

Counter-Discourses of Lower-Caste Intellectuals in Colonial and Postcolonial India: Mainstream Hindu Discourses and the Phule-Ambedkar Ideology

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Abstract

This study examines the nature of discourse formation in the Dalit movement by analysing two different historical stages: 1) the nineteenth-century upper-caste discourse on Aryan race theory and the counter-discourse advocated by Phule; and 2) the early twentieth-century mainstream nationalist discourse and the counter-discourse proposed by B. R. Ambedkar. However, the ideologies of Phule and Ambedkar, which have often been combined and called the 'Phule-Ambedkar ideology', contain heterogeneous and conflicting elements, especially concerning lower-caste identity and perceptions of the upper castes. Counter-discourses have been produced through interaction with and responses to the contemporary mainstream discourse in different times and contexts.

Keywords: *Phule, Ambedkar, Lower-Caste Movement, Dalit Movement, Hindu Discourse*

INTRODUCTION

Dalits have been articulating their own voices since the colonial period, when lower-caste leaders, with their new economic base that was independent from the village and their enhanced consciousness, started to present petitions. The nineteenth century saw the formation and spread of lower-caste discourse among educated members of the lower caste and the masses to a certain extent. Jyotirao Phule, an eminent Shudra thinker of the nineteenth century, established the unparalleled discourse of anti-Brahminism, inheriting a long history of Shramana tradition, the Bhakti movement, Sikhism, etc. Such lower-caste discourses constituted 'ideology' and represented a 'very different set of interests and a very different outlook' from upper-caste discourse (Omvedt, 1971: 1969).² This tendency was accelerated during the twentieth century, as we can see with the example of B. R. Ambedkar, among many other lower-caste spokespersons. Ambedkar elaborated a strategy of lower-caste emancipation and symbolised the political mobilisation of the 'Untouchable' caste (Jaffreot, 2005: 160-161).³ Their ideas remain significant even in present-day India.

Phule and Ambedkar challenged the legitimacy of Brahminism by 'weaving together the emancipatory non-Vedic materialist traditions and new western ideas' (Rege, 2010: 93). Their ideas have often been labelled as the 'Phule-Ambedkar ideology', and they have provided the sources of ideology for many types of social movements, including the lower-caste movement and the women's movement. The Phule-Ambedkar ideology has earned increasing significance and has been reinterpreted from various standpoints as the social movement expands locally and globally and the political meaning of caste changes. The Phule-Ambedkar ideology has been studied and utilised by a number of scholars and activists. It was considered the framework of research on the Dalits— Omvedt (1994: 22) mentioned the 'Phule-Ambedkar thought' in her study on the Dalit movement in the colonial period; Rege (2010: 88-98) applied the Phule-Ambedkar ideology to pedagogy,⁴ and Waghmore (2013) used the concept to explain the politicisation of people from Dalit communities.

These two ideologues shared the perception of lower-caste problems and argued for the emancipation of lower castes as their common solution. However, they did not necessarily agree upon the identity of lower castes or

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² Many other researchers have explored Phule's anti-caste ideology and its influence on the contemporary movement, such as O'Hanlon (1985), Vendell (2014), and Venkatesh (2016).

³ Additional studies on Ambedkar's ideology and movement include Omvedt (1994, 2004).

⁴ Without using the term 'Phule-Ambedkar's ideology', Sarangi (2018) and Paik (2016) also wrote about the contribution of Phule and Ambedkar's ideology in forging both a new type of womanhood and women's studies.

how to resolve their problems. Phule identified the lower castes as the original owners of India and the upper castes as invaders (O'Hanlon, 1985: 141-163), while Ambedkar ruled out the racial theory and argued only for the cultural differences of the Avarna castes (Sharma, 2005: 843-870; Cháirez-Garza, 2018: 281-296). In their arguments for problem-solving, Phule perceived the British colonial government as the potential protector of the lower castes and as potentially establishing a modern equalitarian society,⁵ while Ambedkar pursued a two-track strategy of the lower castes gaining political power and establishing their own identity independent from Hinduism.

In the late nineteenth and the early and mid-twentieth century, India saw the end of full-fledged colonial rule and the emerging trend of nationalism, which competed or cooperated with each other depending on the situation in the political field. Socially, the caste system was consolidated on the one hand, and the social reform movement, including the lower-caste movement, was activated on the other. Nationalist discourses, some secular and some religious, became mainstream. Hindu orientation tended to feature in the popular nationalist discourse as cases of nationalist organisations appeared in the late colonial period (Bandyopadhyay, 2004: 234-247; Jaffrelot, 1996). The lower-caste counter-discourse produced by lower-caste leaders like Phule and Ambedkar provided an alternative view to the mainstream discourse of the period and played the role of the emancipation ideology of the lower castes as well.

