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Review Article

The Politician: A Response to Arundhati Roy's *The Doctor and The Saint*

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*This paper looks closely at Arundhati Roy's introduction entitled "The Doctor and The Saint" to the annotated edition of **Annihilation of Caste** originally authored by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. The paper argues that the basic problem in Roy's analysis is that from the very outset she assumes (by her own confession she has been raised on a diet of Gandhi hagiographies) Gandhi was a born saint and she expects that his every writing and action should conform to her own perception of Gandhi as a saint. On the other hand, in this paper it is argued that if we accept Gandhi as a politician and examine his writings and deeds within its historical context, keeping in mind that he as a human being and as a politician evolved over a period of time, we will be able to better understand his writings, works and contribution to human society.*

ARUNDHATI ROY'S INTRODUCTION to *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Edition* titled "The Doctor and The Saint" appears to have been written more to attack Gandhi than to assess the contemporary relevance of this great book and/or the life and works of its author

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- Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.¹ Therefore, Ambedkarites might find some reasons to ignore the article. However, no Gandhian can afford to ignore her article. The article is a direct challenge to Gandhism. Gandhians are left mainly with two options: accepting the powerful criticism of Roy and reassessing their perception of Gandhi, and/or responding to Roy's criticism of Gandhi. Both are necessary and inevitable elements to have a deeper understanding of Gandhi's life and work, though this response to Roy's article limits itself to the second element only - that too only on the issue of race and caste.

Let's begin with a very general note on Roy's method of analysis. The basic problem in Roy's analysis is not that from the very outset she refuses to treat Gandhi as saint and treats him as a politician alone. The basic problem in Roy's analysis is that from the very outset she assumes (by her own confession she has been raised on a diet of Gandhi hagiographies) Gandhi was a *born* saint and she expects that from his day one in South Africa, Gandhi should have made common cause with the Black Africans to bring down the mighty British rule in British colonies of South Africa. Obviously her reading of Gandhi's life fails to fulfil her expectations regarding Gandhi's sainthood. It appears that while reading Gandhi's writings, she encounters some of Gandhi's odd statements relating to the issues of race, caste and gender, which appear to her as antithesis to her own perception of Gandhi as a saint. Though, she also finds some of Gandhi's statements that might confirm her perception of Gandhi as saint, she decides not to be deceived this time by Gandhian hagiographies. She not only refuses to perceive this inconsistency in Gandhi's views as a gradual evolution in Gandhi's thought but also decides to unravel consistency in his inconsistency. She seems to argue that inconsistency in Gandhi's views or some of his writings that might conform to his image of sainthood are part of larger project to create Gandhi hagiographies that Gandhi himself began. She writes, "in order for Gandhi to be a South African hero, it became necessary to rescue him from his past, and rewrite it. Gandhi himself began that project" (Roy 2014: 88)  we accept her writing we have to also accept that Gandhi was so confident about winning the title of Mahatma or saint in India that he started this project as early as in 1909 (almost six years before his arrival in India and 11 years before assuming leadership of Indian national movement). This realization (some of Gandhi's writings and acts that conform to his image as saint are part of a project to create Gandhi's hagiographies) helps her to reach the conclusion that in spite of shallow inconsistency in Gandhi's views and deeds, at a deeper level, "his [Gandhi's] pronouncements on the inherent qualities of Black Africans, Untouchables and the labouring

classes remained consistently insulting".¹ Therefore for her who has been raised on a diet of Gandhi's hagiographies, it is "not just disturbing, it is almost stupefying".²

However, if Roy had thought of Gandhi as a politician and not a *born* saint, who had two decades of political apprenticeship without any mentor in South Africa, she would not have been disappointed so much. Apart from reading the saint's writings, she should have also looked at the historical circumstances that had forced a novice politician to accept the role of a public man. She should have considered the kind of people with whom the politician was to work, both as associates and as opponents. She should have also developed a proper understanding of social, economic and political position of the Indian community in South Africa, as well as the nature and limit of grievances they could practically think of. In place of blaming the Saint for his proposal of an 'imperial Brotherhood' and for citing Queen Victoria's 1857 proclamation for equal treatment to every Indian in Natal, she should have also contemplated what were the other possible alternatives available for the politician in South Africa. In place of blaming the saint for absence of Black Africans in his Phoenix Settlement, she should have tried to perceive it as an effort of the politician to *gradually* do away with the distinction between the domains of 'home' and 'public'. Along with looking at inconsistency in the saint's *writings* on the issue of caste and varna, she should have also looked at what the politician had been doing, because as Anthony J. Parel writes "nowhere, in his [Gandhi's] entire political career, do we find him attempting to restore the dharma of the discredited varnashrama."³

