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## INTRODUCTION TO DR. B. R. AMBEDKAR'S ANNIHILATION OF CASTE

**Prof. Vijay Devidas Wakode**

Assistant Professor

Head of History Department

Shri Dnyanesh Mahavidyalaya, Navargaon

Tah. Sindewahi, Dist. Chandrapur

E-mail : [vwakode29@gmail.com](mailto:vwakode29@gmail.com)

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### Abstract :

This paper has two parts - the first deals with theorization of activism as resistance and the second with the critical analysis of Arundhati Roy's introduction entitled "The Doctor and the Saint" to B. R. Ambedkar's book, Annihilation of Caste. The first part explains how the space of resistance and activism emerge from the gap between the prevailing situation and promised ideal situation i.e. 'what is' and 'what ought to be.' It also elucidates the trajectory of the activists dwelling on the possible spheres of activism and the myriad forms of resistant activism. The second part lauds the effort of Roy in showing solidarity with the Dalit world thereby demonstrating how she misses the mark of initiating a dialogue/an interaction between the Dalits and non-Dalits on account of making Gandhi the omphalos of her work. The paper thus questions this uncalled for attention lent to Gandhi while prefacing Ambedkar. It seems to be a project of maligning Gandhi rather than denouncing and finding possible ways of annihilating caste--a social evil that has crippled our socio-political system for centuries. The expose on Gandhi exposes Roy's politics of activism too.

**Key Words:** Activism, Resistance, Justice, Caste, Untouchability, Dalits.

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## **Ambedkar Philosophy :**

There has been an assertion of Dalit pride politically over the years - a Dalit, single woman Mayawati is unapologetic about both. Still there are no Dalits and Adivasis in the Forbes list of billionaires. Roy concludes that caste has blended with the capitalist system. Vaisyas control Indian business as ordained by the scriptures and the major chunk of the government jobs is occupied by the Brahmins. Even the media has been traditionally dominated by Brahmins, what Ambedkar said in 1945 still has resonance: 'The untouchables have no Press' (BAWS 9). The statistics show the domination of Brahmins and higher castes, it may not be due to higher IQ but certainly due to better social placement. There is only one government department in which Dalits are over represented. Almost 90% of designated sweepers" who clean streets, who go down the manholes and service the sewage system, who clean toilets and do menial jobs, employed by the Government of India are Dalits. Railways is the biggest employer of manual scavengers. After Independence, the Indian government implemented a policy of reservation as a corrective measure. Roy calls it a positive discrimination and only opportunity Scheduled Castes have to break into the mainstream. However, miniscule the percentage of the Dalit population in the echelons of power may be, but it has given the Dalits an opportunity to find their ways into public services, Roy says that even this tiny opportunity given to Dalits is lamented by the privileged caste and Dalits have to face the unspoken/unsaid hostility.

Ambedkar is respected and remembered for the role he played in drafting the Indian Constitution and criticized for being an 'opportunist' for accepting the invite to the First Round Table Conference when the country was in turmoil, the Congress leaders were being imprisoned for breaking the salt laws and 'separatist' for demanding separate electorates for the Untouchables. His endorsement of Muslim League's demand for Pakistan earned him the label of being 'anti national', He also talked about the trifurcation of Kashmir. So all in all on every important issue in struggle for Independence Ambedkar chose an adversarial path.

## **Annihilation on Cast :**

'Annihilation of Caste' is an eighty year old text of speech written by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar that was never delivered. Roy expresses a sense of illumination after reading the text of the speech, Roy begins her resistant activism by bringing in narratives of Surekha Bhotmange and Bant Singh tortured by upper caste. Roy aptly quotes Ambedkar castigating Hinduism as "a veritable chamber of horrors" (qtd. in Roy Doctor 20) where the fellow human beings are described as "Untouchable", "Scheduled Caste", "Backward Class" and "Other Backward Classes." Roy expresses pain and horror at this nomenclature, Untouchable in our era has been substituted by a Marathi word "Dalit" which means "broken people."

The crime rate against Dalits is appalling, a crime is committed against a Dalit by a non-Dalit every sixteen minutes, everyday more than four untouchable women are raped by touchables, every week more than thirteen Dalits are murdered and six Dalits are kidnapped

as reported by National Crime Research Bureau, Despite the crime rate, caste has always escaped the scrutiny in comparison to other racial excesses because it is inextricably fused with Hinduism and is not colour coded like Apartheid. Dalit activists agree that caste is not same as race but are comparable on account of discrimination, Caste was formulated as per the Varnashrama or Chaturvarna and outside these four varnas are the avarna castes the Atishudras. Some castes like Mahars (to which Ambedkar belonged, had to tie brooms to their waist to sweep away their footprints, others had to hang spittoons around their necks to collect their polluted saliva, Ambedkar calls caste the most degrading system of social organization which Annihilation 17.7, 276).

