

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar

ANNIHILATION OF  
CASTE



PRABHAT

# ANNIHILATION OF CASTE

Dr. B. R. AMBEDKAR



प्रभात  
प्रकाशन

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# Annihilation of Caste

*Know truth as truth and untruth as untruth—Buddha*

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<sup>1</sup>

These epigraphs were added by Ambedkar to the title page of the 1937 edition. The quote from Buddha is from Verse 12 of The Dhammapada and Sutta Nipata (p.3), part of Sacred Books of the East, Vol. 10 by Max Müller and Max Fausböll (1881). Drummond's words are derived from the last lines from his preface to Aca-demical Questions, Vol. 1 (1805, xv). Sir William Drum-mond (not H. Drummond as erroneously printed in the 1937 edition) was a Scottish diplomat and Member of Parliament, poet and philosopher. Ambedkar amends the punctuation and wording of Drummond's words which read: "He, who will not reason, is a bigot; he, who cannot, is a fool; he, who dares not, is a slave."



## Preface to the Second Edition, 1937

The speech prepared by me for the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal<sup>2</sup> 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 copies was exhausted within two months of its publication. It has been translated into Gujarati and Tamil. It is being translated into 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*,<sup>3</sup> and his letter to Mr Sant Ram,<sup>4</sup> a member of the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal.<sup>5</sup>

In Appendix II, I have printed my views in reply to the articles of Mr Gandhi collected in 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 realise 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

The Jat-Pat Todak Mandal (Forum for the Break-up of Caste) was a radical faction of the Arya Samaj, a Hindu reformist organisation that was founded in Lahore on 10 April 1875 by Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824–83). According to Sant Ram (see Note 3), in November 1922, about twenty-two men and women, at the behest of Arya Samaj leader Bhai Parmanand, met at his Lahore residence with the objective of forming a separate outfit to fight caste. In his autobiography *Mere jivan ke anubhav* (Experiences of my life, 1963/2008), Sant Ram says he suggested the name Jat-Pat Todak Mandal. The eighteen founding members of the Mandal listed by Sant Ram are: Bhai Parmanand (president); Pandit Bhoomand; Pandit Paramanand, B.A.; Chowdhary Kanhaiyalal; Babu Teertharam, cotton factory owner; Chak Jhumra; Pandit Brahmadaatt Vidyalkar of Delhi; Shri Sudarshan, short-story writer; Pandit Dharmadev; Deewanchand, office-bearer of Arya Samaj, Jalandhar; Pandit Sant Ram, priest and Arya Samaj worker of Nau Shehra; Paramanand Arya, coal company, Lahore; Pandit Chetram, teacher, Girls School,

Jalandhar; Devnath of Gurudutt Bhavan, Lahore; Devamitra, M.Sc., of Gurudutt Bhavan, Lahore; Dharmendra Nath, M.A., of Meerut; Sant Ram, B.A.; Mrs Parvati, wife of Pandit Bhoomanand; Mrs Subhadra Devi, wife of Pandit Paramanand. From the names, it appears that 'Untouchables' were not part of this distinctly caste-Hindu initiative, a point that Ambedkar draws our attention to in the Prologue of this address (p.189). The Mandal insisted on inter-dining and intermarriage. Member-ship, on paying two rupees as annual subscription, was meant for Hindus who took a vow to marry themselves or their children out of their caste.

Following his fallout with Ambedkar over the Com-munal Award of 1932 and the signing of the Poona Pact (see "A Note on the Poona Pact", in this book, 357–76), M.K. Gandhi launched the Harijan Sevak Sangh in 1932 and an English weekly named Harijan in 1933. Ambedkar preferred the term Untouchable, with capitals, or the official term, Depressed Classes. He also preferred to address those within the varna fold as "caste Hindus" or savarnas, and sometimes as Touchables.