This paper is divided into two parts, each of which consists of two themes. The first part addresses the nineteenth-century discourse held by Indian intellectuals, consisting of upper-caste discourse in the mainstream intellectual world and the counter-discourse of Phule, a lower-caste intellectual. The second part examines the early twentieth-century discourse, consisting of the mainstream nationalist discourse and the counter-discourse of Ambedkar, another lower-caste ideologue. In the first part, I compare the discourse used mainly in upper-caste intellectual circles with the lower-caste counter-discourse of the late nineteenth century. In the second part, I compare the nationalist discourse and the lower-caste counter-discourse at the end of the colonial period and in post-independence India. By making the above comparisons, this paper aims to investigate the interrelationship between the mainstream discourse of the upper castes and the countervailing discourse of the lower castes in the context of two different historical periods. It will elucidate the sociocultural significance of the lower-caste movement and the discourse around it in the late colonial and early independence period in the context of the social discourse of the period. It will also give clues to many conflicting factors in the contemporary development of the anti-caste movement by reviewing its early context.

Aryan Theory: Nineteenth-Century Discourse Among Indian Intellectuals⁶

The Aryan theory of race dominated the discourse among British and Indian intellectual circles during the colonial era. It was an outcome of Orientalist studies in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, with ethnology and linguistics as its base (Ballantyne, 2002: 4-5). Aryan theory held that Indo-Iranians, that is, people from India and Persia, were Aryans just as Europeans were. It was often interpreted that they shared common racial and cultural origins. The racial homogeneity between Europeans and Indians was underlined in colonial society. It was argued that these two peoples belonged to the same language family as well as the same race. Political nuance was added in the 1840s when Max Müller emphasised the blood relationship between the British and the Bengalese (Max Müller, 1848: 319-350), which was used to justify British rule in India. According to some Indologists, modern Britons were Aryans who returned to 'Aryavarta' after three thousand years, and British colonial rule over Indians constituted an 'Aryan reunion' (Wilson, 1858: 42-43).

Westernised Indian intellectuals preferred to interpret this relationship as 'Indo-British fraternity' rather than an Indian-Iranian or Indian-European connection. They supported British rule over India, describing it as a

⁵ The attitude of Phule towards the British colonial government is a controversial topic among scholars. Deshpande (2002: 18-21) criticised the 'clearly soft position on imperialism' of Phule. Omvedt (2008: 170-172), on the contrary, placed more emphasis on Phule's criticism of the colonial exploitation by the British bureaucracy.

⁶ Aryan theory has been a topic of historical studies to which many scholars have contributed. I am heavily indebted to Leopold (1970) and Thapar (1996; 2006), along with other sources cited to complete this part of my article.

‘reunion of parted cousins’ (Sen, 1904(1988): 47-49).⁷ Nationalist intellectuals in India later tried to distinguish Asian Aryans, the forefathers of contemporary Indians and the cultivators of Vedic culture, from Europeans. They did not break from the then-powerful discourse of Aryan theory but rather played a certain role in reinforcing it. Tilak, for example, argued that the owners of Vedic culture were a branch of Aryans who moved towards the East and that only those Asian Aryans were the forefathers of Indians (Tilak, 1903: 14-18). He dismissed the idea of any blood connection between Indians and Britons and emphasised a proud, ancient culture that belonged only to India and thus distinguished Asian Aryans from Europeans. The Aryan religion, with the Vedas as its culmination, became the basis of Indian nationalism. Aryanism symbolised a collection of religious ideals and was directly connected to national origins in the minds of some religious leaders, such as Dayananda Saraswati and Aurobindo Ghosh. Saraswati ruled out the conventional racial interpretation of Aryan theory by denying the blood relationship not only between Indians and Europeans but also between Indians and Iranians. Instead, he espoused a different version of racial theory, and he advocated the division of the Indian population into Aryans (the upper three varnas) and non-Aryans (the Shudras) (Saraswati, 1875(1972): 249-251). Saraswati ironically reinforced internal racial demarcation among Indian people, although he is sometimes argued to have given rise to the nationalist interpretation of Aryan theory by establishing a new interpretation of the concept of Arya as referring to Indian people only, and of Aryavarta, which was no other place than the northern part of the Indian subcontinent.

The Aryan theory of race had unexpected effects on the dynamics of various groups in India. Aryan theory connoted racial equality between Indians and Persians and Europeans to a certain extent while reinforcing divisions between different groups in India. It represented a tinderbox in Indian society, as it identified North Indians as the descendants of Aryans and South Indians and tribal people as non-Aryans (Shah, 2015: 14-43). Prichard (1843: 164) categorised South Indians and tribal people as ‘aborigines’ and distinct from Aryans by saying ‘the Natives of Dekhan, [...] are a distinct race, and speak dialects not of the Sanskrit but of the Tamulian [...] A part of the inhabitants are relics of an ancient population conquered by the Brahmins’. Racial divisions among Indians, intertwined with caste divisions, are related to the theory of the racial origin of caste. Racial origin theory argues that the establishment of four varnas and Avarna stemmed from the Aryan subjugation of aboriginal people in India and categorised the upper three varnas, the descendants of the Aryans, and the Shudra and Avarna who were the indigenous inhabitants of India (Wilson, 1877: 101-113). It was based on racial bias against the aborigines of the Indian subcontinent, who were described as darker-skinned and inferior than the lighter-skinned, and thus superior, Aryans. Therefore, it was used to justify inequality based on caste. Prichard (1843: 164) confined Aryans to the upper three varnas, ‘who formed the great body of the Indian nation’. Ranade (1902: 190-191), a moderate nationalist, lamented the defilement of Aryan culture by the invasion of the Jats and the Muslims in north India and the influence of the ‘aboriginal’ Dravidian culture in the South.⁸ The Aryan theory of race, which argued that Aryans represented a superior culture, was used to justify a sense of racial superiority over non-Aryans, including the South Indians and lower castes.

