

Casteism and Untouchability: A Part of Hinduism?

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Abstract:

The Indian subcontinent, after being enslaved by the Mughal and British invaders alike, for almost five continuous centuries, picked up certain ideologies and reservations that have left behind a blotch on the glorious history that the nation once flaunted. The practice of casteism and untouchability mark as the major drawbacks, set forth in action by the Hindu society of the country. Hinduism, being one of the most followed and accepted religious beliefs in the country, is also one of the most misinterpreted and misconstrued religions. With severe allegations made upon it, as the administrator and propagator of evil practices (such as casteism and untouchability), the true teachings of the religion remain yet to be unfolded in front of the world and those who oppose it. This paper not only focuses on identifying the origins and evolution of the modern-day caste system in India, its connection with the Hindu belief and India's colonial period, with the notion of untouchability following in its wake; but also tries to present the untouched lives of the Dalits, the evils of casteism, and probably the major reasons as to why it continues to be a not so hidden part of the Indian society, even after 75 years down the lane.

Keywords: Casteism; untouchability; Dalits; Hinduism; Reservations.

Introduction:

While the origin of the Varna System dates back to the Early Vedic Period, the Period of the Rig Veda, extending from 1600 B.C. to 1000 B.C., the caste system is a much younger concept. In the current dynamics and functioning of Indian society, the Varna system is considered to be extinct. However, as the misfortune of the Indians would have it, the “caste system”, a rather evil concept, full of propoganda, deceit, and hatred, has taken its place.

What is caste? An Indian might answer as to have read about four groups or categories, with Brahmins at the top, followed by Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and then eventually by Shudras taking the last position, in their elementary and secondary level classrooms. However, this is a very wrong perception or as to say, a wrong definition of the term *caste*. A caste is a surname or a group allocated to a person at the time of his birth, which marks him as a part of a certain tribe or community. There also prevails a misconception of caste being divided into only four groups. The *four groups*' concept belongs to what was known in ancient times as the Varna System. “A guiding principle of life for the better functioning of Humans in a functional society, by the Hindu scriptures” (*The Varna System or The Caste System?*; TOI, 2019).

The caste system, unlike the four functional groups of the Varna system, is dissected into more than a thousand groups, subgroups, divisions, and subparts, throughout the geography of India.

To define caste, one refers to its literal definition in Hindi, which terms it as *Jati*, which means a *community, tribe*, or simply a *clan*. Thus, a caste system functions to assign a person belonging to a certain community, tribe, or clan, at his/her birth, on the basis of heredity.

This specifies one thing, marking the difference between caste and varna more clearly, while the caste system works at a *heredity* level; which means that a particular caste or creed is allotted to a person, based on his/her *birth* in a certain community; on the other hand, varna is an *occupation* based criterion of dividing the functioning humans of society.

The imposed caste system has more demerits than merits. Firstly, it is a system that promotes rigidity and reduces mobility among individuals, prohibiting their advancement in the society they live in. Secondly, it limits one's profession and career choices, to a certain point, and prohibits them from choosing a career they want to proceed in. Thirdly, it creates a rift in society and often leads to humans perceiving each other as *lower* as or *higher* than themselves, causing an entry point for the possibility of discrimination, harassment, and abuse towards each other.

Moreover, the caste system prohibits inter-caste marriages or relationship establishments. One cannot marry outside his community or tribe and thus, it constrains the concept of unity in diversity, in the country. It promotes *endogamy*, and to put an emphasis on it gives it a tag/label of religious tradition (which it is not, as none of the scriptures mention anything of the kind).

Focusing on the concept of untouchability, many rules and actions have been taken against the practice as well as works have been written on the lives of untouchables, who live a cruel life, existing only to serve as objects of embarrassment, abuse, and generally, forced to live a life of poverty.

Similar to the caste system, the practice of untouchability or the tag of being an *untouchable* is designated to a person at the moment of their birth; by just being born in an *outcast* community or tribe, one is considered an untouchable.