Sant Ram B.A., one of the founder-members of the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal, was born on 14 February 1887 in Puranibassi, Hoshiarpur district, Punjab. In his autobiography, he (1963/2008, 12) says the Gohil surname his father carried was found among Rajputs (warriors), Banias (traders) and Kumhars (potters). Sant Ram always used his graduation degree—B.A.—as initials to disavow caste-related surnames, though he identifies himself as a Kumhar. However, one source says he was born into the Megh caste, listed as a Scheduled Caste in today's Punjab (Kshirsagar 1994, 323). Sant Ram says that Kumhars in his village did not make pots but practised trade. Sant Ram's father, Ramdas Gohil, the first person in the village to educate his children, acquired wealth and influence through trade which took him as far away as Central Asia. Sant Ram was married at the age of twelve to an unlettered girl whom he taught to read and write and brought out of purdah. Five years after his first wife died, in 1929, according to the journal *The Indian Rationalist* (1952), he married "Sundar Bai Proothan, a Maharashtrian virgin widow. The marriage was notable for three reasons: it was a widow marriage, an inter-caste marriage, and an inter-provincial marriage." Sundar Bai had been rendered a child widow at the age of eight. Sant Ram recounts two instances of caste discrimination, the first when studying in fourth grade in Ambala and the second when at college in Lahore at the hands of Banias, the merchant caste. In 1930, he published *Phansi ke pujari* (Priests of the noose) in Urdu, featuring biographies of nationalists, entitled *Inquilab ke parvane* (Moths to the flame of revolution) on the inside title page. A 1947 partition refugee, Sant Ram died in New Delhi in 1998 at the age of 101. In one of his exchanges with the Mandal featured in the Prologue, Ambedkar describes Sant Ram as the "moving spirit and the leading light" of the Mandal (p.199).

In 1931, the Mandal campaigned against the declaration of caste in the census. Mark Juergensmeyer (1982/2009, 39) writes that the Mandal relied heavily on the support of privileged-caste Arya Samajis in this regard. This may have caused the Mandal to refuse the address prepared by Ambedkar. Bhai Parmanand was the first president and he continued to support the Mandal despite the rift in 1924 when its permission to use the Arya Samaj pandal was revoked.

# Preface to the Third Edition, 1944

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 Mechanism, Genesis and Development,” which appeared in the issue of the *Indian Antiquary* journal for May 1917.<sup>6</sup> 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 reprint 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.

B.R. Ambedkar  
22, Prithviraj Road  
New Delhi  
1 December 1944

For an annotated edition of “Castes in India”, see Rege (2013). *Indian Antiquary* was an Orientalist monthly founded in 1872 by Dr. James Burgess. It provided a platform for scholarly articles by both European and Indian scholars. In full, it was called *The Indian Antiquary: A Journal of Oriental Research in Archaeology, Epigraphy, Ethnology, Geography, History, Folklore, Languages, Literature, Numismatics, Philosophy, Religion, Etc.*





# Prologue

On 12 December 1935,<sup>7</sup> 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*<sup>8</sup> many times and I have even lectured on it in 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<sup>9</sup> 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.

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The Jat-Pat Todak Mandal is, I was given to understand, an organisation 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 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 on 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 headquarters of the Mandal. The conference was to meet at Easter, but was subsequently postponed to the middle of May 1936.<sup>10</sup>

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 the 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 in 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 grounds of economy. I did not agree, and insisted upon having it printed in Bombay. Instead of their agreeing to my proposition, I received a letter signed by several members of the Mandal, from which I give the following extract:

27 March 1936

Revered Doctor ji,

Your letter of the 24th instant addressed to Sjt. Sant Ram<sup>11</sup> 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, MLA (ex-president, Hindu Mahasabha),<sup>12</sup> Mahatma Hans Raj, Dr. Gokal Chand Narang, minister for local self-government, Raja Narendra Nath,<sup>13</sup> MLC 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.

Under the circumstances it becomes your duty to co-operate 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.

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

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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 February 1936

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

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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<sup>14</sup> 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, 14 April 1936

My dear Doctor Saheb,

Since my arrival from Bombay, on the 12th, I have been indisposed owing to my having not slept continuously for five or six nights, which were spent in the train. Reaching here I came to know that you had come to Amritsar.<sup>15</sup> 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 1,000 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.

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 thousand copies. Eight days later, I received another letter from Mr Har Bhagwan which I reproduce below:

Lahore, 22 April 1936

Dear Dr. Ambedkar,

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 daytime 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,<sup>16</sup> 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. 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 the 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 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.

In fact, we thought you would give us a lead in the destruction of the evil of [the] 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 [a] 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 consider 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 caste system if the Hindus are willing to work in right earnest towards 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

To this letter I sent the following reply:

27 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,<sup>17</sup> 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 characterise 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 most 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 which 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 the 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 the 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 Classes? 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 exchange for the honour you were doing me by electing [me] 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 any honour from you.

After your letter of the 14th, this letter of yours comes as a surprise to me. I am sure that anyone who reads them both 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 communicated 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 1,000 copies, leaving me the liberty to accept or not the verbal changes which you suggested. Accordingly I got 1,000 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 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 someone 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 reason 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

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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 anyone 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?

