UNTOUCHABILITY AND CASTE DISCRIMINATION IN INDIA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON RESERVATION POLICIES

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the complex interplay of untouchability, caste discrimination, and reservation policies in India, tracing their historical roots and social implications. It begins with an examination of the caste system's origins, delineating various castes and their roles within society, followed by a discussion of the discrimination faced by marginalized groups. The paper highlights the atrocities committed in the name of caste and the relationship between caste and religion. It critically analyzes the historical evolution of reservation policies, their significance, and the controversies surrounding their legitimacy, including criticisms directed towards Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. The dark side of the caste system, including caste massacres, is discussed, alongside the urgent need for a caste census in India. Ultimately, the paper emphasizes the necessity for comprehensive strategies to address caste discrimination and promote social equity, aiming to contribute to ongoing dialogues on caste and its repercussions in contemporary Indian society.

Keywords: Caste, Discrimination, Reservations, Untouchability.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of caste has played a foundational role in India's social structure, creating a distinctive identity that has shaped Indian civilization for over 2,500 years (Macdonell, 1914). Derived from the Spanish and Portuguese word casta, meaning "lineage" or "race," and casto, meaning "pure" or "unmixed" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023), the term "caste" in Hinduism refers to hereditary groups that dictate members' occupations and social interactions, with strict rules limiting associations across caste lines. From as early as the Indus Valley Civilization, people in India organized themselves into groups based on skills, leading to early social hierarchies. Discrimination began when certain groups asserted superiority over others. Hindu mythology attributes the codification of these divisions to Manu, who outlined social guidelines in the Manu Dharma Shastra, a text that later evolved into the caste system by categorizing people by origin. Tracing the caste system's development, ancient Indian literature offers evidence through three key periods. The first, from around 500 B.C. to 500 A.D., encompasses the later Vedic texts, law codes, Sanskrit epics, and Pali Buddhist writings. The second, the pre-Buddhistic period from roughly 1000 to 500 B.C., includes the later Vedas and Brahmanas, showing that the caste system was already in place by this time. The earliest period, that of the Rigveda (around 1300–1000 B.C.), reveals a time before the formal caste system, though its foundational elements were emerging (Macdonell, 1914).

Indian society is divided into various social groups based on caste and religion, with caste playing a central role. Within Hindu society, which comprises around 80 per cent of India's population, individuals are born into specific, mutually exclusive caste groups. Broadly, the caste structure divides society into four main groups: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Shudras.

Brahmins, traditionally priests and scholars, occupy the highest caste; Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers) and Vaisyas (traders and moneylenders) are regarded as high-caste Hindus, while Shudras, who historically performed menial jobs, fall into what are now known as Other Backward Classes (OBCs), Scheduled Castes (SCs), and Scheduled Tribes (STs) (Vani et al., 2014). The Dalits, previously considered "untouchable" castes, have long faced discrimination and violence. This violence intensified in the form of large-scale massacres from the 1970s onward, including incidents such as Kilvenmani (1968) in Tamil Nadu, Belchi (1977) in Bihar, and Karamchedu (1985) in Andhra Pradesh (Satyanarayana, 2014). Dalits' occupations vary widely, depending on caste and region. Those who work with leather or human waste are often seen as polluted, while others, like village watchmen, may have numerous responsibilities but fewer polluting tasks, aside from handling dead animals. The origins of untouchability remain a subject of debate. Manusmriti (200 BCE–200 CE), a classical Brahmanical text, references individuals like the Chandala, who lived outside the village, but does not imply a separate, untouchable caste. Scholars generally believe the emergence of specific castes, or jatis, occurred by the fourth century, building on the older Varna system, which included only Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. The classical texts did not include a group below the Shudras. Many Dalit communities have their own origin stories, often attributing their social position to misunderstandings or cosmic events, and reject the orthodox belief that their status is a result of karma.

The Dharma Shastra, attributed to the sage Manu, prescribed roles for each Varna. Brahmins were to study, teach, and perform sacrifices; Kshatriyas were to rule, fight, sponsor sacrifices, and study; Vaishyas were to farm, raise cattle, trade, lend money, and study; and Shudras were assigned to serve the other Varnas. The first all-India census, conducted by the British in 1871–1872, documented caste and tribe classifications, although placing each group within the four-Varna framework proved challenging. Soon after, castes began petitioning for higher status. For instance, during the 1891 Madras Presidency census, the Shanars—a caste engaged in palm tree tapping—claimed Kshatriya status as Nadars. When the census commissioner rejected this claim, fifteen Shanars entered a temple in Kamundi in 1897 to worship the Goddess Meenakshi. The subsequent legal case demanded that the Shanars pay for purification of the "defiled" temple. British courts, including the Privy Council in London, ruled against them, noting that no Shanars had previously worshipped in such temples. The census revealed large sections of India's population were marginalized, with terms like "depressed classes," "backward castes," "tribes," "Adivasis," "Adi-Hindus," and "Adi-Dravidas" emerging to describe them. The English term outcastes was often used to describe certain groups in India, though most had not actually been cast out by their communities. They were also labelled as untouchables, but actual physical contact wasn't the primary issue, except in a few areas in South India. Generally, the so-called upper castes considered themselves "polluted" only if they ate food prepared by untouchables or used utensils that they had used.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, appointed as the chairman of India's Constitution drafting committee, led the creation of a framework that introduced affirmative action—known as protective or compensatory discrimination—to uplift marginalized communities. Under Article 17 of the Constitution, untouchability was abolished, and any act of discrimination arising from it became legally punishable. Article 15(2) granted all castes, including Scheduled Castes (SCs), equal access to public facilities like restaurants, wells, tanks, bathing ghats, and roads. Article 15(4) empowered the state to create special provisions for the advancement of Scheduled Castes and Tribes (STs). For political representation, Articles 330 and 331 reserved seats in the national Parliament and