Phule: Aryan Theory as Lower Caste Counter-Discourse

The Aryan theory of race was reproduced by a Shudra as well, who was branded as an inferior aborigine. It is well-known that the ‘upside-down’ Aryan theory espoused by Jyotirao Phule had a great impact on the intellectual circles of Britons and upper-caste Indians in the colonial era (O’Hanlon, 1985: 149). Phule basically accepted Aryan theory, which argued for the Aryan conquest and settlement of Aryavarta and the subjugation of the original inhabitants. He formulated new identities for the lower-caste, non-Aryan peoples as the owners of land, and for the upper-caste Aryan peoples as invaders and aliens in the format of racial theory. This relationship of conqueror and conquered was manifested in the social system of Aryans as well. Aryans imposed the lowest position in the caste system on the original dwellers after subjugating them. Therefore, the Brahmins

⁷ In case I cite the reprinted version and I feel the year of the original version is significant, I use both years for the citation: the original year first, followed by the reprinted year in the brackets.

⁸ However, Omvedt (1976: 103, 324 note 12) pointed out that Ranade positively estimated Maharashtra as the place of fusion of Aryan and Dravidian culture in his *Rise of the Maratha Power*. These two statements by Ranade in two different writings shared the same premise: that North Indians were descendants of Aryans and that Shudras were non-Aryan Dravidians.

and upper castes who enslaved the lower castes were not natives of India, and the non-Aryan lower castes who suffered from the caste-based exploitation were the genuine owners of the land, according to Phule.

Phule constructed an early discourse on the structural oppression based on the caste system and the lower-caste struggle in the mid- and late nineteenth century. He wrote profusely to argue against the caste system and dispel upper-caste narratives. Phule's narrative on the early history of India is an unconventional interpretation of the traditional Hindu narrative based on the Puranas. Phule explained the Aryan invasion as the process of subjugation of the original inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent and the imposition of the caste system by Aryabhat from Iran (1869(1991): 22-99). His work *Slavery* gave a detailed description of the process, using the ten avatars of Vishnu as a metaphor to describe the Aryan invasion. Some of the avatars characterise their aggressiveness or cunningness. The Aryans killed the kings of the original dwellers and took away their kingdom through deception, argued Phule, as the story of Asura king Bali and Vamana, the fifth avatar of Vishnu, symbolised. Then, they created the Vedas and caste system to suppress and enslave the aborigines. Four-mouthed Brahma, the next chief of the Aryans, composed the Veda with Iranian incantations and fabricated stories (Phule, 1873(1991): 64-75). The Iranian connection in Phule's story reflects early Indological research and emphasises the foreignness of the Aryan Brahmins. Many scriptures, like Brahmana, Shastra, etc., were written to sanctify the institution of the caste system.

In Phule's interpretation, the social status of castes was also reversed. The original Kshatriya, or the owners of land, now became the Shudra and were placed at the bottom of the caste structure and enslaved. The Mahars, the most numerous untouchable caste in the Marathi-speaking region, considered to be lower than the Shudra, were described as the ones who put up a stiff resistance in fierce battles. They were one of the Shudra groups, according to Phule, who never submitted to the Brahmins. Although they suffered ultimate defeat and had to tie black threads around their necks to symbolise their submission, they were the bravest among the Shudras, as to be called Maha-ari, the great enemy. Aryan Brahmins placed them lower than other Shudras as revenge for their fierce resistance and spread the message to all of Indian society to treat them disdainfully (Phule, 1873(1991): 65-70).

