

## Comparison of B R Ambedkar and G S Ghurye's views on Caste

B. R. Ambedkar and G. S. Ghurye were two prominent Indian sociologists who had contrasting views on caste, reflecting their different backgrounds and perspectives. While Ambedkar, a Dalit leader and social reformer, viewed caste as a deeply oppressive and discriminatory system, Ghurye, a Brahmin scholar, approached it from a more structural and cultural perspective. Here's a comparison of their views:

### Ambedkar's View on Caste

#### Caste as a Social Division:

Ambedkar saw caste not just as a division of labor but as a division of laborers, with each caste being assigned a specific occupation. This division, according to him, led to the exploitation and marginalization of certain groups, especially the Dalits. His views on caste as a social division were central to his analysis of the Indian social system. Ambedkar, a prominent Indian jurist, social reformer, and the architect of the Indian Constitution, offered a critical perspective on the caste system, particularly from the standpoint of the Dalit community, which he himself belonged to. Here's an overview of Ambedkar's thoughts on caste as a social division:

- 1. Occupational Division:** Ambedkar acknowledged that historically, the caste system in India had a functional aspect, with different castes being assigned specific occupations. However, he argued that this occupational division had solidified into a rigid social hierarchy that perpetuated inequality and discrimination.
- 2. Hierarchical Structure:** According to Ambedkar, the caste system was not merely a division of labor but a hierarchical social order where certain castes were considered superior to others. This hierarchy was based on notions of purity and pollution, with higher castes claiming superiority and lower castes facing discrimination and marginalization.
- 3. Exploitation and Oppression:** Ambedkar highlighted how the caste system led to the exploitation and oppression of lower castes, particularly the Dalits. He argued that the social, economic, and political power was concentrated in the hands of the upper castes, leading to the marginalization and disempowerment of the lower castes.
- 4. Untouchability:** One of the most egregious aspects of the caste system for Ambedkar was the practice of untouchability, where

certain castes, especially the Dalits, were considered so impure that their touch or presence was deemed polluting. He viewed untouchability as a form of social apartheid that denied basic human dignity to a large section of society.

5. **Social Mobility:** Ambedkar criticized the lack of social mobility within the caste system, arguing that the rigid hierarchy prevented individuals from lower castes from improving their social and economic status. He advocated for the abolition of caste-based restrictions to allow for greater social mobility and equality of opportunity.

6. **Annihilation of Caste:** Ambedkar called for the annihilation of the caste system, viewing it as a major obstacle to the progress and unity of Indian society. He believed that caste-based discrimination could only be eradicated through radical social reforms and the creation of a more egalitarian social order.

Ambedkar's views on caste as a social division were foundational to his broader vision of social justice and equality. His efforts to challenge and reform the caste system continue to have a profound impact on Indian society and politics.

### **Caste and Untouchability:**

Ambedkar highlighted the practice of untouchability, where certain castes were considered so impure that their touch or shadow was believed to pollute higher castes. He considered untouchability as the most degrading aspect of the caste system. Ambedkar, himself born into the Dalit community (formerly known as Untouchables), experienced firsthand the harsh realities of caste-based oppression. His writings and speeches on caste and untouchability remain influential in India's social and political discourse. Here is an overview of Ambedkar's views on caste and untouchability:

1. **Caste as a Social Evil:** Ambedkar viewed the caste system as a deeply entrenched social evil that perpetuated inequality, discrimination, and oppression. He argued that caste not only divided society but also hindered its progress and unity.

2. **Untouchability as a Blight:** Ambedkar considered untouchability, the practice of socially excluding and segregating certain communities based on their caste, as the most dehumanizing aspect of the

caste system. He saw untouchability as a form of social apartheid that denied basic human dignity to millions of people.

3. **Roots of Untouchability:** Ambedkar traced the origins of untouchability to the hierarchical nature of the caste system, where certain castes were deemed superior and others inferior. He argued that untouchability was a tool used by the upper castes to maintain their social and economic dominance.

4. **Annihilation of Caste:** Ambedkar famously called for the "annihilation of caste," advocating for the complete eradication of the caste system and untouchability. He believed that this could only be achieved through radical social reform and the creation of a more egalitarian society.

5. **Social and Political Rights:** Ambedkar fought for the social and political rights of Dalits and other marginalized communities. He advocated for reservations (affirmative action) in education and government jobs to uplift the socio-economic status of Dalits and other backward classes.

6. **Conversion to Buddhism:** In 1956, Ambedkar himself converted to Buddhism along with thousands of his followers, as a symbolic rejection of the caste system and untouchability. He saw Buddhism as a path to social equality and human dignity.

7. **Constitutional Safeguards:** As the chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Indian Constitution, Ambedkar ensured the inclusion of provisions to protect the rights of Dalits and other marginalized communities. These include reservations in education, employment, and political representation.