Though the caste system creates a hierarchy in society, specifying certain castes ranking higher than others, it is important, however, to note that this hierarchy changes its level of authority, position, and power, throughout the geography of India. A caste that might be considered as of higher strata in the Northern region of the country might not be allowed the same position in the Eastern part of the country. However, one thing is for certain, both practices create rifts and divisions in society that affect its otherwise smooth functioning.

The demerits of the Caste system and the practice of untouchability, make up for a long list. The Indian Constitution prohibits these practices and presses severe charges against the use of them for discrimination grounds. Article 14 of the Indian Constitution states that every individual is equal before the law.

“The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India. Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.” (Article 14, Constitution of India).

This fundamental right ensures that every citizen is served rightly, with justice and no prejudices based on his/her caste and other grounds. Similarly, Article 17, of the Indian Constitution, abolishes the act of Untouchability:

“Untouchability” is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of “Untouchability” shall be an offense punishable in accordance with law.” (Article 17, Constitution of India).

However, even upon such strict instructions and impositions of several Equality laws by the Indian Constitution and Government alike, Casteism and Untouchability continue to be an integral part of Indian society, affecting its functioning on a daily basis. We see such prohibited acts of discrimination happening all around us in our daily lives. However, due to generational developed prejudices and mindsets, we often refrain from raising our voices against these acts of discrimination and more often than not, actively take part in maintaining the social hierarchy and treating others as lower or higher than ourselves, as if following a tradition imbued in our minds by our ancestors. A major part of the *Upper Caste* individuals, go above and beyond their way to flaunt these titles on their social media pages, automobiles, and even on their houses, which is illegal. A logical interpretation of this kind of mindset gives two possible alternatives. Firstly, these people actually consider themselves superior to others and have no problem flaunting this superiority, with no regard or respect for the laws enlisted by the Indian Constitution. Secondly, there is a lack of education and awareness among these people, for the concept of Equality before Law that makes them behave in such a way.

Whatever the reason, one thing must remain clear in the minds of everyone, ever touched or scarred by the evil that is casteism and untouchability. Propagated as it may have been, Casteism and Untouchability are not a part of Hinduism. Nor are they the teachings of this faith. It can be said that the name of this particular religion has been misused in order to popularize this concept or corrupt the pre-existing Varna System with the present Caste System. The Hindu texts and scriptures never mention the term *Jati* to define a person’s identity or social position (except the *Manusmriti*, about which the later part of this paper deals). The religion has been misused to incorporate into the mind of society, the unquestioned following and devotion to the system.

The Dalit and the *lower* caste community need to be aware and vocal of their rights. Such an example is Marichamy, a *lower* caste Priest of a Hindu temple in South India, who has been the ordained priest of the respective temple, for more than a decade now. “People from all backgrounds come here. They have no prejudice against me. We are united by our faith. Before, the jobs were linked to your caste. Now, it’s not like that anymore. In temples, the old ways still remain. I don’t know if they can ever change.” (A *video interview*, broadcasted by BBC, 2020).

However, defending the religion will not be possible without answering a few questions that stand out and are much more prominent, when one discusses the controversial topic that is Casteism, with respect to Hinduism. These can be listed as:

1. If only this (casteism) is propaganda, why does it continue to date?
2. Do religious gurus in India speak about this?

3. Can a Dalit/or even a non-Brahmin, become a Shankaracharya?
4. Personally, in the current society, will anyone vow to choose a life partner from a lower- caste?

These questions reflect the deep-rooted caste system and its effects on the Hindu way of life and thought. These questions as well as the misconception, about casteism and untouchability, being a part of Hinduism, have been challenged, fact-checked, and discussed in this paper, in detail.

Review of Literature:

The Caste system is an evil, rooted in Indian Society. After years of tyranny by Muslim and British invaders, and then by achieving the final act of Independence from them, India as a country and in terms of culture, has come far ahead in her journey. However, these corrupted practices of casteism and untouchability have somewhat reduced it to be confined in a single social category.

