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Non Brahmin Approach to the Study of Indian Society: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Introduction

This module discusses Dr. B. R Ambedkar’s analysis of the study of Indian society, referred to as ‘non-Brahmin’ approach. This approach is based on the idea that linkages between ‘knowledge’ and power are real and its impacts are what get presented as ‘reality/truth’ with regard to society. The crucial question embedded within this perspective is ‘How do we analyse India’? This approach is based on the argument that for a very long time ‘India’ has been perceived within a ‘Hindu’ reality and identity, which does not bring into the discussion the principles of inequality, injustice and hierarchy that Hinduism, as a religious principle, thought and practice has instituted. So the approach, by offering an alternative perspective, posed an alternative to an understanding of India. This approach is political as it exposes not only the politics behind knowledge construction but also implicates the ‘self’ who are in the processes of knowledge creation, consumption and distribution. Further, this alternative demands for a change in the structures of inequality as experienced by society. This perspective, built on ideologies of radical social thinkers such as Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar, not only theorises on society but also calls for a change in it.

Their ideologies questioned the writings of officials and scholars who, while analysing what defines India, drew heavily from a world view of Hinduism that privileged the ‘Brahmins’ at the cost of the non-brahmins. Such a ‘Brahmanical production of knowledge’ was challenged by the marginal voices who counter posed this ‘hierarchical knowledge’ with an emancipatory perspective, which brought out into the open the complexities and inequalities that defined the lives of a large number of Indians. I quote Rege extensively here, she states that ‘the colonialists and nationalists contested the function of knowledge in colonial India, for both, the nature of knowledge about India was essentially Hindu and brahmanical. After the Second World War social science discourses refashioned the binaries of Orient/Occident through the tradition/modernity thesis or indigenous approaches, both of which, glossing over the structural inequalities in Indian society, normalized the idea of knowledge and education project offered in India, as Hindu and Brahmanical. Phule and Ambedkar in different ways, by weaving together the emancipatory non-Vedic materialist traditions (Lokayatta, Buddha, Kabir) and new Western ideas (Thomas Paine, John Dewey, Karl Marx) had challenged the binaries of Western modernization and Indian tradition; private caste and gender with public nation and sought to refashion modernity and thereby its project of education( Rege 2010: 92-93).

Drawing upon the above arguments, one can clearly see how power works through production, consumption and distribution of knowledge within particular contexts. This argument could explain why it would be interesting to ask why sociologists in India did not draw upon the works of Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar for such a long time. One can even stretch the argument to ask why it is that in certain parts of India, one would find references to Phule and Ambedkar but not Periyar and vice versa. This is a pertinent question of what is knowledge, and whose knowledge, not only within mainstream dominant discourses but also of alternative discourses that challenge the ‘mainstream knowledge production’. Kannbiran (2009:39) states that Ambedkar offered a multi layered, counter hegemonic reading of caste that was lost on at least three generations of sociologists and accounts for several conservative trends in social science. Kannbiran conceptualizes this in terms of ‘silence
in sociological work\(^1\), which has a great impact on how sociologists have approached and analysed caste.

Within academic discourse there have been many discussions with regard to its conceptualisation. How does one refer to this position; ‘perspective from below\(^2\)’ or ‘non Brahmin approach’? Oommen (2001) states that ‘perspective from below’ includes not only an analysis of the nature of social structure such as caste, but also focuses on the location of the researcher within the production of knowledge. It thus includes a politics of location of not only the ‘social reality’ to be analysed but also the location of the researcher that leads to a cognitive blackout of everyday life experiences of Dalit Bahujans.

The module would have the following sections. Section one would analyse Ambedkar’s analysis of caste. Section two would discuss Ambedkar’s analysis of the subordination of women, referred to as the non-brahmanical approach to the question of women’s liberation in India, and section three would examine Ambedkar’s strategies against untouchability and the caste system.

**Section One: Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s Analysis of Caste\(^3\):**

Dr. Ambedkar developed a theory of caste by analysing its origin and growth and the humiliating processes of untouchability. He argued that in its classical form the caste system involved in itself social, economic, cultural and political frameworks of governance of Hindu society. This form of governance, based on caste which was exclusive to Hindu society, is hierarchical and unequal as it divided the Hindu population into social groups called castes. Further, the castes are then made endogamous, restricting marriage within the caste and in addition, assigned civil, cultural, educational and economic rights, for each caste and continuance by heredity without freedom to change. The entitlements of rights are not only unequal across the castes but it is also hierarchical—rights going down from high caste to low caste. In this hierarchy some occupations or economic activities are treated as superior and others as inferior. Furthermore, such hierarchy is maintained as it is based on principles of ‘purity and pollution/impurity’. Caste also provides a mechanism for enforcement of the system in terms of social ostracism, through a provision of social and economic penalties, including social and economic boycott.

