tradition that formed them. Their moral achievement demonstrates only that individuals can, with considerable effort and against the grain of their social environment, partially transcend the structures that formed them. But structural justice cannot depend on the emergence of exceptional moral actors; it requires the transformation of the structures themselves.

3.5 The Gandhi-Ambedkar Debate and the Limits of Reformist Ethics

The intellectual context surrounding *Annihilation of Caste* was not simply one of silence or indifference. The speech generated direct and substantive responses from two significant figures whose positions illustrate, with particular clarity, precisely the kind of reformist thinking Ambedkar was arguing against. The first was Sant Ram, the secretary of the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal itself, who had initially invited Ambedkar to speak at the conference. Sant Ram represented a position that might be described as structural sympathy without structural commitment: he was genuinely opposed to the more extreme expressions of caste discrimination and had dedicated considerable energy to social reform work, yet he remained unwilling to accept Ambedkar's conclusion that the religious foundations of caste required direct repudiation. His objection was essentially that Ambedkar's radicalism was counterproductive, as demanding the rejection of scriptural authority would alienate the very Hindu reformers whose cooperation was necessary for meaningful change. For Ambedkar, this objection illustrated with precision the structural misdiagnosis he had identified: the assumption that reform could be achieved by working within a tradition whose normative foundations were themselves the source of the problem. Sant Ram's position, however sincerely held, was the

position of someone who had accepted the constraints of the very system he wished to reform.

The second and more consequential response came from Mahatma Gandhi, who published a detailed critique of *Annihilation of Caste* in his journal *Harijan* in July 1936. Gandhi's response, sometimes referred to as a vindication of caste, defended the principle of varnashrama dharma, the traditional four-fold division of Hindu society based on hereditary occupation as a rational and morally defensible social arrangement, provided it was understood as a division of labour rather than a hierarchy of human worth. He distinguished between the varna system in its original, ideally conceived form, which he regarded as functional and non discriminatory, and the degenerate caste system as it had come to operate in practice, which he acknowledged produced injustice and required reform. The appropriate response, in Gandhi's view, was to restore the tradition to its original spirit rather than to repudiate its authority altogether. Ambedkar responded to this position directly and at length in his reply to Gandhi, arguing that the distinction Gandhi drew between an ideal varna system and a corrupt caste system was historically unsustainable and normatively evasive. The religious texts did not describe an ideal system that had subsequently been corrupted; they prescribed the hierarchical arrangements that Gandhi claimed were distortions. Gandhi's defence of varnashrama dharma was, in Ambedkar's analysis, not a reform position but a conservative one, an attempt to preserve the ideological authority of the tradition while conceding only its most indefensible surface expressions.

The exchange between Ambedkar and Gandhi is analytically significant for the present chapter because it dramatises, at the highest level of public debate, the structural argument that *Annihilation of Caste* advances. Gandhi represented, more powerfully and influentially than almost anyone else of his generation, the position that Hinduism contained within itself the moral resources for genuine renewal, and that the appropriate response to caste injustice was to appeal to those resources rather than to challenge the tradition's authority. Ambedkar's reply demonstrated that this position, however generously interpreted, relied on a selective reading of the textual tradition that could not survive honest scrutiny, and that the appeal to an idealised original Hinduism functioned, in practice, to protect the normative order that sustained caste hierarchy. The Gandhi-Ambedkar exchange thus serves not merely as a historical episode but as a case study in the structural argument of this chapter: that reform efforts grounded in moral appeal and traditionalist sympathy are insufficient precisely because they leave undisturbed the religious authority from which caste derives its power.

This constitutes one of the most philosophically significant claims in the text: that individual moral agency cannot operate independently of the surrounding social structure. A

person who lives within a deeply unjust social arrangement, who benefits from it in ways they may not be fully conscious of, and who was raised to regard it as natural and legitimate, such a person cannot achieve moral independence from the structure around them. Their habits of thought, their intuitions about what is normal, their sense of what the world owes them, all of these have been shaped by the very arrangement they might wish to transcend. Individual goodwill could not override structurally defined relations of hierarchy as long as the structure itself remained.

He expressed this with great clarity: "This is so not because there is anything wrong with his personal character. In fact, what is wrong is the entire basis of his relationship to his fellows. The best of men cannot be moral if the basis of the relationship between them and their fellows is fundamentally a wrong relationship" (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 114). This argument extends beyond the specific context of caste. Unjust structures cannot be transformed solely through attitudinal change. The structures themselves must be altered. As Ambedkar further argued: "The real remedy for breaking Caste is inter-marriage" (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 76), a structural intervention, not a sentimental one Caste, he argued, generated a restricted form of moral community that limited the scope of public ethics. Moral obligations were primarily confined within caste boundaries. This, in Ambedkar's analysis, prevented the development of a broader ethical foundation necessary for collective civic life. In the absence of such an ethical foundation, democratic solidarity remained structurally constrained. As he stated: "Hindu society as such does not exist. It is only a collection of castes" (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 51).

The political context of *Annihilation of Caste* was also shaped by the controversy surrounding the Communal Award of 1932, announced by British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald. The Award granted separate electorates to several minority communities, including the Depressed Classes. Ambedkar initially supported this arrangement because he believed political safeguards were necessary for communities systematically excluded from Hindu society. Separate electorates, in his view, would provide an independent political voice rather than leaving oppressed groups dependent on upper-caste representation. Gandhi opposed the proposal and undertook a fast unto death, resulting in the Poona Pact of 1932, which replaced separate electorates with reserved seats in joint electorates. The episode is significant because it illustrates Ambedkar’s wider argument that caste oppression could not be solved through moral appeals alone; it required institutional redistribution of power and guaranteed representation. His later arguments in *Annihilation of Caste,* therefore, emerged not only from philosophical critique but also from direct political experience of how caste shaped democratic negotiation and minority rights.

3.6 Education and What It Really Means to Be Free

Education functions in *Annihilation of Caste* as both an analytical category and a normative proposal. In terms of diagnosis, Ambedkar demonstrated that one of the central mechanisms through which the caste system sustained itself was the deliberate denial of education to those at the bottom of the hierarchy. In terms of prescription, he argued that access to genuine, critical education was one of the most important resources through which that system could be challenged. However, his conception of education extended beyond formal schooling to the development of critical reasoning and self-awareness, the capacity to translate critical understanding into social and political action.

The starting point for his analysis was the Chaturvarnya, the four-fold division of Hindu society. One of the central features of this system, Ambedkar argued, was the deliberate and systematic exclusion of Shudras from education. This exclusion was not incidental but institutionally embedded within religious law. The Manusmriti did not merely discourage Shudras from learning; it actively prohibited them, prescribing severe punishments for any violation. The implication was clear: knowledge constituted a form of power that the normative order restricted to dominant groups. The logic of this prohibition was structurally coherent. As Ambedkar noted: "He was prohibited from acquiring knowledge lest he should keep a steady vigil regarding his interests" (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 68). From the standpoint of dominant groups, restricting access to knowledge limited the possibility of structural critique.

Ambedkar also cited the Kavitha incident at Gujarat to demonstrate how caste oppression operated through the denial of basic civic rights. He noted that the dominant-caste Hindus of Kavitha opposed the attempts of “untouchable” families to send their children to the common village school maintained by the government. For daring to claim access to public education, the oppressed community faced severe retaliation and suffering. Ambedkar used this example to show that caste hierarchy was sustained not only through ritual exclusion but also through active resistance to equality in everyday institutions such as schools. Education, which he regarded as a crucial means of emancipation, was therefore deliberately restricted to preserve social domination. The Kavitha episode reinforces his wider argument that caste survives by controlling access to knowledge, dignity, and citizenship, and that formal legal rights alone are insufficient when dominant social groups remain committed to preserving hierarchy (Ambedkar, 1936/2024)

Intergenerational educational exclusion produces more than informational deficits. It constrained the development of cognitive and normative resources necessary for sustained resistance, the confidence in one's own judgement, the habit of critical thinking, the sense that one has the right and capacity to understand and question what is happening. Such internalised constraints constitute a durable mechanism of social reproduction. They shape self-perception and perceived capacity for agency in ways that cannot be addressed simply by opening a school or removing a legal barrier.