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## **Gandhi and Ambedkar :**

After reading the biased and negative pronouncements on Gandhi in 'The Doctor and The Saint', the researcher was also tempted to refer to the works of Gandhi to comprehend / articulate his perspective on Untouchability, The writings unequivocally

condemn untouchability and underscore Gandhi's deepest concern for the Untouchables. Gandhi during his incarceration in Yerwada Central Prison in 1930 wrote weekly letters to Satyagraha Ashram, In one of his letters dwelling on the observance of Removal of Untouchability, he wrote: 'None can be born untouchable, as all are sparks of one and the same Fire, It is wrong to treat certain human beings as untouchables from birth', (Gandhi, Selected 235). Gandhi considers untouchability prescribed by scriptures as 'rank irreligion fit only to be destroyed' further calls it...a plague which it is the bounden duty of every Hindu to combat", (Gandhi 236). He even condemns the Congressmen who look upon this observance of removal of untouchability as a political necessity and not something as indispensable. He identifies 'the monstrous immensity of this social isolation caused by untouchability, And the removal of untouchability is a must for building the edifice of Swaraj' (Gandhi, 343), Gandhi calls untouchability a soul destroying sin, Caste a social evil (Gandhi, Selected, Vol. V 444). In the light of the above quotes, Roy's castigation of Gandhi seems to be driven by some deep seated bias/prejudice against the Father of the nation, Perhaps it is another naked attempt at free publicity by stirring up a controversy where there is none.

In 1931 when Ambedkar met Gandhi for the first time, Gandhi questioned him about his sharp criticism of the Congress; to which he replied " I have no homeland ..No Untouchable worth the name will be proud of this land" (Roy, Doctor 43), Roy appropiates this searing insolence of Ambedkar but herself questions the nimbleness of Ambedkar to put his foot in the door of the establishment to become a member of Constituent Assembly, The famous reply that he gave to Gandhi that he has no homeland, notwithstanding his homelessness he eagerly became a member of Constituent Assembly. If he didn't have a homeland for whom and for which nation/ land was he drafting the constitution? Roy establishes herself as a scholar and researcher with a probing eye when she questions this dual and confusing legacy of being a Radical and the Father of Indian Constitution. However later Roy validates Ambedkar's desperation by wrapping it in empathy for the Untouchables and Constitutional morality. Ambedkar has been heaped with glowing praise by one and all for incorporating certain rights and safeguards for the subordinated Castes. But Roy criticizes the document for leaving the adivasis in the circumstantial status quo. Also finds fault with Ambedkar's utopia, the City of Justice, for imitating the western model of development that subscribes to big cities, big dams, big irrigation projects which Roy obviously rejects. Roy points out that Ambedkar 'failed to recognize the catastrophic dangers of western modernity' (Roy, Doctor 50). On the other hand she finds Gandhi's utopia of Ram Rajya with Indian pastoral bliss prescient enough to see the seed of cataclysm implanted in the western concept of monetization. These village republics, Roy concedes, have 'become the talismans for these struggles for justice' in today's world. (Roy, Doctor 49),

However, Roy allies herself with Ambedkar's anti-brahminical stance where he calls Brahminism 'the very negation of the spirit of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity'. (qtd. in Roy, Doctor 50) and creates layers of caste even for the lowest in the social pyramid. Viz Untouchables, unapproachables and unseeables. Ambedkar fought against this oppressive

Brahminism and approved rather prodded the untouchables and depressed class to convert to other religions to avoid the stigma of untouchability because “The first and the foremost thing that must be recognized is that Hindu society is a myth. The name Hindu is itself a foreign name....Hindu society as such does not exist. It is only a collection of castes” (Ambedkar, Annihilation 6.2, 241-242), Mohammedans started referring to the natives who lived east of the river Indus as Hindus for the purpose of distinguishing themselves, The word Hindu not occur in any Sanskrit work prior to the Mohammedan invasion, So when the Hindu reformers used the word Hindu, it was a forced unified political constituency.

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Gandhi took it upon himself to unify the three constituencies of conservative privileged upper caste, untouchables and Muslims. Owing to his efforts Indian National Congress passed a resolution in 1917 abolishing untouchability, But Roy s Gandhi of aspiring to be a leader of all subjects of the British Empire. Royâ€™s scathing critique of Gandhi makes one suspicious of her intent and goal. Goal, pethaps, was to preface Ambedkar's work Annihilation of Caste, so her passionate approbation/corroboration of anti-untouchability discourse is understandable but her paroxysm of criticism of Gandhi's role in Independence struggle and particularly his role in eradication of untouchability is akin to propaganda and cynicism.

### **Summary :**

Ambedkar belonged to the community of untouchables so it was logical for him to fight for the rights of his community but Gandhi, fought for the rights of Untouchables, a community he did not belong to. How do you evaluate or rate a person who empathizes with others? Gandhi was humane and believed in humility. Challenging/Rejecting what Roy says about the Saint and the Doctor I would like to reiterate that both were humans with their own set of lacks and beliefs and are not comparable. Both talked and fought for the equal rights of all. Nonetheless Roy's research and scholarship in emphatically resisting the caste and its manifestations in different spheres is laudable. The core of her activism is quintessentially humane and egalitarian that endears her to the socially marginalized. She wants the readers to show the courage to rearrange the stars in the firmament and develop a radical critique of not only Brahminism but also of Capitalism to do away with the social evil of caste.

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