The question is why people followed this unequal and stigmatized system? Ambedkar argues that it was difficult for people to question the inequality as the caste system drew justification from

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1. This reflects very close to life. I could see how, when I joined Masters of Sociology, University of Pune (1997-99) after pursuing sociology as bachelors honours course, the only reference that I had with regard to Dr. B.R Ambedkar was that he was the ‘Father of the Indian Constitution’. Neither did sociology training give me any insight to his analysis nor did my location as a Tamilian Brahmin Upper caste-class woman help. To add to this neither did the masters’ course in Department of Sociology, University of Pune have any reference to Ambedkar. Introduction to his ideas and perspectives was through discussions with students and teachers and reading on social movement literature. It was only in the academic year 2002-2003 that the ideas of Phule and Ambedkar were introduced in the syllabi.

2. Oommen (2001) makes a distinction between ‘perspective from below’ and subaltern approach. He argues that the context for the subaltern history was provided by colonial India and the freedom struggle. It referred to the national historians as macro-holists who ignored the ‘voices from below’. Subalternists are micro-individualists who missed the view from above.

3. Students are requested to refer to the Module on Indological Approach of G. S Ghurye and Structural Functional Approach of M.N Srinivas and compare the ideas on caste with Ambedkar’s ideas on caste.
elements of the Hindu religious philosophy, making it sacrilegious to question it. Castes are referred
to as a form having divine origin\(^4\) which makes it difficult to conceptually change the system.
Hindu philosophy provided ‘divine’ justification for the origin and sustenance of the Hindu social
system especially to the doctrine of inequality in the social, cultural, economic and religious
spheres.
Especially its linkages with concepts of *karma*, (one should perform one’s duty assigned to him by
his/her caste and birth and never question or challenge it) and rebirth (performance of one’s karma
/duty in this present life would ensure a higher birth in the next life), kind of eroded any challenge.
It is so ironical that change was embedded in continuity; the more steadfast one is in the
performance of one’s assigned karma or duty, the more it increases the chance of ensuring a better
life in the next birth. The system structured around the principle of fatalism was rationalized as an
outcome of one’s deeds in the last life. So there was no chance of change and escape. Jaffrelot
(2009) argues that the lower castes were not in a position to question the inequality because they
had internalized the hierarchy and also because caste system was based on ‘graded inequality’.
What was this? The logic divides the dominated groups and thus prevents them from challenging
the system. Jaffrelot states *‘in a society of ‘graded inequality’, the Bahujan Samaj is divided into
the lower castes (Shudras) and the Dalits, and the Shudras and the dalits themselves are divided
into many jatis* (Jaffrelot 2009: 1-2).
The system is based on the hierarchical and graded entitlements of various rights to different castes
and the rights increase in ascending order from Untouchable to Brahmin. In this hierarchical
arrangement castes are artfully interlinked in such a manner that the rights and privileges of the
higher castes become the disabilities of the lower castes. Thus castes cannot exist in a single form
rather they exist as a plural number, interlinked to each other in unequal measures of social,
religious, and economic relations and rights. Thus isolation and exclusion of Untouchables is a
unique feature of the caste system- The Brahmins in this hierarchy are not only placed at the top but
are also considered ‘superior social beings’ worthy of special entitlements, rights and privileges. At
the bottom, the Untouchables and lower castes are treated as ‘sub-human beings’ or ‘lesser beings’
considered unworthy of any rights. The disabilities are so severe that they are physically and
socially isolated and excluded from the rest of the society. Isolation and exclusiveness makes them
anti-social and inimical to one another, so a development of collective consciousness is very
difficult to sustain and nurture.
The most pertinent principle of the caste system is the fixation of rights and continuance thereof by
hereditary. The caste social order gives multiple privileges and rights to the higher castes,
particularly the Brahmins. For example in the economic field every member must follow the
occupation assigned to each caste. It left no scope for individual capabilities, choices or
inclinations. Such a stratified system was based on the principle of ‘no freedom to move’. Thus it
was not so much the existence of classes or segmentation but rather the idea of isolation and
exclusiveness, which was inimical to a free social order. Such a structure was based on unequal
entitlements of rights among castes and inequality in the distribution of these rights, where the
lower castes suffered the most. The way social and economic rights were assigned, there was no
\(^4\) Divine origin of caste system... The centre of the Hindu philosophy is –‘neither the society nor the
individual, it is a class- of supermen called Brahmins’. The philosophy holds that to be right and good the act
must serve the interest of a class of a supermen, namely the Brahmins. Anything which serves the interest of
this class, is alone entitled to be called good. Thus the philosophy, teaches that what is good for one
particular class is the only thing treated as morally right and good.
possibility of social and economic improvement for the lower castes. The members were deprived of the rights to choose occupation, acquire property, and receive education.