For an individual, to understand India, would need to first understand the social and cultural constructs that guide it on a regular basis. Casteism and Untouchability have become social features of India and, to a certain extent, define its past and present decisions regarding a few fissures in the country's history.

The evil that casteism and untouchability are to society is, however, undeniable. Every curve of history, it creates an atrocious and pathetic system of social hierarchy and oppression based on dreadful notions of ceremonial pollution and exclusion from society.

To understand the voice of the marginalized and oppressed, this paper is influenced by the studies of various Dalit literature, showcasing and highlighting the less-talked perspective of the Dalit society or the so-called “untouchables”. The Dalit writing traces its roots back to the Marathi literature of the Seventies. The *boom* in Dalit literature has now spread to other languages, leading to significant works in Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, Kannada, and others.

The works of literature that helped in the understanding and exploration of the caste system in India are listed below. Note, however, that not all of the enlisted works are by Dalit writers. This ensures that the caste experience is not limited to that of the Dalits, and is covered from the perspective of different strata of society.

It is fitting to start the list with “*The Essential Writings of B. R. Ambedkar*”, edited by Valerian Rodriguez. An accomplished rival of M. K. Gandhi on the subject of caste hierarchy, Dr. Ambedkar, the most important leader of the Dalits, fought for their basic rights and position in society. A converted Buddhist himself, Dr. Ambedkar, while framing the constitution made sure to abolish all the restraints imposed on the outcast and marginalized, and establish the *Right to Equality*, among citizens. This collection includes the crucial *Annihilation of Caste* and his uptake on Buddhist culture.

“*Deliverance*”, a short story by Premchand, is the perfect portrayal of exploitation and harassment, endured by a lower caste person, specifically a Dukhi Chamar in this story, by a

higher caste person, a Brahmin in this case. The ending and the title are in juxtaposition, aptly describing the cruelty of this system.

“*Untouchable*” by Mulk Raj Anand, is an Indian Classic, published in 1935, without the inclusion of which, this list stands incomplete. Presenting a day in the life of Bakha, an outcaste, sweeper, and cleaner in the fictional town of Bulashah, is the representative of the underdogs, who suffer daily at the hands of higher caste people. The novel portrays the struggles, humiliation, and harassment suffered by the outcaste community with all the restrictions imposed upon them, banning their upliftment and growth in society.

“*Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man*”, written by U. R. Ananthamurthy in Kannada, and translated (in English) by A. K. Ramanujan, portrays a society blinded by caste-based superstitions and a total lack of compassion among humans, edging slowly towards destruction. It delves into significant themes of identity and the impact of rituals on an individual's self-worth, through the story of Praneshacharya and Naranappa, both of them Brahmins, but with different outlook and approach towards casteism and their duties in life.

“*The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs*” by Urmilla Pawar, published in 1988 in Marathi (later translated into English by Maya Pandit), is an autobiography that has drawn the attention of the world to the experiences of Dalit women. The work traces Urmilla Pawar's life journey from her oppression as a Dalit in her childhood, to her conversion to Buddhism and finally as a revolutionary in the movement concerning Dalit Liberation. The work aptly describes the changing scenario of Modern India in respect to the lives of Dalits, and the politics surrounding them.

“*Karukku*” by Bama, published originally in 1992, and later translated into English by Lakshmi Holmström, is an award-winning autobiography. The life story of Bama, who is a Christian Dalit, is greatly influenced by her Dalit identity, and her realization of the battle that must be fought, both inside the church and outside of it, to overcome the discrimination, faced especially by the women. The book serves as a reminder to not associate a particular religion with the caste problem.

“*Why I am Not a Hindu*” by Kancha Illaiah, published in 1996, marks an important place in this list. The infamous notion of *dalitbahujan* is used to denote the groups oppressed and exploited, who have gained cultural consciousness. Illaiah presents his idea of extreme differentiation through casteism in the Hindu religion, showing how certain practices, both culturally and socially, of the *dalitbahujan* differ so much from the upper caste Hindus, that they cannot even be claimed as Hindus. He aims to disprove the Hindu Fundamentalism through this differentiation. Critiquing this book, S. Shankar, a novelist and cultural critic, describes it as “...part autobiography, part ethnography, part political analysis — and all polemics”.

