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## ***Ambedkar's Historical Method: A Non-Brahmanic critique of Positivist History***

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Under the intellectual upheavals from Renaissance to Enlightenment of Europe, the historical method evolved into a new critical method. By modeling on scientific method it laid down the foundation of internal and external criticism and was baptized as positivist method (Collingwood, 1961:126). Positivist method was established as full-blown method under the leadership of Von Leopold Ranke. His much quoted dictum was 'simply to show how it really was'---- in other words, ascertain facts. He advocated objectivity in history; his object was above all to follow things, without swerving, and in stern subordination and surrender the lead of his authorities. He decided effectually to repress the poet, the patriot, the religious or political partisan, to sustain no cause, to banish from his books and to write nothing that would gratify his own feeling or disclose his private convictions (Gyle, 1962:10). Ranke encouraged historians to preserve, organize and critically examine evidence (Hughes-Warrington, 2004: 256). He gave the primacy to primary sources. The positivist method universalized the system of ascertaining facts. Historical facts were deemed analogous to the facts of natural sciences; discrete, atomic and supremely indifferent to the position of observer (Jones, 1979:97). The positivistic adherence to the visible and immediately verifiable facts of the past was reinforced by an almost unquestioned acceptance of the basic tenets of liberalism. Individuals were discrete, autonomous and thus morally accountable (Jones, 1979:99).

### **Colonial and Nationalist Practice of Positivist Method**

The modern method of history entered India with the advent of colonialism. Colonial officials initiated historical inquiry with a view to manage and administer conquered territories. Hence colonial ideologies, values and expediency structured the agenda of history writing<sup>1</sup>. Colonial school not only shaped the agenda of history writing but laid down the conventions of historical practice. This method modeled on science gave importance to empiricism where texts, documents, statistics, observations and interviews were used for knowledge production (Currie, 1996:22). The prescription of positivist method that the sources should be based on eyewitness accounts resulted in initiating the historian's craft of procuring the sources, examining them to establish authenticity and credibility and editing, translating and publishing of these sources. This created a hierarchy of sources based on their authenticity and credibility. Classical Sanskrit texts were considered authoritative sources for the study of ancient Indian history and the archival records of the kings, nobles, traders and religious institutions as the sources of medieval India. The testimony of the Brahmin informer was assigned importance in the compilation of cultural and ethnological information (Breckenridge, 1994:253).

The idea of the establishment of dominance and hegemony uninterruptedly reined the colonial project of history writing. Under Orientalism the ontological divide of East and West was made central in the descriptive mode representing Orient (Said, 1995:2). This, in other words located Orient within European experience by facilitating dichotomous understanding. The dichotomous understanding was based on the notions of superiority/inferiority, domination/subordination, rationality/irrationality, enlightenment/despotism, progressive/savage etc. Within this context, the perceived inferiority and irrationality inherent in Orient helped to define and reinforce the contrasting image of superior West (Currie, 1996: 6).

Hegemony was ingrained in every orientalist exercise of knowledge production. Kohan comments that, ‘the process of editing of primary sources in indigenous Indian languages, compilation of dictionaries and catalogues, publishing gazetteers had given added advantage to colonialism of capturing epistemological space’ (Kohan, 1997: 21). It also conceded epistemological space to Brahminical system as the positivist definition of primary sources included classical Sanskrit texts and princely archives. The vital help rendered by Brahmin *Pandits* in the procurement, editing and translation of primary sources persevered and legitimized structures of caste-patriarchal domination in the colonial project of history writing (Bagade, 2006: 83). Thus, colonial project unquestionably preserved Brahmanical prerogative.

Orientalism as a body of knowledge drew material sustenance from colonialism but became objectified by the ideology of science as a set of factualized statements about the reality that existed and could be known independent of any subjective, colonizing will. Thus detached epistemologically from politics by a culture that objectivized the world as a collection of scientific observations with universal validity, orientalism floated free of its original mooring; it could therefore serve diverse political purposes and receive new sustenance from any quarter. By 1900, it was even deployed against European dominance by Indian nationalists (Ludden, 1994:252). Under the regime of Orientalism early nationalist historians got trained in the method of history and initiated the school of nationalist historiography. Early reformers of Maharashtra Balshstri Jambhekar and Dadoba Pandurang plunged in to the tradition of Indology and pursued nationalist agenda of history writing by imbibing the spirit and method of orientalist scholars<sup>2</sup>.

Although Ranke’s positivist stance suited most to the establishment of colonial hegemony, it also possessed ingrained Brahminical prerogatives, which attracted nationalists. Concurrently Ranke’s nationalist enunciation also galvanized support to this method. Ranke affirmed that “... history is not simply an academic subject: the knowledge of the history of mankind should be a common property of humanity and should above all benefit our nation...” Here Ranke the adherent of social necessity theory of history and Ranke the nationalist are presented in subtle blend (Marwick, 1971: 37-38). Ranke’s espousal for nationalism as the goal of history certainly must have made nationalists ardent supporters of this method.

R. G. Bhandarkar, who is fondly referred as the *pitamaha* (grand old man) of Indian indologists had shown his leaning for positivism through his strong espousal of

objectivity. He conceptualized history as unbiased chronological narrative of facts, accessible through a rigorous, critical analysis of original sources (Deshpande, 2007: 98-99). Echoing Ranke, Bhandarkar insisted that facts must speak for themselves. ‘One must in first place be impartial, with no particular disposition to find in the materials before him something that will tend to glory of his race and country, nor he should have an opposite prejudice against the country or its people. Nothing, but the dry truth should be his object’ (Iggers and Wang, 2008: 104).

In order to validate and legitimize social reforms Bhandarkar deployed historical research. He reinforced the idea of ancient, classical period by invoking the Sanskrit scriptures in support of women’s reforms (Deshpande, 2007: 110). His progressive standpoint led him to criticize caste as the impediment in the progress of rationalism. He deftly prioritized Vedic-Brahminical tradition as the central or mainstream tradition of India, which infused unitary spirit in the socio-cultural history of India. He advocated caste marriages on the grounds of maintaining racial purity and caste patriarchy. He was brilliant in unraveling the trajectory of anti-caste struggle in Indian history but failed to probe its genealogy as *A-brahmani* tradition (Bagade, 2006: 287-92). Notwithstanding progressivism Bhandarkar’s predisposition for positivist method under orientalist trope persisted in maintaining Brahmanical hegemony.

By upholding positivist method, V. K. Rajwade initiated a school of Maratha historiography, which became popular among the Brahmin historians. ‘No document no history,’ became the motto of this school’. Rajwade led the project of critical editing of the ‘standard’ sources of Maratha history. He not only affirmed Ranke’s positivism, which insisted for rigid, and empiricist criticism of sources, but also embraced Comtean positivism which bent upon identifying overarching framework of laws and was inspired by Hegel’s notion of history of thoughts (More, 1998: Introduction).

Rajwade’s positivist venture in Maratha history upheld caste-patriarchal domination. His interpretations of Indian history undoubtedly privileged Arya-Brahmin tradition as central to nationalist heritage; his conception of Maharashtra Dharama upheld the interests of Brahmins. He defended caste and argued that *chaturvarnya* and caste had enabled Aryan society to survive for thousands of year. Deshpande comments that “Rajwade’s positivism, therefore, emerged not only as systematic approach to the past but also as a perspective that underwrote his nationalist imagination of an ancient Aryan past, and his firm belief in natural leadership of Brahmins in Hindu society” (Deshpande, 2007:108).

### **Transcending of the Positivist Mould**

In the prevalent regime of positivist method set by colonial and nationalist historians, it was very difficult to initiate the history of caste subaltern. Mahatma Phule took the challenge. He identified the role of (Brahminical) knowledge in perpetuation of caste and patriarchy. He pointed out the role of historical knowledge<sup>3</sup> in producing the *shudra-atishura* as docile subjects. According to him Brahmanical system subjugated and enslaved the *shudra, atishudra* castes by inscribing false (caste) identities on them. He

asserted that, 'True history will unravel the trickery of Brahmin caste and will lead the downtrodden castes to resist it. If downtrodden castes recovered their history of glorious struggle against oppressive, unjust caste system, they would revolt against it. They would demolish Brahminical hegemony and caste system (Bagade 2006:331).

Phule had to face the undoubting task of carving out the path from the regime of positivist method. He identified that the reality of Indian history is concealed and suppressed under the Brahmanical mythology. He very innovatively employed Vico's method of ascertaining facts through employing etymology, mythology and analysis of traditions. Phule's hermeneutical exercise offered different etymological meanings and materialist interpretation of myths and traditions and unfolded social strife between Arya Brahmins and Non Aryans *shudra-atishudras*. (Bagade 2006: 333) He endorsed evolutionary view of history, accepted universals of history with specificities of space and time. He espoused historical materialism of India: 'History of India is history of caste struggle' (Patil, 1993, 84).