Ambedkar's own educational trajectory illustrates this dynamic. Having grown up under conditions shaped by untouchability, his education, first at Elphinstone College in Bombay, then at Columbia University in New York under the philosopher John Dewey, and subsequently at the London School of Economics, provided him with intellectual frameworks and methodological tools that informed his critique. His intellectual development exemplifies the transformative potential of critical education, understood not as the accumulation of information but as the formation of analytical capacity.

Ambedkar also acknowledged the limits of individual educational achievement as a strategy for social transformation. Individual advancement did not substitute for structural transformation. He cited the proper purpose of education as orienting a society "not to conserve and transmit the whole of its existing achievements, but only such as make for a better future society" (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 92). Education, in this framework, is oriented toward critical evaluation of inherited traditions and the reconstruction of social norms, but not their preservation.

The significance of Ambedkar's treatment of education for the broader argument of *Annihilation of Caste* warrants further emphasis, as it speaks directly to Research Objective 2 of this study. For Ambedkar, the denial of education was not one disadvantage among many but the mechanism through which all other forms of caste domination were sustained and reproduced. A community denied access to knowledge could not develop the analytical resources necessary to identify, name, and challenge the structures that oppressed it. Education, in this framework, was therefore emancipatory in a precise sense: it did not merely improve material conditions but transformed the relationship between the individual and the social order, enabling a passage from inherited subordination to conscious self-determination. Ambedkar's own life exemplified this conviction. His education at Columbia University under John Dewey, whose pragmatist philosophy treated education as the foundation of democratic life, provided him with the intellectual framework to articulate what he had experienced as a Dalit child in Satara: that the exclusion from knowledge was itself a form of violence, and that its remedy

required not merely access to existing institutions but the reconstruction of education around principles of critical inquiry, equality, and human dignity (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 68). This conception distinguishes Ambedkar's educational thought from both the instrumentalist view that treats education as a pathway to employment and the culturalist view that treats it as the transmission of inherited wisdom. For Ambedkar, education that merely reproduced existing social arrangements was not education at all but a form of ideological reproduction. Genuine education required the courage to evaluate inherited traditions and discard those that sustained injustice, however ancient or revered they might be.

Ambedkar argued that caste persisted less through overt coercion than through the restriction of rational inquiry. The denial of education and critical reasoning restricted both external mobility and internal autonomy. Education and rational inquiry functioned as interrelated components of emancipatory transformation, the restoration of intellectual autonomy constrained by hierarchical social arrangements.

3.7 Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity: Ambedkar's Normative Vision of Democratic Society

Interpretations of *Annihilation of Caste* often emphasise its critical dimension, and the critique is systematic and sustained. But the speech also articulates a positive normative framework, arguably even more central to its purpose. His argument was not purely oppositional; it articulated a positive normative framework grounded in liberty, equality, and fraternity. As he stated: "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity form an inseparable trinity" (Ambedkar, 1936/2024,
p. 60). He borrowed these terms from the French Revolution but engaged with them in light of the specific conditions of Indian society and the specific forms of suffering that caste had produced.

Ambedkar distinguished between formal legal freedom and substantive freedom. He was not referring merely to freedom from legal prohibition, the kind of formal freedom that derives from constitutional guarantees. He was articulating a more substantive conception of autonomy: the capacity to determine one's own life course rather than fulfilling a role fixed before birth. The caste system denied this kind of liberty to almost everyone within it. He conceptualised this condition as a form of social servitude: "It is 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" (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 32). The distinction he drew was between formal freedom, the absence of explicit legal prohibition, and substantive freedom, understood as meaningful autonomy within social life.

Ambedkar also drew on constitutional theory to explain why formal legal authority alone could not secure justice. Referring to A. V. Dicey's discussion of parliamentary sovereignty, he noted that even the most powerful legislature is constrained by external resistance from society and by internal limits arising from the moral character of the community in which it operates. Legal power, therefore, does not function in a vacuum; it is shaped by prevailing social beliefs and collective attitudes. This insight reinforced Ambedkar's broader argument that caste could not be abolished merely through legislation. Unless the moral foundations of society were transformed, legal institutions would remain limited in their capacity to produce substantive equality (Ambedkar, 1936/2024).

His treatment of equality was analytically significant. He did not claim that all human beings were equal in their abilities or circumstances, which would be empirically untenable. Rather, Ambedkar treated equality as a governing political principle necessary for any just society. He connected equality directly with freedom and the removal of domination between social groups. As he argued: *"I don't believe that we can build up a free society in India so long as there is a trace of the skilled treatment and suppression of one class by another. Believing as I do in a socialist ideal in available faith, I believe in perfect equality in the treatment of various classes and groups. I think that socialism offers the only programme for this as well as other problems."* (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 44).This formulation shows that Ambedkar understood equality not merely as legal status, but as the practical dismantling of structural oppression and unequal power relations.

The most theoretically distinctive element of his positive vision was his account of fraternity. For Ambedkar, fraternity was not merely an affective sentiment, a feeling of warmth toward fellow human beings. It was a structural condition of social life: the condition in which people genuinely lived alongside one another, shared experiences across social boundaries, and recognised each other as full human beings rather than as representatives of higher or lower castes. He described an ideal society as one characterised by openness and mobility, where experiences and values flowed freely between different groups — what he termed "varied and free points of contact with other modes of association" (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 32). He described this as "social endosmosis," a permeability through which different communities did not remain sealed off from one another but genuinely interacted and recognised each other as members of the same human world. Democracy, understood in this way, was more expansive than procedural democracy. It was "primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen" (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 61). A society in which people refused to eat together, in which marriage across caste lines was treated as a transgression, and in which those born into

certain castes were regarded as polluting those above them, such a society would lack the social preconditions for democratic functioning, regardless of how many rights its constitution guaranteed. Formal democratic institutions would remain normatively fragile without the social reality of people treating each other as equals in the texture of daily life.

Ambedkar also connected his vision of justice to the question of nationhood, and this part of his argument was particularly significant within debates surrounding nationalism. He argued that a society divided by caste could not genuinely function as a nation, because nationhood required a degree of solidarity and mutual identification that caste systematically prevented. The nationalist movement was asking people to feel loyalty to a national community that, in practice, refused to treat millions of them as full members. Political independence from British rule, without social transformation of the caste system, would not amount to substantive social liberation and would not constitute a stable foundation for national cohesion.

3.8 Limits of Reformist Proposals

Ambedkar argues that caste derives its normative authority from scriptural sanction and that meaningful reform requires repudiating the religious authority of the Shastras. *Annihilation of Caste* is methodologically rigorous in its systematic evaluation of reform proposals. Ambedkardoes not merely state his own position; he examines each major alternative proposal for addressing caste and identifies precisely why it is insufficient. This critique is not merely polemical. It reflects his genuine conviction that the failure of previous reform efforts had specific, identifiable causes rooted in a structural misdiagnosis of the problem, and that unless those misdiagnoses were corrected, subsequent reform efforts would reproduce similar structural limitations. as he argued: "You cannot build anything on the foundations of caste. You cannot build up a nation, you cannot build up a morality" (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 74). The system itself, not its particular expressions, was what required transformation.

The first proposal he examined was the abolition of sub-castes. The reasoning behind this was that sub-castes represented the finest and most recent divisions in the caste hierarchy, and that merging them into larger caste groups would constitute a manageable first step toward broader change. Ambedkar responded that this misidentified the causal structure of caste hierarchy. Abolishing sub-castes would not weaken the caste system; it would strengthen it. The likely outcome would be fewer but more consolidated caste groupings, each with a stronger collective identity and a sharper sense of its distinction from others. The fundamental logic of the system hereditary occupation, endogamous marriage, and the sacred ordering of groups in a hierarchy of purity and pollution would remain structurally preserved and potentially strengthened by the consolidation.

He then turned to inter-caste dining, which many social reformers had championed as a means of eroding the psychological barriers of ritual purity and pollution. Ambedkar did not dismiss this practice as unimportant, but argued that the evidence showed it to be insufficient. Such practices, while symbolically significant, did not alter structural endogamy. People could share a meal and then maintain all the appropriate distinctions of purity and pollution in their household, continuing to regard members of other castes with the full range of hierarchical attitudes that the system had produced.