It important to understand the unique feature of exclusive privileges enjoyed by the Brahmins and denial of the minimum rights to the lower castes, particularly to the Untouchables, in order to understand the present day inter-caste economic inequality, particularly between Brahmins and others. One could analyse the manner in which this inequality was expressed in the field of education. Within education, the problem was denial of the right to education and opportunities to develop human capabilities. Education was equated to the study of the Vedas. All castes did not have equal access to production, consumption and distribution of knowledge. Reading and writing were the prerogative of the high castes and illiteracy, the destiny of the low castes. The teaching of Vedas, officiating at a sacrifice, receiving grants and presents are the exclusive rights or occupations of the Brahmins. There is no restriction on them to take up the other occupations of other castes, except that of the Untouchables. The state did not hold itself responsible for opening establishments for the study of arts and sciences that concerned the life of merchants and artisans. Each caste managed to transmit the required know-how to its progeny in the traditional ways of doing things. Brahmins, Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas could study Vedas but only the Brahmins had the right to teach them. In this structure Shudras were allowed neither to teach them nor study them nor even hear them. Strong penalties were given to those who contravened these rules. Illiteracy thus became an inherent part of the caste system by a process that was indirect but internal to Hinduism, giving rise to illiteracy and ignorance.

Ambedkar in his analysis of the economic relations between high and lower castes – Hindu social order involves a slavish like character for the lower castes. The rule puts an interdict on the economic independence of the deprived castes, which required them to serve others and constantly remain economically dependent on the other castes. In the Hindu system of slavery, Shudras could be made slaves of the three higher castes, but the higher castes could not be slaves of the Shudras. Such an economic system was based on the method of exploitation rather than that of economic efficiency. The manner in which rules concerning the right to property, occupation, employment, wages, education, social status of occupation, dignity of labour, and rules governing graded slavery, involved an element of economic exploitation, particularly of castes located at the bottom of the caste hierarchy.

What are then the consequences of caste system? Ambedkar argues that exclusion and discrimination are two most important consequences of the caste system. The unequal and hierarchical assignment of civil, cultural, occupational, and property rights among castes implies that although every caste, except those at the top of the caste order, suffer in varying magnitude from an unequal division of social and economic rights. The Untouchables are excluded from access to any economic rights except manual labour or service to the castes above them. Moreover, they are prohibited from social intercourse and participation in several social and economic activities due to the stigma of pollution associated with their caste. The caste system is not merely a division of labour but also the ‘division of the labourers’ into watertight compartments without any opportunity for inter-occupational mobility. It was not only the division but also the accompanying hierarchy in occupations, one graded above the other, which had lead to social and economic gradation of labourers. Subordination of natural human powers and inclination to the exigencies (is there a more appropriate word that can be used?) of social rules and disassociation of intelligence from work and recreate contempt for physical labour. Thus caste based economic order entails
adverse consequences on economic growth and income distribution. Furthermore, market failure associated with caste-based market discrimination not only adversely affects economic growth, it also generated unequal income distribution and induced poverty particularly among discriminated social groups.

