



Calypsology of Caste through Metaphorization

A Review of Isabel Wilkerson's *Caste*

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This article reviews Isabel Wilkerson's *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (2020) and analyses her attempt at the metaphorization of caste in order to enable her readers to see race through the lens of caste. It argues that although Wilkerson successfully illuminates how caste works in America, her analysis marginalises the brutal and lethal effect of caste on Dalits in India, thereby limiting the semantic possibilities offered through metaphorization.

Isabel Wilkerson's book *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (2020) has been appreciated internationally by people of colour and lower caste because of its attempt to bring the two categories of race and caste together, by using the latter as a means to explain the former. Its reviews, however, seem to be struggling with a preliminary question: should race and caste be compared? None of them acknowledge the most crucial question: what is the function the comparison with caste performs in the book?

This book is a part of a comparative project which has its own history, its own tradition of using concepts interchangeably in order to explicate the condition of people whose suffering dates back centuries, namely African-Americans and Dalits. One of the most significant events in this history was the World Conference Against Racism (WCAR) held in Durban in 2001, which revealed the politics of metaphORIZATION. The process of metaphORIZATION does not merely entail the use of a literary device or a metaphor: it is a part of a politics which controls how comparisons are made and administers the effects of such comparisons. At the WCAR, Dalits and human rights organisations wanted caste to be acknowledged as a form of race so that caste could be seen as what it really is: a social construct that has the support of religious scripture and is kept alive through heinous discriminatory practices such as untouchability. However, the acknowledgment of caste in racial terms could not be achieved because of the efforts of the Indian government. The Indian government had been a vocal supporter of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa and internationally always made a case for equality of citizens in a polity. It was ironic that after such a public and continuous stance on equality and anti-racism, in the WCAR the Indian government deliberately blocked all attempts made at seeing caste through the lens of race. The Indian government, mostly represented by upper castes, adopted a strategy of treating caste as an internal matter and denied that it had anything to do with race. It feared international sanctions and censure if caste were to be seen in the light of race, despite overwhelming similarities such as discrimination based on work and descent, practices of apartheid and anti-miscegenation prevalent in India. The only solace disheartened Dalits had was that caste was publicly acknowledged on an international platform, whereas the upper caste academia and public offices had thus far kept the reality of Dalit lives in India hidden from the international eye.

Following these events, the Indian social scientist D.L. Sheth was one of the people who opposed raising caste in the WCAR. In order for caste and race to not be spoken in the same breath, he supplemented a biological argument in the differentiation of race and caste. He supported a dated and older understanding of race by saying "race has biological connotations whereas caste is a socio-cultural construct".⁽¹⁾ It has

already been shown through various philosophical, sociological and anthropological works in the 21st century that race, despite how most people understand it and even practice it, cannot be defined biologically. Rather, what we see is a process of ‘biologization’, of both race and caste, which involves the justification of these categories through biological parameters that are not necessarily applicable to either. Notwithstanding, Sheth proposed a different paradigm: of seeing race in terms of caste instead of trying to achieve the acknowledgment of caste in racial terms. He took the position that Indians, and by implication Dalits, had a colonial mentality and only wished to explain contemporary realities through ‘western concepts’. He, therefore, asked, “Can we not try to understand social discriminations (in the world)... through the category of caste?” (2). He argued that “Instead of trying to see caste through the mirror of race, let us now also try to see race in the mirror of caste” (3). Sheth attempted to produce a paradigmatic shift in the way caste is discussed in India and at international platforms. However, Sheth’s attempt begs the following question: do Dalits need to be told how to talk about caste and caste-based discrimination? The tactics of the Indian government and academics like Sheth are more sinister than they appear to be at a first glance: at their core lies an impulse to control and dominate the discourse around caste and thereby control the people whom it affects the most.