The most sustained critique in this section was directed at the Arya Samaj's proposal for a reformed Chaturvarnya, a four-fold division of society based on individual worth and ability rather than hereditary birth. This proposal had prima facie plausibility: if the problem with the existing system was that it assigned roles by birth rather than merit, then a merit-based classification might appear rational and fair. Ambedkar critically evaluated this proposal on multiple levels. He argued that human capacities resist rigid four-fold classification, and that any system of varna classification would require a historically coercive enforcement mechanism, since people would not voluntarily accept being assigned to a lower category. Most fundamentally, he argued that the labels Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra were so thoroughly associated in the Hindu imagination with hereditary hierarchy that they could not be stripped of those associations by redefinition, however sincerely intended. Ambedkar further argued that proposals for a merit-based Chaturvarnya were institutionally unworkable because status in Hindu society had long been organised through birth rather than individual worth. Those who possessed hereditary privilege would be unlikely to surrender it voluntarily, while those historically assigned inferior status would have little reason to accept a system that continued hierarchical classification. As he observed, the existing Chaturvarnya was already based on birth, and any attempt to replace thousands of castes with four varnas would first require dismantling the caste order itself (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 64). The proposal was therefore internally contradictory: it sought to preserve the framework of varna while depending on the prior destruction of caste.

Having worked through each of these proposals and identified precisely where each broke down, Ambedkar arrived at the conclusion he regarded as necessary: the intervention he identified as capable of structural transformation was to destroy the religious authority that gave caste its power in the first place. Not to reinterpret the Shastras in a more favourable light, not to extract better passages while ignoring worse ones, but to deny that authority altogether. He was not calling for the end of spiritual life as such, but for a move away from a religion of inherited rules, one that happened, among other things, to prescribe a permanently hierarchical social order toward a religion of principles grounded in the equal dignity of all human beings.

That, he argued, was not merely a normative preference. It was the only alternative capable of effecting substantive social transformation.

3.9 Contemporary Relevance

It might be tempting to treat *Annihilation of Caste* as a historical intervention addressing problems that have, in significant measure, been institutionally addressed. India has a constitution that guarantees equality before the law and explicitly prohibits caste discrimination. Reservation policies exist in government employment and educational institutions. Ambedkar himself is commemorated on currency notes and in statues across the country. Many individuals from communities historically at the bottom of the caste hierarchy have reached positions of genuine power and influence. These represent significant institutional shifts, and they occurred in no small part because of the traditions of thought and activism that Ambedkar helped create.

However, caste has proven highly adaptive. It now operates through the justificatory vocabularies of merit, cultural tradition, and community values rather than announcing itself in explicitly religious terms. The social networks that historically gave upper-caste families access to education, land, influential contacts, and professional opportunities have translated, in the contemporary economy, into access to financial capital, professional referrals, and entry to desirable institutions, while those whose families were excluded from those networks for generations continue to face structurally unequal starting conditions. A.Deshpande (2011) characterises this as the 'grammar of caste', a set of underlying structural rules that continue to generate hierarchical outcomes even when the explicitly caste-based surface arrangements have been formally dismantled. Marriage patterns remain overwhelmingly endogamous in most communities. Residential segregation continues in many parts of the country. Violence against Dalits who assert their rights, who own land, who marry across caste lines, who aspire to positions the hierarchy assigns to others, continues to be documented in contemporary reporting and in data from the National Crime Records Bureau.

Ambedkar conceptualised caste as a system sustained through belief and consciousness as much as through external coercion. This is precisely what explains its persistence and adaptation. Hierarchical norms may be reproduced through new institutional forms even when older ones have been formally dismantled. The tools he developed, including the critique of how religious authority functions to legitimise social hierarchy, the analysis of how caste operates through consciousness rather than only through overt force, and the demand for a principle-based ethics that treats every person as equally deserving of dignity, remain analytically significant frameworks for understanding what continues and why.

Social movements for Dalit rights and dignity across India continue to draw on the vocabulary and moral framework that Ambedkar developed. The debates about reservation policy, the activism of Dalit women against the intersecting oppressions of caste and gender, and the assertion of Dalit cultural identity as a source of dignity rather than stigma, all reflect the continuing vitality of a tradition of thought that begins with the systematic critique of *Annihilation of Caste.*Ambedkar stated:

You must not forget that if you wish to bring about a breach in the system, then you have to apply the dynamite to the Vedas and the Shastras, which deny any part to reason, to the Vedas and Shastras, which deny any part to morality. You must destroy the Religion of the Shrutis and the Smritis. Nothing else will avail. (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 49)

These remarks underscore the radical nature of his proposal and its fundamental resistance to conciliatory reform. The standard they establish, of what genuine structural transformation would actually require to keep, remains the appropriate benchmark against which subsequent institutional developments must be measured.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the central themes of *Annihilation of Caste,* which are religion, caste, ethics, education, and justice as components of a coherent structural analysis rather than a collection of separate arguments. The problem is caste, but Ambedkar understood caste as something that reaches into every dimension of social, moral, and religious life. His response was correspondingly broad and systematic. He did not only describe the problem; he explained why it persisted despite decades of sincere reform effort. He examined every available alternative approach and identified why each was insufficient. He offered a clear account of what genuine transformation would require, despite its normative implications. And he articulated a positive vision of what a just society would look like, grounded in liberty, equality, and fraternity, where people are treated as full human beings regardless of the family into which they were born.

The enduring significance of the text lies in its refusal to dilute its critique. He resisted conciliatory reinterpretations of caste hierarchy. He did not suggest that incremental progress would add up, over time, to the kind of transformation that was needed. He did not reassure those who had perpetuated suffering that they could address it without fundamentally changing the way they lived and what they believed. This uncompromising stance generated opposition in its historical context and cost him the conference itself.

The text articulated structural injustice in explicit and systematic terms, naming what was happening, arguing that it was wrong, and refusing to accept that anything less than full structural transformation would be adequate. For this reason, the text retains contemporary analytical relevance. The following chapter examines how subsequent policy and constitutional frameworks in India have attempted to address the realities that Ambedkar laid bare, and assesses how far those efforts have succeeded or fallen short in meeting the standard that his vision of justice establishes.

Chapter IV

Constitutional and legislative responses to caste discrimination

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined Ambedkar's normative framework as presented in *Annihilation of Caste*, a framework built upon the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity. This framework did not simply call for the modification of caste-related practices but demanded the fundamental dismantling of the ideological and religious structures that have historically sustained the caste system. The present chapter shifts from this theoretical foundation to explore how the Indian state has responded, through its institutions and policies, to the conditions Ambedkar so precisely identified. Central to this inquiry is a question that Ambedkar's own framework renders inescapable: whether the constitutional provisions, legislative interventions, reservation policies, and welfare programmes introduced since independence have proven sufficient to address the structural problem he diagnosed, or whether they have largely treated its visible symptoms while leaving its deeper foundations intact.

This question is not merely academic. Ambedkar himself was the principal architect of India's Constitution, serving as the chairman of the drafting committee (Austin, 1966). He brought to that task precisely the analytical framework that *Annihilation of Caste* had developed, the understanding that formal legal equality is not the same as substantive social equality, and that a democratic order cannot be stable if the social conditions for democratic life are absent. His own subsequent assessment of the constitutional settlement was deeply ambivalent. In his final speech to the Constituent Assembly in November 1949, he warned that political democracy without social democracy was a structure built on contradiction, and that unless social and economic inequalities were addressed, those denied equality might blow up the political structure that democracy had built (Ambedkar, 1949). This chapter examines how far the institutional responses that followed have engaged with that warning. In doing so, this chapter directly addresses Research Question 4 posed in Chapter 1, which asked how government policies and constitutional provisions have addressed caste discrimination, while drawing on the thematic analysis of *Annihilation of Caste* undertaken in Chapter 3 as a normative benchmark.

4.2 The Constitutional Framework and *Annihilation of Caste*

India's Constitution, formally adopted on 26 November 1949 and brought into effect on 26 January 1950, stands as the most far-reaching effort in Indian history to construct a legal architecture founded on the principle of equality (Basu et al., 2015). The core equality provisions, situated primarily within Part III on Fundamental Rights, bear the clear imprint of Ambedkar's intellectual and political influence. Article 14 enshrines the right to equality before the law and the equal protection of laws for every person. As Ambedkar himself acknowledged, equality may not reflect existing social reality, yet it must be embraced as an indispensable governing principle (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 33). Article 14 thus functions as a normative political commitment rather than a description of prevailing conditions. However, as Basu et al. (2015) note, Article 14 remains grounded in a formal conception of equality, one that presupposes individuals are already comparably placed and therefore deserving of identical treatment. Ambedkar's framework operated on quite different terms, insisting that genuine equality demands active intervention to compensate for historically accumulated disadvantage. This more substantive interpretation was only partially incorporated into constitutional jurisprudence through the doctrine of substantive equality articulated in *Indra Sawhney v. Union of India* (1992).