state assemblies for members of SCs and STs, with reserved seat percentages reflecting their population share within a given region. Article 325 allowed all voters, not just those from SCs and STs, to vote for candidates running for these reserved seats. Article 335 set aside jobs in central and state governments specifically for SCs and STs. Initially, these reservations for legislative seats and jobs were intended to last ten years, but the Constitution was subsequently amended multiple times to extend them for additional ten-year periods. In 1960, the government published an all-India list detailing 405 Scheduled Castes and 225 Scheduled Tribes, organized alphabetically. Some castes appeared in the schedule only in specific areas, while others were listed under various names across India's diverse linguistic regions. In 1976, this list was replaced with a more detailed, state-by-state list that included 841 Scheduled Castes and 501 Scheduled Tribes. However, certain castes and tribes continued to be recognized as "scheduled" only in particular locations, and many groups were known by different names across regions. In cases of ambiguity regarding a group's scheduled or non-scheduled status, the Constitution designated Parliament and the president as the authorities to make final decisions.

The article addresses common myths about caste and the evolving understanding of caste-based reservations, highlighting the historical context and contemporary implications of the caste system in India. The topic Untouchability and Caste Discrimination in India: A Historical Perspective on Reservation Policies is of profound significance as it addresses the enduring injustices faced by marginalized communities in Indian society. By exploring the historical roots and contemporary implications of the caste system, we can better understand how these entrenched inequalities continue to affect millions, influencing their access to education, employment, and social mobility. Reservation policies play a critical role in promoting social justice and providing opportunities that have long been denied to these groups, yet examining their effectiveness is essential for identifying gaps and advocating for necessary reforms. Ultimately, engaging with this topic not only highlights the lived experiences of those impacted by caste discrimination but also emphasizes the ongoing need for collective efforts to eradicate untouchability and foster a more equitable society for all.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Macdonell (1914), The early history of caste provided an insightful analysis of the origins and evolution of the caste system in India. It explained that the caste system arose from various factors, including occupational divisions and tribal affiliations, as well as religious influences. While the contemporary caste system exhibited rigidity, the historical context revealed a more fluid structure with significant changes over time. The work highlighted that many castes retained their tribal identities despite being absorbed into the Hindu social hierarchy. Overall, the article offered a nuanced understanding of how historical and social dynamics shaped the caste system in India.

In Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development (1916), Dr. B.R. Ambedkar provides a thorough analysis of the caste system in India, exploring its origins, functions, and societal implications. Ambedkar argues that caste is not merely a social division but a systematic structure that enforces inequality and restricts mobility. He highlights the role of caste in perpetuating discrimination against the lower castes and emphasizes the need for social reform to dismantle this oppressive system (Ambedkar, 1916). This seminal work laid the foundation for understanding the complexities of caste in India and continues to be a vital reference for discussions on social justice and equity.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's Annihilation of Caste (1936) serves as a critical examination of the caste system in India, condemning it as a social evil that dehumanizes individuals and perpetuates inequality. Written for a Hindu social reform conference, Ambedkar argues for the complete annihilation of caste rather than mere reform, emphasizing the necessity of reservation policies to uplift marginalized communities and ensure their participation in society (Ambedkar, 1936). His insights remain relevant today, as they continue to inspire movements against caste-based discrimination and inform contemporary discussions on social justice in India.

In The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables? (1948), Dr. B.R. Ambedkar explores the historical and social factors that led to the creation of the "Untouchable" class in India. He argues that the Untouchables emerged as a result of systematic discrimination and social exclusion, rooted in the rigid caste hierarchy that developed in ancient Indian society. Ambedkar emphasizes that the Untouchables were not inherently inferior; rather, they were marginalized due to socio-religious practices and the imposition of a caste-based identity that enforced their exclusion from mainstream society (Ambedkar, 1948). This work is crucial for understanding the plight of the Untouchables and the historical context of caste discrimination in India.

