

# Example of name research paper

[Sociology](#), [Community](#)



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## **‘ Instructor’s name’**

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Untouchability: specific example like Kabir or B. R. Ambedkar

Untouchability is a practice, whereby a certain group of people are socially segregated and are denied equal rights among the other communities of that area or country, based on their caste, creed or any such classification. Though untouchability was widely prevalent in India for centuries, this practice is not exclusive to India. In many other countries in south Asia and even in some parts of Europe, untouchability was practiced for many centuries. In Japan, the Burakumins and Cagots in Europe are some of the groups which were considered socially unequal to the other so called forward or advanced social classes. This segregation is/was based on many reasons such as tribes, castes, color, criminal activities. Sometimes even if a person

carried some sort of contagious disease he was segregated from the main stream.

The aim of this essay is to focus on the practice of Untouchability followed in India and understand its origin and effects on the society. We will also look into how people of these segregated classes fought against this oppression and gained the rights due to them, with the specific example of Dr. Ambedkar. We will also take a look as to whether this practice is still prevalent in India and the various steps taken to abolish this practice. But to understand untouchability in India, one has to familiarize himself with the caste system of Hinduism (the major religion of the country), to which the roots of untouchability can be traced.

## **Origin of untouchability**

Hinduism is the main religion of India and has been so, for the past 2000 years. The Vedas, which are the ancient Hindu scriptures, popularly classified the Hindu society into four groups namely Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. (Bayly, 1999). This segregation was primarily done to assign and share the various tasks of the community building among people.

Brahmans were primarily priests, who took care of the religious affairs and education, the Kshatriyas were royals and warriors who would defend their country or territory and Vaishays were people who indulged in trade activities. But when it comes to the Shudras, they were handed those tasks which were considered suitable for only socially backward communities, like being the servants of the other class people, tending to the hygiene needs of the community, barbers, artisans and other such jobs. (Berreman, 1972)

## **The evils of the untouchability practice**

The Shudras were denied equal rights with other classes and were not allowed to eat and drink with them. Most of them cannot enter the house of the other class people and some were even forced not to wear shirts or slippers. In most places they were not allowed to worship the Gods inside the temple. They were not allowed to touch the other class people and were socially neglected and were considered unclean. The castes which were deemed untouchables remained so, for thousands of years.

Of course it is downright inhumane to deny a person his basic right and subject him to prejudice just because he was born in a particular caste. The evils suffered by these so called untouchables were not just unjust but utterly horrifying. Most of the earlier atrocities committed against these castes were not recorded and are just hearsay. But in the eighteenth century after the European powers had got a strong foothold in India, many of these social inequalities were documented and made known to the outer world. The people who were considered untouchables were restricted to very few vocations which were allocated to them, even though they were skilled enough to do better jobs. Also they were paid very little and sometimes were given only the leftover food from the village houses and no money for these jobs. Besides these economic sanctions against them, there were more humiliating social practices such as not allowing them in the same street in which a Brahman would walk. This is because their shadow is not supposed to fall on a Brahman as this would make him unclean.

## **Kabir's take on Untouchability**

Kabir is a well known poet of the fifteenth century and his legacy lived through many centuries. He influenced many leaders of India including Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism and Dr. Ambedkar, about whom we will discuss a little later in the essay. Kabir was born to a Brahmin widow in 1398 and was abandoned at birth by his mother. He was raised by a poor Muslim family and was mentored by the famous saint Ramananda. He later went on to become one of the most celebrated poets of his times.

He was the best known voice for caste equality and Dalit (low caste people) rights during the medieval Bhakti period. (Anshu Pandey, 2008) The Bhakti movement started in the Tamilnadu state of Southern India and many poets contributed to this literary movement which aimed at preaching people that everyone are equal at God's eyes. Through his poems he raised awareness, that segregating a class of people based on their birth was a crime against God. He was one of the great icons of the Hindi literature and one of the first voices to seek equal rights for the oppressed people of the nation. Below given is an extract from his poems (English Translation)

We all hail from the same land  
And reach here on earth  
Touched by the winds  
that blow here  
Each pursues his own pat. (Trans'G. N. Das, 168.)

## **Opposition to this practice**

The untouchability practice in India was made known outside India only after the European infiltration into the country. Till then it was almost a way of life for both the upper and lower class people alike. While the upper class people took their privileges for granted, the lower class remained secluded in their humble dwelling outside the village resigned to their fate. If there were any

protests organized by the oppressed groups or any other political figure or group we wouldn't know, as there are no historical records. But in 1820, Thomas Marshall, a British officer in Western India, conveyed the following in a literary meeting held at Bombay.