It should be sincerely accepted that if someone should have studied Gandhi as a politician, it would not have been so disturbing and stupefying for her/him, and she/he should have found some element of saintliness in the politician Gandhi. The problem in Roy's analysis is not that she accidentally misses above-mentioned aspects of Gandhi's life that would have conformed to her own perception of Gandhi as saint. Instead her article clearly speaks for her determination of not only to refuse to see any aspect of Gandhi's life that would conform her own perception of Gandhi as a saint, but also to tear up her own perception of Gandhi as saint; even taking the risk of being charged of showing gross disregard for facts, use of "suitable" quotations out of context and shallow analysis for deliberate misrepresentation of Gandhi's positions on important issues like race, caste, gender and so on.

Let us consider the quotation of E. M. S. Namb oodiripad that Roy had used in her article to highlight 'the conflict between

Ambedkar and the left' as an example. Though, the quotation is not used for deliberate misrepresentation of Gandhi's position that is primary concern of this response, it is important to demonstrate how far she has gone in her article to prove her own point of view. She writes:

Angered by Ambedkar's display of independence, the communists denounced him as an 'opportunist and an 'imperial stooge'. In his book *History of the Indian Freedom Struggle*, E. M. S. Namboodiripad, [...] wrote about the conflict between Ambedkar and the left: 'However, this was great blow to the freedom movement. For this led to the diversion of the peoples' attention from the objective of full independence to the mundane cause of the uplift of Harijans [Untouchables].'⁴

According to Roy, Namboodiripad wrote the above quote to explain 'the conflict between Ambedkar and the left'. However, in fact Namboodiripad wrote above quote regarding Gandhi's decision to go on fast unto death against British government decision to offer separate electorate for untouchables and subsequent events leading to the Poona Pact. In this quotation Namboodiripad blamed Gandhi and not Ambedkar for diversion of the peoples' attention. Namboodiripad wrote that Gandhi:

...subordinated the struggle for Swaraj to the day-to-day activities for the upliftment of the depressed castes. What is more, Gandhi gave a moral (religious) character to this political approach... Thus, the Congress as well as its undisputed leader, Gandhi, which was engaged in a country-wide struggle with the objective of liberating India from the British rule, engrossed itself in the programme of liberating the Depressed Castes and other Hindus from the curse of untouchability from which the entire Hindu religious community had been suffering... A direct result of this was the weakening of the civil disobedience movement.⁵

This was the context in which Namboodiripad wrote about the shift of focus and Roy uses it for entirely different purpose—highlighting 'the conflict between Ambedkar and the left'.

I

Let us now be more specific and consider Roy's dubious charges against Gandhi that are gross misrepresentation or perhaps deliberate misrepresentation of Gandhi's positions on different issues. Let us also analyse all the explanations and justifications that she puts forward to substantiate her charges against Gandhi. We may begin with her charges against Gandhi on issue of race that makes an

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impression on the reader that Gandhi was an outstanding racist. First, she charges Gandhi for 'always careful to distinguish – and distance–passenger Indians from Indentured (bonded) workers.' She gives two lengthy quotes of Gandhi to support her argument. In the first quote, Gandhi says:

Whether they are Hindus or Mahommedans, they are absolutely without any moral or religious instruction worthy of the name. They have not learned enough to educate themselves without any outside help. Placed thus, they are apt to yield to the slightest temptation to tell a lie. After some time, lying with them becomes a habit and a disease. They would lie without any reason, without any prospect of bettering themselves materially, indeed, without knowing what they are doing. They reach a stage in life when their moral faculties have completely collapsed owing to neglect.⁶

This quote is part of Gandhi's open letter address to the members of legislative council and legislative assembly, Natal, dated December, 1984. In this open letter, Gandhi had argued that Indians are as civilized as British, and being the citizen of British Empire they are legally entitle to receive equal treatment in Natal. At the end of his explanation, Gandhi anticipated a possible objection against his own argument. He writes that one can justifiably argue that the glorious picture of Indian civilization presented by Gandhi is imaginary because the practices of most of the Indians in South Africa- they speak lies and do immoral things- do not conform to it. He partially accepted the possible objection, but argued "that other classes do not fare much better in this respect, especially if and when they are placed in the position of the unfortunate Indians"⁷ (CW 1: 188) and he went on explaining the position of the unfortunate Indians in which they live and develop practice of speaking lies and doing immoral things, to substantiate his point that in such position people from any race will do the same thing. On the other hand, Roy uses it for a completely different purpose to argue that Gandhi was always careful to make distance with indentured workers.