Ambedkar's views on caste and untouchability were rooted in his commitment to social justice, equality, and the dignity of all human beings. His teachings continue to inspire movements for social reform and empowerment in India and beyond.

### **Caste as a Social Evil:**

Ambedkar viewed caste as a social evil that denied basic human rights and dignity to individuals. He argued that caste perpetuated social inequality and hindered the progress of society as a whole. Ambedkar himself experienced firsthand the brutalities and injustices inflicted by the caste system. His views

on caste as a social evil are deeply rooted in his personal experiences, academic research, and advocacy for social justice. Here's an exploration of Ambedkar's perspective on caste as a social evil:

1. **Inequality and Discrimination:** Ambedkar saw the caste system as a system of social hierarchy that institutionalized inequality and discrimination. He argued that caste determined an individual's social status, economic opportunities, and even basic human rights, leading to the marginalization and oppression of certain communities.

2. **Barriers to Social Progress:** According to Ambedkar, the caste system created rigid social divisions that hindered social progress and unity. He believed that as long as the caste system persisted, India would be unable to achieve true democracy and modernity.

3. **Violation of Human Dignity:** Ambedkar viewed caste-based discrimination, particularly untouchability, as a violation of human dignity. He considered untouchability to be a heinous practice that denied basic human rights to a significant section of society.

4. **Rooted in Hinduism:** Ambedkar traced the origins of the caste system to Hindu scriptures and traditions. He argued that the caste system was an integral part of Hinduism and that it was sustained by religious beliefs and practices.

5. **Call for Annihilation of Caste:** Ambedkar famously called for the "annihilation of caste," advocating for the complete eradication of the caste system. He believed that this could only be achieved through radical social reform and the creation of a more egalitarian society.

6. **Conversion to Buddhism:** As a symbolic rejection of the caste system and Hinduism, Ambedkar, along with thousands of his followers, converted to Buddhism in 1956. He saw Buddhism as a religion that promoted equality, human dignity, and social justice.

7. **Constitutional Reforms:** Ambedkar played a crucial role in drafting the Indian Constitution, which includes provisions for the abolition of untouchability and the promotion of social justice. He ensured that the Constitution provided safeguards for the rights of Dalits and other marginalized communities.

Ambedkar's views on caste as a social evil continue to influence discussions on caste, social justice, and human rights in India. His teachings and legacy serve as a reminder of the ongoing struggle against caste-based discrimination and the quest for a more just and egalitarian society.

## **Annihilation of Caste:**

Ambedkar famously called for the annihilation of the caste system, advocating for radical social and political reforms to eliminate caste-based discrimination and oppression. He believed that caste could only be eradicated through education, social reform, and inter-caste marriages.

"Annihilation of Caste" is a seminal text by B. R. Ambedkar, originally written as a speech in 1936 but not delivered due to opposition from orthodox Hindu groups. In this work, Ambedkar fiercely criticizes the caste system in India and calls for its complete eradication. Here's an overview of the key themes and arguments presented in "Annihilation of Caste":

1. **Caste as an Evil:** Ambedkar condemns the caste system as a social evil that has created deep divisions and inequalities in Indian society. He argues that caste is not just a division of labor but a system of graded inequality and discrimination.

2. **Hindu Scriptures:** Ambedkar criticizes Hindu scriptures, particularly the Manusmriti, for legitimizing and perpetuating caste-based discrimination. He argues that these texts have been used to justify the subjugation of lower castes.

3. **Untouchability:** Ambedkar highlights the plight of the untouchables (Dalits) who have been subjected to extreme forms of discrimination and social exclusion. He calls for the abolition of untouchability and the upliftment of the Dalit community.

4. **Caste and Democracy:** Ambedkar argues that the caste system is incompatible with the principles of democracy and equality. He believes that as long as caste-based discrimination exists, true democracy cannot flourish in India.

5. **Religion and Caste:** Ambedkar criticizes the role of religion in perpetuating the caste system. He calls for a reformation of religious practices that are based on caste distinctions.

6. **Solution: Annihilation of Caste:** Ambedkar's central thesis is that the only way to eradicate caste is through its annihilation. He argues for the destruction of the social and religious foundations of caste and the establishment of a society based on equality and justice.

7. **Conversion:** Ambedkar argues that conversion to a religion that does not recognize caste distinctions, such as Buddhism, is one way

to break free from the shackles of the caste system. He himself later converted to Buddhism along with thousands of his followers.

"Annihilation of Caste" remains a powerful critique of the caste system and a manifesto for social reform in India. Ambedkar's ideas continue to inspire movements for social justice and equality in the country.

