

TRACTS FOR THE TIME

No. 2

ANNIHILATION OF CASTE

WITH

A REPLY TO MAHATMA GANDHI

BY

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THIRD EDITION

Know truth as truth and untruth as untruth."

—AUDDHA

"He that WILL NOT reason is a bigot
He that CANNOT reason is a fool
He that DARE NOT reason is a slave."

H. DRUMMOND

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PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

The second edition of this Essay appeared in 1937, and was exhausted within a very short period. A new edition has been in demand for a long time. It was my intention to recast the essay so as to incorporate into it another essay of mine called "*Castes in India, Their origin and their Mechanism*" which appeared in the issue of the Indian Antiquary Journal for May 1917. But as I could not find time, and as there is very little prospect of my being able to do so and as the demand for it from the public is very insistent, I am content to let this be a mere re print of the second edition.

I am glad to find that this essay has become so popular, and I hope that it will serve the purpose for which it was intended,

1st December 1944 }
22, Prithwiraj Road, }
New Delhi. }

B. R. Ambedkar

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LAHORE.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

The speech prepared by me for the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal of Lahore has had an astonishingly warm reception from the Hindu public for whom it was primarily intended. The English edition of one thousand five hundred was exhausted within two months of its publication. It is translated into Gujerati and Tamil. It is being translated in Marathi, Hindi Punjabi and Malayalam. The demand for the English text still continues unabated. To satisfy this demand it has become necessary to issue a second edition. Considerations of history and effectiveness of appeal have led me to retain the original form of the essay—namely the speech form although I was asked to recast it in the form of a direct narrative. To this edition I have added two appendices. I have collected in appendix (I) the two articles written by Mr. Gandhi by way of review of my speech in the Harijan, and his letter of Mr. Sant Ram, a member of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal. In appendix (II) I have printed my views in reply to the articles of Mr. Gandhi collected in the appendix (I). Besides Mr. Gandhi many others have adversely criticised my views as expressed in my speech. But I have felt that in taking notice of such adverse comments I should limit myself to Mr. Gandhi. This I have done not because what he has said is so weighty as to deserve a reply but because to many a Hindu he is an oracle, so great that when he opens his lips it is expected that the argument must close and no dog must bark. But the world owes much to rebels who would dare to argue in the face of the pontiff and insist that he is not infallible. I do not care for the credit which every progressive society must give to its rebels. I shall be satisfied if I make the Hindus realize that they are the sick men of India and that their sickness is causing danger to the health and happiness of other Indians.

B. R. AMBEDKAR

PROLOGUE.

On December 12, 1935, I received the following letter from Mr. Sant Ram, the Secretary of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal :—

My dear Doctor Saheb.

Many thanks for your kind letter of the 5th December. I have released it for press without your permission for which I beg your pardon, as I saw no harm in giving it publicity. You are a great thinker, and it is my well—considered opinion that none else has studied the problem of Caste so deeply as you have. I have always benefited myself and our Mandal from your ideas I have explained and preached it in the Kranti many times and I have even lectured on it many conferences. I am now very anxious to read the exposition of your new formula—“It is not possible to break Caste without annihilating the religious notions on which it, the Caste system, is founded”. Please do explain it at length at your earliest convenience, so that we may take up the idea and emphasise it from press and platform. At present, it is not fully clear to me.

Our Executive Committee persists in having you as our President for our Annual Conference. We can change our dates to accommodate your convenience. Independent Harijans of Punjab are very much desirous to meet you and discuss with you their plans. So if you kindly accept our request and come to Lahore to preside over the Conference it will serve double purpose. We will invite Harijan leaders of all shades of opinion and you will get an opportunity of giving your ideas to them.

The Mandal has deputed our Assistant Secretary, Mr. Indra Singh to meet you at Bombay in Xmas and discuss with you the whole situation with a view to persuade you to please accept our request.

The Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal, I was given to understand, to be an organization of Caste Hindu Social Reformers, with the one and only aim, namely to eradicate the Caste System from amongst the Hindus. As a rule, I do not like to take any part in a movement which is carried on by the Caste Hindus. Their attitude towards social reform is so different from mine that I have found it difficult to pull on with them. Indeed, I find their company quite uncongenial to me no account of our differences of opinion. Therefore when the Mandal first approached me I declined their invitation to preside. The Mandal however would not take a refusal from me and sent down one of its members to Bombay to press me to accept the invitation. In the end I agreed to preside. The Annual Conference was to be held at Lahore, the head quarters of the Mandal. The Conference was to meet in Easter but was subsequently postponed to the middle of May 1935. The Reception Committee of the Mandal has now cancelled the Conference. The notice of cancellation came long after my Presidential address had been printed. The copies of this address are now lying with me. As I did not get an opportunity to deliver the address from the presidential chair the public has not had an opportunity to know my views on this problems created by the Caste System. To let the public know them and also to dispose of the printed copies which are lying on my hand, I have decided to put the printed copies of the address on the market. The accompanying pages contain the text of that address.

The public will be curious to know what led to the cancellation of my appointment as the President of the

Conference. At the start, a dispute arose over the printing of the address. I desired that the address should be printed in Bombay. The Mandal wished that it should be printed in Lahore on the ground of economy. I did not agree and insisted upon having it printed in Bombay. Instead of agreeing to my proposition I received a letter signed by several members of the Mandal from which I give the following extract:—

Revered Dr. Ji,

27-3-36

Your letter of the 24th instant addressed to Sjt. Sant Ram has been shown to us. We were a little disappointed to read it. Perhaps you are not fully aware of the situation that has arisen here. Almost all the Hindus in the Punjab are against your being invited to this province. The Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal has been subjected to the bitterest criticism and has received censorious rebuke from all quarters. All the Hindu leaders among whom being Bhai Parmanand, M. L. A. (Ex-president, Hindu Maha Sabha), Mahatma Hans Raj, Dr. Gokal Chand Narang, Minister for Local Self-Government Raja Narendra Nath, M. L. C. etc, have dissociated themselves from this step of the Mandal.

Despite all this the runners of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal, (the leading figure being Sjt. Sant Ram) are determined to wade through thick and thin but would not give up the idea of your presidentship. The Mandal has earned a bad name.

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Under the circumstances it becomes your duty to cooperate with the Mandal. On the one hand, they are being put to so much trouble and hardship by the Hindus and if on the other hand you too augment their difficulties it will be a most sad coincidence of bad luck for them.

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We hope you will think over the matter and do what is good for us all.

This letter puzzled me greatly. I could not understand why the Mandal should displease me for the sake of a few Rupees in the matter of printing the address. Secondly, I could not believe that men like Sir Gokal Chand Narang had really resigned as a protest against my selection as President because I had received the following letter from Sir Gokal Chand himself:—

5 Montgomery Road
Lahore, 7-2-36

Dear Doctor Ambedkar,

I am glad to learn from the workers of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal that you have agreed to preside at their next anniversary to be held at Lahore during the Easter holidays. It will give me much pleasure if you stay with me while you are at Lahore.

More when we meet.

Yours sincerely
G. C. Narang.

Whatever be the truth I did not yield to this pressure. But even when the Mandal found that I was insisting upon having my address printed in Bombay instead of agreeing to my proposal the Mandal sent me a wire that they were sending Mr. Har Bhagwan to Bombay to "talk over matters personally". Mr. Har Bhagwan came to Bombay on the 9th of April. When I met Mr. Har Bhagwan I found that he had nothing to say regarding the issue. Indeed, he was so unconcerned regarding the printing of the address, whether it should be printed in Bombay or in Lahore, that he did not even mention it in the course of our conversation.

All that he was anxious for was to know the contents of the address. I was then convinced that in getting the address printed in Lahore the main object of the Mandal was not to save money but to get at the contents of the address. I gave him a copy. He did not feel very happy with some parts of it. He returned to Lahore. From Lahore, he wrote to me the following letter.

Lahore, Dated April 14, 1936.

My dear Doctor Sahib,

Since my arrival from Bombay, on the 12th. I have been indisposed owing to my having not slept continuously for 5 or 6 nights which were spent in the train. Reaching here I came to know that you had come to Amritsar. I would have seen you there if I were well enough to go about. I have made over your address to Mr. Sant Ram for translation and he has liked it very much, but he is not sure whether it could be translated by him for printing before the 25th. In any case, it would have a wide publicity and we are sure it would wake the Hindus up from their slumber.