Article 15: Prohibition of Discrimination

Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth, extending this protection to access to public facilities, including shops, restaurants, hotels, and places of entertainment (Government of India, 1950). This provision speaks directly to the social practices Ambedkar carefully documented, practices through which castes maintained rigid internal boundaries by regulating dining, marriage, and even modes of dress (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 25). Ambedkar's position was that such patterns of separation were not merely incidental social habits but the very mechanisms through which caste identity and hierarchy were actively reproduced. While Article 15 tackles the public dimensions of this separation by guaranteeing shared access to common spaces, its reach does not extend into the private domain, where endogamous marriage practices and domestic exclusion continue largely undisturbed (A.Deshpande, 2011; Jodhka, 2012).

Article 17: Abolition of Untouchability

Article 17 formally abolishes untouchability in all its forms and renders its practice an

unpunishable offence under law. This provision represents a distinctive constitutional intervention against ritually grounded social exclusion (Galanter, 1984). It targets what Ambedkar considered the most severe and dehumanising expression of caste hierarchy, namely the classification of entire communities as ritually impure and their consequent physical and social exclusion from mainstream society. Yet Ambedkar was clear-eyed about the limits of legal prohibition alone. In his view, untouchability could not be eliminated simply by banning its outward practice, because its roots lay in religious doctrine and belief rather than in social custom alone (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 42). Article 17, therefore, carries an inherent structural limitation: it targets the practice without engaging the religious and ideological framework that generates and justifies that practice in the first place. Empirical research conducted by Shah et al. (2006) and Human Rights Watch (1999) confirms that untouchability has persisted across rural India even after more than seven decades of constitutional prohibition, a finding that lends weight to Ambedkar's argument that legal interdiction, absent deeper doctrinal transformation, remains structurally insufficient.

Part IV: Directive Principles of State Policy

Part IV of the Constitution, containing the Directive Principles of State Policy, reflects Ambedkar's understanding that political democracy required social and economic foundations (Pylee, 2004). Article 38 directs the state to promote the welfare of the people by securing a social order in which justice, social, economic, and political, informs all institutions of national life. Article 39 directs the state toward equal pay for equal work, the right to an adequate livelihood, and the prevention of the concentration of wealth. Article 46 directs the state to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, particularly the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. This provision maps onto Ambedkar's broader argument that caste operates through the denial of material and educational resources, not only through ideological assertion:

"He was prohibited from acquiring knowledge lest he should keep a steady vigil regarding his interests" (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 68).

The Directive Principles thus identify the dimensions of caste disadvantage, educational exclusion, economic marginalisation, and occupational restriction that the Constitution commits the state to addressing. However, the non-justiciable character of Part IV means that these provisions operate as guidelines rather than as enforceable rights (Jain, 2010). Ambedkar himself acknowledged this limitation in his final address to the Constituent Assembly and stated:

On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics,

we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. (Ambedkar, 1949).

The constitutional framework has demonstrated important limitations when assessed against Ambedkar's standard. The first limitation concerns the distinction between prohibition and transformation. The Constitution prohibits specific practices associated with caste discrimination, including untouchability, discrimination in access to public spaces, and denial of equal opportunity in employment, but does not directly address the ideological and religious foundations of caste that Ambedkar identified as its primary sustaining mechanism. Article 17's abolition of untouchability, for instance, targets a specific practice rather than the belief system that produces and legitimises that practice (A.Deshpande, 2011). This limitation corresponds directly to the distinction drawn in Chapter 3 (Section 3.2) between a "religion of rules" and a "religion of principles."Ambedkar argued that a normative order governed by inherited rules could not generate internal mechanisms for self-correction. The constitutional framework, by prohibiting specific rules without addressing the underlying normative structure, replicates precisely this limitation.

The second limitation concerns enforcement. Constitutional provisions are only as effective as the institutional mechanisms through which they are implemented. The persistence of caste-based discrimination across multiple dimensions of Indian social life indicates that the gap between constitutional guarantee and social reality has remained substantial (Human Rights Watch, 1999). Courts have interpreted constitutional provisions expansively, particularly through the doctrine of substantive equality developed in cases such as *Indra Sawhney v. Union of India* (1992), but judicial enforcement of anti-discrimination norms has been inconsistent, and access to judicial remedies has itself been shaped by caste-based inequalities in legal literacy, resources, and social power (Mendelsohn & Vicziany, 1998).

The third limitation concerns the scope of the constitutional framework. The Constitution addresses discrimination by the state and in public spaces, but caste discrimination operates most pervasively in the private sphere, in marriage decisions, in residential choices, in hiring practices in the informal economy, and in interpersonal social interactions (Shah et al., 2006). The constitutional framework's reach into these domains is limited, and the most durable mechanisms of caste reproduction, including endogamy, social exclusion, and the internalisation of hierarchical norms, operate largely outside the reach of formal legal prohibition (Jodhka, 2012).

4.3 Legislative Framework

The Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 (originally the Untouchability Offences Act) operationalised Article 17 by criminalising untouchability in access to public spaces, water, and religious institutions (Galanter, 1984). While it directly addressed ritual exclusion condemned by Ambedkar, its limited success reflects a deeper problem he identified: caste persists through internalised belief systems. As Ambedkar (1936/2024) argued, the caste system constitutes a structure of graded inequality arranged along hierarchies of reverence and contempt (p. 52). Legal prohibition alone cannot dismantle a system sustained by social conviction, as reflected in persistently low conviction rates (Human Rights Watch, 1999).

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, expanded the scope of offences, strengthened penalties, and established special courts (Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, 2019). This aligns with Ambedkar's analysis of coercion as central to caste enforcement, specifically his observation that social excommunication represents the most severe punishment the caste system can impose (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 59). His insight extends beyond social exclusion to physical violence, which operates as a mechanism of enforcement when caste hierarchies are challenged (National Crime Records Bureau [NCRB], 2022; Rathore, 2017; Teltumbde, 2010).

The Hindu Code Bills (1955–1956) represented the most direct legislative attempt to address caste through reform of family and gender relations. Ambedkar explicitly linked caste reproduction to endogamy, identifying intermarriage as the most meaningful remedy for dismantling caste (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 75). However, these reforms were significantly diluted during the legislative process (Ambedkar & Rege, 2013), contributing to Ambedkar's resignation (Rodrigues, 2019). The enacted laws addressed surface-level inequalities but left the deeper religious and patriarchal structures largely intact.

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, addresses caste reproduction through educational exclusion. Ambedkar (1936/2024) emphasised this mechanism, noting that historically, subordinated communities were denied access to knowledge specifically to prevent them from becoming aware of and asserting their own interests (p. 111). While the Act ensures formal access, caste-based discrimination persists within schools (Thorat & Sadana, 2009). Ambedkar's broader vision of education as a tool not merely to preserve knowledge but to transform society remains relevant: in his view, education should serve the construction of a better future rather than the conservation of existing arrangements (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 53).

4.4 Reservation Policies and Structural Limits

India's reservation framework, covering Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and Economically Weaker Sections, constitutes one of the most extensive affirmative action regimes globally (Deshpande & Weisskopf, 2014; Jaffrelot, 2003). Ambedkar himself played a central role in its constitutional foundation through the Poona Pact (1932). However, he cautioned against mistaking remedial measures for structural transformation, warning that nothing built upon the foundations of caste could endure without eventually cracking (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 74).

Reservations have significantly expanded access to education and public employment. However, they do not dismantle the caste's underlying logic. Empirical evidence demonstrates persistent discrimination in hiring practices (Thorat & Attewell, 2007) and the continuation of informal hierarchies within workplaces (A.Deshpande, 2011). Thus, the limitation of reservation lies not in its ineffectiveness but in its partial scope: it addresses access but not endogamy, ideological legitimation, or the everyday reproduction of caste.