Kak (1993) in their article Understanding caste in India offered an in-depth analysis of the caste system in India, examining its historical roots and socio-cultural implications. It discussed how caste operates beyond mere occupational roles, shaping identities and power dynamics in society. Kak highlighted the intersection of caste with religious and political factors, emphasizing the persistent challenges faced by marginalized communities. This comprehensive exploration contributes significantly to the discourse on social stratification and identity in contemporary India. The article serves as an important resource for understanding the complexities of caste and its ongoing relevance.

Deshpande (2010) in their article explored history of the Indian caste system and its impact on India today, exploration of the Indian caste system revealed its deep historical roots and significant impact on contemporary Indian society. The system, characterized by four primary varnas and numerous jatis, has been instrumental in defining social roles and occupations, largely influenced by religious beliefs, particularly Hinduism. Over centuries, caste stratification led to entrenched discrimination and inequality, creating a culture where occupational mobility was severely restricted. While urbanization has facilitated some degree of social interaction among castes, remnants of caste consciousness still persist, affecting economic status, kinship ties, and marriage practices. Various movements advocating for the rights of lower castes emerged, leading to a partial dismantling of caste barriers, yet the legacy of the caste system continues to shape social dynamics and individual lives in India today. Therefore, it remains crucial to assess the ongoing implications of caste status on quality of life and social mobility in the modern context.

Desai and Dubey (2011) in their article Caste in 21st century India, competing narratives examined the relevance of caste in contemporary India by analysing data from a nationally representative survey of 41,554 households conducted in 2005. It explored the relationship between social background and various dimensions of well-being, such as education and income. Findings indicated that caste disparities persisted despite significant economic changes over the preceding two decades, highlighting ongoing inequalities. The study also emphasized that caste differentiation remained evident in social networks, underscoring the complexities of caste's influence on modern life. Overall, the research contributed to the debate surrounding the inclusion of caste in the 2011 Census, suggesting that caste still plays a significant role in shaping social

outcomes in India and suggested that further investigation could focus on how these disparities affect policymaking and community engagement efforts.

Borooah et al., (2014) in their article caste, inequality, and poverty in India examined the issues of caste, inequality, and poverty in India through the lens of rural households' monthly per capita consumption expenditure, utilizing data from nearly 20,000 households. The study initially set out a model highlighting a poverty–inequality trade-off, suggesting that governments could choose their preferred combination of poverty and inequality levels. Subsequently, the authors investigated whether inequality and poverty in India had a "caste basis" or if the outcomes were "caste blind," determined solely by the attributes of individual households. Their overarching conclusion indicated that the outcomes of households regarding their position on the distributional ladder and their likelihood of being poor were significantly influenced by caste. Specifically, households from Scheduled Castes were found to be more likely to occupy the lowest quintile of consumption and to experience higher levels of poverty compared to high-caste Hindu households. They suggested that that many people who are poor suffer a double jeopardy: they are at the bottom of both the income ladder and the social hierarchy. This means that, for many of India's poor, asset acquisition per se is not enough to rescue them from poverty. Their way is also blocked by discriminatory attitudes stemming from a feeling of caste and religious superiority. It is these blockages that must also be cleared before India's poor can begin their long march out of poverty.

Dag-Erik Berg (2014) studied Karamchedu and the Dalit subject in Andhra Pradesh Two massacres, occurring in coastal Andhra, are central to the post-colonial history of Andhra Dalits. The first took place in Karamchedu village (Prakasham district) on 22 July 1985, resulting in the deaths of six Dalits, while the second, with eight fatalities, was in Chundur village (Guntur district) on 6 August 1991. These brutal events were carried out by local dominant castes as comprehensive attacks on Dalits in the most prosperous part of the state, the residuary state of Andhra Pradesh. He outlines the history of the Dalit Mahasabha from its beginnings as a coherent front after Karamchedu in 1985 until its fragmentation at the time of the Chundur event in 1991 and highlighted what can be referred to as the ontological and historical significance, and concluded that massacre in Karamchedu is a significant case with a range of historical and theoretical implications. The most obvious effect was that it represented a new point of departure for the emergence of an independent Dalit movement in the postcolonial period.

Kumar (2014) exploration of caste and inequality in India offered an insightful analysis of the Hindu social order, emphasizing how this structure perpetuates social exclusion, particularly for Dalits. The study highlighted the stark contrasts between Dalits and other marginalized groups, revealing how caste atrocities, especially against Dalit women, serve as indicators of systemic oppression. Kumar argued that the upper castes possess significant social and symbolic capital, which facilitates their dominance across various societal institutions. This dominance not only marginalizes lower castes but also fosters a culture of violence and mistrust. The paper effectively illustrated the layered nature of oppression faced by Dalits, particularly women, due to their unique position within the caste hierarchy. Overall, Kumar's work underscored the urgent need for addressing these inequities in contemporary Indian society.