Ambedkar carried out the legacy of Phule and Satyashodhak-Non-Brahmin movement. Having been trained in America and England, he was well versed with positivist method and its limitations. He had seen the intricate issues involved in the development of scientific method. He valiantly confronted hegemonic designs of colonial, nationalist historiography underlying in the positivist method. He made several innovations and transcended the positivist mould of history writing. He searched for every methodological possibility to write history of caste-subaltern and thus expanded the horizon of scientific method. This paper is a broad attempt to bring out Ambedkar's critique of positivist method and his attempt of innovate scientific method of writing history of caste subaltern. It will also unfold Ambedkar's creative engagement in developing new conceptual and methodological tools of writing social history of caste consolidating a tradition of non-Brahmin method of history writing.

Ambedkar consciously rooted himself in the tradition of scientific method from a caste/subaltern point of view. For him objectivity is an essential prerequisite of scientific method, which only could unfold the socio-cultural history of India and specifically will unravel the causal trajectory of the institution of caste and untouchability, therefore he urged for the objective stance. He wrote:

".....an historian ought to be exact, sincere and impartial; free from passion, unbiased by interest, fear, resentment or affection; and faithful to the truth, which is mother of history, a preserver of great action, the enemy of oblivion, the witness of the past, the director of the future. In short he must have an open mind, though it may not be an empty mind and readiness to examine all evidence even though it be spurious" (Ambedkar 1990:17).

Although Ambedkar espoused objectivity, he knew that in caste society objectivity could not withstand. Despite positivist strictures, the caste subjectivities will always prevail. The colonial and nationalist practice of history had already shown that caste and patriarchal subjectivities were so entrenched that they covered methodological ground. Both colonial and nationalist practice of history had prioritized the role of Brahmin scholarship. Colonial version of ancient Indian history was based on analysis of Sanskrit

texts offered by army of Brahmin scholars. And although Nationalists challenged colonial version; their own version was also relied on Brahmin scholarship. Ambedkar pointed out the very character of the Brahmin subjectivity operating in the positivistic enterprise. According to him, 'Brahmin subjectivity was so conditioned that it could not critically engage with Sanskrit scriptures and therefore was incapable of ascertaining historical truth'. He stated: 'Brahmins, as learned men, are class-conscious; they are not intellectuals who are emancipated from class conditioning. They are severely limited by the anxiety to preserve their interests. The subjective position of the Brahmin does not allow his intellect full play with honesty and integrity. The Brahmin scholar's search is not for accomplishing historical truth but is intended to maintain sanctity of Sanskrit scriptures. He defends the scriptures with the view of defending *Brahminic*-privileges. His concern for upholding the prestige of the social system built by his forefathers prevents him from searching for the historical truth. As a result, Brahmin scholar engages himself with fixing dates and tracing genealogies' (Ambedkar 1990:17, 240-41).

Ambedkar was very critical of the complacent, self-contented approach of the Brahmin scholar. Brahmins, being devoid of the critical approach always took pride in their decadent tradition. They portrayed the Hindu past as glorious and blatantly defended the social order based on Hindu scriptures. Ambedkar cites Buckle in his critique of Brahmin's self-contented approach in the field of knowledge thus:

"...men who are perfectly satisfied with their own knowledge will never attempt to increase it. Men who are perfectly convinced of the accuracy of their opinions will never take the pains of examining the basis on which they are built. They look with wonder, and often with horror, on views contrary to those which they inherited from their fathers; and while they are in their state of mind of impossible that they should receive any new truth which interferes with their foregone conclusions" (Ambedkar vol-4, 1987: 8).

Ambedkar believed that acquisition of fresh knowledge is a necessary precursor of every step in social progress. Doubt is a precondition of inquiry and inquiry leads towards knowledge. Painstaking efforts and sacrifices are needed to produce new knowledge. The Brahmin, being self-contented, cannot labour or make any sacrifices for the acquisition of new knowledge (Ambedkar vol-4, 1987: 8).

While advocating an impartial, unbiased view of history, Ambedkar argued that the Non-Brahmin or untouchable subjectivity possesses more critical potential than any Brahmin historian in of seeking historical truth from the textual analysis of the scriptures. Non-Brahmin scholars do not have the limitation which Brahmin scholars suffer from<sup>4</sup>. They are free from the burden of upholding scriptures. As opposed to the Brahmins' incapability of raising a doubt, the Non-Brahmin subjectivity is free to raise doubts and oppose the infallibility of the *Vedas*. The non-Brahman scholar examines the scriptures with accepted rules of evidences without making any distinction between the sacred and profane. His subjective stance towards scriptures gives him the critical strength and vision for marching on the path of relentless pursuit of truth (Ambedkar 1990: 17). Ambedkar, without any inhibition, declared his own non-Brahmin subjectivity. "I am a non Brahmin, not even a non-Brahmin but an untouchable. My antipathy to the sacred

literature is not naturally less than that of Non-Brahmin. As Pro. Thorndyke says: “a man thinks is a biological fact what he thinks is a sociological fact” (Ambedkar 1990: 16). However Ambedkar was well aware about the limitations of Non-Brahmin subjectivity. According to him the Non-Brahmin scholar’s attitude of unsparing condemnation of scriptures was most harmful to historical research. In addition, their tendency to treat the whole literature as a collection of fables and therefore not worthy of serious study defied the very spirit of historian (Ambedkar 1990- 17).

Ambedkar was critical about positivist stance of European scholars on Hindu religion. He observed that, advocates of Hinduism took shelter under the science of comparative religion. Their positivistic assumptions that religion is a purely personal matter between man and God that it is supernatural, that it has arisen from magic, that it shows characteristics of savage religion lent justification to the Hindu religion. Ambedkar condemned this tendency as discrediting science. He argued for religion as social fact and employed normative categories like preservation of life for the criticism of the religions of savage society. In support of this position, he gave Lord Balfour’s quote favoring positivism (i.e. science) over Christianity, where human good is expected from religion. Ambedkar poses the same question to Hinduism with untouchable subjective position demanding humanistic treatment from religion (Ambedkar, 1989: 406-412).

Ambedkar privileges subjective experience of an untouchable as important criterion in conceiving the scientific understanding of the reality of Hinduism. In some way he endorses Dewey’s pragmatist notion of experience. According to Dewey the knowledge-experience is never separated from non-cognitive, affect,-habit- and tradition- laden sphere of social life. He shared the feminist antipathy to positivist conception of experience as passive mirror of nature, and stressed active and selective character of human experience. For Dewey, the data of science are not ‘the given’ but rather the taken that is, they are selected from totality of experiences by socially embedded human beings, with the express purpose of finding the clues to the solution of problem at hand (Nanda, 2006:8).

The issue of experience was earlier encountered by the empiricism. For empiricism, ‘thought does not simply emerge from experience, but actually is provided by the concepts and mental categories which are utilized to organized and make sense of experience’ (Munslow, 2000:81). Ambedkar was aware about this problem therefore while espousing objectivity he urged that historian ‘must have open mind, though it may not be an empty mind’ (Ambedkar, 1990:17). In the case of scriptural analysis, Ambedkar thought that epistemological world of Brahmin scholar is not capable in taking critical inquiry of the scriptures. The non-Brahmin/untouchable partisan stand or subjectivity renders him the position of critic, which is more competent to strip the interests inscribed in the scriptures. Regarding the issue of understanding Hinduism, Ambedkar’s privileging of untouchable experience is a ploy to secure humanistic location for objective understanding of the reality of Hinduism. He thought that in the habit, tradition embedded social world of caste experiences untouchable subjective experience is more positioned to generate humanistic stand point which certainly helps in mustering objectivity.

Therefore, for Ambedkar, objectivity means 'historicized' and 'humanized' objectivity. He employs historically subjective and humanly objective criteria of 'social good', utility and social justice to assess history of India and Hindu philosophy (Ambedkar, 1987: 22). His notion of objectivity complements Gramscian notion of objectivity. Gramsci writes, "Objective always means 'humanly objective' which can be held to correspond exactly to 'historically subjective: in other words, objective could mean 'universal subjective'. Man knows objectively in so far as knowledge is real for the whole human race historically unified in a single unitary cultural system" (Salamini, 1974: 376).

Positivist regime in Europe has its blatant limitation. Much history was focused upon the constitution and upon 'great men'. Realities like class, mode of production or politically and culturally determined patterns of behavior were not empirically verifiable. They could not simply be uncovered by the study of documents, and they did not afford the straight forward criterion of moral pronouncement' (Jones, 1979:98). Ambedkar realized these limitations of positivist method. He took up the project of unraveling historical trajectories of caste and untouchability; he wanted to trace their genesis and development. Positivist method was incapable in taking up these inquiries. Ranke's insistence for empirically verifiable facts made it more difficult. Having scanty or no documentary evidences have left many missing links in Indian social history. Ambedkar wanted to bridge these missing links to unfold complex causal trajectory, which evolved the institutions of caste, untouchability and patriarchy.