—B.R. Ambedkar

Rajgriha, Dadar

Bombay–14

15 May 1936

The portion of the Prologue from here till the end of Sant Ram's letter has been added in the 1937 edition.

Kranti (Revolution), edited by Sant Ram, was an Urdu monthly published from Lahore. After the founding of the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal, Sant Ram (1963/2008, 116) says the forum tried publishing a monthly magazine in Hindi. A monthly eight-page broadsheet called Jat-Pat Todak, priced at Rs 1.50, was published from December 1922 to September 1924, but it failed owing to the lack of Hindi readers. The Mandal produced, for free distribution, many books in Hindi, Urdu and English on the question of caste. In January 1927, Jat-Pat Todak was revived, this time as an Urdu publication. In January 1928, this was renamed Kranti, with Sant Ram as chief editor. "This became a very popular magazine," according to Sant Ram. "Produced in Royal Octavo size, it had 64 pages. The magazine's Health Special, Children's Special, Women's Special, and Men's Special were extremely popular ... Since the Mandal's key assets were stuck in Pakistan, Kranti folded up after its last issue in August 1947 ... After a gap, we revived it for two or three issues in India. Since the conditions were not right, we lost about Rs 2,000 and shut down Kranti for good" (117). According to Bhagwan Das (2010a, 21–2), Kranti was the only Urdu magazine that reported on the speeches of Ambedkar. Das also mentions the Mandal's strong aversion to the conversion of Untouchables due to its proximity to the Arya Samaj.

Harijan, 'children of god', was the epithet used by M.K. Gandhi, beginning 1932, to paternalistically refer to 'Untouchables'. The term figures in the bhajan "Vaishnava jana to" by Narsinh Mehta (1414?–1481?), a Gujarati Brahmin Vaishnavite poet-saint, which was popularised by Gandhi. The scholar Aishwary Kumar (2014) draws our attention to Gandhi citing Tulsidas's sixteenth-century Ramayana, one of his favourite books on this term: "You know the word 'Harijan' occurs in Tulsidas's Ramayana? There Lakshmana describes to Parashurama the characteristic of a true Kshatriya. He says: सुर महिसुर हरिजन अरु गाई. हमरें कुल इन्ह पर न सुराई। (It is the trait of our clan never to use force towards a god, a Brahmin, a Harijan or a cow)" (CWMG 68, 327). The British government, from 1916 onwards, deployed the bureaucratic term Depressed Classes (used first in the volumes of the Bombay Gazetteer in 1877), which was replaced by Scheduled Castes in 1935 by the Government of India Act—a term that continues to be used in official parlance till date. 'Harijan' has been steadfastly rejected by the Ambedkarite and Dalit movements. Though the founding of the militant organisation Dalit Panther in Bombay in 1972 gave an all-India currency to Dalit (broken, crushed people), the term has been used in western India in this sense at least since Jotiba Phule's (1827–90) time. Phule is supposed to have used Dalit in terms of dalittuthan (uplift of the downtrodden), but the evidence is anecdotal (Louis 2003, 144). Phule used the term Ati-Shudra for Untouchables in his writings. Etymologically, the origins of the term Dalit can be traced to the Buddha's usage of the Pali dalidda in the Dalidda Sutta, said to have been preached at the Kalandakanivapa

in Rajagaha (Samyutta Nikaya: XI.14). In Pali Buddhist literature, the term *dalidda* (*daridra* in Sanskrit) is used for the property-less poor in contrast to the *gahapati* class of the rich. Nalin Swaris (2011, 99), citing *Anguttara Nikaya*: III.84, says: “The *dalidda-kula*, the pauper-lineage, is described as people without enough to eat and drink, without even a covering for their back.” More recently, the Dalit leader P.N. Rajbhoj founded the journal *Dalit Bandhu* (Friend of Dalits) in Pune in 1928. For an account of the nascent histories of the terms Untouchable, Depressed Classes, Harijan, Scheduled Caste, etc., see Simon Charsley (1996). Sant Ram’s use of the term Harijan here shows how within three years of Gandhi coining the term it had entrenched itself among reformers and intellectuals. As Ambedkar says in the very opening paragraph of AoC, “I have questioned the authority of the Mahatma whom they [the Mandal] revere”.

In the process of opening with Sant Ram’s letter in the 1937 edition, Ambedkar rearranges the contents of this paragraph without affecting its import.