Implications:

Throughout the years, casteism and untouchability are two derogatory terms that have always been associated with Hinduism. The caste system is often used interchangeably with the Varna system, mentioned in the Rig Veda of the Early Vedic Period.

While the Varna (root word *Vrinja*, which means *Choice*) system urges humans to live a life based on their profession and duties towards society, making them of varnas, quality-based distinction in respect to work skills, the caste system is a heredity-based distinction of humans in *Jatis* or *communities* that binds its followers to their specific communities on the basis of birth. Also, the caste system creates a hierarchy in the society, disrupting its order, and marking one caste higher or lower than others.

The main reason for connecting this caste hierarchy, an evil practice, with the Hindu religion is the book/text named *Manusmriti*, written around 100 CE, which proclaims to have laws, rules, and regulations needed to live a life free of complications. Although the writer of this text is believed to be Maharishi Manu, an ancient Indian sage, there are still doubts regarding this notion. Some believe Manu to have been a Kshatriya king of the *Surya Vamsha* (*Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 4, Verse 1*), while others believe the text to have numerous authors and many interpolations. However, one thing is for certain that the book tries to provide a description of what those many authors (or a single one), from their/his/her perspective, saw as the *ideal* society and the simplest way to lead a life. It never was the basis of any real practical law in any Indian state before the Early Vedic Period, at which time, many kings and their advisers started using it to construct social hierarchy and for their selfish interests.

Even B. R. Ambedkar, a revolutionary figure, who protested against the Caste System and Untouchability, discourages the inter-changeability of the two terms. He writes, “Particular attention has to be paid to the fact that this (the Varna System) was essentially a class system, in which individuals when qualified, could change their class, and therefore classes did change their personnel” (*Writings and Speeches, Vol. 1, P.18*; B. R. Ambedkar).

In the Bhagavad Gita, we have Lord Krishna saying,

“*chātur-varṇyaṃ mayā sṛṣṭaṃ guṇa-karma-vibhāgaśah
tasya kartāram api mām viddhyakartāram avyayam*”

“The four categories of occupations were created by Me according to people’s qualities and activities. Although I am the Creator of this system, know Me to be the Non-doer and Eternal.” (*Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 4, Verse 13*).

“*brāhmaṇa-kṣatriya-viśhām śhūdrāṇām cha parantapa
karmāṇi pravibhaktāni svabhāva-prabhavair guṇaih*”

“The duties of the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras—are distributed according to their qualities, in accordance with their *guṇas* (and not by birth).” (*Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 18, Verse 41*).

“*śhūdro brāhmaṇatāmeti brāhmaṇaścaiti śhūdratām |
kṣatriyāj jātamevaṃ tu vidyād vaiśyāt tathaiva ca || 65 ||*”

“The Shudra attains the position of the Brahmin and the Brahmin sinks to the position of the Shudra; the same should be understood to be the case with the offspring of the Kshatriya or of the vaishya.” (*Manusmriti, Chapter 10, Verse 65*).

Even though by literary and cultural standards, many Vedic texts by far surpass the contents/quality of the Manusmriti, it is still given much more importance and is more significant than any other Vedic texts. This can be due to several reasons, the most important of which is the political viewpoint of this evil. Many kings, advisers, and politicians alike have used the text to implement the divide-and-rule policy among the citizens.

The Manusmriti tries to provide the principles needed to govern a society strategically without any hint of rebellions. It does not provide any spiritual or philosophical upliftment. Even after scanning the historical pages of India, one will fail to find a king of Indian origin, who employed the teachings of Manusmriti, page to page, as his constitution or the guiding law for his state and people. Upon reading the original text, one might conclude that the lofty and sublime ideas of the text had already been mentioned in other Vedants preceding it. But, the sublime or lofty ideas are not the images that come to mind when we hear about this text. The controversial aspect, however, of this Smriti is known to almost all, those who have a keen interest in *religious* readings. Political gain is a major reason for this. To consider these controversial aspects, written by anonymous authors of different thoughts, millennia ago, reflecting their environment and ideologies, cannot be considered as the base of Hindu thought and way of life.