Ambedkar knew that he was dealing with the obscure realities of past and hence was not sure about the exact reconstruction of the past. Unlike the positivists he conceived of history as a construction that what we could know about the past; what historical rules and convention particularly the facts/ circumstantial evidences governs the production of knowledge that is designated as history. He perceived that the task of reconstructing history of untouchability, "...is one of gathering survivals of the past, placing them together and making them tell the story of their birth". He further affirmed that this task is creative and imaginative endeavor 'analogues of archaeologist who constructs a city from broken stones or of the paleontologist who conceives an extinct animal from scattered bones and teeth or a painter who reads the line of horizon and the smallest vestiges on the slopes of a hill to make up a scene' (Ambedkar, vol-7, 1990: 244).

The task of reconstructing the history of untouchability, with almost no direct evidence was indeed very challenging task. Ambedkar attempted to resolve this theoretical impasse by allowing imagination and intuition to be used to bridge the gaps in the chain of facts. He was aware of the positivist's objection that he was violating the canon of empiricist historical research. He asserted that, "[a] thesis would not be unsound merely because in some parts it is based on [a] guess." He claims that his position is scientific which allows for the use of imagination and intuition. He quoted Gorky, '.... imagination and intuition permit the scientist to create hypothesis and theories which more or less correctly and successfully direct the searching of the mind in its study of the forms and phenomenon of nature. They are literary creation; the arts of creating characters and type demands imagination, intuition the ability to make thing up in one's own mind" (Ambedkar 1990:



244). Though Ambedkar argued that imagination and intuition should be used in the formulation of hypotheses for bridging the missing links of Indian history; he warned against using imagination and intuition as conjectures. He contended that the hypothesis should be based on facts and inferences from facts. In addition, where it is not based on facts or inference from facts, it should be based on circumstantial evidence of presumptive character resting on considerable degree of probability (Ambedkar, 1990: 225).

Ambedkar picked up the area of missing links in tracing the origins of untouchability. He rejected popular theories like racial difference and occupations as the reasons for the genesis of untouchability. He constructed a remarkably complex theory/hypothesis of 'broken men' to explore the origins of untouchability. 'He explains that those primitive societies have been conquered at one time or another by invaders who set themselves above the autochthones people. In the process of social fragmentation that followed peripheral group, or what he calls broken men, split off from the centre: In a tribal war it often happened that a tribe, instead of being completely routed. In many cases, a defeated tribe becomes broken in to bits. As a consequences of this, there always existed in primitive times a floating population consisting of groups of broken tribesmen roaming in all directions. When conquerors became sedentary, they turned to these broken men to protect them from the attacks of nomadic tribes. Ambedkar applied this theory by portraying Untouchables as the descendant of the broken men...' (Jaffrelot, 2005:40). To establish untouchables as the broken men he offered three kinds of evidence. From his initial anthropological inquiries, he showed that the totems of untouchables of particular villages differed from the totems of the caste Hindus of those villages. He discussed various etymological meanings of the word *Antyaja* and concluded that *Antya* means the people who live outside of the village. The reason why untouchables lived outside villages was that they were broken men. As evidence, he pointed out the social location of Mahars: outside every village of Maharashtra. As baluta arrangement, Mahars had specific duties of serving the village in lieu of grant of fifty-two rights. Similar cases of bargaining between untouchables and villagers from other parts of India substantiated his thesis that untouchables were broken men (Ambedkar, 1990: 278-79). He cited examples of 'Broken men' from Irish and Welsh villages too. This analogy brought universals of world history to prove the existence of broken men (Ambedkar, 1990: 281-83).

Ambedkar used circumstantial evidence of presumptive character to prove that the contempt for Buddhists had been the root of untouchability. He offered several anthropological evidences of the antipathy between Brahmins and Untouchables. Not only did Brahmins consider untouchable inauspicious, but Untouchables also considered Brahmin inauspicious<sup>5</sup>. Ambedkar used this circumstantial evidence of presumptive character to construct the hypothesis that broken men were Buddhists. As there is no direct evidence to establish that there existed hatred and abhorrence against Buddhists in the mind of Hindus he quoted from the Brahminical scriptures decrying Buddhists as impure. He finally has given an instance from the Sanskrit drama *Mritcchakatika* where a Buddhist monk is seen as inauspicious and beaten (Ambedkar, 1990: 315-17). Positivist path of ascertaining visible and verifiable facts from written primary sources was not the only impediment but Positivist dictum against abstraction and generalizations

also created hurdle in bridging the causal links of the evolution of the institution of caste and the trajectory of caste struggles in Indian history. Romanticist influences on Ranke's positivism had created a tendency of breaking away from generalizations or abstractions (Gyle 1962:12). Natural science characterized by the manner in which it establishes general laws to which the phenomena of a particular science conform. Nevertheless, Ranke's idea of history as being scientific meant that it is exact and painstaking in the collection and sifting of evidence. Therefore, it desisted from seeking laws through generalizations. Against this, in the nineteenth century Europe, there were various attempts to establish scientific histories of this type, partly indeed as reactions against those followers of Ranke who insisted that history could not answer questions, could only show, 'how things really were' (Marwick 1971:40). These included August Comte, Karl Marx, Durkhiem, Weber, John Dewey and other thinkers who were engaged in expanding the scope of scientific history. In this tradition of scientific history, Ambedkar was setting his agenda of writing Indian History.

Ambedkar shunned the dichotomy between facts and interpretation, which was the cornerstone of Ranke's positivism. He structured his historical narrative as one in which facts and interpretations were interwoven as an integrated argument. He presented existing views of history as arguments where facts and interpretation were not separable and argued in favour of one view of history employing the judicial mode of seeking truth<sup>6</sup>. E. H. Carr, also attacks empiricism and pseudo-objectivism and rejects the notion that facts and interpretations are rigidly separable. Pointing out that all writing of history involve a selection from the sum of facts available, he demonstrates that any selection obeys an implicit evaluative criteria. Facts are thus inseparable from interpretations, which are in turn determined by values. These values should moreover, he argued, be grounded and verified by the immanent movement of history itself. (Jones, 1979:112-3) For Ambedkar, this movement is towards progress and human freedom.

Positivist dictum that 'facts were analogous to the facts of natural sciences; discrete, atomic and supremely indifferent to the position of observer' has created a tendency of dissociating the fact from its context. Authenticity and sovereignty of a truth was assigned to the dissociated single fact and was selectively picked to prove the resonant interpretation. Colonial historians instituted the practice of making grand generalization based on selective citation of dissociated facts and established hegemonic version suited to their interests. Ambedkar categorically opposed this tendency of colonial historiography. He criticized Aryan race theory as a perversion of scientific investigation because the theory being preconceived selected facts to prove it (Ambedkar, 1990:78). He also attacked the colonial pretensions of science where desire to prove particular hypothesis was dominant. He called it as poison of science (Ambedkar, 1990:80). Nationalists resisted colonial version of history. They picked facts and argued in favour of their own version of Indian history. In the field of historical research, conflicting interpretations are integral to the method of ascertaining facts. The manifold conflicting interpretations are always negotiated by putting them under the close scrutiny and continuous criticism confirming with the universals of scientific method. Although Ambedkar voluntarily indulged in the open ground of negotiation, he strongly objected the colonial or nationalist practice of dissociating the fact from the context. He insisted

that the facts should always be placed in its institutional social milieu and specifically in its own course of probability (Ambedkar, 1990: 245).

Ranke's positivism showed a reluctance to pass judgments in conformity with either rational or moral standards. Neutrality was accorded to the high office of historian (Marwick, 1970: 35). Ambedkar affirmed that a historian should work like a jurist. He cited Goethe in his support<sup>7</sup> (Ambedkar 1990:243). His commitment to finding historical truth did not discourage him from passing judgments. His unfinished work, *Ancient India: Revolution and Counter-revolution*, is highly loaded with moral judgments. His moral denunciations are not according to the positivist tenet. Positivists held 'individuals morally accountable' (Jones, 1979: 99). Rather than individuals, Ambedkar attacked on institutions and system. Unlike nationalist historians<sup>8</sup>, he has seen individual as the representatives of system and offered moral condemnation of a system. His narrative offered a moral critique of all pertinent institutions and systems like caste, untouchability, Congress, colonialism and more immensely Brahmanism.

Ambedkar was searching for alternatives to written records. He sought a strategy of procuring historical elements preserved in the contemporary reality. Trained as anthropologist he passionately indulged in the anthropological inquiry of caste and untouchability. He furnished anthropological data from colonial records and from indigenous researches carried by scholars like V. R. Shinde. He not only used epistemological tools of anthropology but innovated new tools and enriched the conceptual understanding of caste and untouchability. For tracing the casual links in the social history, he used all his acumen as anthropologist. He located the interdependence of social and cultural institutions of India by searching their parallels in other societies of the world. He accorded to scientific method by putting history of India in a universal setting. Marxism and anthropology disseminated scientific criteria of universalism by establishing comparative method. They maintained that laws of history should accord to the historical experiences of world history. Scientific method of deductive logic proceeding from the known to the unknown was employed in this comparative method. Ambedkar used this method for two purposes 1) to ascertain historical facts and 2) to formulate laws of Indian history in accordance with the universals of world history.