The passage I pointed out to you at Bombay has been read by some of our friends with a little misgiving, and those of us who would like to see the Conference terminate without any untoward incident would prefer that at least the word "Veda" be left out for the time being. I leave this to your good sense. I hope, however, in your concluding paragraphs you will make it clear that the views expressed in the address are your own and that the responsibility does not lie on the Mandal. I hope you will not mind this statement of mine and would let us have 1000 copies of the address, for which we shall, of course, pay. To this effect I have sent you a telegram today. A cheque of Rs. 100 is enclosed herewith which kindly acknowledge, and send us your bills in due time.

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I have called a meeting of the Reception Committee and shall communicate their decision to you immediately. In the meantime kindly accept my heartfelt thanks for the kindness shown to me and the great pains taken by you in the preparation of your address. You have really put us under a heavy debt of gratitude.

Yours sincerely,
Har Bhagwan.

P. S. Kindly send the copies of the address by passenger train as soon as it is printed, so that copies may be sent to the Press for publication.

Accordingly I handed over my manuscript to the Printer with an order to print 1000 copies. Eight days later, I received another letter from Mr. Har Bhagwan which I reproduce below:—

Dear Dr. Ambedkar,

Lahore, 22-4-36

We are in receipt of your telegram and letter, for which kindly accept our thanks. In accordance with your desire, we have again postponed our Conference, but feel that it would have been much better to have it on the 25th and 26th, as the weather is growing warmer and warmer every day in the Punjab. In the middle of May it would be fairly hot, and the sittings in the day time would not be very pleasant and comfortable. However, we shall try our best to do all we can to make things as comfortable as possible, if it is held in the middle, of May.

There is, however, one thing that we have been compelled to bring to your kind attention. You will remember that when I pointed out to you the misgivings entertained by some of our people regarding your declaration on the subject of change of religion, you told me that it was undoubtedly outside the scope of the Mandal and that you had no intention to say anything from our platform in that connection.

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At the same time when the manuscript of your address was handed to me you assured me that that was the main portion of your address and that there were only two or three concluding paragraphs that you wanted to add. On receipt of the second instalment of your address we have been taken by surprise, as that would make it so lengthy, that we are afraid, very few people would read the whole of it. Besides that you have more than once stated in your address that you had decided to walk out of the fold of the Hindus and that that was your last address as a Hindu. You have also unnecessarily attacked the morality and reasonableness of the Vedas and other religious books of the Hindus, and have at length dwelt upon the technical side of Hindu religion, which has absolutely no connection with the problem at issue, so much so that some of the passages have become irrelevant and off the point. We would have been very pleased if you had confined your address to that portion given to me, or if an addition was necessary it would have been limited to what you had written on Brahminism, etc. The last portion which deals with the complete annihilation of Hindu religion and doubts the morality of the sacred books of the Hindus as well as a hint about your intention to leave the Hindu fold does not seem to me to be relevant.

I would therefore most humbly request you on behalf of the people responsible for the Conference to leave out the passages referred to above, and close the address with what was given to me or add a few paragraphs on Brahminism. We doubt the wisdom of making the address unnecessarily provocative and pinching. There are several of us who subscribe to your feelings and would very much want to be under your banner for remodelling of the Hindu religion. If you had decided to get together persons of your cult I can assure you a large number would have joined your army of reformers from the Punjab.

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In fact, we thought you would give us a lead in the destruction of the evil of caste system, especially when you have studied the subject so thoroughly, and strengthen our hands by bringing about a revolution and making yourself as a nucleus in the gigantic effort, but declaration of the nature made by you when repeated loses its power, and becomes a hackneyed term. Under the circumstances I would request you to reconsider the whole matter and make your address more effective by saying that you would be glad to take a leading part in the destruction of the system caste if the Hindus are willing to work in right earnest toward that end, even if they had to forsake their kith and kin and the religious notions. In case you do so, I am sanguine that you would find a ready response from the Punjab in such an endeavour.