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Through these events, one can observe the development of the politics of metaphorization: should caste be seen through the lens of race or should race be seen through the lens of caste? The fight behind which term should gain currency by being frequently and widely employed in a metaphor reveals the politics of being the dominant metaphor at play. It is not merely about being a dominant term that accurately explains the social condition of disempowered people: it is about which concept allows the immediate elevation of a cause to international interest and which concept forms the ‘frame’ through which narratives should be understood.

The comparison of caste and race has a long history and an intellectual tradition, beginning from the well-known correspondence between the Dalit intellectual and statesman B.R. Ambedkar and W.E.B. DuBois, the inspiration of Dalit Panthers from Black Panthers, the solidarity and collaboration between Suraj Yengde and Cornel West to name a few. Isabel Wilkerson and her book *Caste* (2020) are a part of this comparative project to understand the dehumanisation of African-Americans and Dalits, and it seems that she took (even if unknowingly) Sheth’s proposal of seeing race in the mirror of caste to its logical conclusion. What is also not new is the metaphorization of caste being used to explain the realities

of people who have suffered extreme forms of discrimination. Hannah Arendt wrote an essay titled “The Jew as Pariah” in 1978, comparing Jews to the Outcastes or Dalits from southern India. She asserts that Jews were the Pariahs of European society. She says that the Pariahs, or rather those who experience the fate of Pariahs, reveal the treacherous “promise of equality which assimilation has held out. In their own position as social outcasts such men reflect the political status of their entire people” (4). The Jewish writers and artists develop the “pariah as a human type- a concept of supreme importance for the evaluation of mankind in our day” (5). Caste offers a rich language of experiences that can serve as a metaphor for other, subordinated and disenfranchised people. However, this process of metaphorization has reduced caste to a narrow utility—the comparison is used to shed light on but also ultimately privilege the experiences of certain communities over others. Ultimately, the outcaste whose fate Arendt was concerned with was the Jew and not the Pariah or the Indian untouchable. The process of metaphorization creates a certain profitability of using the metaphor of caste, which accrues to the entity that borrows the vocabulary of caste to explain its condition while leaving the original unexamined. Metaphorization enables a structure which creates the appearance that homage is paid to the original concept (which in this case is caste), while it seeks to merely use the original concept as a stepping stone to address matters that are of interest to one’s self and the community one identifies with (which in Arendt’s case are the Jewish people). It ultimately creates a new paradigm of suffering in which the original or the ‘borrowed’ concept is subordinated and forgotten, while the ‘borrowing’ concept is elevated to a position of semantic domination.

Notably, Wilkerson begins her book with reference to Jews in Hitler’s Nazi regime who were referred to as “outcastes”, and not with the Indian untouchables who were literally defined as “outcastes” and were forced into its lived reality for millennia, since they were considered to be so filthy, so sub-human that they were necessarily outside the traditional Hindu caste order which codified Indian society. This is a direct result of the achievement of Arendt’s metaphorization, since the dominant or prevalent trend when one now thinks of ‘outcastes’ is to think of Jewish people, and not Indian untouchables. Wilkerson explains caste in America in architectural terms. She says America has an unseen skeleton, a caste system that is as central to its operation as are the studs and joists that we cannot see in the physical buildings we call home. Caste is the infrastructure of our divisions. It is the architecture of human hierarchy, the subconscious code of instructions for maintaining, in our case, a four-hundred-year-old social order. Looking at caste is like holding the country’s X-ray up to the light.

A caste system is an artificial construction, a fixed and embedded ranking of human value that sets the presumed supremacy of one group against the presumed inferiority of other groups on the basis of ancestry and often immutable traits, traits that would be neutral in the abstract but are ascribed life-and-death meaning in a hierarchy favoring the dominant

caste whose forebears designed it. A caste system uses rigid, often arbitrary boundaries to keep the ranked groupings apart, distinct from one another and in their assigned places.(6)

She gestures towards the process of racialization, which is a practice of creating and policing racial borderlands. Robert Bernasconi defines race as “border concept”(7) and says that “Although race was... understood in terms of permanent inheritable characteristics, there was nothing permanent about the way the lines were drawn”(8). Definitions of race are continuously created and policed through the process of racialization. Racialization does not just result in the production of races as we see and understand them, but also a rationalisation of how they should be treated and differentiated. It creates a consciousness of how one should speak and act with upper castes and lower castes, blacks and whites.