Satyanarayana, K. (2014) in their article Dalit reconfiguration of caste: representation, identity and politics that sociological functionalist theory has typically viewed the caste system as an externally imposed and consensual structure, focusing primarily on the perspectives of upper castes. This interpretation often obscures the entrenched interests that maintain caste inequalities, particularly benefiting dominant groups such as the Brahmins. In contrast, those marginalized by

caste discrimination have actively challenged these representations, offering a reconfigured understanding of caste as both an identity and a political entity. Recent scholarly work illustrates how Dalit leaders and intellectuals have invoked historical narratives and cultural experiences to redefine caste in contemporary contexts, emphasizing its role as a dynamic power structure. Furthermore, by drawing parallels between caste and racial discrimination, they position caste oppression within the broader framework of human rights violations. This transformation necessitates a new theoretical approach that acknowledges the complexities of caste in modern India, recognizing its ongoing significance in social relations and political action.

Singh (2014) in their article Dalits in India, origin of caste and social exclusion meticulously traced the historical origins of the caste system and its impact on social exclusion. The research highlighted the evolution of Dalit identity, particularly after the adoption of India's Constitution, showcasing Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's pivotal role in advocating for their rights. Following his disillusionment with legislative change, Ambedkar turned to Buddhism, prompting many Dalits to embrace this faith and adopt the term "Dalits," meaning "oppressed." The rise of Dalit activism in literature and politics marked a significant shift in their societal roles, although it often met with violent opposition from higher castes. Additionally, the 1990s saw the emergence of political parties representing Scheduled Castes, reshaping voting behaviour and increasing Dalit representation. Overall, Singh's work underscores the ongoing struggles and resilience of Dalits in their quest for dignity and equality within a historically hierarchical society.

Rao (2015) studied Dalit movement in Andhra Pradesh, a historical outline of a hundred years and provided a comprehensive historical overview of the Dalit movement in South India, particularly within the Telugu-speaking regions of the Madras presidency and the erstwhile Nizam state. It argued that the movement was not merely a social struggle but an ideological quest for an egalitarian social order and human dignity, challenging the oppressive structures of the traditional Hindu caste system. The discussion was structured into three sections: the first traced the historiography and sources related to Dalit history, while the second highlighted significant events that marked changes in the movement during the colonial era. Finally, it examined the connections between these historical shifts and the evolving nature of the Dalit movement in the post-colonial context. Overall, the article illuminated the radical nature of the Dalit struggle as it sought to dismantle pejorative identities imposed by the non-Dalits and suggested that further research could explore the implications of these historical developments on contemporary Dalit activism and identity.

Bharti, N. K. (2018) in their article Wealth inequality, class and caste in India combined data from wealth surveys (NSS-AIDIS) and millionaire lists to produce wealth inequality series for India over the 1961-2012 period and found a strong rise in wealth concentration in recent decades, in line with recent research using income data. *E.g.*, the top 10 per cent wealth share rose from 45 per cent in year 1981 to 63 per cent in 2012, while the top 1 per cent share rose from 12.5 per cent to 31 per cent also gathered information from censuses and surveys (NSS AIDIS and IHDS) explored the changing relationship between class and caste in India and the mechanisms behind rising inequality, concluded that caste still plays important role in Indian society. The repercussions of past injustice towards lower castes are now becoming more visible with more information coming out in public. Economic outcomes do not see a converging trend. The relative growth of lower castes is either stable or declining. Probably the most worrying aspect for any Indian policymakers is poor educational outcomes for lower caste population. This means that in

coming future the condition will not improve either. The privatization of education is increasing the cost of education and the requirement of skills in employment is ever increasing.

Goghari and Kusi (2023) studied an introduction to the basic elements of the caste system of India reviewed the basic elements of the Indian caste system highlighted its profound impact on the daily lives of individuals from various caste backgrounds. It examined how colonialism contributed to the institutionalization of the caste system, merging the concepts of varna and jāti to create a hierarchical social structure that excluded Dalits, who faced systemic discrimination. The paper discussed India's reservation system, designed to alleviate the disadvantages stemming from caste-based oppression, providing crucial insights for policymakers and social scientists. It emphasized that the caste system's repercussions extend beyond India, affecting South Asian countries and communities worldwide, particularly within the Indian diaspora. Furthermore, the study addressed the implications of categorization and labels on individual identity, self-esteem, and mental health. Overall, it illustrated how systemic oppression can shape psychological functioning and highlighted the need for targeted policies to address these issues in various cultural contexts. The findings underscored the global relevance of the caste system and its ongoing implications for equity and social justice and suggested that the discussion surrounding justice and reconciliation often remains rooted in local contexts and Euro-Western ideologies; however, the caste system of India serves as a critical example of an enduring form of hierarchical discrimination that warrants global study. Comparisons between the caste system and racial discrimination in the United States reveal striking parallels, with scholars like Isabel Wilkerson highlighting the systemic nature of oppression faced by both Dalits in India and Black Americans. This evolving framework of caste not only offers insights into individual and systemic discrimination but also provides valuable lessons on reconciliation and justice applicable on a global scale.

3. DISCUSSION

In this article, I attempt to answer some basic questions related to my research titled *Untouchability and Caste Discrimination in India: A Historical Perspective on Reservation Policies*, using important facts and information.