Thus fixed and compulsory caste based division of occupation results in immobility of factors of production and imperfections in the labour and market. Far from promoting competitive market condition, caste-based division of labour and occupation creates:

- Segmentated and monopolistic market situations and produces less than economic optimum
- Denial of equal rights
- Exclusion
- Discrimination
- Subordination of one caste by the other
- Untouchables suffer not only from denial of property rights but also human dignity

Teltumbe (2013) argues that Ambedkar had two important visions; ( only one vision is mentioned in this paragraph, pls check) annihilation of castes and socialism within the economic structure based on enlightened middle class, featured by emancipation of land and industrial capital. The final words of Ambedkar were ‘educate, agitate and organise’; where he stressed the everchanging nature of reality and the need to be enlightened enough to confront it. Educate so as to understand the world, agitate against evil and organize in order to gain strength to root it out. Ambedkar perceived Hinduism as the emerging ground of the caste system and thus argues for an alternative philosophy that would highlight the interlinkages between caste and material bases of exploitation (Pardeshi 1998)

Section two: Non-Brahmanical Approach to the Question of Women’s Liberation in India

Non-brahmanical approach interlinked hierarchies of caste, class and patriarchy to analyse the question - why are women subordinate in the society? Parsdeshi (1998) argues that Ambedkar’s analysis of caste helps one to explore the relation between caste and the subordination of women. According to Ambedkar, the key to the caste system is not the idea of untouchability but that of the principle of ‘endogamy’ (rule that demands marriage only within one’s group/ caste). The fact of the matter is that perpetuation of the system required strict rules governing marriage, so that boundaries are not transgressed. The question that Ambedkar asked is -how did the system perpetuate endogamy and thereby, the caste system? Ambedkar argued that it was through the rules and practices governing the conduct, rights and obligations of women that the endogamy was continued thereby strengthening caste. What were the rules? Pardeshi (1998) argues that Ambedkar referred to four important practices enforced on women that maintained endogamy and thereby strengthened caste, such as the practice of sati, enforced widowhood, enforced celibacy and the marriage of child brides with older men and widowers. Through these practices women’s sexuality was controlled and regulated thereby ensuring the continuity of caste system. It is this context that Ambedkar refers to ‘women as the gateways of caste system’.

In conceptualizing brahmanical patriarchy, Chakrvarthi (1993) argues that patriarchal codes ensure that the caste system continues; where there are set rules and institutions by which caste and gender are linked. Each shaping the other and where women are crucial in maintaining the
boundaries between castes and thus the Brahmanical codes for women differ according to the status of the caste group in the hierarchy of castes with the most stringent control over sexuality. Within this brahmanical patriarchy women of upper castes were especially the gateways- entry points into caste system. The sexuality of the lower caste male was always perceived as a threat to upper caste purity of blood, and so had to be institutionally prevented from having sexual access to women of the higher castes. Thus women of the upper caste had to be carefully guarded and regulated. How did the regulation take place? Chakravarthi argues that it was through the process of socialization, where young girls were presented with binary visions of ‘good/bad’- girl, daughter, wife, mother – virtues of being ‘pativrata’ (obedient and chaste to her husband), importance of virginity, following and never questioning her husband were taught, accepted and perpetuated by women themselves. Challenge to this principle was controlled by the right to discipline to keep women under control was granted to kinsmen (moral policing) and the king (state) also had the power to discipline and punish women for their errant behavior (Chakravarthi 1993).

How did the mixed marriages come to be regulated? Pardeshi (1998) argues that mixed marriages were regulated by patriarchal and biased law. There are two kinds of mixed marriages Pratiloma (hypogamy-marriage between women of higher caste and man of lower caste) and Anuloma (hypergamy- marriage between men of higher caste and women of lower caste). Though both were punished, the Pratiloma, marriage was not approved because in this case the women had transgressed the boundaries, so punishment was excommunication. Here Omvedt’s (1994) analysis adds to this complexity. She argues that there is very significant connection between the illegitimacy of pratiloma and the legitimation of the devadasi tradition. She said that the temple dancers enjoyed some amount of autonomy in the village. But these customs were used to institutionalize the sexual accessibility of dalit women for the high caste men. Pardeshi (1998) argues that one can observe a significant sexual dialectics, when the accessibility of dalit women to the high caste men is juxtaposed with the forbiddance of relation between women of higher caste and men of lower caste. This sexual dialectics informs caste interactions and behavior even in many parts of India in the present times. Pardeshi (1998) argues that for Ambedkar, caste and patriarchy intersect as a system to exploit women, but this system is not uniform but exploitation varies in accordance with caste status. It is intensified as one moves down the caste hierarchy. Pardeshi states that ‘the exploitation of the dalit women is of a different nature than that of a high caste women. Thus from within Phule-Ambedkarite position any claims to all women being a dalit is only a rhetoric. To speak on behalf of all women is to deny the very core of Phule- Ambedkarism’ (Pardeshi 1998:110). From the non-brahmanical position, the subordination of women in India is structured through the intersections of caste, class and patriarchy.