“ There is no relation that an Englishman can be acquainted with that will furnish him with the idea of the mingled scorn and horror with which a pure and sleek Hindoo views and addresses the unresisting outcaste (Dher); nor is there in the whole of the peculiar vices or prejudices, or whatever name may be given to them, which are engendered by the constitution of Hindooism, any one half so revolting to a mind of good feeling. The Dhers of these villages are strong, active and industrious men; quite as capable of being useful in any way as any other class.”(Hanlon 1982 Volume: 32 Issue: 5)

Also there were many prominent Indian personalities, who apart from opposing the ruling imperialist British government, also launched a campaign against the evils that plagued the Indian society like the untouchability practice. One such figure is Dr. Ambedkar, who has a very big role in releasing the Dalits (as they are officially named by the Indian Government) or oppressed people, from the chains holding them back from moving up the social ladder.

### **Dr. Ambedkar and his fight against Untouchability**

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is a prominent Indian leader and is one of the most significant contributors to the Indian Constitution. He was born into an economically and socially backward Mahr community, which was labeled as an untouchable community by the upper class. His father was serving the Indian army under the control of British East India Company and he

encouraged his children to get educated. He used his position in the Government to enable his children to study in a Government school which was not allowed by the then Indian society. Although Ambedkar studied in the same school as other village children, thanks to his father's lobbying, he and other lower caste children still faced discrimination in the school. They were not allowed to sit inside the class and they were seated in a sack which they should carry back home after school. The teachers would give them very little attention and even if they want water, the school peon would pour it from a height, so that he doesn't touch them. And if the peon is absent, they don't get any water to drink. (Pritchett, 2010, Columbia. edu. )

Surviving all these oppressions in his early life Ambedkar graduated in 1912 (becoming the first of his community to do so) and got a Government job in Baroda. He obtained a lot of degrees after that including one from the University of Columbia and took up various jobs including a professor job in the Bombay University. But even here, other professors would not share the same drinking water with him and social discrimination followed him wherever he went. He then took to a career in law and defended three non-Brahmins against Brahmins successfully. He was asked to testify to Southborough Committee which was given the task of formulating the Government of India act in 1919 and he urged them to give reservation for the untouchables.

He then organized many protests against untouchability including the Satyagraha protest in Mahad for allowing the oppressed community to draw water from a village well. He worked with the Simon commission in 1925, where he formulated certain recommendations which would be used in the

future Constitution of an independent India. He contested the 1937 Bombay election and his Independent Labor Party won 14 out of the 17 seats allotted. (Christophe 2005, p 76-77). He published a number of books including The “Annihilation of Caste” and “Who were Shudras”, which aimed at explaining the reasons behind untouchability practice and its evils. He in fact led thousands of untouchables to a mass conversion from Hinduism to Buddhism in 1956. After India’s independence, Ambedkar played a pivotal role in forming the new Constitution, which would lay down guidelines, according to which the country would be governed. (Constitution of India, 2007, Preamble), He was instrumental in abolishing untouchability and legally preventing discrimination. He was the law minister of the first cabinet of an independent India and truly a champion of the fight against untouchability.

### **Untouchability in today’s India**

When the constitution laid down laws making caste discrimination illegal, many reformists hoped that it would put an end to this age old practice of untouchability. But even today after almost 63 years, the practice is not completely abolished and many people suffer humiliation just because they were born in a particular caste. Of course, one cannot expect an immediate end to a centuries old evil just in a few decades. But given the progressive nature of the Indian society of today, it is incomprehensible why so many Dalits, who contribute almost one fifth of the entire Indian population, are still being discriminated.

Even in modern Indian society, we can see Dalits being used as manual scavengers in railway stations and postmen not delivering mails to the Dalit residences and asking them to collect it from the post office. Even today in



Madurai, one of the prominent cities of the Tamilnadu State of India, a 500 meters wall exists which separates the Dalit dwelling from the rest of the city in Uthapuram area. Dalits in many places are asked to do very menial jobs and are denied opportunity for respectful employment, besides there being many seats reserved exclusively for them. In many parts of the country they are still not allowed inside the houses of other castes people. In certain tea shops the two tumbler system is still prevalent, whereby the Dalits are served in a different teacup and the other castes people are given different tea cups. Worse still, in schools when scolding Dalit students, teachers use their caste name in admonishing them.

Laws can prevent an evil only to an extent and the real change can happen only if the social perception of the lower caste people undergoes a transition. India is progressive in many aspects both economically and socially and the plight of the Dalits have improved remarkably post independence, with many of them getting educated and occupying prominent positions both in the Government and private sector. So, one should believe it would not take too long for the practice of untouchability, to completely fade away from the Indian society.

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