The second quote of Gandhi is part of his interview to *the Natal Advertiser*, dated January 1897. This time Roy tries to explain the context in which Gandhi made the remarks regarding his attitude towards indentured Indians in South Africa. She very fairly mentioned that "in 1897, he [Gandhi] travelled to India where he addressed packed –and indignant–meetings about the racism that Indians were being subjected to in South Africa." She also informs the reader that "when Gandhi returned to Durban in January 1897, the news of his campaign had preceded him." She also tells that "it took several days

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of negotiation before Gandhi was allowed to disembark. On his way home, on 12 January, 1897, he was attacked and beaten." Then, she writes the last sentences – "two day later, in an interview to The Natal Advertiser, Gandhi once again distanced himself from the 'coolies'" - followed by Gandhi's quote. Gandhi said:

I have said most emphatically, in the pamphlets and elsewhere, that the treatment of the indentured Indians is no worse or better in Natal than they receive in any other parts of the world. I have never endeavoured to show that the indentured Indians have been receiving cruel treatment.⁸

However, she forgets to explain two important things: first the context of the question and second the meaning of the question in response to which Gandhi had mentioned his attitude towards the indentured Indians. In this interview Gandhi was trying to defend himself from the charge that in India he had indulged in unmerited condemnation of the Natal whites for their cruel treatment of Indians. In the same interview earlier Gandhi said, "it has been said that I went to India to blacken the character of the Natal Colonists. This I must emphatically deny".⁹ In this context when the interviewer asked Gandhi the following question: "in your Indian campaign what attitude did you adopt towards the indentured Indian question?", the interviewer wanted to know whether Gandhi had said anything in India regarding Natal whites' attitude towards indentured Indian labour that blackened their character. **What Roy had quoted is only part of Gandhi's response in which he tried to say that while speaking about the Indentured labourer's condition in Natal Colony, he did not blacken the character of the Natal Colonists, and had not 'distanced himself from the 'coolies' contrary to the impression created by Roy.** We can understand it better if we read the first full paragraphs of Gandhi's reply keeping in the mind the context and the meaning of the question. The first full paragraph of Gandhi's answer goes like this:

I have said most emphatically, in the pamphlets and elsewhere, that the treatment of the indentured Indians is no worse or better in Natal than they receive in other parts of the world. I have never endeavoured to show that the indentured Indians have been receiving cruel treatment. The question, generally speaking, is not a question of the ill-treatment of Indians, but of the legal disabilities that are placed on them. I have even said in the pamphlet that instances I have quoted show that the treatment that the Indians receive was owing to the prejudice against them, and what I have endeavoured to show is the connection between

the prejudice and the laws passed by the Colony to restrict the freedom of the Indians.¹⁰

When we read this first full paragraph of Gandhi's answer keeping in mind the meaning and context of the question, it gives entirely different picture of Gandhi than what Roy wants us to believe about him. **Apart from this, Roy did not go into the works that Gandhi had done for the indentured Indians. Instead she looked carefully at a single document- Report Of The Natal Indian Congress – dated August 1895.** The document says, "work has also been done among the indentured Indians. Balasundram, who was badly treated by his master, was transferred to Mr. Askew." It also informs that two other works were done by NIC for indentured Indians. First "The Congress interfered on behalf of the indentured Indians in the Railway department, in connection with the Mohurrum festivals as well as supply of wood instead of coal. Much sympathy was shown by the Magistrate presiding." Second, "the Immigration law, which contemplates imposition of a £3 tax in lieu of indenture, has been strenuously opposed. Petitions were presented to both the Houses".¹¹ These are a few examples to argue that Gandhi did work with and for Indentured Indian, and he did not try to distance himself from them as Roy seems to argue.