Other religious texts like Bhagawad Gita and Srimad Bhagvadam, do not once mention the concept of caste, inferiority, or superiority in humans based on their *birth* or the act of untouchability.

Neither does another two very influential books of the Hindu religion, Ramayana and Mahabharata, propagate this evil of casteism and untouchability. To connect the base, the thought of a religion, to such derogatory terms and practices, just because of a book written by (a) a person/people, accounting and vouching only for his/their own thought, mindset, and ideology, would be an utter nonsensical and absurd way to deal with the teachings and propagation of such practices, that aim to promote hierarchy, loss of stability and seek to harm the idea of social equality among individuals.

The Four Questions:

1. If only this (casteism) is propaganda, why does it continue to date?

First comes the question, that if this casteism is an act of propaganda, promoted by a few “gurus” of the Hindu society for selfish means, then why to date, people of the religion are blindly following it? Why does it continue to date? There are two possible reasons for this. To quote Jaggi Vasudev, famously known as Sadhguru, in and outside the Indian subcontinent, an influential Yogi and Mystic and a bestselling author as well as a poet, who when asked about the current prevalence of Casteism in the Indian society, answers it as a means of “social security” (Sadhguru, *Truth about the Indian Caste System*, 2019) among communities. The

caste system in the rural areas where there is a lack of schemes related to insurance and life support, serving as a means of security and as a beneficiary that a clan provides to its own people in times of need.

Another reason, that explains and (probably) justifies the prevalent caste system in India, is the Reservation system. The very system, proposed and implemented to reduce the plight of the oppressed, has been used politically to remind the lower caste people about their position in the society, to generate sympathetic votes from time to time. Saroj Chadha, a technical officer, who served in the Indian Army for 23 years, writes, “The logic for reservations was to facilitate the initial entry of a few, from the backward sections of the society, in a concessional manner for a limited period. The move was intended to give the government time to mobilise efforts for uplifting the lower castes to enable them to compete on an equal footing with others. But that was not to be.” (*Casteism and reservations- A Baggage carried too far?*; TOI).

2. Do religious gurus in India speak about this?

India has an abundance of Religious Gurus who are always available to present their thoughts and views on various discourses. Considered among India’s fifty most influential people, Jaggi Vasudev (better known as Sadhguru), when asked about the origin of the caste system in the Indian Society, explains it as a system “that initially began as division of labor. For a society to function, a certain number of people in the population must have a variety of skills and artisans, somebody should take care of the administration, and somebody should take care of education and the spiritual process for the community. Like this, they made four basic divisions.” (Sadhguru, *Truth about the Indian Caste System*, 2019)

Note, how very similar to the ancient Varna System, the Caste system started as a means to serve the society through profession. However, this was not the case for a longer period. Over an expanding period of time people started dividing themselves majorly in customs and duties than other tribes or clans, “not essentially as a discriminatory process, but more as a division of labor” (Sadhguru, *Truth about the Indian Caste System*, 2019). Unfortunately, in a very short period of time, the caste system manifested as “apartheid” (Sadhguru, *Truth about the Indian Caste System*, 2019).

Sadhguru, in his talk, highlights how the Dalits, the so-called untouchables of the society, still face caste-based discrimination and abuse, mainly in the rural areas, even after the implementation of constitutional laws against this evil. He further clears the main reason for the continued practice of Casteism in India which is seeing this evil as a means of “social security” (Sadhguru, *Truth about the Indian Caste System*, 2019). “People take care of their own clan and caste. They will always reach out to people who are in trouble in their caste. This kind of social security is there. So it is very important that we bring a nationwide social security system and an education system that will transmit skills to everybody based on their aptitude, and not birth. Once that happens, I think the Caste System will die a natural death.” (Sadhguru, *Truth about the Indian Caste System*, 2019).