Ambedkar took recourse to mythology to write the history of caste-Varna struggle of India. His approach towards myth was twofold. Firstly, he indulged in materialist interpretations of the myths and provided discerning portrayal of Indian social history. Secondly, like Phule, he provided devastating critique of myths and its mythical heroes by exposing moral decadence of gods and heroes. He employed more advanced method than Phule to produce facts from the myths<sup>9</sup>. He juxtaposed different versions of the same myth from different texts and deduced facts from them. He gathered corroborative evidence from other sources or authorities in support of these facts. Then he situated these corroborated facts in their context of social process or in the course of probability to establish its veracity (Ambedkar, 1990: 141-151). Ambedkar's method of analyzing myth is exemplified in his work '*Who were the Shudras.*'

Ambedkar was aware of the importance of the oral tradition. He had undertaken a project of collecting *Mahars' Garhnes*, i.e., appeals of *Mahars* to the indigenous deity, *Chaloba*

(Ambedkar 2005:424). However, he did not use oral sources for writing history. He was also trying to investigate the Buddhist reminiscences of the cult and deity of *Vithoba*. He used etymological devices to decipher the meaning of *Pundalik* as lotus and traced it to Buddhist lineage (Ambedkar, 2002: 424).

Ambedkar approached scriptural sources through the rationalist/ materialist method. On one hand, he followed the normative path enshrined by the tenets of liberalism for the interpretation of *Vedas*, *Smritis* and other sacred texts<sup>10</sup>. On the other hand, he unraveled the historical, social, institutional context of the text by employing materialist interpretations. He thought that all texts should be available to critical scrutiny and eventually have to defend themselves in the battlefields of ideas (Rodrigues, 2011: 63). His hermeneutical engagement with *Gita* and *Manusmriti* has yielded fascinating results. It unfolded socio-political undercurrents of history and explained the intricate dynamics of structural and institutional progression of history. His reading of *Manusmriti* uncovered the Brahminical attempt of subjugating *Shudras* and women and helped in building sociological/anthropological construction of caste and untouchability. His reading of *Gita* unfolded the complexity of social conflict explicating the assimilative mechanism of Brahminism and its ascendancy under counter-revolution (Ambedkar, 1987: 332-380).

Although Ambedkar was in search of a new method, his busy schedule did not allow him to deploy all the methodological tools available. He failed to employ the archeological method; he did not even use the reports of Harappan excavations (Pandit, 1996: 119). He hardly used any inscriptions. His history was highly reliant on religious scriptures (Pandit, 1996: 110). Even for the exacting new facts from available primary sources, there was a strong need to develop linguistic and hermeneutical tools, which would have unfolded the subjugated and suppressed history of caste-subalterns.

Ranke's belief that states are the thoughts of 'God' and his emphasis on archival sources (necessarily of princes and prelates) gave history firm orientation towards past politics and relation between states (diplomatic history). (Marwick, 1971:37-38) Taking cue from Ranke colonial and nationalist historians produced volume of political history. Political history was easy ground for peruse the hegemonic agenda of Brahmanical nationalism. Ambedkar lambasted on this tendency of writing political and diplomatic history. For him history is not merely a succession of kings and dynasties. There are larger social forces, which are the operative forces (Gore, 1993: 242). Ambedkar's attempts to unfold the forces of Indian history have led him towards an encounter with Marxist positivism.

### **Critiquing Marxist Method of History**

Ambedkar was influenced by the Marxist mode of analysis. For Ambedkar (as for Marx and Phule) social processes involve contradiction, violence and exploitation. (Omvedt, 1994: 242) His historical narrative gave centrality to the theme of social conflict. Ambedkar questioned the assumption of European Marxism that class struggle is the sole determinant of history. Ambedkar's theory of social conflict accepted caste-class as the

social categories of exploitation and domination. But primarily, he emphasized Indian history as the history of caste struggles (Patil, 1993 :).

Marxists made a distinction between the basic economic structure of any society, constituted by the condition of production, taken as a whole and the superstructure (of laws institution religion and ideas). Their primacy to economic structures of (imagined) class relations of production claimed that the motor for the historical progression is provided by the 'class struggle'. Their emphasis on economic structure created a variety of shades of Marxism some of which offered mechanical interpretation of history. Ambedkar stood against this Marxist variety subscribing to rigid economism. He stated that caste system in India is unique phenomenon. Nowhere in the world is the economic activity consecrated by religion. But in India caste as a system of social and economic relations was based on religion. He wrote, "The Hindus are the only people in the world whose social order the relation of man to man is consecrated by religion and made sacred eternal and inviolate. The Hindus are the only people in the world whose economic order the relation of workman to workman ---is consecrated by religion and made sacred eternal and inviolate". (Ambedkar, 1989:190) Ambedkar identified the key role of the religious sanctions in the sustenance of the caste system. He stated that 'Legal and religious sanctions were both powerful engines to keep caste-system going. The legal penalty for the breach of caste-rules was twofold. It involved excommunication and loss of right to inheritance. And the religious sanction is so primary that caste system has been maintained solely it'. He asserted that religious sanction was the highest sanction because religious was social and religious was sacred. Here Ambedkar quoted Durkheim in his support (Gore, 1993:264). Marxists regarded religion, ideology, consciousness culture as the product of economic reality. Durkheim moved from this position regarding ideas and beliefs as derivative of subset of social facts, suggesting that symbolic thought is a condition of and explains society. His ideas on the sociology of religion were important in the analysis of Indian society since religion is often regarded as the crucial variable, which gave a particular direction to Indian society (Thaper, 2002:34). Durkheim's position on religion acknowledged the religious grounding of caste. Ambedkar shared Durkheim's ideas on religion like the bipolarity of purity/pollution to define the hierarchy of caste system.

The Indian variety of Marxism reiterated the primacy of matter over human consciousness and was not ready to accept the economic basis of caste nor did it want to acknowledge linkages between caste and religious ideology. Ambedkar objected to the deterministic economic canons of historical materialism. He reversed the often-used Marxist architectural analogy of base and superstructure:

'But the base is not building. On the basis of economic relations a building is erected of religious, social and political institutions. The building has just as much truth (reality) as the base. If we want to change the base, then first the building that has been constructed on it has to be knocked down. In the same way, if we want to change economic relations of society, then existing social, political and other institutions will have to be destroyed.' (Omvedt, 1994: 228)

Ambedkar argued in favour of an anti-caste revolution. He emphasized that the mental hold of religious slavery has to be destroyed. In his renowned speech, 'Annihilation of

Caste,' he argued that religion maintained a hold over the proletariat. Religion, social status and property were sources of power and authority hence must be given equal importance. If the source of power and dominion is at any given time or in any given society, social and religious then social reform and religious reform must be accepted as the necessary sort of reform. (Ambedkar, 1979:44-47) He observed that political revolutions have been always preceded by social and religious revolutions. Ambedkar cited several examples of world history and Indian history to support this view. He advocated the socio-religious revolution as the prerequisite of socialist revolution (Ambedkar, 1979:43-44).

Ambedkar did not accept the Marxist notion of religion 'as an inverted consciousness of alienated labourers'. The religion in the history of mankind has most of the time served the established system of exploitation and domination. It sustained the system by offering recurrent justification and legitimatization through the web of ideology and rituals. The counter-cultural religious upsurge has provided emancipatory space for downtrodden masses. Ambedkar cites this example of early upsurge of Christianity offering emancipatory space to toiling masses. 'The slaves of Rome, crushed under the tyranny of Patricians, roaming on the roads for without bread and shelter, embraced Christianity for salvation and freedom' (Ambedkar, 2002:436). In Indian context Ambedkar argued the case of egalitarian and emancipatory potential of Buddhism which manifested in to revolutionary era of Indian history<sup>11</sup> (Ambedkar, 1987 :).

Ambedkar's critique of Marxist positivism was aimed to assert man's role as maker of history. Marxist emphasis on material basis of history acknowledged that only economic forces shape the course of history, which in turn denied man any role or place in making of history. Ambedkar categorically stated that impersonal forces (like economic, geographical etc.) are determining factors of history. But the effect of these impersonal forces depends on the man his free will and his greatness (Ambedkar, 1989:212). Ambedkar placed human action as central to historical causality. His commentary on Buddhist causality gives human action a major role, as important as the role of nature, in history:

"The Buddha... maintained that not only every event has a cause but the cause is the result of some human action or natural law. He rejected that man is a puppet in the hands of Time, Nature, Chance, God, Fate, and Necessity. If man is free then every event must be the result of man's action or an act of nature" (Ambedkar, 1992: 240). For Ambedkar man existed not only in the physical sense but had a spiritual super-existence through knowledge and love. (Gore, 1993:261) This freedom of reflective reasoning of man comprised the motive force of history.