Section Three: Ambedkar’s Strategies against Untouchability and the Caste System

As mentioned in the introduction of this module Ambedkar had two important objectives first unite Dalits and Bahujan Samaj and then to endow a separate identity that would help them to challenge the sanskritisation process. Ambedkar implemented four strategies, which includes identity building, electoral politics, working with the rulers, both British and the Congress and conversion to challenge caste (Jaffrelot 2009).

5 Devadasi system is a religious practice that consists of offering young prepubescent girls to the deities in the Hindu temples. The dedication usually requires the girl to become sexually available for community members. The girls invariably belong to the lower castes/ Dalits and the community members are elite upper caste class men.
Ambedkar by challenging the racial theory\(^6\) of caste hierarchy, argued that lower castes need to develop an identity, (not caste based), to regain their self-respect and overcome their divisions. So Ambedkar developed the ‘identity of sons of the soil’. Jaffrelot explains that Ambedkar in his seminal book, ‘The Untouchables, who were they and why they became Untouchables? (1948), he argued that Untouchables were the descendants of the Broken Men\(^7\) and the original inhabitants of India, before the conquest of the country by the Aryan invaders. According to Ambedkar these Broken men followed the principles of Buddha and identified and continued being Buddhists, despite many returning to the Hindu fold due to increased pressure from the Brahmins. According to Ambedkar, the Broken Men hated the Brahmins, as they were perceived to be the enemies of Buddhism and the Brahmins to deal with this imposed untouchability upon Broken Men as they would not leave Buddhism. Thus what Ambedkar believed is that if the groups defined as ‘untouchables’, recognized themselves as ‘sons of the soil and Buddhists, they would be able to transcend the differences of being divided into so many \textit{jatis} and take a stand together as an ethnic group against the system in its entirety (Ambedkar 1948, cited in Jaffrelot 2009).

The second strategy followed by Ambedkar according to Jaffrelot, was the instrument of electoral politics. Jaffrelot argues that Ambedkar wanted the Dalits to develop into a political force and in that was convinced that it would be important to pursue an election based strategy by creating a political party, the Independent Labour Party in 1936. The party was not confined to addressing the concerns of the Untouchables but that included the demands of the toiling labouring masses. The ideology of the party was based on challenging Brahmanism and capitalism. But this party failed to gain in the electoral process. Though it was a Dalit political party, the majority belonged to Mahar, and very few other Dalit communities. As the ILP could not bring all the Dalits together, Ambedkar resigned and formed the Scheduled Castes Federation (Dalit Federation in Marathi), arguing for a minority status for the Scheduled Castes in 1942 (Jaffrelot 2009). The SCF depended mostly on Ambedkar, but lost heavily as they had no organizational machinery, no network of party branches and only a handful of party cadres and to this was added the immense popularity of the Congress, who were the driving force of the freedom movement. Jaffrelot (2009) argues that the political parties created by Ambedkar failed as a strategy, so through the formation of Republican Party of India, he wanted to build a non-caste based political party.

The third strategy was working with the ruling elite, both the British Rulers and later the Congress government. Ambedkar pushed, coaxed and pressurized them to address the interests, concerns and causes of Untouchables. Jaffrelot argues that Ambedkar had an ambivalent attitude towards the British. On the one hand British represented rational government cherishing values of equality, with whom, he could hope for a protection against the ‘caste Hindus’. On the other hand he resented the British, who ruled a foreign country with force and violence, thereby challenging the values of

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\(^{6}\) G.S Ghurye, in his Caste and Race (1932) argued that caste was fundamentally the product of underlying racial differences that are rationalized under conditions of continuing intercultural contact, assimilation and conflict.

\(^{7}\) Dr. Ambedkar argues that all primitive societies have been one day or the other conquered by invaders, who not only raised themselves above the natives. These natives were then relegated to a peripheral group referred tom but also as the Broken Men. (not clear) When the conquerors became settled, these Broken Men started giving them services from the attack of the native tribes who still remained nomadic. These Broken Men settled in the borders of the village because of two reasons; one from the view of topography, it was logical for guards to be stationed at the border and secondly the tribes did not accept the invaders/ foreigners of a different blood, within their groups (1948, cited in Jaffrelot 2009: 2).
equality, freedom and brotherhood. But evaluating both the Congress and British, Ambedkar strategically aligned with British, to gain maximum gains for the Untouchables. Later on he accepted the position of Law minister in Independent India’s first government led by Nehru and later on as the president of the ‘Drafting Committee’ of the Constitution. For Ambedkar this was a matter of strategy as he realized that it was easier to fight for the interests of the Scheduled Castes from inside the government.