I shall be grateful if you will help us at this juncture as we have already undergone much expenditure and have been put to suspense, and let us know by the return of post that you have condescended to limit your address as above. In case, you still insist upon the printing of the address *in toto*, we very much regret it would not be possible—rather advisable for us to hold the Conference, and would prefer to postpone it *sine die*, although by doing so we shall be losing the goodwill of the people because of the repeated postponements. We should, however, like to point out that you have carved a niche in our hearts by writing such a wonderful treatise on the caste system, which excels all other treatises so far written and will prove to be a valuable heritage, so to say. We shall be ever indebted to you for the pains taken by you in its preparation.

Thanking you very much for your kindness and with best wishes,

I am, yours sincerely,
Har Bhagwan.

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To this letter I sent the following reply:—

27 th April 1936.

Dear Mr. Har Bhagwan,

I am in receipt of your letter of the 22nd April. I note with regret that the Reception Committee of the Jat--Pat--Todak Mandal "would prefer to postpone the Conference *sine die*" if I insisted upon printing the address *in toto*. In reply I have to inform you that I also would prefer to have the Conference cancelled—I do not like to use vague terms—if the Mandal insisted upon having my address pruned to suit its circumstances. You may not like my decision. But I cannot give up, for the sake of the honour of presiding over the Conference, the liberty which every president must have in the preparation of the address. I cannot give up for the sake of pleasing the Mandal the duty which every President owes to the Conference over which he presides to give it a lead which he thinks right and proper. The issue is one of principle and I feel I must do nothing to compromise it in any way.

I would not have entered into any controversy as regards the propriety of the decision taken by the Reception Committee. But as you have given certain reasons which appear to throw the blame on me I am bound to answer them. In the first place, I must dispel the notion that the views contained in that part of the address to which objection has been taken by the Committee have come to the Mandal as a surprise. Mr. Sant Ram, I am sure, will bear me out when I say that in reply to one of his letters I had said that the real method of breaking up the Caste System was not to bring about inter-caste dinners and inter-caste marriages but to destroy the religious notions on which Caste was founded and that Mr. Sant Ram in return asked me to explain what he said was a novel point of view. It was in response to this invitation from Mr. Sant Ram that I thought I ought to elaborate in my address what I had stated in a sentence in my letter to him. You

cannot, therefore, say that the views expressed are new. At any rate, they are not new to Mr. Sant Ram who is the moving spirit and the leading light of your Mandal. But I go further and say that I wrote this part of my address not merely because I felt it desirable to do so. I wrote it because I thought that it was absolutely necessary to complete the argument. I am amazed to read that you characterize the portion of the speech to which your Committee objects as 'irrelevant and off the point.' You will allow me to say that I am a lawyer and I know the rules of relevancy as well as any member of your Committee. I most emphatically maintain that the portion objected to is not only most relevant but is also important. It is in that part of the address that I have discussed the ways and means of breaking up the Caste System. It may be that the conclusion I have arrived at as to the best method of destroying Caste is startling and painful. You are entitled to say that my analysis is wrong. But you cannot say that in an address which deals with the problem of Caste it is not open to me to discuss how Caste can be destroyed.

Your other complaint relates to the length of the address. I have pleaded guilty to the charge in the address itself. But, who is really responsible for this? I fear you have come rather late on the scene. Otherwise you would have known that originally I had planned to write a short address for my own convenience as I had neither the time nor the energy to engage myself in the preparation of an elaborate thesis. It was the Mandal who asked me to deal with the subject exhaustively and it was the Mandal which sent down to me a list of questions relating to the Caste System and asked me to answer them in the body of my address as they were questions which were often raised in the controversy between the Mandal and its opponents and which the Mandal found difficult to answer satisfactorily. It was in trying to meet the wishes of the Mandal in this respect that the address has grown to the length to which it has. In view of what I have

said I am sure you will agree that the fault respecting length of the address is not mine.

I did not expect that your Mandal would be so upset because I have spoken of the destruction of Hindu Religion. I thought it was only fools who were afraid of words. But lest there should be any misapprehension in the minds of the people I have taken great pains to explain what I mean by religion and destruction of religion. I am sure that nobody on reading my address could possibly misunderstand me. That your Mandal should have taken a fright at mere words as 'destruction of religion etc.' notwithstanding the explanation that accompanies them does not raise the Mandal in my estimation. One cannot have any respect or regard for men who take the position of the Reformer and then refuse even to see the logical consequences of that position, let alone following them out in action.