Positivist variety of Marxism was enunciating the idea of passivity of the masses before the law of history<sup>12</sup>. Ambedkar was challenging fatalistic doctrines of economic determinism. He affirmed that ideas generate actions and movements of change and that man is the creator of history. He spoke of the historically determined man, that is, of a man who lives and struggles in concrete historical realities and is confronted with objective societal contradictions.



## Historicizing Caste

Ambedkar's strength as historian is reflected in his writing on the social history of India. He took up the inquiry of the origin and growth of Varna-Caste system in evolutionary framework of history. Unlike colonial and nationalist scholars, he argued that caste is not a static system. 'It has been a growing institution. It never been the same at all times. The shape and the form of caste as it existed when Megasthenes wrote his account was very different from the shape and form it had taken when Alberuni came and the appearance it gave to Portuguese was different from what it was in the time of Alberuni (Ambedkar, 1987:141).

As Ambedkar talked about the evolution of Varna into caste where Varnas were parceled out into several castes; he calls it evolution in the opposite direction. He does not admit linear path of historical progression but acceded spiral path of revolution and counter-revolution. In '*Caste in India*', he argued that Brahmins first became endogamous and caste system emerged as the process of emulation of Brahmins (Ambedkar, vol-1, 1979:20).

Ambedkar also mentions tribal lineage as a structural basis of caste. He argued that family being unit of Hindu society founded on the rule of exogamy fundamentally a tribal organization. Ambedkar writes:

“...Hindu society is still tribal in its organization with the family at this base observing the rule of exogamy based on Kul and Gotra. Castes and sub-castes are social organizations which are superimposed over the tribal organization and rule of endogamy enjoined by them does not do away the rule of exogamy enjoined by tribal organizations of *Kul* and *Gotra* (Ambedkar, vol-7, 1990:303-4). Nevertheless Ambedkar held that the clan, the social groping followed in the primitive or tribal people is different than of caste. According to him clan is antagonistic to caste, it does not have gradation like caste nor does it have clan-class system to match class-caste system (Ambedkar, 1989:171).

Ambedkar gave centrality to the theme of social conflict in Indian history. According to him, social conflict was the prime force in Indian history. He identified several social contradictions, which brought social upheaval in Indian history. First was *varna* contradiction between Brahmins and *khsatriya*. In his book, '*Who Were the Shudras*' he argued that the struggle between Brahmin and *kshatriya* led to the degradation of *Shudras* from *Kshatriya Varna* to fourth *Varna*. He picked up this theme in the book, '*Revolution and Counter-Revolution*'. He commented that struggle between Brahmin and *Kshtriya* as the fiercest class struggles of world history (Ambedkar, vol-5 1989:192). The second is caste contradiction in tribal moorings. While locating genesis of untouchability Ambedkar depicted the background of tribal rivalry leading towards clash of interests between sedentary social groups and broken men. The third is contradiction among the caste groups like the *Savarnas* and *Avarnas*. While dealing the issue of untouchability he portrayed it as the contradiction between Untouchables and Hindus<sup>13</sup>. He also brought out several facets of caste struggles including the complex character of the caste-class struggle under colonial India.

Ambedkar very perceptively uncovered the structural linkages between caste and the enslavement of women. His definition of cast as endogamy has divulged these linkages between caste and patriarchy. Endogamy ensured subjugation and enslavement of women by prohibiting women from marrying outside caste. Women were denied all freedom over their will and body. Caste instituted control over women's sexuality. Their sexuality was put under the control of the men of their family and caste (Dhamale, 1998: 16-31). This is indeed an important breakthrough, which unfolds theoretical basis of caste-patriarchy.

Ambedkar also grapples with the caste gender intricacies associated with dominance and slavery. While commenting on scriptural injunctions on slavery he points out that slavery was practiced, only in descending order (low castes can be slaves of high castes). He cites *Narad Smriti*, which says that slavery is analogues to condition of wife; and thus suggests the hierarchical unity of gender subordination with caste slavery. The intrinsic bonding between caste and gender is an important characteristic of caste hierarchy. Consequently Ambedkar observes that in the caste hierarchy legislated under Manu's code, the low-caste women were made sexually accessible to the high caste men (Ambedkar, Vol-3, 1987:107). His observation that patriarchal subjugation and gendered hierarchy are entangled with caste hierarchy is important in the study of caste and patriarchy. Ambedkar also cites the gender component involved in the social conflict between Brahmin and *Kshatriya Varna*. He stated that, 'Kshatriyas got provoked against the legal injunctions claiming superiority of Brahmins. One of these injunction granted Brahmin prerogative over the wife of *Kshatriya* (Pandit, 1996:116). He was conscious to unravel the gender element entrapped in the social history of revolution and counter-revolution. He plotted women's freedom in the Buddhist revolution and divulged the fiercest regime of women's enslavement in the era of counter-revolution of Brahmanism. Although Ambedkar's history opened the possibilities of feminist history, it did not narrate the women's resistance to caste-patriarchy. Thus, it failed to acknowledge women as active agent of history.

Ambedkar identified the role of Brahmanism in the genesis and continuity of the caste. His affirmation of the religious basis of caste many times was confused with colonial representation of caste. Colonial historians described caste as a religious construct and propagated that the Brahmins engineered caste by authoring and disseminating religious rituals, scriptures and ideology (Gelders and Derde, 2003). Phule accepted the colonial stance and argued that caste was the conspiracy of Brahmins against Non-Brahmins (Bagade, 2012:462). Ambedkar rejected conspiracy theory, he categorically denied that Manu as individual legislator has infested caste-system in India. He writes:

"I want to impress upon you that Manu did not give the law of caste and that he could not do so. Caste existed long before Manu. He was an upholder of it and therefore philosophized about it, but certainly he did not and could not ordain the present order of the Hindu society. ....The Brahmins may have been guilty of many things, and I dare say they were, but the imposing of caste system on the non-Brahmin population was beyond their mettle" (Ambedkar, 1989:190). In later writings, Ambedkar illustrated the role of Brahmins in the making and sustaining of the caste system in specific historical situations. He blamed the Brahmins for the role they played in providing religious



sanctity to the *varna-jati* system. His two monographs argue that the Brahmins played active role in the degradation of Shudras and untouchables (Gore, 1993:273).

Thus Ambedkar's positions regarding the role of Brahmins in upholding caste was modified as per the progress of his researches in history and particularly on Brahminism. He not only unraveled the role of Brahminism in shaping and maintaining hierarchy of caste and patriarchy but also identified it as hegemonic and coercive apparatus where attempts of revolution were either met with coercion or addressed through assimilative mechanism of persuasion. He also explored the ideological cultural shifts in Brahmanism broadly constituting two historical stages of ancient Indian history: first, was the barbaric phase of Brahminism under Vedic period, and second was the phase of counter-revolution. Ambedkar observed that counter-revolution defined Brahminical resurgence. Under the reign of Pushyamitra Shunga, the state used indiscriminate coercion against Buddhism. Brahminism channelized and organized rituals, beliefs, laws, ideology and culture to thwart and eliminate the forces of Buddhism. Under these conditions of counter-revolution, caste-system came to dominance in India through a process of turmoil, warfare, contradiction and conflict. In particular, we may see its consolidation as a result of Brahminism (including both ideological forces and temples and other religious institutions) and state-power; of coming together of Brahmins and the amorphous set of powerholders, chieftains and Rajas of various castes and tribal origins who have their power confirmed in the emerging medieval synthesis (Omvedt, 1994:42).

In the processes of regimentation of caste system Ambedkar located the emergence of untouchability. He contended that untouchability as an institution emerged in fourth century AD when caste system was fully-grown and consolidated. He has seen the emergence in the socio-cultural conflicts of Buddhism with Brahmanism. Ambedkar has rightly identified the socio-economic nuances involved in the religious strife of India. He categorically stated that 'purely religious point of view would give only a superficial picture. The questions: about the way the masses and classes of India live; the social and economic terms of their associated lives and the influences of the religion constituting their condition of life are very important' (Ambedkar, Vol-5, 1989:129). Ambedkar very presciently unraveled the structure of social dependence within which untouchables as broken men were subjugated to social servitude. The broken men were distinct group of Buddhist; wandering tribesmen defeated in battle as nomadic society degraded and homeless. They at one hand, because of their condition of utter destitution were forced to accept the social servitude of *baluta-jajmani* relationship. And on the other hand, their incessant struggle with Brahmanism resulted in inflicting permanent impurity on them. The condition of untouchability thus subordinated and stigmatized their labour enchained them in social slavery and degraded and humiliated their entire existence.

### **Approaching the Method to Study Caste**

Ambedkar employed available methods of social sciences for studying caste and untouchability and relentlessly searched for the new methodological possibilities for explicating every aspect of caste and untouchability. His critical and creative engagement with the project of caste annihilation gave him rare insights, which helped in theorization of caste system. His passionate research in this field provides us important conceptual tools to study caste society.