Wilkerson develops a seemingly new terminology for Whites and Blacks, upper castes and lower castes. She terms them ‘dominant caste’ and ‘subordinate caste’ respectively. However, these terms are not new as they are already prevalent in reporting and academic discussions on caste in India. Slavery was legally abolished in America in 1865 and Untouchability was abolished in India in 1956, but that has not changed the condition of the ‘subordinate castes’, since neither caste nor race were abolished. If US and India pride themselves on being the oldest and largest democracies respectively, it only goes to show that the foundation of apparently modern democracies is the dehumanisation of people of a specific race and caste and their enslavement.



The act of creating a metaphor has political implications: it is the realisation of a specific semantic possibility, the fruition of one set of effects, and therefore, metaphorization is not a neutral process.

The analysis in *Caste* is limited to three types of people: the Jews in Germany in Hitler’s Nazi regime, the Untouchables or Dalits in India, and African-Americans in the US. Wilkerson does not mention the predicament of Palestinians in Israel and the Occupied Territories of West Bank and Gaza, the Uyghurs in China, the Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar, and barely addresses the apartheid in South Africa. She thereby restrains the reach of her analytical work from becoming truly international and applicable to all the people of the world who are suffering because of prejudices that are based out of social constructs.

Wilkerson asserts that race is the “visible decoy, the front man, for caste”(9). Her attempt to find the underlying caste structure of race probably arises from a desire to address White people in America who say, “we are not racist because we have no hatred for Black people”. Through the narration of various biographical and autobiographical accounts,

Wilkerson describes how many White Americans practice racism while being apparently unaware that they are doing so. They remain blind to their race/caste privilege.

In order to acknowledge the stalwarts in Dalit history, Wilkerson mentions both Jyotiba Phule and Ambedkar, but does so without presenting their intellectual achievements in full, which were the education of Dalits, the upliftment of women through social reforms and education, the introduction of Dalits in public and official spaces, and the legal end of practices of segregation and untouchability.

Ambedkar is commemorated through the efforts of lower caste academics in Indian academia, for his jurisprudential achievements and intellectual contributions to new directions in sociology. Phule and Ambedkar were not just anti-caste activists, but also visionaries and social reformers to whom modern India owes a huge debt. To explain who Ambedkar was to a fellow American, Wilkerson describes Ambedkar as “the Martin Luther King of India” (10). In *Poetics* (11), Aristotle says that a metaphor consists of giving a thing a name that belongs to something else. While ‘Martin Luther King’ becomes the means of explaining who Ambedkar was for Dalits, Wilkerson unconsciously subordinates Ambedkar to King by making King the dominant part of the metaphor. It could be argued that Wilkerson could have said Martin Luther King was the ‘Ambedkar of America’. The creation of hierarchies is inherent to the process of metaphorization, which is neither innocuous nor innocent. While maintaining the appearance of equality between the two elements being compared in a metaphor, metaphorization subordinates one element to the other. In Wilkerson’s book, the imperialism of the racial category is reflective of the imperialism of the US. The dominant international power must determine the which lives should be considered more valuable: African-American or Dalit, and Wilkerson’s book rules in the favour of the former. Therefore, Wilkerson participates in the imperialism and hegemony of modern neoliberals in US who seem benevolent and well-meaning. She makes the same mistake, like well-meaning Whites, who are blind to their privilege while defending the rights of the underprivileged.