### **Conversion to Buddhism:**

In 1956, Ambedkar led a mass conversion of Dalits to Buddhism as a way to escape the caste system and its discriminatory practices. This event, known as the "Dhamma Chakra Pravartan Din" or "Conversion to Buddhism Day," marked a significant turning point in Ambedkar's life and in the history of Dalit empowerment in India. He saw Buddhism as a path to liberation and equality.

Ambedkar's decision to convert to Buddhism was a deliberate rejection of the caste system and Hinduism, which he saw as perpetuating caste-based discrimination and inequality. Buddhism, with its emphasis on equality, non-violence, and social justice, appealed to Ambedkar as a more egalitarian and inclusive alternative.

Through his conversion, Ambedkar sought to inspire other Dalits to embrace Buddhism as a means of asserting their dignity and freedom from the constraints of the caste system. He believed that Buddhism offered a path to spiritual and social liberation for the oppressed.

Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism had far-reaching implications for the Dalit community and for Indian society as a whole. It was a bold statement against the injustices of the caste system and a call for social reform and equality. The event also sparked a revival of interest in Buddhism in India and led to the growth of the Dalit Buddhist movement, which continues to advocate for the rights and dignity of Dalits to this day.

### **Political Representation:**

Ambedkar emphasized the importance of political representation for marginalized communities. He was a key figure in the inclusion of provisions for affirmative action and reservations for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the Indian Constitution.

Ambedkar's views on political representation were deeply influenced by his experiences of social discrimination and his commitment to social justice. He believed that political representation was crucial for marginalized

communities, particularly Dalits, to have a voice in governance and to secure their rights and interests.

Ambedkar argued that the existing political system in India, which was based on British colonial institutions, was inadequate in representing the interests of Dalits and other oppressed groups. He criticized the caste-based nature of Indian society, which he saw as inherently unjust and discriminatory, and called for political reforms to address these issues.

One of Ambedkar's key contributions to political representation was his role in drafting the Indian Constitution. As the chairman of the Drafting Committee, he played a significant role in shaping the provisions related to fundamental rights, social justice, and affirmative action. These provisions included reservations for Dalits and other marginalized communities in educational institutions and government jobs, as well as measures to protect their cultural and social rights.

Ambedkar also advocated for separate electorates for Dalits, arguing that this would ensure their representation in legislatures and local bodies. While this proposal was not ultimately included in the Constitution, the idea of reservations for Dalits and other marginalized groups was adopted and has since become a key feature of Indian politics.

Overall, Ambedkar's views on political representation were driven by his commitment to social reform and his belief in the importance of giving marginalized communities a voice in the political process. His efforts laid the foundation for a more inclusive and equitable political system in India, although challenges and disparities remain.

Ambedkar's views on caste were revolutionary and continue to be highly influential in discussions on social justice and equality in India. His work laid the foundation for the Dalit movement and continues to inspire efforts to combat caste-based discrimination and inequality.

### **Ghurye's View on Caste:**

Ghurye's views on caste were multifaceted and evolved over time. He was one of the pioneering sociologists in India who extensively studied the caste system. Ghurye viewed caste as a fundamental feature of Indian society, shaping

its social, economic, and cultural life. His perspective on caste can be summarized as follows:

### **Caste as a Unique Social Institution**

Ghurye's views on caste were deeply rooted in his understanding of Indian society and culture. He considered caste to be a unique social institution in India, with its origins in the varna system described in ancient Hindu texts. According to Ghurye, caste was not just a division of labor but also a division of society into distinct groups with specific social, economic, and ritual roles.

One of Ghurye's key arguments was that caste was not static but rather dynamic and adaptable to changing social and economic conditions. He believed that caste boundaries were not rigid and that there was mobility within the caste system, although this mobility was limited and often constrained by social norms and practices.

Ghurye also emphasized the role of caste in preserving social order and stability. He argued that caste provided a sense of identity and belonging to individuals and communities and helped maintain social cohesion and solidarity. At the same time, Ghurye acknowledged the negative aspects of caste, such as untouchability and social discrimination, but he believed that these were aberrations rather than inherent features of the caste system.

Overall, Ghurye's view on caste was complex and multifaceted. While he recognized the importance of caste as a social institution in India, he also critiqued its negative aspects and called for reforms to address issues of social inequality and discrimination. His work continues to be influential in the study of caste and Indian society.

### **Caste as a Complex Social System**

G. S. Ghurye viewed caste as a complex social system with deep roots in Indian society. According to Ghurye, caste is not merely a system of social stratification but a comprehensive social institution that influences various aspects of life in India. Here are some key points from Ghurye's perspective on caste as a complex social system:

1. **Social Organization:** Ghurye saw caste as a system of social organization that structured Indian society into distinct groups based on birth. Each caste had its own rules, customs, and traditions governing social interactions and relationships.