Firstly, Ambedkar defined caste as an endogamous social group. The emergence of caste was the result of the superimposition of endogamy over exogamy (Ambedkar, vol-1, 1979:9). Endogamy as the basis of caste (which placed restriction to marry within ones own caste) produced and reproduced the caste system. This is indeed an important structural marker of caste. Secondly, the characteristic feature of the division of labor instituted by the caste system, which Ambedkar rightly pointed out as, ‘a system of division of laborers’<sup>14</sup>. This very feature of caste ordained a system of divisions and differentiation by fragmenting toiling masses into various caste groups and placing them in caste hierarchy. Ambedkar states that ‘the genius of caste is to divide and disintegrate’ (Ambedkar, vol-3 1987:02). Caste divisions took place based on occupations. In addition, within one occupational caste group divisions of sub-castes took place based on what kind of labor/service/products provided or what technique of production employed were by particular groups/people. Endogamy remained the principal ground of caste divisions and differentiations and constituted autonomous sphere of caste.

Thirdly, the very structure of caste autonomy worked as the driving force of the existence and continuity of caste. Ambedkar writes:

“...there is no inter-connection between various castes which form a system each caste is separate and distinct. It is independent and sovereign in the disposal of its internal affairs and the endorsement of caste regulations. The caste touch but do not penetrate (Ambedkar, vol-5, 1989:160). The spirit of isolation and separation shapes the course of caste system. Autonomous domain of each caste set a pattern of behavior towards one another. The guiding principle is ‘be separate’, ‘do not intermarry’, ‘do not interdine’, do not touch (Ambedkar, 1990:103).

Fourthly, caste in single number cannot exist; caste can exist only in plural number by forming a system involving other castes (Ambedkar, Vol-3, 1987:102). Autonomous sphere of caste did provide a ground for coming together but forming of system of caste involves integration and ordaining of all autonomous castes under the system of coercion and hegemony provided by systemic cultural unity<sup>15</sup>. This very system and apparatus of cultural unity is provided by Brahminical system. Ambedkar has identified the role of Brahmanism in bestowing of the cultural unity of caste system. Brahminism engineers the system of assimilation where all castes are roped in the order of graded inequality and exploitation.

Fifthly, Ambedkar identifies caste as system of graded inequality and exploitation, which is indeed, is an important conceptual tool to locate the socio-economic mechanism of

caste. Religious apparatus of Brahmanism gives graded inequality a ritualistic-structural basis. Ascriptive status of superiority and inferiority is based on religious ceremonies, (like upnayana ceremony) incantation (Vedokta, Puranokta, Shastrokta) that accompany the religious ceremonies and through the position of the priest. The principle of commensality also governs inter-caste relations and hierarchy (Ambedkar, vol-5, 1989: 162-3). Purity-pollution is the governing principle of the hierarchy of caste. It regulates the inter caste and intra caste social relations. Individual caste or castes groups are always located in the structure of graded inequality based on purity and pollution. The unity of caste lies in the Brahminical culture system, which lower castes internalize through a process of imitation.

The principle of graded inequality works in economic field. Ambedkar writes, “The principle of graded inequality has been carried into the economic field ...The Hindu social order does not recognize equal need, equal work or equal ability the reward of the labour. Its motto is that in regard to the distribution of the good things of life those who are reckoned as the highest must get the most and best and those who are classed as lowest must accept the least and the worst” (Ambedkar, 1987:111).

Ambedkar’s perceptive struggle and writing for the issue of Mahar *watan* unfolds caste-based relations of production and the caste modality of surplus appropriation. Caste as a system of graded inequality and exploitation structured Baluta/jajamani relations of production and exchange. Mahar as untouchables were placed at lowest ebb of social hierarchy. They were allotted menial and hard physical labour. A large number of untouchables in the village were either village servants or landless labourers (Omvedt, 1994). Their labor and services were put under the control of feudal elites; their relationship with *Vatandar* (landed or dominant) peasant castes was structured through Baluta mode of production and exchange channelizing the surplus appropriation. Ambedkar tries to define the social structure of relationship between touchable with untouchable as the condition of exploitation and oppression of untouchables. The touchable as the majority community were economically strong and powerful, socially occupied the position of ruling race, lived inside the village and Untouchables as the disadvantaged minority community economically poor and dependant on touchable castes, socially occupied the position as subject race of hereditary bondsmen.

Ambedkar categorically marked out the social servitude of untouchables inbuilt in baluta relations. Untouchability as condition of existence doomed Mahars to be dependent on baluta watan. The subservience of Mahar caste was structured through three ways 1) by placing patronizing authority to Savarna castes who gave remuneration to Mahars for their labour and Mahars had to accept it as obligation, 2) by giving insufficient, meager baluta payment far below than needed for survival, 3) by not allowing them to take up alternative sources of survival. He pointed out that untouchable was dependent upon the touchable for earning his livelihood as well as for the purchases of necessities of life. The total dependence of untouchable made Mahars subservient to the village community (Ambedkar, vol-5 1989:266-7).

This condition of untouchability created several disabilities for untouchables. They were bound to give manifold services to the village community. Ambedkar gives a long list of the enormous work assigned to untouchables. Untouchables were forced to work hard for less remuneration, perquisites and meager produce obtained from vatan land. Therefore, Ambedkar declared Mahar Vatan as the charter of social slavery of Mahars. Untouchability created conditions where untouchable castes were exploited and dominated through various mechanisms. The idea of untouchability restricted them from using and controlling natural and public resources. Access to public, roads and temples was denied. Natural resources like land and water was restricted. It created a structure where untouchable's consumption level was the lowest. Untouchables were not allowed to wear good clothes, ornaments of silver and gold, not given permission to eat good food or live in good houses. Untouchability lowered the sustenance power of untouchables and gave them the least bargaining power. When untouchables revolted for the rise of baluta remuneration, they could not sustain their struggle because of their very low sustaining power, lack of resources and their dependence on the village community for the survival. In such a situation, the village community used to resort to violence. Village community used to ostracize or boycott untouchables and many times committed physical violence against untouchables (Ambedkar, vol-5 1989:267).

Ambedkar developed an array of conceptual tools to unfold intricate aspects of caste economy. His definition of the caste as 'endogamy' and caste as 'a system of division of labourers' helps us in understanding the social condition of production under caste system. The concepts like graded inequality and exploitation informs us about the caste mode of surplus appropriation. He creatively used the experience of untouchable caste-labour in unfolding intricate mechanism of caste economy. He presciently unraveled the role of religious ideology and social domination in structuring the unequal relationship of production where untouchable labourer is made dependent, servile, having no sustaining power, and possessing lowest consumption level against the collectivity of *Savarna* castes. Although he avoided Marxist terminology like mode of production relations of production (etc.), he described the economic basis of caste and untouchability more perceptively than Marxists did.

Having such a perceptive economic method to study caste Ambedkar did not take up the historical inquiry to locate economic roots of caste. Omvedt criticized Ambedkar for writing the history of India largely in terms of political group conflict without looking at economic structures that underlay or influenced these. (Omvedt, 1994: 242) Nalini Pandit and other Marxists scholars reiterated the charge that Ambedkar's historical writing has not acknowledged the productive forces as the motive force of history (Pandit, 1996:119). It is true that Ambedkar's history focused more on political and cultural aspects of Varna-caste struggle. That might be because he asserted the religious basis of caste-economy. He observed that productive relations of untouchables with *Savarna* Hindus are constituted under the graded inequality and exploitation of caste enshrined by the religious principle of purity/pollution. Therefore, he zealously argued that the religious sanction is the highest sanction of caste.

Nevertheless, his concern about economic aspect of caste is strongly reflected in his struggle against caste and untouchability. In his first agitation against untouchability at Mahad, he laid down the economic agenda entangled with socio-cultural aspects of caste. In the historical conference of Mahad, he drafted a resolution against untouchability, which had economic implications. The resolution was: "...no untouchable shall skin the dead animal of the Hindus, shall carry it or eat the carrion". This was aimed at fostering among the Untouchables self-respect and self-esteem. 'But the major objective was to strike a blow at the Hindu social order. The Hindu social order is based upon a division of labour, which reserves for the Hindus clean and respectable jobs and assigns to untouchables dirty and mean jobs and thereby clothes the Hindus with dignity and ignominy upon the untouchable. The resolution was the revolt against this part of Hindu social order. It aimed at making 'do their dirty jobs' (Ambedkar, 1989:258). Ambedkar did discuss economic contradictions involved in the contemporary caste struggles but at the same time focused on the immediate issues like civil rights because untouchables were denied human treatment. The need to resolve the issues of untouchability at the earliest has driven him to take up the struggle in political and cultural spheres, which reflected in his historical writings<sup>16</sup>.