Caste is an algorithm— it is a set of rules that are taught and followed by everyone who is split in a caste order. It enforces an attitude and assumption of supremacy on those who are considered higher in the order, and expectations of inferiority from those who are considered lower in the order. Wilkerson develops the idea of a body as a “container” (12), which contains or limits one’s experiences based on the colour of their skin. Stereotypes are imposed on people based on their containers, which are at once expanded to suit variations and contracted to limit them to a coloured skin. She asserts that caste is “the autonomic, unconscious, reflexive response to expectations from a thousand imaging inputs and neurological societal downloads that affix people to certain roles based upon what they look like and what they historically have been assigned to or the characteristics and stereotypes by which they have

been categorized” (13). While she asserts that race is a social construct, perhaps her most significant contribution in this book (although she does not clearly outline it) is the idea of race/caste as a social code, which everyone must learn to cipher and decipher.

The history presented in *Caste* mentions the derivation of the Indian caste from *varna* and *jati*, the importance of Ambedkar and Phule, the role of reservation in Indian society, but fails to mention how Dalits are routinely killed, raped, thrashed and tortured—for the simple fact of being Dalits. One can consider the cases of the Khairlanji massacre in 2006 and the recent gang-rape, dismemberment, torture, and murder of a young Dalit girl from the Valmiki caste in Hathras, Uttar Pradesh in September 2020. This young Dalit girl has to remain unnamed because of Indian laws that do not allow a victim’s name to be published while a police investigation is underway. Such laws mask caste-based crimes as law and order issues in order to hide the fact that caste-based sexual atrocities occur routinely in India.

September 2020 was a dark month for Dalit girls since one read a repetitive pattern of cases week after week, all with similar tragic events of Dalit girls being raped and murdered, and happening in the central northern belt of India. Wilkerson does not mention the daily atrocities and humiliation that are experienced by lower castes in India and replicates the silence that Indian media, academia and politicians adopt when it comes to publicly addressing caste-based atrocities. While examining Wilkerson’s attempt to see race as caste, one must, therefore, ask the question: do metaphors enable only a superficial comparison or can they be used for a higher, more meaningful purpose?

Following her architectural terminology, Wilkerson describes eight pillars of caste which justify and uphold caste: divine will and laws of nature, heritability, endogamy, purity of the dominant caste, occupational hierarchy, dehumanisation and stigma, terror and cruelty, and assumptions of inherent inferiority and superiority. Wilkerson observes that with some people, there is a “miscasting” (14) of caste. Her use of the term ‘miscasting’ reveals that she believes caste names or duties are (or should have been) given based on verifiable physical or intellectual characteristics. She fails to understand that there is not truth to caste descriptions. For instance, she describes meeting a man from a warrior/*kshatriya* caste and says he hardly looked like a warrior. The seemingly innocent observation carries the weight of an implicit suggestion: surely that must mean that lower castes have been miscast too? It appears that Wilkerson is trying to suggest that Dalits, too, must have been miscast and hence, should not be treated poorly. This suggestion appears benevolent but actually ignores the fact that there are structures in place in Indian society that ensure and force one to follow their caste. Deviations from one’s caste and caste duty, especially if one is a Dalit, are simply not to be tolerated. Meanwhile, the names of upper castes have worked their way into popular vocabulary as aspirational and complimentary terms. For instance, ‘Boston Brahmins’ draws on the caste

superiority of Brahmins in India and is used to refer to an aristocratic, cultured individual. Similarly, 'Tech Pundit' draws on the idea of the expertise of the educated upper caste, while ignoring their monopolisation of education for millennia, to refer to technocrats. Caste is a carceral structure that is erected by drawing literal and figural lines demarcating public spaces, dividing them into areas where Dalits can and cannot enter.



Metaphors create a new way of talking about things that have pushed into the realm of obscurity. They can perform a revelatory function, provided the possibility of semantic innovation is kept open by maintaining equality between the entities compared.

Wilkerson argues that subordinate castes function as the scapegoats of society. All societal ills are attributed to them, and their sacrifice is made to appear as necessary for the smooth functioning of the caste order. Rather than viewing lower or subordinate castes as scapegoats, it might be more productive to analyse how lower castes are made 'superfluous'- excessive and unnecessary- to the imagination of a seemingly democratic world that is White and upper caste. The creation of 'superfluous' beings is an essential step in the process of dehumanisation that enables the perpetrators of violence to execute heinous crimes against Dalits and African-Americans. It would not be an overstatement to say that each Dalit and African-American can narrate experiences of discrimination when their racial or caste identity is apparent.