Sjt. here is short for the respectful prefix ‘Srijut’, commonly used during this period. For instance, in Gandhi’s autobiography the prefix Sjt. is often used (such as Sjt. Vitthalbhai Patel). The 1931 Macmillan edition of *Mahatma Gandhi: His Own Story* edited by C.F. Andrews has a glossary page that explains Srijut as “a common title the equivalent to ‘Esquire’”.

Bhai Parmanand (1876–1947) wore many hats. Born in Lahore, he started as an Arya Samaji under the influence of Lala Lajpat Rai and Lala Har Dayal, and moved to the far right as a Vedic missionary of the Samaj, travelling the world (South Africa, Guyana, Martinique, the US, South America) preaching, and became a founder-member of the Ghadar Party that sought to overthrow British rule. Remembered today for his leadership of the Hindu Mahasabha and for being a proponent of *Hindutva*, he was sentenced in 1915 to imprisonment on the Andamans in the First Lahore Conspiracy Case. Parmanand is also regarded as the first advocate of an Islamic state divided out of the subcontinent. Following the British announcement of the partition of Bengal in 1905, he suggested that “the territory beyond Sindh should be united with Afghanistan and North-West Frontier Province into a great Musulman Kingdom. The Hindus of the region should come away, while at the same time the Muslims in the rest of the country should go and settle in this territory” (cited in Yadav and Arya 1988, 196). Also see Parmanand’s autobiography translated into English, *The Story of My Life* (1934/2003). Jaffrelot (2010, 139) cites Parmanand’s 1936 work, *Hindu Sangathan*, where he excoriates the Buddha for attacking the *var-nashrama* system: “The abolition of castes and ashrams cut at the very root of social duties. How could a nation hope to live after having lost sight of this aspect of Dharma? ‘Equality for all’ is an appealing abstraction; but the nation could not long survive the rejection or destruction of Dharma.” Parmanand espouses such views in the year of inviting Ambedkar, and even as he is the founder-president of the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal.

Mahatma Hans Raj was among the first wave of a young, new generation of educated Hindus joining the Arya Samaj. Later he became the principal of the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College, Lahore, over which he presided from 1888 to 1911. Gokal Chand Narang belonged to the DAV (College) faction of the Arya Samaj and acquired influence alongside the rich landowner, Raja Narendra Nath, in the Legislative Assembly opposed to the encroachment of the Congress in the Punjab. For a history of the Arya Samaj and its leaders, see Kenneth W. Jones (1976).

Har Bhagwan’s full name, according to the journal *The Atheist* (March–April 1974), was Har Bhagwan Sethi. He may have given up his (Bania) caste surname owing to his membership of the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal; he served as its secretary at one time. As an associate of Sant Ram, he was “closely associated with the abolition of caste

distinctions". He died in 1976 at the age of eight-one in Delhi, having emigrated after partition from Lahore like Sant Ram. Notably, Har Bhagwan was the publisher of Swami Dharmateertha's *The Menace of Hindu Imperialism* (1941). Dharmateertha, born Parameswara Menon, a Nair from Kerala, came under the influence of Sree Narayana Guru (1856–1928), the pioneering anticaste social reformer who preached the message of "one caste, one religion, one god". In 1937, Dharmateertha led "the life of a wandering sannyasin and spread the Guru's social message of castelessness and social egalitarianism across the subcontinent" (Aloysius 2004, 19). Aloysius cites Ambedkar's words on this work in the blurb of the new edition: "This book is written from a point of view which I appreciate very much. I am myself writing a book in which I have touched many of the points which I find are dealt with in this book. The book therefore was a very welcome thing to me." After touring much of North India, Dharmateertha settled down in Lahore for five years (1941–6) at Har Bhagwan's house, and as a member of the Indian Social Congress met and held discussions with Jinnah, Ambedkar and the Sikh leader Master Tara Singh. In a short account in *The Atheist* (1974), Har Bhagwan says that after moving to Delhi he founded the Jat-Pat Todak Samata Sangh (Association for Equality Without Caste) which was soon renamed Avarnodaya Samata Sangh (Association for the Advancement of Casteless People).