Ambedkar also explained why caste has historically resisted broad-based collective opposition. Unlike class systems that may generate common solidarity among the disadvantaged, caste distributes status and privilege unevenly across multiple ranked groups. As he observed, the graded allocation of social and religious rights made calls for unified mobilisation ineffective, since different castes feared losing their relative prestige and advantages if the system were dismantled (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 52). This insight remains relevant to reservation policy debates. While affirmative action has expanded opportunities for historically excluded communities, caste fragmentation continues to limit wider solidarities capable of challenging the hierarchy as a whole. The persistence of internal competition among ranked groups helps explain why institutional reform often advances incrementally rather than through broad transformative consensus.

In Ambedkar's framework, the *annihilation of caste* requires transformation across all these dimensions simultaneously. Legal and policy interventions, while necessary, remain insufficient without broader social and ideological change.

4.5 Welfare Schemes and the Limits of Structural Change

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005, addresses caste-based limits on occupational mobility by guaranteeing wage employment. This reflects Ambedkar's (1936/2024) critique that the caste system functions not as a division of

labour but as a division of labourers whose roles are fixed by birth (p. 46). While MGNREGA has improved rural wages and reduced distress (Dutta et al., 2012; Khera, 2011), caste hierarchies continue within worksites, where tasks are often allocated along traditional lines (Thorat & Kumar, 2008). As Ambedkar observed, caste divides not merely labour but labourers themselves, ranking them in a graded order of social worth (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 47). Employment provision, therefore, does not in itself dismantle the hierarchical social relations through which caste operates.

The Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (PMAY) improves access to housing but does not alter caste-based spatial segregation. Ambedkar's observation that Hindu society constitutes little more than a collection of castes (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 51) reflects how caste is embedded in the physical layout of villages. PMAY largely builds within existing segregated settlements, reinforcing rather than transforming spatial divisions (Patel, 2021). Implementation gaps further limit its impact (Drèze & Sen, 2013).

Post-Matric Scholarship schemes reduce financial barriers to education, which Ambedkar saw as central to social change, particularly given his insistence that the denial of knowledge was historically a mechanism for maintaining the subordination of lower-caste communities. However, delays in funding and continued discrimination within institutions weaken their effectiveness (Parliamentary Standing Committee, 2021; Deshpande & Zacharias, 2013). Formal access does not ensure equal experience.

The Scheduled Caste Sub-Plan aims to ensure fair allocation of development funds, but is often implemented only formally rather than substantively (Planning Commission, 2013). This reflects Ambedkar's broader insight that unjust social relations shape institutional outcomes: in his view, no individual can act morally when the fundamental basis of the relationship within which they operate is itself unjust (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 63). Local power structures continue to influence how benefits are distributed (Mosse, 2018).

Across welfare and policy interventions, a clear pattern emerges. These measures have improved material conditions, including employment, housing, and education, but they do not transform the structural basis of caste. Ambedkar's warning that nothing built on caste's foundations can endure remains instructive (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 74). Policies reduce inequality but do not remove its underlying logic. Caste continues through social norms, spatial segregation, and everyday practices that policy does not directly address (A.Deshpande, 2011; Guru & Sarukkai, 2018; Teltumbde, 2018).

Thus, while welfare schemes represent meaningful progress, they remain limited in scope. Ending caste, in Ambedkar's framework, requires deeper social and ideological change

beyond material and institutional reform.

4.6 Synthesising Assessment: Achievements and Structural Gaps

An honest assessment of seven decades of constitutional provisions, legislation, reservation policies, and welfare schemes must acknowledge genuine achievements. The constitutional abolition of untouchability established an important normative baseline and created legal resources for advocacy and litigation (Galanter, 1984). Reservation policies have enabled the emergence of Dalit and Adivasi professionals, civil servants, academics, and politicians who constitute a genuine transformation of the representational landscape and who have used their positions to advance the claims of their communities (Jaffrelot, 2003). Welfare schemes, despite implementation failures, have reached tens of millions of people and have provided material support that has reduced the most extreme destitution (Drèze & Sen, 2013)

The Atrocities Act has criminalised violence against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and has created accountability mechanisms that, however imperfectly implemented, represent a significant departure from the legal impunity that historically characterised such violence (Rathore, 2017).

These are real achievements, and they should be recognised as such. They occurred in no small part because of the intellectual and political traditions that Ambedkar created, and the communities he spoke for have used the institutional spaces he helped create to advance their claims for dignity and equality (Omvedt, 1994).

However, when measured against the standard that Ambedkar's normative framework establishes, the overall policy architecture reveals a structural gap that is not merely a matter of implementation failure. The gap reflects a fundamental difference between what Ambedkar argued was necessary and what the policy framework has attempted. Ambedkar's central argument was that caste derives its power from religious sanction and ideological legitimacy, and that meaningful transformation requires engaging with these foundations directly (Ambedkar, 1936/2024). The constitutional and policy framework has addressed the legal and material dimensions of caste inequality, prohibiting discrimination, criminalising violence, and providing economic support, while leaving largely untouched the ideological and social dimensions that Ambedkar identified as primary. This is not a failure of implementation; it is a structural feature of the policy approach, which treats caste as a social phenomenon susceptible to management through law and redistribution rather than as an ideological and religious order requiring the kind of fundamental critique that *Annihilation of Caste* demanded (A.Deshpande, 2011; Thorat & Kumar, 2008).

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the constitutional, legislative, and policy responses to caste discrimination in India, assessing them against the normative standard established by Ambedkar's framework in *Annihilation of Caste*. The assessment reveals a consistent pattern: the policy architecture has addressed legal and material dimensions of caste inequality with some effectiveness, while leaving substantially undisturbed the ideological, religious, and social dimensions that Ambedkar identified as the primary sustaining mechanisms of caste.

Constitutional provisions have established important formal commitments to equality and created legal resources for advocacy, but their reach into the private sphere and into the normative foundations of caste is limited (Galanter, 1984). The Atrocities Act has criminalised caste-based violence but has not addressed the structural conditions that produce it (Rathore, 2017). Reservation policies have enabled significant representational transformation but have not engaged with the mechanisms of caste reproduction that operate outside the domains of government employment and public education (A.Deshpande, 2011). Welfare schemes have provided material support to communities in acute need but have been mediated by the caste based power relations they were intended to address, limiting their effectiveness and failing to engage the social dimensions of caste inequality (Drèze & Sen, 2013)

The gap between Ambedkar's vision of full structural transformation, grounded in liberty, equality, and fraternity as substantive conditions of social life rather than formal legal guarantees, and what the policy architecture has attempted reflects a fundamental tension in the Indian democratic project (Omvedt, 1994). The Constitution that Ambedkar crafted contains within it the aspiration for the kind of society he envisioned in *Annihilation of Caste*. The policy framework built around that Constitution has addressed important dimensions of the problem he identified without engaging its foundations. The following chapter turns to the implications of this assessment, examining what *Ambedkar*'s *Annihilation of Caste's*
continuing relevance means for understanding the gap between India's constitutional aspiration and its social reality, and what a policy framework adequate to Ambedkar's standard would require.

Chapter 3 (Section 3.6) demonstrated that Ambedkar's vision of a just society rested on 'social endosmosis,' a genuine permeability between communities characterised by shared experience and mutual recognition. The policy architecture examined in this chapter has not engaged with that vision in any systematic way. A framework adequate to Ambedkar's standard would need to address not only material deprivation and legal exclusion but also the ideological,

religious, and interpersonal dimensions through which caste reproduces itself, the very dimensions that Chapters 2 and 3 identified as most resistant to institutional intervention.

Chapter V

Discussion, conclusion, and recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter consolidates the central arguments developed throughout the preceding chapters and assesses the continuing relevance of B. R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* within the broader context of Indian democratic thought and contemporary social policy. Chapter 1 established the historical background, conceptual framework, and methodological foundations of the study, while also setting out the four research questions that guided the analysis. Chapter 2 examined the existing body of scholarship and positioned Ambedkar's work within wider debates concerning religion, democracy, endogamy, welfare, and social exclusion. Chapter 3 undertook a close thematic reading of *Annihilation of Caste*, demonstrating how Ambedkar connects caste with religion, education, ethics, social reproduction, and the democratic principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Chapter 4 then evaluated more than seven decades of constitutional, legislative, and welfare-based responses to caste discrimination in India, measuring their effectiveness against Ambedkar's analytical framework.