What is Caste: The word "caste" is derived from the Spanish and Portuguese word casta, meaning lineage, breed, or race, and casto, meaning pure and unmixed (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023) Caste by literal meaning one of the hereditary social classes in Hinduism that restrict the occupation of their members and their association with the members of other castes.

Origin of caste: The origin of the caste system in India can be traced back to ancient texts and societal developments. According to Hindu mythology, Manu outlined the principles for societal organization in his work, the Manu Dharma Shastra, which categorized people based on their birth into different groups known as castes. The historical development of the caste system began around 1300 B.C., with three key periods marking its evolution.

Initially, in the earliest period from around 1300 to 1000 B.C., represented by the Rigveda, the caste system was not yet established, though foundational elements were present. This was followed by the pre-Buddhistic period (1000 to 500 B.C.), during which the later Vedas and Brahmanas emerged, and the caste system started to take shape. Finally, from 500 B.C. to 500 A.D., texts like the later Vedic literature, ancient law books, and great epics further solidified the caste structure, reinforcing social hierarchies and defining roles for different castes. Thus, the caste

system evolved through a combination of religious texts and historical developments over the centuries.

Different castes: Indian society is divided into various social groups defined by caste and religion, with the caste system being a significant aspect of this stratification. Approximately 80 per cent of India's population identifies as Hindu, and they are classified into mutually exclusive caste groups based on birth. Broadly speaking, these groups can be categorized into four main subgroups: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. Brahmins, who traditionally served as priests and educators, occupy the highest position in this hierarchy, followed by Kshatriyas, who were historically warriors and rulers, and Vaishyas, who engaged in trade and moneylending. The Shudras, who traditionally performed menial labor, include those classified as 'Other Backward Classes' (OBCs), Scheduled Castes (SCs), and Scheduled Tribes (STs) (Vani et al., 2014). In 1960, the Government of India published a comprehensive national list that identified 405 Scheduled Castes and 225 Scheduled Tribes, organized in alphabetical order, to address the social inequalities entrenched within this caste system.

Discrimination: Means treating someone or a specific group in society unfairly compared to others (Oxford Dictionary). It can be illegal based on factors like sex, sexual orientation, race, religion, disability, or nationality, which means it can take many forms. In India, caste discrimination has been a major issue, and I have discussed this with examples in my review of literature. In other countries, discrimination may occur based on race, gender, or religion. It is essential that discrimination comes to an end.

Caste and Atrocities: The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has tracked caste-based atrocities in India since its first report in 1995, which documented 21,900 cases of crimes against Scheduled Castes (SCs) Over the years, the data has shown a disturbing trend of increasing reported incidents. By 2001, this number had climbed to 31,000, and it rose to 40,000 by 2011. The most recent data from 2022 reveals a significant spike, with 57,582 cases recorded, indicating a 62 per cent increase over the last decade. This escalation reflects not only the persistent nature of caste discrimination but also the growing awareness among marginalized communities to report such crimes, supported by efforts from government initiatives and NGOs to highlight the issues faced by SCs and Scheduled Tribes (STs) Despite the increase in reported cases, the conviction rates for these crimes remain alarmingly low, with only 36.0 per cent for SCs and 28.1 per cent for STs This highlights systemic issues within the law enforcement and judicial frameworks, where victims often face obstacles in seeking justice. While the improved reporting may indicate greater societal awareness and the implementation of protective laws, the continued prevalence of caste-based violence underscores the need for more effective reforms to ensure justice and protection for marginalized communities.

A total of 10,064 cases were registered for committing crime against Scheduled Tribes (STs), an increase of 14.3 per cent over 2021 (8,802 cases). The crime rate increased from 8.4 in 2021 to 9.6 in 2022. The report reveals that 1,347 cases of rape and 1022 cases of assault on tribal women were reported in 2022. In India, Uttar Pradesh (15,368), Rajasthan (8,752), Madhya Pradesh (7,733), and Bihar (6,509) reported the highest number of crimes against SCs. In UP, the number of crimes against SCs went up from 13146 in 2021 to 15368 in 2022 - an increase of 16 per cent. The figure was 12714 in 2020. Madhya Pradesh (2,979) and Rajasthan (2,521) also recorded the highest number of cases over crimes against STs. Among South Indian states, Andhra Pradesh with 2315 cases, topped the list in cases against SCs. While Telangana registered 1787 crimes against SCs, Tamil Nadu had 1761 and Karnataka had 1977 such cases. Kerala reported

the lowest number of crimes against SCs (1,050). Tamil Nadu witnessed a spurt in crimes against SCs, rising from 1377 in 2021 to 1761 in 2022. An increase of 28.4 in percentage terms. The highest number of crimes against Scheduled Tribes (STs) in South India were reported in Telangana (545) and lowest in Tamil Nadu (67). Karnataka registered 438 crimes against STs while Andhra Pradesh recorded 396 crimes against STs while Kerala recorded 172 crimes against STs. Karnataka reported the highest spurt in crimes against STs from 361 cases in 2021 to 438 cases in 2022, an increase of 21.3 per cent Among the cases registered for crime against SCs majority of cases were registered under simple hurt ((18,428), followed by Criminal Intimidation (5,274) and violations of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act (4,703). In crimes against STs, most are in the category of simple hurt cases (2,826).