Many Indian intellectuals in the nineteenth century, such as Ghosh, Tilak, Ranade, and Swami Dayananda Saraswati, reinterpreted Aryan theory based on early Orientalist writings. Phule's writing occupied a pioneering position in the reinterpretation of Aryan theory, as O'Hanlon commented (1985: 150).⁹ Phule offered an entirely different interpretation from those of contemporary Western and Indian intellectuals while accepting Aryan theory in a broad sense. Aryans were described as aggressive and cunning invaders and sly swindlers who enticed people with Iranian sorcery and not as enterprising immigrants who brought with them a new civilisation, according to Phule's writings. Aryans were not the upper three varnas, as stated by Saraswati, but were only the Aryan-Brahmins for Phule. The lower castes, the 'Shudra-Atishudra' in Phule's terminology, the original owners of the land, were now subjugated and enslaved by Aryans. They were also identified as cultivators, in relation to their landowner identity, which coincided with the occupation of Shudras and Avarna jatis, who were mostly farmers and agricultural labourers. They were owner-cultivators before, but had been degraded to agricultural labourers with a slave-like status. They were the true Kshatriya caste and therefore the original warriors and rulers of their territories. In sum, Phule's reinterpretation of Aryan theory placed the current lower castes as the original rulers, warriors, and cultivators of India before the invasion of the Aryans and the subsequent Brahminisation of the Subcontinent.

Another clear distinction between Phule's reinterpretation of Aryan theory and other Indian interpretations was the relationship between Indian Aryans and European Aryans. The basis of nineteenth-century Aryan theory was the blood relationship between Indians and Europeans, especially Britons. The British advocates of Aryan theory and some Westernised Indian intellectuals wanted to make Britons and Indians brothers, while the Indian nationalists sought to disprove this blood relationship between them. Phule maintained his silence on the relationship between Indian Aryans and European Aryans. Rather, he focused on an analogy of the

⁹ Tilak, Ranade, and Ghosh wrote or spoke on Aryan theory in 1893, 1895 and 1908, respectively. Saraswati published *Satyarth Prakash* in 1875, while Phule published *Slavery* two years earlier in 1873 and *Priestcraft Exposed* six years earlier in 1869.

Aryan Brahmins who invaded India and enslaved its owners and the British who returned and conquered India three thousand years later (Phule, 1873(2002): 27). For Phule, the term ‘Aryans’ did not apply to all Indian people, but only to the Brahmin caste. Thus, if there was any blood relationship, it would be between the Brahmins and the Britons. Both had the common characteristic of being conquerors of the Shudra-Atishudra, the original dwellers of the Indian subcontinent.

Phule’s attitude towards the British colonialists seems to have been ambiguous. There is a mention of the “kind consideration of [...] [the] Earl of Dufferin, Viceroy and Governor General of India” on the front page of his book *Cultivator’s Whipcord* (1883(2002): 114). There are many places in his writing where Phule praised the British as the liberators of the lower castes from Brahmin dictatorship and the bringer of education to Shudra-Atishudra and women (1873(2002): 44; 1885(2002)a: 209; 1885(2002)b: 215). The English title he gave to his work, *Gulamgiri*, was “*Slavery in this Civilized British Government Under the Cloak of Brahmanism*” (1873(2002): 22), which displays Phule’s perception of the dual control over the Indian masses in the late nineteenth century, by the British in the political domain and the Brahmins in the social domain. According to him, British rule of India was “civilised”, while Brahmin rule, concealed to the British, brought about thralldom for the lower castes. British rule relied upon the principles of freedom and equality, while the Brahmins exercised a kind of tyrannical domination over the lower castes, which was kept hidden from the British rulers. On the other hand, Phule severely criticised the British colonialists for their negligence, pleasure-seeking behaviours, and entrusting everything to the greedy Brahmin caste (1883(2002): 151-156). Phule criticised the Brahmins for being used as tools by the British rulers in this sense (1883(2002): 151-152). Still, he had no choice but to position the British as the safeguard of the lower castes, as they presented a possible escape from three thousand years of caste-based oppression and ignorance. Phule thought that British political rule checked the traditional dominance of the Brahmin caste and offered possible opportunities for the lower castes to move to a more egalitarian position in Indian society. Phule and his contemporary lower-caste leaders shared the perception of British colonial rule as a potential saviour in a certain sense.¹⁰

Hindu Identity Amid Twentieth-Century Nationalism

The national movement for self-rule rose dramatically during the 1920s, when Ambedkar started the anti-untouchability movement after returning from his studies abroad. Mass nationalism prevailed after Gandhi returned from South Africa and led the peasants’ movements in Champaran and Kheda in the late 1910s. It was the task of the nationalist elites to explore the meaning of ‘nation’ and forge a national identity. Aryan theory underwent changes during the nationalist era: It sought to define who was Aryan based on nationalism, while earlier Aryan theory had been based on race. In the nationalist era, Aryans were identified as a group sharing common roots in Aryan civilisation rather than linguistic ties or blood relationships. Many authors examined the meaning of the Aryans in relation to ancient culture and religion. This redefining of the meaning of Aryan excluded Europeans, not because they belonged to a different race but because they were detached from ancient Aryan civilisation. Swami Vivekananda excluded Europeans from the definition of Aryans and compared the self-sacrificing Aryan society with selfish European society in his 1899 writings. Western cultural values like Christianity, materialism, atheism, etc. were criticised and clearly distinguished from Aryan culture and spirituality (Vivekananda, 1899(1971): 399-408).