Drawing these strands together, the present chapter summarises the principal findings of the study, relates them to the original research questions, considers their implications for democratic theory and public policy, outlines the limitations of the research, proposes areas for future inquiry, and concludes with reflections on the enduring significance of *Annihilation of Caste* for the unfinished project of Indian democracy.

5.2 Key Findings Mapped to Research Questions

The four research questions identified in Chapter 1 are addressed below on the basis of the analysis developed throughout the study. Together, these findings demonstrate both the continuing analytical power of Ambedkar's thought and the limitations of contemporary responses to caste inequality.

Before turning to the broader implications of these findings, it is necessary to confirm that each of the four research objectives established in Chapter 1 has been substantively

addressed. Research Objective 1, which sought to explore the key ideas Ambedkar presented in *Annihilation of Caste* and especially his challenge to the religious and social foundations of caste, was addressed through the thematic analysis in Chapter 3 (Sections 3.2–3.5), which demonstrated that Ambedkar's critique operates simultaneously across religious, ethical, and social dimensions, treating caste as a normative order sustained by scriptural authority rather than by social custom alone.

Research Objective 2, which sought to examine Ambedkar's emphasis on education as a means of social and moral emancipation leading to equality and self-respect, was addressed primarily through Chapter 3 (Section 3.6), which analysed Ambedkar's distinctive conception of education. The study found that Ambedkar understood education not merely as the acquisition of literacy or vocational skills but as the formation of critical intellectual autonomy, the capacity to question inherited traditions rather than reproduce them. He argued that the systematic denial of education to subordinate castes was not an incidental disadvantage but a deliberate mechanism of social control designed to prevent the development of the critical reasoning necessary for sustained resistance (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 68). His own educational trajectory, from Mhow to Columbia University and the London School of Economics, embodied this conviction. Chapter 4 (Section 4.3) further demonstrated that contemporary educational policy, including the Right to Education Act (2009) and post-matric scholarship schemes, has secured formal access to educational institutions but has not engaged with the substantive conception of education that Ambedkar articulated: education as the formation of persons capable of independent moral and political judgement, not merely as the transmission of existing knowledge.

Research Objective 3, concerning Ambedkar's ideas about equality, liberty, and fraternity, was addressed through Chapter 3 (Section 3.7), which reconstructed his normative vision of democratic society as resting on these three principles as an"inseparable trinity." Research Objective 4, concerning government policies and constitutional provisions, was addressed through the entirety of Chapter 4, which assessed seven decades of institutional responses against the normative standard that Ambedkar's framework establishes. The study concludes that all four objectives have been substantively engaged, and that the findings across chapters are mutually reinforcing: the limitations of post-independence policy (RO4) are rendered intelligible precisely by the analytical framework that Ambedkar's treatment of religion (RO1), education (RO2), and democratic principles (RO3) provides.

Research Question 1: What are the Main Ideas About Caste in *Annihilation of Caste*?

The analysis undertaken in Chapter 3 established that *Annihilation of Caste* presents a comprehensive and interconnected critique rather than a single argument about social reform. Ambedkar rejects the common claim that caste represents a functional division of labour. Instead, he characterises it as a division of labourers organised through a system of graded hierarchy in which status, occupation, and dignity are unequally distributed (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, pp. 46–52). In this sense, caste is not simply an economic arrangement but a moral and social order that assigns unequal worth to human beings.

The study further found that Ambedkar views caste as self-reproducing through ideological and psychological mechanisms as much as through formal restrictions. It is sustained through socialisation, inherited norms, marriage practices, and everyday acceptance of hierarchy. Consequently, caste cannot be dismantled solely through legal reform or economic change. Ambedkar places particular emphasis on inter-caste marriage and the rejection of scriptural authority as necessary steps toward structural transformation.

A key conclusion of this study is that these elements form a coherent theoretical framework and should not be separated. Reformist approaches that condemn untouchability while leaving caste boundaries intact, or that advocate equality while preserving endogamy, fail to address the deeper structures of exclusion that Ambedkar identified.

Research Question 2: What is the Relationship Between Caste, Religion, and Social Hierarchy?

One of Ambedkar's most significant contributions, examined in Chapter 3, is his argument that caste is not merely associated with Hinduism but is historically reinforced through religious doctrine. Through his engagement with texts such as the *Manusmriti* and the *Dharmashastras*, Ambedkar contends that scriptural authority has played a central role in legitimising hierarchy and preserving social separation across generations.

The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 supports the continuing relevance of this claim. Scholars such as A.Deshpande (2011) describe caste as a structuring grammar of Indian social life, while Ilaiah (2005) highlights the enduring influence of Brahmanical systems of knowledge and cultural authority. Jha (2019) further demonstrates the seriousness and rigour of Ambedkar's textual engagement with Hindu religious sources.

The study further concludes that attempts to detach caste from its religious foundations have often underestimated the normative power of doctrine and tradition. Whether expressed through Gandhian reinterpretations of *varnashrama* or through secular reformism that avoids theological critique, such approaches have frequently failed to confront the moral legitimacy through which caste reproduces itself. Ambedkar's distinction between a "religion of rules" and a "religion of principles" remains especially useful in understanding why symbolic reform without doctrinal change has had limited impact.

Research Question 3: How do Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity Shape Ambedkar's Democratic Vision?

The study found that Ambedkar's critique of caste is inseparable from a positive and substantive conception of democracy. As explored in Chapter 3, liberty, equality, and fraternity are not treated as abstract ideals but as mutually dependent conditions necessary for democratic life. Ambedkar's description of them as an "inseparable trinity" reflects his belief that none can exist meaningfully in the absence of the others (Ambedkar, 1936/2024, p. 32).

Within this framework, liberty refers to more than formal freedom under law. It signifies the practical ability of individuals to shape their lives free from inherited restrictions and social domination. Equality is understood not as a denial of difference, but as a political principle requiring equal status and equal concern within institutions. Fraternity, perhaps the most neglected of the three, refers to a sense of shared social belonging that transcends caste boundaries. Ambedkar captures this through the idea of "social endosmosis," in which communities remain open to one another rather than socially sealed.

The study concludes that Ambedkar's understanding of democracy extends far beyond electoral procedures or constitutional design. His description of democracy as "a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" offers a demanding standard by which democratic societies should be judged. This remains particularly relevant where formal democratic institutions coexist with persistent social exclusion.

Research Question 4: How Effective Have Government Policies and Constitutional Measures Been in Addressing Caste Discrimination?

Chapter 4 examined the constitutional and policy framework developed in post-independence India to address caste inequality. The study found that these measures have generated significant achievements. These include the constitutional abolition of untouchability, the enactment of protective legislation such as the Protection of Civil Rights Act (1955) and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (1989), the expansion of political representation through reservation policies, and the delivery of material support

through welfare schemes such as MGNREGA and the Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana (Deshpande & Weisskopf, 2014; Jaffrelot, 2003).

At the same time, the findings reveal important limitations. While state policy has addressed legal exclusion and some forms of economic disadvantage, it has been less successful in transforming the underlying social relations that sustain caste. Marriage endogamy remains widespread (Ray et al., 2017), residential segregation persists across both rural and urban spaces (Jodhka, 2012), and caste-based violence continues at levels inconsistent with a fully transformed democratic order (National Crime Records Bureau, 2022).

The study, therefore, concludes that the gap between constitutional promise and social reality cannot be explained solely through weak implementation. It also reflects a deeper structural problem: caste has often been treated as a matter of administrative classification or distributive justice, rather than as an entrenched ideological system requiring broader social transformation.

5.3 Implications for Democratic Theory and Social Policy

The findings of this study carry several broader implications for both democratic theory and practical policy-making. First, they reinforce the argument that democracy cannot be understood solely in procedural or institutional terms. Elections, constitutional safeguards, and representative structures remain essential, but they are insufficient where deep social hierarchies continue to shape access, dignity, and participation. Ambedkar's warning that political democracy cannot endure without social democracy remains highly relevant in this regard (Ambedkar, 1949). His thought anticipates contemporary democratic theory, which increasingly recognises that citizenship requires not only legal rights but also social recognition and material inclusion (Jayal, 2013).