Caste and religion: The relationship between caste and religion in India is complex and deeply rooted in society. Although the caste system is mainly linked to Hinduism, which divides its followers into different groups based on birth, its effects are seen in other religions too. For example, in Buddhism, many Dalit Buddhists, who converted from lower-caste Hindu backgrounds to escape discrimination, still face social bias and often identify with their previous castes. In Sikhism, some Jatt Sikhs continue to marry within their caste, despite the religion's message of equality. Similarly, in Islam, there are distinctions like Ashraf (elite) and Ajlaf (lower status), which show how caste-like divisions can influence social interactions. Even in Christianity, certain communities, such as those in Kerala, have caste-like structures that affect social practices. Therefore, even though these religions promote equality, caste identities and discrimination remain present. B.R. Ambedkar, in his influential work "Annihilation of Caste," emphasizes that caste is a social construct deeply embedded in Indian society, stating that it is not merely a Hindu phenomenon but a pervasive issue affecting various religious groups. He argues that true social reform can only occur if the caste system is dismantled, regardless of the religious beliefs people hold. This suggests that caste is a strong social construct in India that influences relationships and interactions, regardless of religious beliefs**.**

Reservations, History, Origin and Importance: Reservations in India have a long history that goes back to the British colonial period in the mid-19th century. In 1850, the British recognized the unfair treatment faced by lower castes, especially the Untouchables, and started to take steps to help them. In 1871, the British government conducted the first census, which categorized people by caste, helping to understand the social structure better. In the early 20th century, the British introduced separate electorates for some castes, including Untouchables, through the Government of India Act of 1919. This allowed marginalized communities to have a voice in governance but also created more divisions within society.

Jyotiba Phule was an important social reformer who worked hard for the rights of lower castes and opposed the caste system. He believed that education and social equality were vital for improving society. His efforts laid the foundation for future movements that aimed to secure rights and representation for the oppressed. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar continued this fight as a key leader against caste discrimination. After India gained independence in 1947, the Constitution was adopted in 1950, which included reservations to help Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Article 17 abolished untouchability, and Articles 330 and 331 reserved seats in Parliament and state assemblies for SCs and STs, ensuring they had representation. Over time, the government updated these lists to include more castes and tribes, acknowledging the diverse identities in India. Overall, reservations are important for providing opportunities in education,

jobs, and politics for marginalized communities, promoting equality and inclusion, and helping to create a fairer society in India.

Reservations in India are aimed at uplifting historically oppressed groups, regardless of their community or religion. For instance, the Mahar caste in Maharashtra has been granted Scheduled Caste (SC) status due to their long history of discrimination, whereas in states like Gujarat, the Mala community, despite facing similar challenges, may not receive the same recognition. Similarly, in Andhra Pradesh, the Kapus community has sought inclusion in the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category to address their socioeconomic struggles, demonstrating that reservation policies can vary significantly across regions. Moreover, the Jats in Haryana, who have experienced economic hardships, were granted OBC status in 2016 after widespread protests, showcasing how caste-based reservations adapt to local dynamics and demands.

In Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, the reservation landscape is particularly complex. The Mala and Madiga communities, both classified as SCs, face disparities in access to resources despite their recognized status. Conversely, communities like the Pallis and Gollas have been designated as OBCs, which further complicates the situation as they advocate for more recognition. The case of the Reddy and Kamma communities also highlights this issue; while they enjoy significant social and economic advantages, the demand for reservations continues to rise among them. This underscores the principle that reservations are meant for all those who have faced oppression, regardless of their caste or religion, to promote a more equitable society. The ongoing debates and legal battles surrounding these classifications reflect the necessity of adapting reservation policies to meet the needs of diverse groups, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Is it legit to blame reservations: Blaming reservations for incompetence in India's systems is not entirely fair, as these reservations were established to promote social, political, and educational justice for marginalized communities that have faced historical discrimination. While they aim to level the playing field and provide opportunities for the historically excluded, the implementation of these policies often falls short due to various factors. Many individuals remain unaware of the reservation system, which limits its effectiveness, and issues like the misuse of fake caste certificates, as reported in recent news, undermine the intended benefits. This allows some to benefit unfairly while deserving candidates are overlooked. Instead of blaming reservations, it is crucial to focus on improving implementation, ensuring transparency, and educating people about their rights to create a more equitable society.