However, we face another very contrasting view of another “saint” of the Hindu society, Swami Nishchalanand Saraswati. In his interviews and talk shows, one can easily find him backing up *Brahmanvad*, promoting the Caste system and (to a certain extent) even the act of

Untouchability towards the Shudra community. On 05th May 2022, CJP, an organization working for the benefit of the oppressed, released an article targeting and labeling Swami Nishchalanand as a “Hate Offender” towards the lower communities, the concept of gender equality, and to the women of the society, and rightly so. Nishchalanda is quite famous for spreading Hate among the Hindu community on the basis of Casteism and promoting the idea of *Brahmanvad*, his theory of Brahmin being supreme in the Caste system. His ideas, when listened to clearly, promote his view of himself being superior to that of many other gods and goddesses of the Sanatan Dharma, (who incarnated as beings of different varnas other than as Brahmins), just because he is a Brahmin. Promoting his selfish interests in the name of religion has, however, not gone unnoticed by the citizens of the country. Saraswati has also repeatedly voiced his support for the caste system. In 2020, CJP’s sister organization Sabrang India reported how the Shankaracharya said that people’s “fate” is determined at birth. During Lok Sabha elections, he earned the anger of the Akhil Bharatiya Sant Samidhi in Ranchi, Jharkhand for saying, “Dalits should not enter temples.”

3. Can a Dalit/or even a non-Brahmin, become a Shankaracharya?

In the present condition of Indian society, when the Advaita Vedanta school of thought is being governed by such extremist orthodox representatives (Shankaracharya), it is, to no one’s surprise, a negative answer. The current four Shankaracharya, are Brahmin by *birth* and to a certain extent, by their *duties* too. However, they possess the mindset that a person born in a Brahmin family, capable of *Sanyas* (renouncing of the material world), is the only valid applicant for the post of Shankaracharya. Meaning that a *Sanyasi*, higher in spiritual knowledge than any other knower of the Vedanta, but belonging to any of the three varnas, other than that of the Brahmin, will not even be considered for the position. This definitely goes against the very teachings of the founder of the Advaita Vedanta school of thought, the first and original Adi Shankaracharya.

Adi Shankaracharya’s famous story of enlightenment by a *Chaandal*, and his bowing and accepting this person of *lower* caste as his teacher, will probably be considered as a heinous and revolting act by the current representatives of the society. The *Nirvana Shatakam* composed by Adi Shankaracharya, clearly speaks against the act of discrimination based on caste and race.

“*na me mrtyu shanka na mejati bhedaha
pita naiva me naiva mataa na janmaha*”

“I am not bound by death and its fear, not by caste or creed, I have no father, nor mother, or even birth” (*Nirvana Shatakam*; Adi Shankaracharya)

However, this practice of only Brahmins being the Mutt heads/representatives/Shankaracharya, is a practice corrupted by the recent selfish minds. The first Jagadguru/Shankaracharya of the Uttarakhand Mutt was Totakacharya, disciple of Adi Shankaracharya, and a *non-Brahmin*. In his later life, Totakacharya, composed the teachings of *Upanishads* as Totaka syllables as *Shruti Saara Samudhram*, which is still read by the current four “Brahmin” Shankaracharya of today. It will be valid to say that the current representatives of the mutts are more politics driven and

keep their selfish interests at heart, instead of the betterment and growth of the Hindu society, as a whole.

4. Personally, in the current society, will anyone vow to choose a life-partner from lower-caste?

“According to recent research carried out by scientists who analyzed data from matrimonial websites, Indians — especially those living in the northern states of the country — are becoming more open to having an intercaste marriage. The study also found that those with lower economic status are less likely to be open to intercaste marriage.” (*Are people becoming more open to inter-caste marriages in India?*; TOI, 2019).

“Indian youth are becoming "more liberal with caste and community", putting common interests and hobbies above them, as close to 60 percent of members have said they are open to inter-caste and inter-community marriages, according to a report released by Bharat Matrimony.” (*Indian youth becoming more open to inter-caste marriages*; Bharat Matrimony, 2022).