Second, the findings suggest that policy interventions which ignore the ideological foundations of inequality are likely to reproduce those inequalities within their own operation. As examined in Chapter 4, welfare schemes and employment programmes have often functioned within pre-existing caste relations rather than transforming them. Instances of caste-based task allocation

in MGNREGA worksites, elite capture of benefits at the local level, and discriminatory practices within educational institutions illustrate how formal policy can be limited by informal social power. The issue, therefore, is not the failure of state intervention as such, but the failure to engage with the social structures through which policy is implemented.

Third, the study supports Ambedkar's broader claim that caste cannot be dismantled through isolated reform. Legal protection without social integration, economic redistribution without

dignity, or representation without structural equality are each incomplete responses. Meaningful transformation requires simultaneous movement across legal, ideological, economic, and interpersonal domains. Without such an integrated approach, caste is likely to adapt rather than disappear.

Finally, these findings also contribute to wider debates beyond India. Ambedkar's analysis offers a valuable framework for understanding how democratic institutions may coexist with deeply embedded forms of inherited inequality. In this sense, his work speaks not only to caste but to broader global questions concerning race, class, status, and exclusion.

5.4 Policy Recommendations

While this study is primarily theoretical and interpretive in nature, its findings allow several cautious policy recommendations to be proposed.

First, stronger enforcement of existing anti-discrimination legislation is essential. Laws such as the Protection of Civil Rights Act and the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act remain important instruments, but their effectiveness is often weakened by delays, underreporting, low conviction rates, and institutional bias. Independent monitoring bodies, time-bound case disposal, and greater accountability within policing and judicial systems would significantly strengthen implementation.

Second, affirmative action policy requires reconsideration in light of changing labour markets. As public-sector employment declines relative to private-sector growth, reservation limits primarily to state employment risks becoming less effective over time. Extending anti discrimination obligations and forms of affirmative inclusion to large private employers and private educational institutions deserves serious consideration (Thorat & Attewell, 2007).

Third, welfare policy should move beyond material assistance alone and incorporate explicit goals of social integration. Housing programmes, for example, should avoid reproducing segregated settlement patterns. Public employment schemes should prohibit caste-based division of tasks, while educational institutions should incorporate anti-caste and equality

based curricular content that addresses prejudice at an early stage.

Fourth, institutional support for inter-caste marriage should be expanded. Given Ambedkar's recognition of endogamy as central to caste reproduction, measures such as financial assistance, legal protection, housing support, and safeguards against violence or harassment are especially significant.

Fifth, better public data on caste inequality is urgently needed. Regular publication of disaggregated information relating to education, employment, income, health, and criminal justice outcomes would improve policy design and public accountability. In this context, renewed debate around caste enumeration in the census remains important.

These recommendations should be understood not as complete solutions, but as practical steps consistent with the broader structural concerns identified in this study.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

Several limitations of the present research should be acknowledged.

First, the study is interpretive rather than empirical. Its conclusions regarding contemporary caste realities rely primarily on existing quantitative and qualitative scholarship rather than original fieldwork or primary data collection. Although this allows broad synthesis, it limits the ability to test claims directly through lived experience or institutional observation.

Second, the focus on *Annihilation of Caste* necessarily narrows engagement with Ambedkar's wider intellectual corpus. His writings on economics, constitutionalism, women's rights, labour, and Buddhism offer additional insights that would enrich and potentially complicate the analysis presented here (Rodrigues, 2019).

Third, the research relies predominantly on English-language scholarship. This means that important contributions in Marathi, Hindi, Tamil, and other Indian languages, particularly within Dalit intellectual traditions, have not been engaged in full depth.

Fourth, the study focuses mainly on contemporary India, especially developments since 2000. It therefore does not undertake sustained comparative analysis with caste-like systems elsewhere or with parallel histories of racial and status-based hierarchy.

Fifth, although the study refers to thinkers such as Gandhi, it does not systematically compare Ambedkar's framework with other traditions of anti-caste or democratic thought. Such a comparison would offer a richer intellectual context for evaluating both the originality and limitations of Ambedkar's position.

Recognising these limitations does not diminish the value of the study; rather, it clarifies its

scope and points toward productive areas for further research.

5.6 Directions for Future Research

The findings of this study indicate several promising directions for future scholarship.

First, further empirical research is required on the implementation of anti-caste legislation and reservation policies at the state, district, and local levels. While constitutional safeguards and statutory protections exist, their outcomes often vary significantly across regions and institutions. Ethnographic studies, case-based research, and mixed-method investigations would help explain how formal rights are translated or denied in everyday practice.

Second, the relationship between caste and digital modernity deserves sustained attention. Emerging evidence suggests that caste discrimination is increasingly reproduced through social media networks, online matrimonial platforms, digital recruitment systems, and algorithmic decision-making (Dhanda, 2020). These developments raise important questions about how older hierarchies adapt within new technological environments.

Third, comparative research between caste and other systems of durable inequality would be valuable. Examining caste alongside racial hierarchy in the United States and Brazil, ethnic exclusion in other societies, or class-based marginalisation in post-socialist contexts may clarify both the distinctive features of caste and the broader mechanisms through which inherited inequality is maintained. Such inquiry would also reflect Ambedkar's own comparative method, particularly his engagement with slavery and race.

Fourth, greater scholarly attention should be given to intersectionality. Future work should examine how caste interacts with gender, sexuality, disability, and religious minority status. Existing scholarship on Dalit women by Rege (2000; 2013) and Paik (2014) has already demonstrated the importance of analysing multiple and overlapping forms of disadvantage. Expanding this line of inquiry remains essential.

Fifth, recent constitutional and legal developments require systematic evaluation. Measures such as the 103rd Constitutional Amendment introducing reservation for Economically Weaker Sections, as well as subsequent developments in anti-atrocity legislation, should be examined in terms of both legal reasoning and practical outcomes.

Finally, further textual and philosophical engagement with Ambedkar's later writings would significantly deepen understanding of his intellectual trajectory. Works such as *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (1957), alongside his speeches and unpublished manuscripts, may reveal continuities and shifts in his thinking on morality, democracy, religion, and social

transformation.

5.7 Conclusion

Nearly a century after its publication, *Annihilation of Caste* remains one of the most powerful and enduring works in the history of Indian political thought. Its significance lies not only in the force of its language, but in the depth and coherence of the structural critique it advances. Few texts have confronted so directly the relationship between social hierarchy, moral legitimacy, and democratic possibility.

This study has argued that Ambedkar's central insights retain profound contemporary relevance. Although caste has changed in form, it has not disappeared. In many contexts, explicit exclusion has given way to subtler practices of social closure. Occupational barriers have often shifted into network-based privilege, spatial segregation has moved into new urban forms, and inherited status continues to shape opportunity, recognition, and belonging. Caste has therefore adapted to modernity rather than being overcome by it.

At the same time, the study recognises the real achievements of constitutional democracy in India. Legal equality, affirmative action, expanded representation, and welfare protections have produced significant gains for historically marginalised communities. These developments should not be underestimated. Yet they have not completed the democratic transformation Ambedkar envisioned.

The broader implication is clear: democracy cannot be measured only by institutions, elections, or formal rights. Where deeply embedded hierarchies continue to regulate social life, democracy remains partial and uneven. Ambedkar understood this with unusual clarity. His demand was not merely for legal reform, but for the reconstruction of society on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity as lived realities.

The project outlined in *Annihilation of Caste,* therefore, remains unfinished. Its continuing relevance lies in reminding contemporary India that political democracy without social transformation is inherently fragile. To engage seriously with Ambedkar today is not simply to honour an historical figure, but to confront the unresolved contradictions of democracy itself.

This study has sought to demonstrate both the enduring value of Ambedkar's framework and the considerable distance that remains before its emancipatory promise is fully realised.

SUMMARY OF THE DISSERTATION

Brief Background

B. R. Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) remains one of the most significant critiques of caste and social inequality in modern Indian political thought. Written originally as a speech for the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal conference, the text challenged the religious, social, and ideological foundations of caste hierarchy and argued that genuine democracy could not exist within a society structured by graded inequality. Despite constitutional safeguards, legal reforms, and welfare measures introduced after independence, caste continues to shape social relations, dignity, access to opportunity, and political participation in contemporary India. Against this background, the present study revisits *Annihilation of Caste* to examine its continuing relevance in the twenty-first century.