Jaffrelot (2009) argues that, it was through the efforts of Ambedkar that discrimination based on religion, race, castes, sex and birth-place were dealt with by giving due to Right to Equality, Article 15 and Article 17, that abolished Untouchability. When Ambedkar failed to bring in a uniform Civil Code, to restructure the personal law, he tried to incorporate it within the Directive Principles of State Policy, as ‘The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India’. Ambedkar then tried to legislate a reform of Hindu Personal Law, based on the Hindu Code Bill that the British had evolved. What did the Hindu Code Bill propose? It had provisions such as equality between men and women on question of property and adoption, granting members of legal status to monogamous marriages only, the elimination of ‘caste bar’ in the civil marriage, petition for divorce by the wife. Such a radical change within the ‘private’ lives of Hindus was objected by many leaders from both the members of Hindu Mahasabha and the Congress.

Jaffrelot argues that though Nehru was attached to this bill, he did not have the courage to fight it out in the assembly and so he did not support Ambedkar. The bill was passed after much of the radical changes were changed into more tamed reforms. Due to this Ambedkar resigned from the government. Though Ambedkar could secure some benefits for the Untouchables, he was disillusioned with the political system as a strategy to bring about changes in the lives of the Untouchables and believed it to be of limited use.

The final strategy used by Ambedkar was conversion. Jaffrelot argues that the idea of conversion to another religion to escape caste was based on logically evaluating Hinduism. Based on analyzing Ambedkar’s writings and speeches, Jaffrelot argues that the first instance that he referred to conversion was in 1927. It was in 1935, that Ambedkar announced his decision to leave Hinduism at the famous Yeola Conference. His famous words were, ‘Unfortunately for me I was born a Hindu Untouchable. It was beyond my power to prevent that, but, I declare that it is within my power to refuse to live under ignoble and humiliating conditions. I solemnly assure you that I will not die a Hindu’ (Bhagwan Das, 1969: 108, cited in Jaffrelot 2009: 12). Why Buddhism? For Ambedkar, Buddhism formed the best possible choice because not only was it based on egalitarian principles but also that it was born in India. The impact of conversion was varied for it was essentially the Mahars, who converted and called themselves, Bauddha, but despite this they could not escape the caste hierarchy. Jaffrelot states that not only did the Chambhars not convert to Buddhism but they also opposed any concessions granted to the ‘Bauddhas’, through positive discrimination. To add to this, many converted ‘Bauddhas’, continue to follow and observe some Hindu customs. For Jaffrelot (2009), conversion by Ambedkar should not be perceived as strategy of last resort, but instead, as an effort to endow the Untouchables with a new identity and a new sense of dignity.

Conclusion:

In this module one analysed the Non-Brahmanical approach to the study of India particularly the perspective of Dr. Ambedkar. What are the important ideas that it raises? The approach strongly argues that to understand India, one has to locate it within the complex terrain of caste, class and
patriarchy linkages which structure the life chances and opportunities of people. It raises important questions about knowledge itself, such as what is knowledge?, and who creates knowledge? It is important because sociology in India, has to answer the question raised by Kalpana Kannabiran, why did sociologists in India fail to take cognizance of Ambedkar’s analysis of caste, especially the conceptualization of caste as ‘graded inequality’? This is important because the system was structured in such a manner that some groups were always below another group, which made it extremely difficult to organize them together and unify them. Further by theorizing ‘women as gateways of caste system’, Ambedkar powerfully stresses how the structures of caste continue through the control and regulation of women and how women of different castes have different experiences, thus questioning the universal category of ‘Indian women’.

Caste system was thus based on the principle of economic inequality and exploitation, where economic and socio-cultural inequality was a direct outcome of its governing principles and its core doctrine. We need to recognize that society in India is featured by cultural (language and ethnic) heterogeneity, religious plurality and caste hierarchy. Non Brahmin approach is crucial as it seeks to approach the study of India from the analysis of the everyday life of Dalit Bahujans. Such a perspective presents a picture of a stratified, unequal, hierarchical and violent India. Further by arguing the politics of knowledge production not only includes what social reality gets analysed but also who analyses it and how the analysis takes place. The effort is to bring the marginalized experiences right into the centre of what defines, structures and represents India.