In the education sector of India, reservations are allocated to promote equality and uplift marginalized communities. Currently, there are specific quotas: 15 per cent for Scheduled Castes (SC), 7 per cent for Scheduled Tribes (ST), 29 per cent for Other Backward Classes (OBC), and 10 per cent for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS). These reservations aim to address historical injustices and provide opportunities to those who have been socially and economically disadvantaged. However, when a student from a reserved category secures admission with significantly lower marks or ranks, it raises concerns about the educational infrastructure available to these communities. For example, if a student from the SC category gains entry into a prestigious college with much lower scores than the general category cut-off, it may indicate that there are not enough students from that community who have had access to quality education or support systems to perform at the same level.

This discrepancy highlights the inadequacies within the educational system itself, which has often failed to provide a solid foundation for these students. The reservations are designed as a temporary measure to level the playing field, compensating for years of systemic discrimination

and neglect. Ideally, the need for such reservations should diminish as society progresses toward genuine equality. However, the reality remains that many students from reserved categories face numerous obstacles, including inadequate schooling, lack of resources, and societal pressures. Moreover, it's essential to consider the reservations for elite students, often referred to as "management quotas" or payment seats in private institutions. These seats are typically reserved for students who can afford to pay high fees, which perpetuates inequality by allowing wealthier families to bypass competitive exams altogether. This practice often goes unnoticed, as it does not receive the same scrutiny as the reservations for marginalized communities. By focusing solely on the reservations for SCs, STs, OBCs, and EWS, we risk overlooking the complexities of privilege and access that exist within the education system. Thus, while reservations play a crucial role in providing opportunities to marginalized groups, they also reveal deeper systemic issues that need addressing. The ultimate goal should be to create a genuinely equitable education system, where all students, regardless of their background, have access to quality education and the resources necessary to succeed. Only then can the need for reservations be reconsidered, as the society will have achieved a level of equality that makes such measures redundant.

Blaming Ambedkar for Reservations: Blaming Dr. B.R. Ambedkar for reservation policies in India neglects the extensive work he accomplished to promote social justice and equality for marginalized communities. As the chief architect of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar understood that affirmative action was crucial to remedy centuries of oppression faced by Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). He firmly believed that reservations were necessary to fulfil the constitutional promise of equality. His advocacy for these policies stemmed from a deep understanding of the systemic barriers that had historically hindered the progress of these groups. Additionally, Ambedkar was instrumental in the Poona Pact of 1932, which marked a significant turning point in the struggle for Dalit rights. This agreement between Ambedkar and Gandhi addressed the issue of separate electorates for the Untouchables, which Ambedkar initially supported to ensure political representation. However, under pressure, he agreed to a compromise that allowed for reserved seats within the general electorate instead. This was a crucial moment, reflecting his pragmatic approach to achieving social justice while recognizing the need for unity among oppressed communities.

As the first Law Minister of independent India, Ambedkar laid a robust legal framework aimed at promoting social justice and economic equality. His commitment as Labour Minister was equally notable; he championed workers' rights, advocating for fair wages and improved working conditions. He emphasized the establishment of trade unions to empower labourers, regardless of caste. Ambedkar's work extended beyond policy-making; he actively educated the public about their rights and the significance of social reform. His influential text, "Annihilation of Caste," critiqued caste discrimination and called for a radical restructuring of society. Ambedkar envisioned a future where marginalized communities could fully engage in political, social, and economic life. Instead of attributing blame for reservations, society should recognize and honour his relentless efforts to forge a more equitable India—where justice and opportunity are accessible to all, regardless of caste or gender. His contributions laid the groundwork for a society where rights and equality could thrive, reflecting his vision of a just and inclusive India

Dark side of Caste system: The dark side of the caste system in India has a serious impact on employment opportunities for lower-caste people, keeping them trapped in cycles of poverty and inequality. For a long time, the caste system has forced many marginalized groups, especially Dalits and other lower castes, into low-paying and menial jobs. According to the 2011 Census,

around 16.6 per cent of the Indian population identifies as Scheduled Castes (SCs), and many of these individuals are engaged in occupations classified as unclean, such as manual scavenging, street sweeping, and agricultural labour. The National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) reports that approximately 65 per cent of Dalit households still live below the poverty line, compared to about 29 per cent of the general population.

The lack of education makes things worse. The Ministry of Education's statistics show that the literacy rate for SCs is around 66 per cent compared to the national average of 74 per cent. Many people from lower castes do not get a chance to go to good schools because of their social and economic conditions, which means they are not prepared for skilled jobs in today's world. Additionally, poor nutrition and living conditions affect their health, making it even harder for them to study and succeed. For example, the Planning Commission has reported that nearly 30 per cent of SC children under five are malnourished, which impacts their growth and learning ability.

This lack of education and health issues keep them stuck in low-paying jobs, creating a cycle that is difficult to break. Moreover, the stigma attached to their caste often leads to discrimination during hiring. A study by the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies found that around 60 per cent of employers are hesitant to hire individuals from Dalit backgrounds, often preferring candidates from higher castes. This deeply rooted social structure not only prevents them from moving ahead in life but also sends the message that their value is determined by their caste. This situation continues to maintain poverty and exclusion in Indian society, making it hard for lower-caste people to improve their lives and achieve equality.