Such new developments in Aryan theory occurred in the same context as the development of Hindu nationalism, in that Aryan civilisation had been explained by its religious features like the Vedas or the Hindu religion by Indian nationalists. Nationalism was easily expressed through religion, and nationalist leaders intentionally drew upon Hindu religion as ‘an instrument for effecting political change’ (Massetos, 1993: 100). Religion thus became one of the largest motifs in unifying the masses within the boundaries of the popular Indian national movement.

V. D. Savarkar clearly stated that the Aryans who first settled in India were upholders of the Vedic religion, writing “Aryans made it their home and lighted their first sacrificial fire on the banks of the Sindhu, the Indus [...], the holy waters of the Indus were daily witnessing [...] the scented sacrificial smokes and the valleys

¹⁰ Lower-caste groups often appealed to the colonial government for their rights and depended on the British law (Zelliot, 1996: 36).

resounding with the chants of Vedic hymns” in his book *Hindutva*, first published in 1923 (1923(2005): 4-5). His concept of Aryan included “all those who had been incorporated as parts integral in the nation and people that flourished on this our side of the Indus whether Vaidik or Avaidik, Brahmana or Chandal, and owing and claiming to have inherited a common culture, common blood, common country and common polity”, as written in the same work (Savarkar, 1923(2005): 33). The Aryan concept of Savarkar was more inclusive in the sense that it depended on geographical boundaries. However, Savarkar called the home of the ancestors of India ‘Sindhusthan’, not Aryavarta, often mentioned before the twentieth century as the land of Arya. It seems related more to Hinduism than to Aryanism. Aryans, in his writing, seemingly included all people within the geographical boundaries of “this our side of the Indus”, but actually it was people who shared a “common culture”: the Hindu culture. Including both “Brahmana and Chandal” meant that, irrespective of highness and lowness in the caste hierarchy, people without caste, that is, non-Hindus, could not be included in this category. Including both “Vaidik and Avaidik” was a more controversial concept, because it included the followers of non-Vedic Indian religions such as Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism. Therefore, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs were encompassed in the category of all-inclusive Hinduism, and followers of foreign religions, which could not be categorised as Vedic or non-Vedic (i.e. Christianity and Islam), were excluded. The essential feature of contemporary Aryan was thus their ‘Hindutva’ or ‘Hinduness’ in essence, as argued by Hindu nationalists.

Muslim nationalism also vigorously developed during the early twentieth century as a counter-action to the Hindu nationalism that was rising among Hindus, the largest community among Indians. Various minority groups in India started to develop political consciousness, which accompanied the move towards political democratisation in the late colonial period. Muslims and other minority groups endeavoured to secure political representation through reserved seats in the 1937 provincial elections. The Avarna caste also formed their own identity and claimed their political rights in this political milieu. Muslims were the largest minority group; therefore, Hindu-Muslim tensions dominated the political situation. Matters of other minorities, including the lower castes, became of secondary importance to the Hindu-Muslim opposition. Muslims secured a separate electorate and were inclined to harbour strong separatist sentiments. Hindu nationalists appealed to the solidarity of all Indians with the exception of Muslims and Christians; in this case, embracing Hindus meant including the followers of religions that had originated in India, which included Hindu lower castes, Jains, Sikhs, Tribals, and Avarnas.

Under these political circumstances, the Avarna caste pursued representation by quota in India’s legislative bodies and independent political empowerment. To realise this, they needed to establish their own identity separate from caste-Hindus because their quota would be based on their not belonging to the Hindu community and their discrimination due to their ‘untouchability’. Hindu nationalist ideology identified all residents of the Indian subcontinent but Muslims and Christians as Hindus. This ideology fascinated the Hindu nationalist leaders and spread among the masses in the turmoil of Hindu-Muslim conflicts. The Avarna castes struggled against the ‘myth of Hindutva’ shared by the majority Hindus to consolidate their identity. Considerable numbers of Avarna people preferred to identify themselves with Hindus. The preamble of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, which stated “amongst Hindus, no one shall be regarded as an untouchable by reason of his birth [...]”, accepted the Avarna castes in the category of Hindus as fact (Verma, 1971: 231-242). Many Avarna leaders tried to consolidate their position as the ‘owners’ of India by accepting the racial theory of the previous century in the era of mass Hindu nationalism, when the independent identity of the Avarna caste was not clear. M. C. Rajah (1883-1943), an ‘Adi Dravida’ activist and politician from Tamil Nadu, described Adi Dravida, or “the oldest civilisation in South India”, as a powerful community with a democratic government before the advent of the Aryans. He argued the original lords of the soil were degraded to the caste of Shudra and became slaves (Rajah, 1925(2005): 10-13). There are similarities in the Aryan theory of Rajah with that of Phule in the nineteenth century. However, one can feel the influence of nationalism in Rajah’s theory in that the British conquest and European missionary activities are subtly compared with the invasion and infiltration of Aryans thousands of years ago (Rajah, 1925(2005): 10-11). New versions of Aryan theory like Rajah’s were popularised throughout India, not only in South India, and provided the ideological basis for the popular Adi movements.