### **Caste-class Analysis**

Ambedkar used the idiom of class to explain caste contradiction. He observed that the consciousness in the caste society operates on two levels: one is the level of caste consciousness and other is the class or caste-group consciousness. The mechanism of these two-caste consciousness regulate social relations of caste. Ambedkar knew the difference between class and caste, he categorically said that class is different and opposed to the notion of caste. Nevertheless, he used the term classes of caste to denote the process of the syndicates of caste groups. "... as Hindus are divided into so many castes, castes are divided into different classes of caste" (Ambedkar, vol-5 1989:164). These classes of castes are based on *Varna* division of society. Ambedkar identified two major classes of caste: one is *Savarna* (who belongs to Varna society) and other is *Avarna* (who does not belong to Varna society). *Savarna* has two classes *Dwija* castes (twice born high castes) and castes belonging to *Shudra* status. The *Avarna* class is divided into three groups'... tribes, nomadic tribes and untouchable castes. Ambedkar has not used the term class in the same way as the Marxist but he used it to denote operation of groups or collectives of castes. The division of classes of caste is based on the hierarchy of castes, isolation and separatism as the spirit of caste division continues to operate in these group-castes.

Ambedkar explained the difference between caste consciousness and class (syndicate of castes) consciousness. Every individual goes through shifting trajectories of caste consciousness and consciousness of its caste syndicate. When an individual, as a member of caste comes in conflict with the caste which is outside his caste syndicate, shares the consciousness binding horizontally all the castes belonging to that caste syndicate. And when he engages in conflict with the other caste of his own syndicate then his consciousness is caste conscious. Ambedkar writes:

"Whether he is caste conscious or class conscious depend upon the caste with which he comes in conflict, if the caste with which he comes in conflict is a caste

within the class to which he belongs he is caste conscious. If the caste is outside the class to which he belongs he is class conscious". (Ambedkar, vol-5 1989:164) This analysis provided the theoretical basis to narrate the history of caste antagonisms. In caste society, with the varying nature of conflict caste and caste-group antagonisms prevailed. Ambedkar broadly identified Brahmins and non-Brahmins, *Avarnas* and *Savarnas* antagonisms as the basic antagonisms of Indian society. He pointed out that *Savarna* and *Avarnas* antagonism is such that it cannot be resolved and whereas other caste and caste-group antagonisms can be resolved. He asserted that class-caste system follows closely the class cleavage of Varna system (Ambedkar, vol-3 1987:147).

With the advent of British colonialism institution of class entered in India. However, class did not emerge displacing caste, rather caste system accommodated class phenomenon within its fold. Ambedkar identified the peculiar characteristics of class phenomenon, which indeed made a dent in Indian society but adopting itself with the forces and structure of caste. He explained the nature and characteristics of emerging classes. He placed them on the power axis, as governing classes and servile classes. According to him, Brahmins and Bania comprised governing classes of India. He employed two criteria 1) reverence about that class in the subordinated masses, 2) presence in administration for the identification of governing class and concluded that Brahmin constituted governing class<sup>17</sup>. His description of Banias as the governing class explains how the capitalist class in India retained its caste character. He defined servile classes of India as Shudras and untouchables. It implies that class in India does not operate as wholly class phenomenon. However, class exists, happens or operates by retaining, consolidating its caste specific characteristics and behavior pattern. (Ambedkar, 1991:205-217)

Ambedkar knew that the class analysis unfolds intriguing aspects of the modern Indian history. He used class analysis in the interpretation of modern Indian history. He acknowledged that the politics of communalism has been shaped by class interests. "Those Hindus and Musalmans who are now fighting have the same policy in Indian politics. They want to establish their classes from them as governing body. The masses whether the Hindus or Musalmans are merely used for establishing the ascendancy of classes (Ambedkar, 1889:222).

### **Probing of Caste Consciousness**

Ambedkar's theory of caste placed Brahminical religion as central to the structure of caste. This is described as the holistic theory of caste system. Louis Dumont's interpretation of caste is also characterized as holistic. However Dumont's organicist perspective of caste portrays caste as harmonious, with constituent parts fulfilling complementary functions. Dumont's way of putting caste hierarchy apparently absolves it from the function of domination, even social oppression (Jaffrelot, 2004:33-4). Contrary to Dumont, Ambedkar emphasizes the inbuilt mechanism of domination and exploitation underlying in the system of caste. He pertinently observed that dominant notion of caste hierarchy enforced by Brahminism was not acceptable to Kshatriya<sup>18</sup> and other low castes (Pandit, 1990: 116). Thus, Brahmanical caste hierarchy remained

potentially discordant hierarchy. Downtrodden castes always contested the dominant hierarchy and the exploitation, which unremittingly manifested through the occurrences of caste struggles.

Unlike Dumont, Ambedkar acknowledges the autonomous existence of caste. He explains how caste identity fosters caste autonomy and specific cultures associated with castes and sub-castes. He writes:

“The significance of separate name of the caste lies in this ....namely it makes caste an organized an involuntary grouping. A separate and distinctive name for a caste makes caste akin to a corporation with a perpetual existence and seal of separate entity. .... they have become castes because in other countries the social groups were not given name while in India they did. It is the name, which the caste bears which gives it fixity and continuity and individuality. This name, which defines who its members are and in most cases a person born in a cast carries the name of caste as a part of surname. Again it is a name which makes it easy for the caste to enforce its rule and regulation” (Ambedkar, vol-5, 1989:160). The very caste names (or labels) provide a basis to autonomous working of caste. Ambedkar is not rejecting the role of Brahmanical ideology in the configuration of caste labels or caste names he emphatically argues about the autonomous working of caste, which gives distinct, separate identities and regulates the internal aspects of caste.

The practice of isolation and exclusion laid down in the caste autonomy keeps the caste society intact. Ambedkar states that, ‘observing isolation and exclusiveness makes castes anti-social and inimical towards one another. Isolation traps them into the rigidity of caste consciousness. It sets processes of institutionalization of social life where only selfish ideals of respective caste get prominence. Isolation makes life static. It continues to produce and reproduce the mentality of separation into privileged and underprivileged, masters and servants’ (Ambedkar, Vol-3, 1987:113).

The graded inequality of caste subsumes the sphere of psychosocial relationships of caste. Ambedkar presciently observes this phenomenon of caste where a progressive order of reverence and descending order of contempt is ordained. Each caste acquired its own identity or selfhood within this hierarchy of ascending scale of hatred and descending scale of contempt. Ambedkar also pointed out that the Brahminical scale of reverence for higher castes is reversed by the lower castes into the hatred towards higher castes. This mentality of caste obtains a self-perpetuating phenomenon where the caste hierarchy is continuously produced and reproduced.

Ambedkar has also identified the other ways of psychosocial regimentation of caste. He marks that the natural sanction of caste operates through habit. In the matter of routine instituted by caste system an individual is initiated to habitual way of caste life. Without using any force, individuals are socialized by caste system and subjugated in the world of caste habits. Conformity is another way through which caste mentality is initiated and socialized. He pointed out that through popular sanctions the conformity is generated. He writes, “... popular sanction works through public opinion. It is the sense of approbation and disapprobation prevalent in society in certain ways of practices. A certain way

becomes folkway and acts in conformity with an established folkway, receives approbation and acts contrary to it is regarded as disapprobation” (Ambedkar. 1989:172). The caste mentality based on graded inequality remained the main hurdle in rallying the depressed and oppressed caste against caste exploitation and domination. The entrenched caste mentality always carries division among the dominated and exploited caste groups, preventing them from uniting to overthrow the oppressor. Ambedkar was the first to underline the reality and to deplore the divisions among the untouchables who were in his opinion ‘a disunited body’ ... infested with the caste system in which they believe as much as does the high caste Hindu. This caste system among the untouchables has given rise to mutual rivalry and to jealousy and it made common action impossible. (Jaffrelot, 2005:36) Ambedkar argued that the existence of caste and caste consciousness has served to keep the memory of past feuds between castes green and has prevented solidarity (Ambedkar, 2003:35). Ambedkar explains that the self of caste which is articulated on hierarchy of caste structure assigns pride to their respective castes while assigning degradation and inferiority to lower castes. “The system untouchability sustains the natural pride of Hindus and makes them feel as well as look big. This is additional reason why the Hindus are not likely to give up untouchability particularly those large majorities who are small men” (Ambedkar, vol-5 1989:102).

Ambedkar explored caste consciousness in two realms 1) caste consciousness structured in Brahminical culture system 2) caste identities and their autonomous structure where self of caste/pride is attained against the other castes within the hierarchical scale of hatred and contempt. That is why he calls caste as fundamentally a state of mind (he meant these both collectively and individually). Ambedkar’s observation of caste consciousness entails the mechanism of caste psychology and gives explanation of multitudes of caste struggles particularly struggles between Untouchables and *Savarana* castes. Ambedkar thus provided the conceptual tool to write the history of caste consciousness. Nevertheless he could not go further to probe the sub-conscious/unconscious of the caste system<sup>19</sup>.

## Conclusion

Ambedkar employed scientific method to unfold the history of caste. Consciously opting for the path of non-Brahmin tradition of history writing he not only rejected narrative constructs and interpretations of colonial and nationalist historiography but also criticized their method of history. He unshackled history from positivist cage and opened the horizon of scientific history. He took departures from some of the Phuleian premises and embarked on the path of rigorous inquiry of history. He took up the several intricate issues like of an origin and growth of caste and untouchability, domination and exploitation in the caste system, role of Brahmanism, and the incessant struggle carried by downtrodden castes against it. He realized that the reality of caste and untouchability cannot be recovered by the positivist method of history.