What is problematic in Wilkerson's attempt to see race in terms of caste is an unconscious and unfortunate structure of subordination coded in the metaphor. Wilkerson claims to have decoded the caste code— she could identify Indian upper and lower castes without having them declare their identity. Using what she calls a 'caste radar', she could distinguish caste from a person's bearing and demeanour, observing that upper castes tended to be more confident and self-assured, whereas Dalits were more meek and hesitant. She says that "caste is... a performance"⁽¹⁵⁾. While she acknowledges that these behavioural patterns reflect power dynamics in India that have favoured the upper castes for centuries, she does not pay attention in her book to the phenomenon of 'passing' that is common to both African-Americans and Dalits. For Dalits, especially, this is not merely an attempt to dissolve in the upper caste. It is a careful and painfully crafted strategy for survival, a necessity of hiding one's caste identity in a country where Dalits are killed and thrashed for something as simple as wearing ornate shoes or growing a moustache. 'Passing' demonstrates the arbitrariness of caste lines that are crossed by African-Americans by 'appearing' White and by Dalits through economic prosperity or name changes. Caste lines are simultaneously fluid and

rigid: they are fluid so that they can constantly be changed according to discern who must be excluded, they are rigid so that they can enforce people to perform what is expected of their caste. 'Passing' contests racial borderlands by showing that colour and caste are socially defined parameters of discrimination and not actual markers of one's internal abilities.

The metaphor of seeing race as caste emerges leads the reader to the politics of metaphorization that have formed the terrain of Wilkerson's book. The process of metaphorization gains its strength from creating new hierarchies while subverting old ones. For instance, when a brave man is compared to a lion, the man is clearly superior to the lion since he possesses the qualities of a lion without being one. The place of man is known in the hierarchy of animals and physically a man is inferior to the lion. However, the man who possesses a lion's strength or bravery in addition to human qualities (such as reason or thought) is superior to the lion who only possesses brute strength. Metaphors are used to understand or explain the extraordinary— those who defy the order of things such as a 'lion-like' man. Metaphors gain their strength from their ability to create new meanings and semantic paradigms. In Wilkerson's book, the process of metaphorization subordinates caste to race while seeming to do the reverse, as Wilkerson is primarily concerned with the effect of caste on African-American lives. By making African-American lives her preoccupation, Wilkerson elevates race over caste, while seeming to explain race through caste. For her, caste is *only* a metaphor, simply a means to an end. She is successful in her project of showing how racism functions through subtle acts found across caste-based discrimination, but she fails to realise the devious effects of the process of metaphorization adopted in her book.

Wilkerson's book is a hermeneutic project, but perhaps only a hermeneutic project. It removes the politics of caste. To an extent, it remains within the parameters of the metaphor defined by I.A. Richards, who says that in the process of creating a metaphor, "we compound different uses of the word into one, and speak of something as though it were another"⁽¹⁶⁾. He calls "metaphor the omnipresent principle of language"⁽¹⁷⁾ and asserts that "thought is metaphoric"⁽¹⁸⁾. Richards splits the metaphor into two parts: the tenor and the vehicle. He defines "the tenor... (as) the underlying idea of principle subject which the vehicle or figure means"⁽¹⁹⁾. He asserts that it is not necessary for the tenor to be considered central and the vehicle peripheral. The metaphor gains its effect from similarities or disparities between the tenor and vehicle. In Wilkerson's book, the tenor is race and the vehicle is caste, but Wilkerson subordinates the vehicle to the tenor. Wilkerson is unable to maintain the equality of elements, namely the tenor and vehicle, which Richards believed to be possible. Furthermore, this inequality of elements reveals the politics that are a part of creating a metaphor and the process of metaphorization. Unlike what Richards suggests, metaphors cannot be neutral, impartial or unbiased. The act of creating a metaphor has political implications: it is the realisation of a specific semantic

possibility, the fruition of one set of effects, and therefore, metaphorization is not a neutral process. The politics emerge from the fact that only one set of effects is realised, at the cost of negating other effects. There is a competition of elements at play during the creation of a metaphor, for the term which becomes dominant will gain the power to shape discourses. And yet, metaphors should help us think better about reality, since semantic innovation holds the possibility for positive politics.