Dalit Identity in the Republic of India

Ambedkar, who led the political consolidation of the Scheduled Castes to form their own political party in the late colonial transition period for democratisation, failed to gain political power. Ambedkar had a point when he analysed the reason of repeated electoral defeats as his inability to secure the right to a double vote— one vote in the general electorate and another in the special Scheduled Caste electorate (Ambedkar, 1945(1991)). On the other hand, it was a natural consequence of the Congress predominance in essential issues, including the nationalist movement and swaraj discourse of the late colonial era. Frustrated by the limitations of lower-caste political parties, Ambedkar felt that it was necessary to expand the emancipation movement from the political realm to culture and religion. He also held the position of a member of the Constituent Assembly, Chairman of the Drafting Committee, and the first Law Minister of the Republic of India, through which he strengthened the role of state for the uplifting of the Scheduled Castes and the securement of equal rights. Ambedkar believed that the role of the state was indispensable for the Scheduled Castes to escape the oppression of the upper castes. Therefore, the identity formation of the Scheduled Castes as equal citizens of independent India was as equally important a task for him as the formation of independent Scheduled Caste culture. He published books on the origins of the Shudras and Dalits and started a conversion movement to Buddhism, which strengthened Dalit identity and widened the vision of their movement.

Ambedkar tried to contribute to the formation of the cultural identity of the Shudras and Dalits by searching for the truth of their origins. According to him, Shudra was a tribe that belonged to the Kshatriya varna, a part of the Aryan community who was denied upanayanam, because of discord between kings and Brahmins, and consequently the caste was downgraded to a position below the Vaishya. The present system of the four varnas was formed on this basis (Ambedkar, 1946(1990): 156-172). Ambedkar also sought to uncover the origins of the Dalits to dispel the Brahmanical theory of mixed marriage and the racial or occupational theories, which were based on Indological studies. He argued for the tribal origins of the Dalits instead, in which a tribe became 'untouchable' in the process of settlement from their earlier nomadic lives. When the nomadic people learned agriculture, they gradually settled, and land became a new form of wealth. During the transition period, when nomadic and settled groups coexisted, wars were fought for arable land. The defeated tribes were broken into smaller units, and they continued to lead nomadic lives. They were deprived of land, cattle, and grain and remained without any means of production. They roamed and gathered their foodstuffs because they were not able to establish settled communities. Ambedkar called them the 'Broken Men', and they were the ancestors of the Dalits. However, they were not always 'Untouchables': They initially lived around the settlers' villages and were provided with food and shelter in exchange for forewarning the villagers of raids and protecting them against invaders (Ambedkar, 1948(1990): 233-382).

Therefore, the Broken Men lived at the entrances of villages, not because they were 'Untouchables' but because they belonged to a different tribe from the settlers of the village, and they had to fulfil their duties as guards. It was not until later that they became associated with untouchability and that restrictions were imposed on them in Hindu society. Ambedkar thought that it was only conceptual and without any firm ground that they were segregated from Hindu society due to impurity. He thought that the untouchability imposed on the Broken Men was related to their religion, Buddhism, and their dietary custom of eating beef. He observed that the Dalits also hated to touch caste Hindus, especially Brahmins, no less than caste Hindus tried to avoid physical contact with the Dalits. He suggested the hypothesis that the Dalits had originally been Buddhists on the basis of his own observations. They did not change their religion after the 'counter-revolution', that is, when the last king of the Mauryan dynasty was slain by a Brahmin general and Brahminism consequently became the dominant ideology (Ambedkar, 1987).¹¹ Therefore, Brahmins considered the Broken Men impure and imposed untouchability on them and, on the other hand, the Broken Men thought the Brahmins to be inauspicious (Ambedkar, 1948(1990): 317). Moreover, they did not give up the habit of beef-eating after the cow was raised to sacred status. The flesh of dead cows was given to them by the villagers as a reward for guarding and protecting the village, which was an indispensable source of nutrition for them. As the Broken

¹¹ Ambedkar (1987) is believed to have been written around 1956, but it remained unpublished. It is compiled and published later in 1987. According to Ambedkar's interpretation of ancient history, the collapse of the Mauryan dynasty was the result of a struggle between Buddhism and Brahmanism.

Men did not have any means of production, they could not give up eating carrion (Ambedkar, 1948(1990): 318-320, 350-355). The stigma of untouchability, that they were impure and that their impurity would pollute the upper castes in case of proximity was the only ideology fabricated by Brahmins out of their hatred for and suppression of Buddhists, argued Ambedkar.