On 13–14 April 1936, Ambedkar attended the Sikh Prachar Conference in Amritsar (50 km from Lahore). In his address he extolled the principle of equality within the Sikh community and alluded to the possibility of converting to Sikhism. Zelliott (2013, 162) writes: "There is an unverified story that Ambedkar spoke to a Sikh group at this time, asking them if they were willing to allow inter-marriage between Sikhs and new converts, and the Sikhs responded in the affirmative." For an analysis of why Ambedkar gave up on Sikhism, see Puri (2003, 2698), who says: "After participating in the Sikh Missionary Conference at Amritsar in April, Ambedkar sent his son, Yashwant Rao, and nephew to the Golden Temple in May, where they stayed for one month and a half, to observe the situation and meet with leaders of the community." Puri argues that perhaps the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) feared that "after six crore (60 million) un-touchables became Sikhs" the clout of dominant-caste Jats in the SGPC and the gurdwaras would be undermined.

This must be seen in the light of the statement Ambedkar had made on 13 October 1935 at the Yeola Depressed Classes conference: "I had the misfortune of being born with the stigma of an Untouchable. However, it is not my fault; but I will not die a Hindu, for this is in my power" (Zelliott 2013, 147). The conference was attended by ten thousand people, a conglomeration of Mahar panchayats and delegates from Hyderabad and the Central Provinces. "The conference included an instruction to stop temple entry movements and an exhortation to cease fruitless attempts to gain status on Hindu terms" (Zelliott 2013, 148). Sant Ram (1963/2008, 137) writes, "One of the reasons for my inviting Dr. Ambedkar was that in matters we can't convince him with logic, we would convince him in love by appealing to his heart." Ambedkar's insistence on including in his address a detailed section on the destruction of the Hindu religion signalled the likelihood of failure if the Mandal insisted on trying to win him over to the cause of religious reform. At the same time, members of the Mandal's welcome committee were threatened with a black-flag protest if Ambedkar were to preside over the meeting, and this made Sant Ram unsure of endearing Ambedkar to the cause. Ambedkar's address at the Sikh Prachar Conference, Amritsar, in April 1936 would have further disoriented the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal, a point Ambedkar makes in his final letter to the Mandal (203).

Sant Ram (1963/2008, 119), in his autobiography, lists the following past presidents of the Mandal's annual conferences in Lahore from a 1939 report of the Mandal: Swami

Shraddhanand, Motilal Nehru, Raja Narendra Nath, Bhai Parmanand, Rameshwari Nehru, Swami Sarvadanand, Sir Hari Singh Gaur, Sri Satyananda Stokes, Sri Ramananda Chatterjee, Sri Harkishan Lal, Barrister Dr. Gokul Chand, Barrister Dr. N.B. Khare of Nagpur, Swami Satyanand and Dr. Kalyandas Desai.

# Annihilation of Caste An Undelivered Speech, 1936

## 1

### 1.1

Friends, I am really sorry for the members of the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal who have so very kindly invited me to preside over this conference. I am sure they will be asked many questions for having selected me as the president. The Mandal will be asked to explain as to why it has imported a man from Bombay to preside over a function which is held in Lahore. I believe the Mandal could easily have found someone better qualified than myself to preside on the occasion. I have criticised the Hindus. I have questioned the authority of the Mahatma whom they revere. They hate me. To them I am a snake in their garden. The Mandal will no doubt be asked by the politically minded Hindus to explain why it has called me to fill this place of honour. It is an act of great daring. I shall not be surprised if some political Hindus regard it as an insult. This selection of mine certainly cannot please the ordinary religiously minded Hindus.

### 1.2

The Mandal may be asked to explain why it has disobeyed the shastric injunction in selecting the president. According to the shastras, the Brahmin is appointed to be the guru for the three varnas. वर्णानाम् ब्राह्मणो गुरुः<sup>18</sup> is a direction of the shastras. The Mandal therefore knows from whom a Hindu should take his lessons and from whom he should not. The shastras do not permit a Hindu to accept anyone as his guru merely because he is well versed. This is made very clear by Ramdas<sup>19</sup>, a Brahmin saint from Maharashtra, who is alleged to have inspired Shivaji to establish a Hindu Raj. In his *Dasbodh*, a socio-politico-religious treatise in Marathi verse, Ramdas asks, addressing the Hindus, can we accept an *antyaja*<sup>20</sup> to be our guru because he is a pandit (i.e., learned)? He gives an answer in the negative.

### 1.3

What replies to give to these questions is a matter which I must leave to the Mandal. The Mandal knows best the reasons which led it to travel to Bombay to select a president, to fix upon a man so repugnant to the Hindus, and to descend so low in the scale as to select an *antyaja*—an Untouchable—to address an audience of the savarnas<sup>21</sup>. As for myself, you will allow me to say that I have accepted the invitation much against my will, and also against the will of many of my fellow Untouchables. I know that the Hindus