In other words, Wilkerson subordinates caste to race and limits the possibilities for semantic innovation that stem from employing or creating metaphors. According to Paul Ricoeur, metaphors allow people to produce concepts. They are a part of how people interpret the world and create a new relationship with language and the world: Metaphorical meaning is an effect of the entire statement, but it is focused on one word, which can be called the metaphorical word. This is why one must say that metaphor is a semantic innovation that belongs at once to the predicative order (new pertinence) and the lexical order (paradigmatic deviation). In its first aspect it depends upon a 'dynamics' of meaning; under the second, upon a 'stasis' or non-dynamic state of a system. (20)

By saying that race is caste, Wilkerson creates a new 'predicative order' to show her readers how race operates in the world through the mechanism of caste. She also redefines the 'lexical order' by creating a new paradigm which creates an analogy between race and caste, and encourages her readers to view race through the lens of caste. However, her creation of metaphors is not merely poetic but also serves a political purpose since it seeks to explain racism in American society. Wilkerson forgets about Dalits in India who were originally affected by caste because she marginalises caste in her analysis and subordinates it to race. She fails to mention the plight of Dalits in America who experience caste-based discrimination from upper castes who exploit their caste capital overseas. There is an injustice in limiting the possibilities of semantic innovation offered by a metaphor. These possibilities should not be limited to merely making new comparisons, but should aim to extend the



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positive effects of these comparisons to the society. Semantic innovation does not mean simply producing new metaphors— it is a discursive process that must change politics on the ground too. There are two stages in the process of semantic innovation: the production of a new metaphor, and the realisation of multiple effects the metaphor produces. Wilkerson’s book only achieves the first stage. It staggers at the second stage since it reduces the potential of positive politics only to African-Americans, and excludes Dalits from these politics, thereby going against the collaborative history of Dalits and African-Americans.

The process of metaphorization follows from an attempt to make sense of the world by creating metaphors. Metaphors are not neutral or apolitical since they entail the creation of new meanings. While Richards portrayed metaphors as neutral, Ricouer asserted that semantics are tied with politics. The process of making and interpreting metaphors, or what has been called the process of metaphorization, is a political process. Wilkerson’s omission of the condition of Dalit lives in India is a result of metaphorization which ultimately privileges race over caste as the book represents race as the problem in society that deserves immediate attention. Wilkerson fails to realise that the reality of caste in India is so devious and malignant that merely gesturing to it through a metaphor does not do it any justice. The death of the young Dalit girl from Hathras could not mobilise people in India the way George Floyd’s death reignited the Black Lives Matter movement in America. Dalit people in India have always been viewed as ‘superfluous’ to the upper castes’ imagination of India, which is the dominant way of imagining the country. In the hands of upper castes, the slogan ‘Dalit Lives Matter’ became a tokenistic phrase for people who only wished to superficially mirror White people supporting the Black Lives Matter movement. The upper castes in India refuse to seriously engage with Dalit lives and their condition, despite holding a majority of the country’s powerful offices in politics, media and academia. Despite lower castes (Dalits, Adivasis and Other Backward Classes) forming the majority in the country, a movement after the death of the Dalit girl from Hathras could not be successfully mobilised over a long period of time because of the severe backlash it faced from authorities who are only concerned with a woman’s murder and rape if she is an upper caste.