Statement of the Problem

Although caste discrimination has been constitutionally prohibited and various policies have been introduced to address historical inequality, caste continues to persist in both visible and subtle forms across Indian society. Existing scholarship often treats Ambedkar primarily as a historical figure while giving limited attention to the continuing analytical relevance of *Annihilation of Caste* for understanding contemporary caste relations and democratic contradictions. Moreover, studies frequently analyse constitutional measures and policy interventions separately from Ambedkar's theoretical framework. The present study addresses this gap by critically examining how Ambedkar's arguments continue to illuminate the structural, ideological, and institutional persistence of caste in contemporary India.

Objectives and Research Questions

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the key ideas Ambedkar presented in *Annihilation of Caste*, especially how he challenges the religious and social reasons behind the caste system.
2. To examine Ambedkar's emphasis on education as a means of social and moral

emancipation leading to equality and self-respect.

3. To examine Ambedkar's ideas about equality, liberty, and fraternity as the foundation of a truly democratic and humane society.
4. To study the various major government policies and constitutional provisions introduced over time to tackle caste discrimination.

Research Questions

1. How does Ambedkar connect religion, ethics, and education to his call for the annihilation of caste?
2. How does Ambedkar link caste to religion and social hierarchy?
3. What do equality, liberty, and fraternity mean in Ambedkar's vision of a democratic society?
4. How have government policies and constitutional provisions addressed caste discrimination?

Methodology Snapshot

The study employed a qualitative and interpretive methodology centred on close textual analysis of *Annihilation of Caste*. The dissertation examined Ambedkar's arguments through thematic analysis while also engaging with secondary scholarship, constitutional provisions, legislative measures, reservation policies, and welfare schemes. The study was guided by an Ambedkarite theoretical framework supported by insights from Critical Theory, enabling caste to be analysed as a structural, ideological, social, and institutional phenomenon. Since the study focused primarily on political and social theory, it did not involve fieldwork, interviews, or empirical surveys.

Main Findings

The study found that Ambedkar's critique of caste remains highly relevant in contemporary India because caste has adapted to democratic and modern institutional structures rather than disappearing altogether. The thematic analysis undertaken in Chapter III demonstrated that caste, in Ambedkar's framework, operates not merely as a social custom but as a religiously sanctioned and socially reproduced system of graded inequality. The analysis highlighted Ambedkar's critique of scriptural authority, his distinction between a "religion of rules" and a "religion of principles," his critique of reformist ethics, and his emphasis on education as a means of emancipation, dignity, and critical consciousness. The chapter further demonstrated

that Ambedkar's democratic vision was grounded in liberty, equality, and fraternity as lived social principles rather than merely constitutional ideals.

The dissertation further found that constitutional provisions, reservation policies, anti discrimination laws, and welfare schemes have achieved important progress in addressing legal and material inequalities. However, these interventions have been less successful in transforming the deeper ideological and social foundations that sustain caste hierarchy. The study demonstrated that caste continues to persist through endogamy, social conditioning, unequal access to opportunities, residential segregation, and everyday practices of exclusion. Ambedkar's concept of graded inequality therefore remains significant for understanding how caste reproduces itself within democratic institutions and modern social structures.

The study additionally found that education, in Ambedkar's framework, functions not simply as a means of economic mobility but as a process of emancipation, self-respect, and democratic transformation.

Final Conclusion

The dissertation concludes that *Annihilation of Caste* continues to function as a powerful framework for understanding the contradictions of democracy and social inequality in twenty first-century India. Ambedkar's analysis demonstrates that political democracy cannot remain stable without social democracy, since constitutional rights alone cannot dismantle deeply embedded structures of caste hierarchy. Although post-independence India has made significant constitutional and legislative advances, caste continues to persist in transformed and institutionalised forms.

The study ultimately argues that Ambedkar's vision of liberty, equality, fraternity, constitutional morality, and human dignity remains essential for imagining a more just and democratic society. *Annihilation of Caste* therefore must be understood not merely as a historical text but as an enduring theoretical and political intervention that continues to illuminate the challenges of achieving substantive equality and social transformation in contemporary India.

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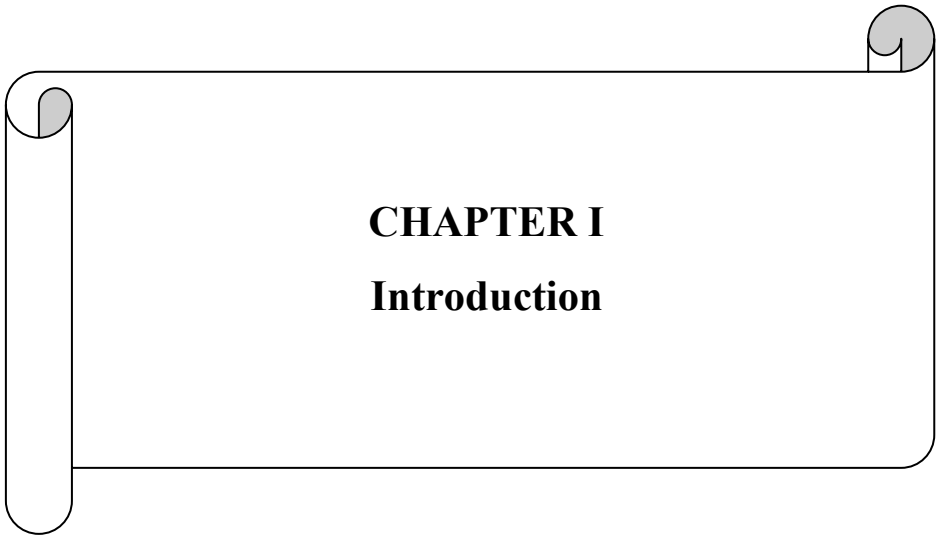
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

CHAPTER III

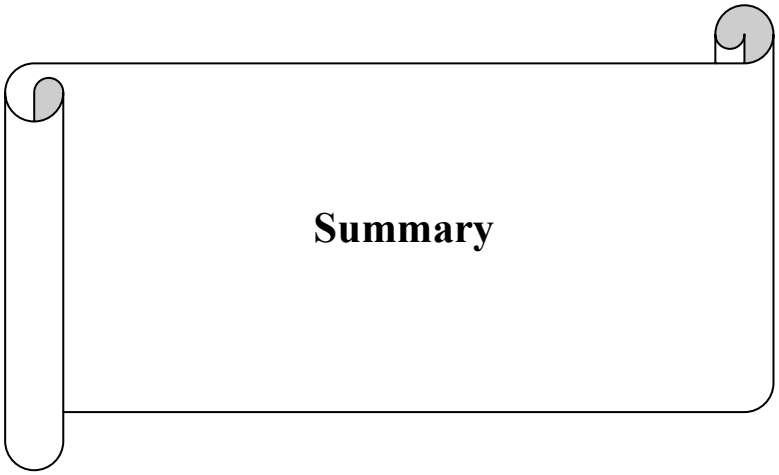
Thematic Analysis of *Annihilation of Caste*

CHAPTER IV

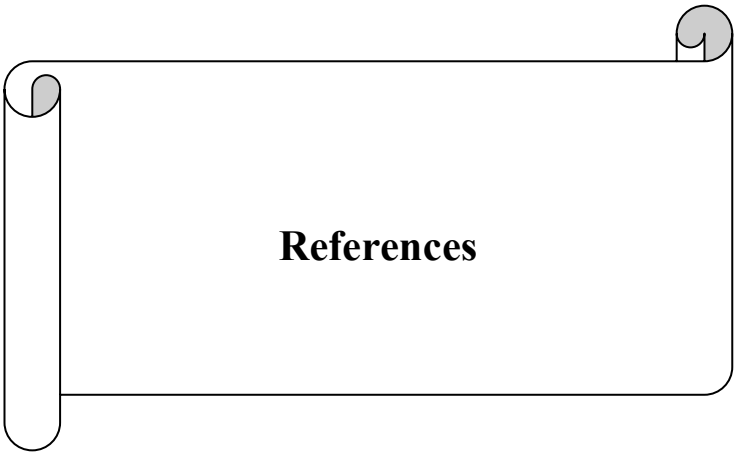
Constitutional and Legislative Responses to the Constitutional Framework

CHAPTER V

Discussion, conclusion, and recommendations



Summary


References