To overcome the challenges of caste discrimination and poverty in India, a multi-faceted approach is needed, focusing on education, economic opportunities, and policy implementation. First, increasing access to quality education for marginalized communities is crucial, supported by scholarships and tutoring programs. Second, economic empowerment through skill development and entrepreneurship can help individuals secure better-paying jobs. Strengthening the implementation of affirmative action policies, alongside improving healthcare access and nutrition for lower caste communities, is essential for breaking the cycle of poverty. Additionally, fostering social integration through community-building activities can reduce stigma, while legal reforms should be enacted to address caste-based discrimination and ensure accountability for violators. By adopting these methods, a more equitable society can be created where all individuals have equal opportunities to thrive, thus addressing the deep-rooted issues of caste and poverty in India.

Caste Massacres: Caste based violence is a serious problem in India, especially in the southern states, where many tragic incidents show how deep-rooted caste discrimination is. One terrible example is the Kilvenmani massacre in 1968, when upper-caste landlords killed many Dalits in Tamil Nadu. This happened because the Dalits were demanding fair wages and better working conditions. Another shocking incident was the Karamchedu massacre in 1985 in Andhra Pradesh, refers to an incident that occurred in Karamchedu, Bapatla district of Andhra Pradesh on 17 July, 1985, where brutality by Kamma landlords against Madigas (Dalits) resulted in the killing of six Madigas and grievous injuries to many others. Three Madiga women were raped. Hundreds of Madigas in the village were displaced from their home & killed after their houses were burnt and looted. Other incidents, like the Dharmapuri riots in Tamil Nadu in 2008 and the Marad massacre in Kerala in 2003, also highlight the violence against Dalits. Such events show that caste discrimination leads to tragic outcomes and that urgent changes are needed in society.

To fight against caste discrimination, we need to take many steps. First, educating people about caste issues is important, especially in villages and cities, to help change old mindsets. Strict

laws must be enforced to punish those who commit caste-based violence, ensuring justice for victims. Social reformers and community groups can help by supporting the rights of marginalized communities and encouraging unity among different social groups. Talking openly about caste and promoting understanding can help bridge gaps in society. Only by consistently challenging the caste system can we hope to achieve true equality for everyone.

Need of Caste Census in India: The need for a caste census in India has become increasingly evident in addressing the socio-economic disparities faced by marginalized communities. A comprehensive caste census would not only provide essential data on the effectiveness of reservation policies but also offer insights into the actual number of individuals from Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) who have benefited from these initiatives. For instance, recent statistics indicate that approximately 65 per cent of Dalit households live below the poverty line, highlighting a persistent gap in socio-economic advancement compared to the general population, where the figure stands at around 29 per cent (NSSO, 2019). By collecting detailed information on caste-wise achievements in education, employment, and entrepreneurship, policymakers would be better equipped to design targeted interventions that address the unique challenges faced by these communities. This data is vital for assessing the impact of existing reservations and ensuring that the intended benefits reach those who are most in need (Economic Times, 2021).

Furthermore, a caste census is crucial for revealing disparities in access to education and employment opportunities among various caste groups. It would shed light on the number of students from different backgrounds attending government versus private schools, thus identifying inequities in educational resources and opportunities. Additionally, understanding the representation of SCs and STs in the private sector and as entrepreneurs is essential for formulating policies that promote equal opportunities and economic empowerment. For example, a caste census could provide insights into the challenges faced by these groups in securing jobs and establishing businesses. By identifying specific barriers to success, the government can develop targeted strategies that align with Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's vision of social justice and equality. Ultimately, conducting a caste census is a critical step toward dismantling systemic inequalities and ensuring that all citizens, regardless of caste, have an equitable chance to thrive in society (The Hindu, 2022; Indian Express, 2023).

Way Forward:

To address the deep-rooted issues of untouchability and caste discrimination in India, a multi-faceted approach is essential. First, awareness and education about caste and its impacts should be emphasized in schools and communities. Programs that promote social harmony and inclusivity must be implemented, ensuring that people understand the detrimental effects of caste discrimination. Additionally, the government should take steps to strengthen existing laws against caste-based violence and discrimination, ensuring strict enforcement and accountability. Furthermore, conducting a caste census would provide valuable data to assess the current social dynamics and tailor policies more effectively. Involving civil society organizations and community leaders in these initiatives will also help foster a collective responsibility to eliminate caste discrimination.

4. CONCLUSION

Untouchability and caste discrimination remain significant challenges in Indian society, despite legal protections and reservation policies. This historical perspective highlights how these issues are intertwined with social, economic, and political factors. While reservations have played a crucial role in providing opportunities for marginalized communities, they are often debated and blamed for perpetuating divisions. To move forward, a deeper understanding of caste and its historical context is necessary, along with active efforts to promote equality and social justice. By fostering dialogue and implementing effective policies, India can hope to create a more inclusive society, free from the shackles of caste discrimination.

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