To seek the laws and forces governing caste and untouchability Ambedkar indulged in the field of generalizations against Ranke’s insistence. He zealously searched for every methodological possibility to generate new facts to unravel the obscured historical reality.



He entered in the interdisciplinary domain to seek the possibility of combined method. In support of his generalization he fetched facts from anthropology, etymology, mythology etc. and also through drawing inferences from comparative analysis of world-history and from every day experiences of caste and untouchability. Hence by transcending the confines of positivist method he carried innovations in the usages of scientific method of history. In this course he criticized Marxist tenet of economic determinism. This variety of Marxist positivism gave primacy to economic structure of class based mode of production and denied the role of man in human history.

Ambedkar evolved new conceptual methodological tools to write social history of India. He argued that caste operates as economic system of surplus appropriation based on the principle of graded inequality and exploitation. He used caste-class as a category of social analysis. He explained the linkages between caste and patriarchy and explained the nature of caste consciousness. His exploration and interpretation of India's history and culture have immensely contributed to the evolution of the philosophy and methodology of non-Brahmin historiography.

**Notes:**

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- 1) For example: as per the expediency, revenue history was written primarily to help the administration in Bengal under British. This was undertaken to determine inheritance along the lines of descent within the leading landlord families of district. These are among the first specimens of elitist bias in British Indian historiography (Guha, 1998:1).
- 2) While defending Hinduism, Jambhekar invokes Dubois, William Jones, Hastings and Wilkinson in support of his glorious representation of Hinduism. He also took keen interest in the reading the copper plates found at Kharepatan and published them in Asiatic societies' journal (Bagade, 2006:110-11). Dodoba Pandurang has shown his inclination towards Indology from early formative days. And in later part of his life he continued his Indological inquiry by writing articles in the journal 'The Theosophist'. Lokhitwadi was a prolific writer who wrote *Aitehasik Goshti* (Historical Stories) and many books on history.
- 3) G. P. Deshpande has pointed out that 'Phule talked about power and knowledge much before Foucault did. In fact, Foucault's postmodernist analysis comes at the time when Europe has literally seen the end of history; whereas Phule's efforts were to change the world/ society with the weapon of knowledge'. Phule classified knowledge in three broad realms: knowledge of individual and social

self (i.e. historical knowledge), empirical knowledge and moral knowledge or knowledge of social relationships.

- 4) Bhanadarkar had shown ambivalence about complete impartiality, he preferred Indian over Europeans or Americans for writing history of India. He argued that being equipped with critical method of inquiry, Indians could throw more light on Indian history in some respects than European and American scholars. Chiplunkar declared history to be an expression of affinity and closeness with the culture that could be properly written only by a nation's own people, and demanded an Indian history of India (Deshpande, 2007: 100-101). It is quite interesting that Bhandarkar and Chiplunkar both were in favour of partiality borne out from affinity. Contrary to it, Ambedkar argued in favour of partiality borne out from antipathy towards scriptures.
- 5) Ambedkar has listed several reports of the practice of mutual antipathy between Brahmins and untouchables where untouchables are not allowed to pass from the quarters of Brahmins; in unison Brahmins under no circumstances allowed to pass through untouchable part of village (Ambedkar 1990: 314-15).
- 6) Ambedkar like a distinguished lawyer argues in favour and against each disputing parties which has taken their stand in the debate of historical truth. By examining all the available evidence of each party he like a non partisan judge concludes his opinion regarding the historical truth.
- 7) "The historians duty is to separate the true from the false, the certain from uncertain, and the doubtful from which cannot be accepted....Every investigator must before all things look upon himself as one who is summoned to serve on a jury. He has only to consider how far the statement of the case is complete and clearly set forth by evidence. Then draws his conclusion and gives, whether it be that his opinion coincides with that of the Forman or not" (Ambedkar 1990:243).
- 8) Nationalist historian Rajwade was exponent of positivist method. He negated all the institutional and systemic reasons offered for the defeat of Panipat 1761 and held individuals like Malharrao Holkar and Govindpant Bundele for the defeat of Panipat. The practice of holding individuals morally accountable is characteristic to colonial and nationalist historians' espousing positivist method.
- 9) Phule approach was direct; he projected the mythological account of ten incarnation of Vishnu as history. His critical method though was having piercing edge but was not well advanced to separate the facts from the myths.
- 10) In the article entitled *Philosophy of Hinduism* Ambedkar referred religion as 'divine governance the aim and the object of which is to make the social order in which men live in moral order'; and criticized the Hindu scheme of divine governance enshrined in the sacred books like Manusmriti. It is quite interesting that prior to Ambedkar James Mill employed these criteria of examining the Hindu scheme of governance in his book *History of India*. Ambedkar used liberal principles like liberty, equality and fraternity in the criticism of scriptures.
- 11) According to Ambedkar the two charges leveled by communists against Christianity or any other religion are not applicable to Buddhism. The first charge that religion made people otherworldly and made people suffer poverty

in this world and second charge that religion is the opium of the people are not applicable to Buddhism. He posed very poignant question to communists that what will take the place of state when according to Marxism state will wither away? He fervently argued that when the force of state will be withdrawn religion will take its place (Ambedkar, 2007:21).

- 12) Positivist Marxism, a theory of history and society constructed on the model of physical and natural sciences, whose foremost proponent was N. Bukharin. He espoused clear deterministic principles, such as the existence of the body of regular, necessary and objective laws of history and society and the primacy of matter over human consciousness. For Bukharin, economic processes operate independently from human will and outside history. Social phenomena can only be analyzed in terms of certain causalities which are objective (Salamini, 1974:363).
- 13) Besides economic contradiction Ambedkar cites ideological and psychological grounds of this contradiction. According to him “untouchables are not Hindus and Hindus does not accept them. Not having conscience, the Hindu has no such a thing in him as righteous indignation against the inequalities and injustices from which the untouchable has been suffering. He sees no wrong in these inequities and injustices and refuses to budge. By this absence of conscience the Hindu is great obstacle in path of removal of untouchability (Ambedkar, Vol-5, 1989:99). While showing the caste mentality of Hindus he writes, “The system of untouchability sustains the natural pride of Hindus and makes them feel as well as look big. This is additional reason why the Hindus are not likely to give up untouchability particularly those large majorities who are small men (Ambedkar, Vol-5, 1989:102).
- 14) Ambedkar notes following Observation regarding the division of labour of caste: 1) Caste divides Labourers 2) Caste disassociates work from interest 3) Caste disconnects intelligence from manual labour 4) caste devitalizes by denying to him the right to cultivate vital interest and 5) caste prevents mobilization. Caste system is not merely division of labour. It is also division of labourers (Ambedkar, 1987: 67).
- 15) Ambedkar blamed other western authors---from Emile Senart to H. H. Risley and including Ibbeston ---for having defined ‘caste as a unit by itself and not as one within a system of castes’. Castes form a system and that is why, in Ambedkar’s theory, Brahmins are the object of imitation by other groups. He emphasized that India’s remarkable homogeneity derives from the caste system because Brahmins are present throughout the sub continent (Jeffrelot, 2005:33).
- 16) Ambedkar’s reluctance to construct an economic history of caste undermined equal emphasis on material and religious basis of caste and given preferences to cultural and moral struggles. Ambekar’s narrative of the struggle between Brhmanism and Buddhism stressed the superiority of Buddhist morality against the background of Aryan decadence in social and cultural life. He emphasized the Buddha’s condemnation of caste inequality, the wastefulness and inhumanity of *Yajnyas* and credulity and superstition in Brahmanism. He had not explained the economic basis of Buddhist revolution.

- 17) Ambedkar cites the examples French and Japanese governing class. French governing class on the cost of surrendering their privileges gave France a constitution based on liberty equality and fraternity. Japanese governing class Daimyos and Samurais sacrificed their feudal privileges to brought out the revolution against feudalism but in India a governing class is not ready to accept the just demands of servile class/castes of India. They are just working for the perpetuation of their interests and privileges in ancient and medieval times Brahmins were having reservations as ministers officers and clerical staff.
- 18) Ambedkar writes: there would not be the slightest exaggeration to say that the social history of the Hindus not merely class struggle but class war fought with such a bitterness that even the Marxist will not find it difficult to cite parallel cases to match (Ambedkar, Vol-5, 1989:192)
- 19) Comrade Sharad Patil criticized Marxist history as history of consciousness and propounded an epistemology of the conscious and subconscious mind to unfold the history of India. He argued that Dignaga the Buddhist monk contributed the concept of subconscious. In the west Kant, Hurssel, Freud and others developed the idea of subconscious. Patil argues that this epistemology of conscious and subconscious will unfold the history of caste struggle concealed in the collective subconscious.

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