2. **Kinship:** Caste played a significant role in shaping kinship patterns in India. Marriages were often arranged within the same caste to maintain purity and preserve caste boundaries. Kinship ties were crucial for social mobility and maintaining caste solidarity.

3. **Occupation:** Caste was closely linked to occupation, with each caste traditionally associated with specific professions or trades. This occupational division helped maintain social order and economic stability within the caste system.

4. **Culture:** Ghurye emphasized the role of caste in shaping cultural practices and beliefs. Each caste had its own cultural identity, including rituals, festivals, and norms, which were passed down through generations.

5. **Hierarchy and Inequality:** While acknowledging the hierarchical nature of the caste system, Ghurye did not view it solely as a system of oppression. He believed that caste also provided a sense of identity, belonging, and social security to its members.

Ghurye's perspective highlights the complexity of the caste system in India, portraying it as a multifaceted social institution that influences various aspects of social life. His work has contributed significantly to the understanding of caste and its role in Indian society.

### **Functional Aspects of Caste**

G. S. Ghurye emphasized the functional aspects of caste in Indian society, highlighting its role in maintaining social order, stability, and cultural continuity. Ghurye viewed caste as a functional institution that served several important purposes:

1. **Social Stability:** Ghurye argued that caste provided a stable social structure by organizing individuals into distinct groups based on birth. This helped in maintaining social cohesion and preventing social chaos.

2. **Occupational Specialization:** Ghurye believed that the caste system promoted occupational specialization, with each caste being associated with specific occupations. This division of labor contributed to economic efficiency and productivity.

3. **Social Control:** Caste norms and values acted as a form of social control, regulating behavior within and between castes. This helped in maintaining social harmony and resolving conflicts.

4. **Cultural Preservation:** Ghurye noted that caste played a crucial role in preserving cultural traditions and practices. Each caste had its own customs, rituals, and beliefs, which were passed down through generations, ensuring cultural continuity.

5. **Identity and Belonging:** Caste provided individuals with a sense of identity and belonging within their community. It gave them a social status and a network of relationships that provided support and security.

6. **Political Organization:** Ghurye also recognized the role of caste in political organization, particularly in the past when caste-based associations and councils played a significant role in governance and decision-making.

Ghurye's emphasis on the functional aspects of caste highlighted its importance as a social institution in Indian society. While acknowledging its drawbacks, such as inequality and discrimination, Ghurye argued that caste also served several important functions that contributed to the stability and continuity of Indian social life.

### **Caste as a natural and enduring feature of Indian society**

Unlike Ambedkar, Ghurye did not see caste as inherently oppressive but rather as a natural and enduring feature of Indian society. He viewed it through a functionalist lens, focusing on its role in maintaining social order and stability. According to Ghurye, caste served several important functions in Indian society that were beneficial and necessary for social organization. Here are some reasons why Ghurye did not view caste as inherently oppressive:

1. **Functionalism:** Ghurye's functionalist approach led him to emphasize the functional aspects of caste, such as social stability, occupational specialization, and cultural preservation. He believed that these functions were essential for the smooth functioning of society.

2. **Cultural Perspective:** Ghurye viewed caste as a cultural institution that was deeply rooted in Indian society. He believed that caste played a crucial role in preserving cultural traditions and values, which were important for maintaining social cohesion.

3. **Historical Context:** Ghurye considered the historical origins of caste and its evolution over time. He recognized that while caste had been associated with inequality and discrimination, it had also undergone changes and adaptations that reflected the changing social and economic conditions in India.

4. **Social Order:** Ghurye saw caste as a system of social order that provided individuals with a sense of identity and belonging. He believed that caste helped in organizing society into distinct groups with their own roles and responsibilities.

5. **Complexity of Caste:** Ghurye acknowledged that caste was a complex social institution with multiple dimensions, including social, economic, and cultural. He believed that a simplistic view of caste as purely oppressive would not capture its full complexity.

Ghurye's perspective on caste was shaped by his belief in its functional importance for Indian society. While he recognized the negative aspects of caste, such as inequality and discrimination, he also saw it as a dynamic institution that had played a significant role in shaping Indian culture and society.

In conclusion, while both B R Ambedkar and G S Ghurye made significant contributions to the study of caste in India, their perspectives differed significantly. Ambedkar, coming from a background of personal experience of caste discrimination, viewed caste as a deeply oppressive and hierarchical system that needed to be eradicated for the progress and equality of all individuals. He saw caste as a social evil that hindered the development of a just and egalitarian society. In contrast, Ghurye, with his functionalist approach, viewed caste as a complex social institution that served important functions in Indian society, such as social organization, occupational specialization, and cultural preservation. He did not see caste as inherently oppressive but rather as a natural and enduring feature of Indian social life. Despite their differences, both Ambedkar and Ghurye contributed valuable insights into the study of caste, highlighting its complexity and significance in Indian society.