Buddhism and a beef-eating diet were aspects of their identity. Ambedkar directly related the habit of beef-eating, which was a reason for the hatred from the Hindus, with their identity and justified it from a historical perspective.¹² Buddhism related more directly and decisively with Dalit identity because of later mass conversion. It was not until 1956 that Ambedkar converted to Buddhism, but he had displayed an inclination towards Buddhism in his writings and activities as early as the mid-1940s.¹³ Buddhism was described as the original religion of the Avarna castes from the ancient period, and thus much significance was attributed to Ambedkar's writings. It was grounds for the historical justification of Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism, who claimed that the Scheduled Castes should have a different religion from Hinduism. Buddhism was not a new religion but their original religion, he argued. Therefore, the mass conversion of the Scheduled Castes to Buddhism from 1956 onwards was not seen so much as conversion but as the restoration of their original faith.

The theory of Ambedkar was distinct from existing discourse on Dalit identity and distinct from the mainstream nationalist discourse on Hindu identity. The history of the Avarna castes associated with Buddhism and beef-eating formed their own identity, and their acceptance by those in the Hindu category was difficult. Ambedkar did not want their separate identity to make the Avarna castes aliens in India. The Aryan concept suggested by Ambedkar was a key to understanding the lower-caste identity, including the Avarnas and Shudras. According to Ambedkar:

The Aryans were not a race. The Aryans were a collection of people. The cement that held them together was their interest in the maintenance of a type of culture called Aryan culture. Any one who accepted the Aryan culture was an Aryan. Not being a race there was no fixed type of colour and physiognomy which could be called Aryan. There was no dark and flat nose people for the Aryans to distinguish themselves from (Ambedkar, 1987: 419).

The Avarnas and Shudras were all supporters and heirs of Aryan culture, not non-Aryans nor pre-Aryan aboriginals. He never claimed that Avarnas were the original inhabitants or owners of Indian land. Instead, he postulated two different kinds of Aryans (Ambedkar, 1946(1990): 96-97). The first were the Vedic Aryans, who upheld chaturvarnya, social order by varna; the second was the non-Vedic Aryans, who did not accept the varna order, to which the Shudra belonged. Ambedkar pursued totally new dimensions of Dalit identity, distinct from Phule's theory or the traditional Adi movements, which were derived from Aryan racial theory. His understanding of Arya was rather similar to the nationalist definition of Arya.

Ambedkar did not believe that race was a meaningful factor in the state formation and national integration of the 1940s. For him, nationality was a sense of oneness, but the racial homogeneity of its members was not a necessary element. Rather, he understood that it was natural to have disparate elements in a country of diverse races, religions, and cultures like India. The nation should play a leading and rational role for the various disparate elements to harmoniously coexist under the principle of equality. Although he criticised what he saw as the irrational social and religious customs of Hinduism and he even declared that he was abandoning Hinduism in 1935, he never expressed the idea of a separate nation or criticism against the nation led by the Hindu majority. It was his conviction that the Indian nation should be secular and egalitarian. He, as a leader

¹² In the early phase of the Ambedkar movement in the 1920s and 1930s, he had persuaded the local untouchable masses not to eat carrion to avoid Hindus' contempt. He requested that the government ban carrion-eating through the resolution of the early Mahar conference. See 'Resolutions' of the 1927 Mahar Conference, reprinted in Telumbde (2016: 336-339). This recounts the change in strategy in the Ambedkar movement from assimilation to an establishment of a unique cultural community among Dalits.

¹³ The following activities of Ambedkar in the 1940s and early 1950s were related to Buddhism: The first college established by the People's Education Society in 1946 was named Siddharth College after the Buddha. *The Essence of Buddhism* by P. Lakshmi Narasu was re-published with a preface written by Ambedkar in 1947. He started to write *The Buddha and his Dhamma* in 1951 and advised his followers to convert to Buddhism.

of India's minority without political and socioeconomic power, was aware that only state power could provide them with legal protection.

CONCLUSION

Indian intellectuals witnessed the formation of and changes in various social discourses during the colonial period. Aryan theory originated from the Indologists of nineteenth-century Europe, who exercised considerable influence not only on the British but on Indian intellectuals as well. Aryan theory of the nineteenth century was a racial theory that asserted the common racial origins of Europeans and Indians, especially North Indians. Colonialists interpreted this as a blood relationship between the British and the Indians and used it as the basis of their justification of British rule over India, on which Westernised Indian intellectuals agreed. There was a sense of superiority in the psychology of the upper castes in that they shared language and lineage with their rulers, the white men. Colonial rule, accompanied by political subjugation and economic exploitation, was glamourised with the sentimental language of the 'reunion of Aryan brothers'. However, this perspective began to receive criticism in the late nineteenth century with the rise of nationalism. Nationalist sentiments spread among intellectuals, who began to deny former assertions of consanguinity between the British colonialists and their Indian subjects. The concept of Aryans was disassociated from race and was instead connected to Vedic culture. Pride in Hindu culture became the foundation of nationalist sentiments. Hindu nationalism, with *Hindutva* or 'Hinduness' as its cardinal concept, aroused a counter-movement in Muslim nationalism. The all-embracing Hindu nationalist identity, which identified all the minorities except Muslims and Christians as Hindus, was formulated against the strengthening of Muslim nationalism in the process of political democratisation in the late colonial period and spread not only among intellectuals but also among the masses.