Divya Dwivedi writes that

The caste order works to convert all men and all means into one sole end—perpetuation of the caste order. Like Calypso in the Greek legend, it seeks to hide or avert everyone who is on and from the subcontinent from actualising the fundamental homological powers of humans to become something different from what they are or what they are born as. It is stasis—a conversion to end all conversions—it *interns* and *inters*. It is the most perfected calypsology known in history, the longest lasting form of racism. It is the death mask. (21)

Shaj Mohan and Divya Dwivedi define calypsology as “the conversion of a being into another through the exchange of one comprehending law for

another such that the ends of that being are enclosed in the means.... Calypsology is a programme governed by the passive forces” (22). The process of metaphorization present in Wilkerson’s book performs the calypsology of Dalit lives by making the effect of caste on African-American lives its primary focus. Calypsology refers to reduced potentiality— a fate the Dalits suffer in India and in Wilkerson’s book. In India, the democracy should have meant the emergence of new possibilities and emancipation for Dalits. However, caste converted everything to the same end. Calypsology prevents Dalits going in different directions, it brings them back to the age old system of their lives being governed by caste. Wilkerson is guilty of this as well as her book fails to imagine a future for Dalits in India.

 **The process of metaphorization does not merely entail the use of a literary device or a metaphor: it is a part of a politics which controls how comparisons are made and administers the effects of such comparisons.**

There is a problem in the way Sheth and Wilkerson have attempted to talk about caste. Sheth notes the danger in the easy privileging of North American categories. However, most non-Dalits object to such a privileging only when a comparison illuminates specific conditions, such as the condition of Dalits in India. By dismissing the way Dalits want to speak about their own condition, Sheth masks the difficulty Dalits encounter when talking about caste. In academic and other discourses, there is a fluency when it comes to race and a stammering when it comes to caste. Dalits have tried to overcome these gaps by articulating their condition through the comparison of caste with race. They have had a fruitful engagement with North America and the 21st century understanding of race as a social construct. By talking about caste in terms of race, Dalits have been able to gain visibility for their condition since the talk about race is everywhere and it is a part of the world which is very influential. It is not that caste, as it operates in India, is difficult to understand. The problem is not with the object being examined, but the way it is discussed. All discussions about caste are still controlled by upper castes who block the way Dalits want to talk about it, which is the whole story of the WCAR in Durban. Similarly, Wilkerson mutes Dalits in her discussion of caste. If her aim was to explain caste to the world, it cannot be achieved through the metaphorization of caste where semantic possibilities have been limited. It appears that Wilkerson used the comparison with caste to produce an abhorrence for the practices of racism. The abhorrence is to be derived from the vehicle of caste, but she makes the vehicle unavailable for inquiry. The comparison of race with caste seeks to produce self-disgust in Whites who should feel ashamed that they are practicing an ancient Indian construct. Wilkerson, thereby, retains the sense of supremacy that Americans feel towards third-world countries. Hence, she limits the productive potential of metaphorization.

The task at hand is to continue the project of Dalit and African-American solidarity, to enrich each other's intellectual terrain, and not to elevate one at the cost of the other. It must be acknowledged that "caste is as much of a social construct as race" (23), and one must be cautious while using one as the metaphor for the other. Comparisons between race and caste are necessary and should be encouraged since they hold the potential for productive politics. Metaphors produce a mixing of categories, but Wilkerson does not look at them side by side. In the American context, where caste exists, metaphors can produce a calypsology. It occurs in America and in India, where a discussion on caste omits the Dalit speaker, and hence, the international reader has no sense of what brutal and micro aggressions Dalits experience everyday. Although Wilkerson discusses race in terms of caste, she ignores how caste exerts its power over Dalits in the US. While caste and race should be discussed together, one should ask if they should be compared through the process of metaphorization. Or in other words, is simply making a comparison between caste and race sufficient? Metaphors cannot only be used for making a comparison and do serve a more meaningful purpose. The use of metaphors must translate into positive action for both entities compared. Metaphors create a new way of talking about things that have pushed into the realm of obscurity. They can perform a revelatory function, provided the possibility of semantic innovation is kept open by maintaining equality between the entities compared.

NOTES

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