“Individuals in the United States are much less open to intercaste marriage than those in India, nearly 14% versus 23%. However, compared with Indian immigrants, U.S.-raised Indians are more open, which supports the modernization theory that individuals will adopt aspects of the surrounding environment.” (A report by University of Michigan, Laurel Thomas. 2019).

Many other such reports by matrimonial sites and research articles worldwide, show the increase in inter-caste marriages among Hindu citizens. One factor for awareness could be the propagation of proper knowledge of Vedas and Puranas (that rightly condemn such practices), while the other is the spread of right consciousness among the newer generations. However, there’s a long distance to be covered before the Hindu society completely abolishes the practices of Casteism and Untouchability from its midst.

However, in no way can one disregard or overlook the heinous crimes and mistreatments of the oppressed, done by Hindu and non-Hindu alike, for their selfish interests, in the name of religion. This suppression has not only affected the marginalized and oppressed but has left its impact on the country, as a whole, accounting for its suppression and state of slavery, both socially and financially for more than a thousand years.

Conclusion:

Casteism and untouchability are not unknown or foreign words to the Indian community. Taught and ingrained in the minds of Indians from an early age through education and social conduct and behavior, it creates more rifts in the society, rather than promoting welfare and harmony in the people.

This paper covers the origin, propagation, and demerits of these terms, in Indian society. Prevalent from the times of the Early Vedic Period, and practiced by the Hindus in an almost devout way, since the times of colonial rule, these practices still continue to exist in modern India, though at a micro level. Even though the Hindus of this modern century are more aware and conscious of their cultural and social identity, casteism and untouchability are still not extinct (as they should have been by now).

The Indian Constitution condemns the practice of caste-based discrimination and the act of untouchability, but still, some antisocial elements, continue to propagate and abuse their caste power on the socially weak sections.

The sense of superiority and power leads even some educated and learned Hindus to abuse the poor, both financially and physically. However, there are certain reasons, which seem to some *upper-caste* Hindus, to *validate* their mistreatment of these socially weak communities. One of the major reasons is *caste-based reservations* that, in some way sustain the caste system, making sure that every upcoming generation is aware and conscious of the hierarchy. Many *upper* caste people might not have any inherent sense of discomfort towards other castes, but when they see someone with lesser credibility, with all the comfort and means to a standard life at their disposal, getting a promotion in their respective field, accounted only because of these reservation quotas, a feeling similar to dislike or hatred arises naturally.

Next, in line, is the lack of analytical thinking which causes *caste pride* in upper-caste Hindus. An example can be taken of Brahmins and Kshatriyas who boast of having learned sages and fearless warriors as their ancestors, with no knowledge of Vedas and Puranas and no skills in weaponry and warfare of their own, flaunting about their ancestry and using it as a (ridiculous) reason to look down upon others.

However, one thing is certain, that misconception and preaching of false information on these terms, have led to a widespread belief of relating it with the Hindu religion/way of life. Hinduism is a limitless way of living life to its fullest, in the most productive way possible. It is important to note that none of the most influential epics/texts of the religion (*Ramayana, Mahabharata,*) ever mention caste-based hierarchy or allotment of a specific caste on birth. Texts like Manusmriti were followed by royal families and advisers (only certain parts, not the whole book, line by line), to control and govern the society and it does not relate to any particular religious philosophy. In today's society, it is the lack of analytical thinking and the demerits of the reservation system that are the significant reasons for the continuous sustenance of both, casteism and untouchability.

It becomes important to note that this research article is not free of limitations. They are present in the form of sample size, word limitations, time constraints, and availability of resources as well as personal boundaries of knowledge on the subject, making it open to interpretations, criticisms, and reviews by the experts on this subject. A systematic research approach is provided that contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the subject. The main object of this paper is to provide researchers and practitioners with insight, gained from this study on the “caste system and untouchability with respect to the Hindu religion”, to further aid them in their work and advancements in the field.

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