B.R. Ambedkar. *Annihilation of Caste.* (The Annotated Critical Edition). Ed. S. Anand. New Delhi: Navayana, 2014. pp. 415. ₹ 525.00. ISBN: 978-81890-596-37.

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Annihilation of Caste was first published in May 1936 by Ambedkar himself. This revolutionary book encapsulates the ideas of a rebel of how *Caste* and *varna* division inflict social, moral and economic wound to people without any fault of theirs because no one in this world has control over his birth in one caste or the other. The book was originally conceived as a speech for Jat-Pat-Torak-Mandal, an off-shoot of the Arya Samaj which had been established to meet the threat of mass conversion of the Scheduled Caste people to Budhism/Christianity/Islam. The organisation, however, withdrew the invitation when Ambedkar refused to delete his provocative remarks against Vedas in the original draft and subsequently, Ambedkar published the book himself.

It is true that Ambedkar was not the first to have come out strongly against the evil of caste based discrimination and cruelty and from Raja Ram Mohan Roy to Mahatma Gandhi and even before there were people who made scathing attack on caste system but none was so thorough in his investigation of the malady. Moreover, what distinguishes Ambedkar from Mahatma Gandhi in particular is that while the later argued that political reform must precede social reform, the former insisted social change must precede political change. It is a different matter that the cause of social reform quickly dissipated because of the indifference of the majority of the Hindu community to the unjust social conditions within their midst, which desperately focussed on finding emancipation from British Rule. But Ambedkar's argument remains still fresh just as Arjun's argument with Krishna fails to die. What is more revolutionary and indomitably courageous about Ambedkar and this book that he questions the very authority of the Vedas, Upnishads and Manu Smritis itself:

> There should be one and only one standard book of Hindu Religion, acceptable to all Hindus and recognised by all Hindus. This of course means that all other books of Hindu religion such as Vedas, Shastras, and Puranas, which are treated as sacred and authoritative, must by law cease to be so, and the preaching of any doctrine, religious or social, contained in these books should be penalized. (308)

Another important part in this book is Ambedkar's reply to the criticism of Mahatma Gandhi to this work. Ambedkar does not spare even Mahatma Gandhi and gives back a direct, logical and completely devastating reply. Thus, responding to Gandhiji's argument that everyone should follow his ancestral calling according to his/her caste, he asks:

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> Does the mahatma practise what he preaches? ..... The Mahatma is a Baniya by birth. His ancestors had abandoned trading in favour of ministership, which is a calling of the Brahmins. In his own life, before he became a Mahatma, when the occasion came for him to choose his career he preferred law to [a merchant's] scales. On abandoning law, he became half saint and half politician. He has never touched trading, which is his ancestral calling. (342)

As a matter of fact, the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar form an essential binary. One person paves the way for immediate change, taking into consideration current sensibilities, while the other constructs the dreams of tomorrow – shattering every rotten, but dearly held sentiment that stands in the way. By playing a crucial role in the drafting of our constitution Ambedkar has left us the foundation for the construction of an eternal nation. How we engage with his legacy, will determine the fate of our nation. So far we have done very little to strengthen the foundation laid by Ambedkar except customary garlanding of his statue on his birth anniversary. This is what this fresh edition of Annihilation of Caste strives for – to place Ambedkar not just as the constitution maker but as a visionary who 'imagined the contours of a nation that persisted beyond this century and into the next', as a scholar remarks.

The charm of this fresh edition lies in the book length introduction titled The Doctor and the Saint by Arundhati Roy and S. Anand's masterly executed annotations. Arundhati Roy who has become the most hated & loved intellectual of our country regards this book as 'a breach of peace' and reinvents Ambedkar and makes a fervent plea for lending our ears to Ambedkar's teaching to cure the disease of casteism that plagues India. She may sound provocative at times but her introduction, as Satish Deshpande says, 'is both well documented and closely argued.' Moreover, her triumph lies in the fact that through her arguments she has shown how and why we need Ambedkar urgently. This book is a must for all, who wish to see India grow into a true democracy based on the ideals of equality, fraternity and brotherhood.

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