The above discourse formation on Indian identity was led almost entirely by upper-caste intellectuals. The North Indian and upper-caste ideology centred on cultural prejudice and a sense of superiority engendered by the Aryan theory of race. This Aryan theory was reproduced among the lower castes, whom the racial theory defined as inferior aborigines. This version of Aryan theory was re-used by Phule, who reversed its meaning to define upper-caste Aryans as invaders and aliens. The lower-caste version of Aryan theory counteracted the upper-caste theory, who collaborated with the British rulers and dominated Indian society; furthermore, it inspired their own identity as the original owners of India, which was usurped and then governed by alien Aryan invaders. The lower-caste identity centred on the idea of non-Aryan, non-Brahmin owners of India that was started by Phule continued to play a core ideological role in the *Adi*-movements of the twentieth century.

It was B. R. Ambedkar who defined a new lower-caste identity in the mid-twentieth century based on his perspective of ancient history. Ambedkar, a lower-caste Mahar, influenced Indian society in various ways from the anti-caste social movement to mass politics and later became a founding father of the constitution of India and the country's first Law Minister. He was a recognised national leader and the icon of the Dalit movement. It was his task to establish a Dalit identity that survived the 'all-embracing Hindu' identity of the 1940s, when the nationalist and *Hindutva* discourse prevailed. At the same time, the Dalit identity should not violate the identity of equal citizens, which would provide the oppressed castes with a minimum safeguard. Therefore, his refusal of the racial approach meant that *Avarna* had tribal origins distinct from caste Hindus but that neither of them were aliens of India. He shared the concept of Aryans and the identity of Indians with his contemporary nationalists to a considerable extent, in the sense that he defined all Indians, irrespective of caste or religion, as descendants of Aryans. He believed that the Scheduled Castes should form a separate identity from caste Hindus, but did not desire the marginalisation of any groups in Indian society, which he hoped would develop in a secularist direction. He did not agree with the racial theory on the origin of the Shudras by the same token. Both Shudras and *Avarnas* were identical to the rest of Indians, only with historically different cultural backgrounds. Under this theory of identity, the *Avarnas* would remain an equal part of the Republic of India even after they converted to Buddhism, which Ambedkar asserted was their original religion.

Phule and Ambedkar's lower-caste discourses concerning identities and historical origins differed in nature because of their different approaches to Aryan theory, which were topics of particular interest to contemporary intellectuals. Phule, while accepting the racial approach that was in vogue in the nineteenth century, formulated the 'original owner' identity of the lower castes and thus reversed Aryan theory. Ambedkar, on the contrary,

ruled out the racial theory and shared the Aryan concept with the twentieth century nationalist intellectuals. Furthermore, he formulated a 'Buddhist' identity for Dalits through historical and cultural approaches. In addition, as leaders of marginalised minorities deprived of social power, both Phule and Ambedkar recognised the importance of state power. Phule, who experienced the double rule of the British colonial government and Brahminic social control, perceived the British colonial government as the potential saviour of the oppressed castes. The matter was more complicated for Ambedkar, who started activity in the late colonial period and faced the issue of Indian independence. State power remained the sole safeguard of the legal protection of the Scheduled Castes; therefore, a power shift from the British back to the Brahmins presented the threat of the return to a Brahmin dictatorship. He had to establish the status of Dalits as equal members of an independent India, as well as a separate identity of Dalits in the face of the all-embracing Hindu identity. A separate Dalit identity, as the co-successors of traditional Indian culture but separate from that of the Hindus, was the desperately needed answer to the problems facing them at the time.

The Phule-Ambedkar ideology, the ideological axis of the lower-caste movement, are emancipation theories sharing the common objectives of the upliftment of the Avarna and Shudra castes and the nullification of the exploitive and oppressive caste system. The ideologies of Ambedkar and Phule possessed heterogeneous and conflicting elements in their foundations, however. Their ideas display large gaps, especially concerning lower-caste identity, such as their origins, history, and perceptions of the upper castes. These conflicting points seem to have been produced because of the contextual difference and the distinction in the respective mainstream social discourse of each era. The ideology of lower-caste emancipation formulated by Phule and Ambedkar logically embodied the voice and vision of India's lower castes. They formed the resistant ideology to counter the dominant mainstream discourse of the time. It seemed to be difficult to form a counter-discourse totally out of the framework and context of the mainstream discourse exercising influence over the leading class and being spread among the masses to a certain extent. Rather, counter-discourse seemed to be produced in the course of interacting with and responding to the contemporary mainstream discourse. Therefore, it is natural that the Phule-Ambedkar ideology seemingly lacked consistency from an incisive perspective, although it is treated as if it is coherent when employed in contemporary Dalit and anti-caste movements. Phule and Ambedkar's ideologies can be understood more thoroughly when they are read in the social and ideological contexts of their respective formative periods.

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