You will agree that I have never accepted to be limited in any way in the preparation of my address and the question as to what the address should or should not contain was never even discussed between myself and the Mandal. I had always taken for granted that I was free to express in the address such views as I held on the subject. Indeed until, you came to Bombay on the 9th April the Mandal did not know what sort of an address I was preparing. It was when you came to Bombay that I voluntarily told you that I had no desire to use your platform from which to advocate my views regarding change of religion by the Depressed Classes. I think I have scrupulously kept that promise in the preparation of the address. Beyond a passing reference of an indirect character where I say that "I am sorry I will not be here.....etc." I have said nothing about the subject in my address. When I see you object even to such a passing and so indirect a reference, I feel bound to ask; did you think that in agreeing to preside over your Conference I would be agreeing to suspend or to give up my views regarding change

of faith by the Depressed Classe? If you did think so I must tell you that I am in no way responsible for such a mistake on your part. If any of you had even hinted to me that in exchan for the honour you were doing me by electing as President, I was to abjure my faith in my programme of conversion I would have told you in quite plain terms that I cared more (for my faith than) for my faith than for any honour from you.

After your letter of the 14th, this letter of yours comes as a surprize to me. I am sure that any one who reads them will feel the same. I cannot account for this sudden *volte face* on the part of the Reception Committee. There is no difference in substance between the rough draft which was before the Committee when you wrote your letter of the 14th and the final draft on which the decision of the Committee communciated to me in your letter under reply was taken. You cannot point out a single new idea in the final draft which is not contained in the earlier draft. The ideas are the same. The only difference is that they have been worked out in greater detail in the final draft. If there was anything to object to in the address you could have said so on the 14th. But you did not. On the contrary you asked me to print off 1000 copies leaving me the liberty to accept or not the verbal changes which you suggested. Accordingly I got 1000 copies printed which are now lying with me. Eight days later you write to say that you object to the address and that if it is not amended the Conference will be cancelled. you ought to have known that there was no hope of any alteration being made in the address. I told you when you were in Bombay that I would not alter a comma, that I would not allow any censorship over my address and that you would have to accept the address as it came from me. I also told you that the responsibility for the views expressed in the address was entirely mine and if they were not liked by the Conference I would not mind at all if the Conference passed

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a resolution condemning them. So anxious was I to relieve your Mandal from having to assume responsibility for my views and also with the object of not getting myself entangled by too intimate an association with your Conference, I suggested to you that I desired to have my address treated as a sort of an inaugural address and not as a Presidential address and that the Mandal should find some one else to preside over the Conference, and deal with the resolutions. Nobody could have been better placed to take a decision on the 14th than your Committee. The Committee failed to do that and in the meantime cost of printing has been incurred which, I am sure, with a little more firmness on the part of your Committee could have been saved.

I feel sure that the views expressed in my address have little to do with the decision of your Committee. I have reasons to believe that my presence at the Sikh Prachar Conference held at Amritsar has had a good deal to do with the decision of the Committee. Nothing else can satisfactorily explain the sudden *volte face* shown by the Committee between the 14th and the 22nd April. I must not however prolong this controversy and must request you to announce immediately that the Session of the Conference which was to meet under my Presidentship is cancelled. All the grace has by now run out and I shall not consent to preside even if your Committee agreed to accept my address as it is in toto. I thank you for your appreciation of the pains I have taken in the preparation of the address. I certainly have profited by the labour if no one else does. My only regret is that I was put to such hard labour at a time when my health was not equal to the strain it has caused

Yours sincerely,
B. R. Ambedkar.

This correspondence will disclose the reasons which have led to the cancellation by the Mandal of my appointment as President and the reader will be in a position to lay the blame where it ought properly to belong. This is I believe the first time when the appointment of a President is cancelled by the Reception Committee because it does not approve of the views of the President. But whether that is so or not, this is certainly the first time in my life to have been invited to preside over a conference of Caste Hindus. I am sorry that it has ended in a tragedy. But what can any one expect from a relationship so tragic as the relationship between the reforming sect of Caste Hindus and the self-respecting sect of Untouchables where the former have no desire to alienate their orthodox fellows and the latter have no alternative but to insist upon reform being carried out?

Rajgraha
 Dadar, Bombay-14 }
 15th May 1936.

B. R. AMBEDKAR