Let us now take another charge made against Gandhi by Roy. She blames Gandhi for proposing an idea of "Imperial Brotherhood" and for citing Queen Victoria's 1858 proclamation in order to argue equal treatment for 'passenger Indians'. Roy argues that "Gandhi was not trying to overwhelm or destroy a ruling structure; he simply wanted to be friends with it".¹² She also writes that "when Indian political activist joined the liberation movement under African Leadership in the 1950s and saw their freedom as being linked to the freedom of African people, they were breaking with Gandhi's politics, not carrying on his legacy."¹³ From the following quote of Gandhi, one can infer that why at the initial level he preferred to fight the Indian cause separately. He writes:

This Association of Coloured People does not include Indians who have always kept aloof from that body. We believe that the Indian community has been wise in doing so. For, though the hardships suffered by those people and the Indians are almost of the same kind, the remedies are not identical. It is therefore proper that the two should fight out their cases, each in their own appropriate way. We can cite the Proclamation of 1857 in our favour, which the Coloured people cannot. They can use the powerful argument that they are the children of the soil. ...¹⁴

However it would be wrong to believe that if he would have stayed longer in South Africa, he would have continued to organize his struggle on the same principle. On the other hand, the history of Gandhi's struggle in South Africa as well as in India clearly shows that as an incisive politician Gandhi would have developed a new strategy and fixed new aims according to the circumstances. Judith M. Brown writes: "the techniques he [Gandhi] evolved were those of the pragmatist, in particular he was limited by the people he had to organize, the audience at which he aimed, and the nature of the issue at stake" she adds: "as the circumstances and the grievance changed so did Gandhi's political tactics."¹⁵ It appears that Roy forgets the old proverb that 'the tree does not grow in one day'. She needs to remember that to fight against the policy of racial discrimination of a powerful government is a long-term struggle, and such struggle advances through stages. As the struggle evolves, its strategy, methods and aims evolve. Even Indian National Congress took almost 50 years to officially fix complete political freedom of India as its ultimate objective. Therefore, in spite of vast differences between the methods of early congress nationalist leaders like Dada Bhai Naoroji, and Gopal Krishna Gokhale, and the methods of later congress leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, Maulana Azad, it is believed that the latter were carrying the legacy of the former. Thus it can be argued that when the Indian political activists joined the liberation movement under African Leadership in the 1950s, they were carrying on Gandhi's legacy.

Let us now take the most serious charge of Roy against Gandhi that he had 'shown disdain for Black African' and he "was not offended by racial segregation". He was offended that "passenger Indian's- Indian merchants who were predominately Muslim but also privileged- caste Hindus- who had come to South Africa to do business, were being treated on a par with native Black Africans."¹⁶ From the very outset, it has to be accepted that she did not give any evidence to the reader to believe that Gandhi was ever offended because he or some other 'passenger Indians' were forced to travel with native Black Africans or he had started any movement to make different accommodation arrangement for Indian and Native Black Africans in trains. Gandhi in some of his writings mention that British Indians were being treated on a par with raw Kaffirs; however in an altogether different context (the context will be analysed later) than on the issue of common accommodation for Indians and Kaffirs in trains. On the other hand in the latter part of his life in South Africa when Gandhi started experimenting with simplicity in life, he decided to travel in 3rd class carriages only. When he was asked about its

reasons by one of his friends, he replied: "I shuddered to read the account of the hardships that the Kaffirs had to suffer in the third-class carriages in the Cape and I wanted to experience the same hardships myself".¹⁷ In another letter to a different friend, he informs that he along with Kasturba and two friends travelled in 3rd class carriage where generally "Natives are herded together like cattle!" He also writes that the idea behind travelling in 3rd class carriage is "that only a 3rd- class traveller can bring about reform in 3rd class carriages".¹⁸ He also strongly advised some of his white friends to travel in 3rd class carriages only, because he believed that "a few of us doing this will be able to do a great deal for 3rd class passengers."¹⁹

In place of giving any evidence to substantiate her argument that Gandhi was offended because 'passenger Indians' were treated on par with native Black Africans, Roy cites the Durban Post Office problem. She writes: "The Post Office had only two entrances: one for Blacks and one for Whites. Gandhi petitioned the authorities and had a third entrance opened so that Indians did not need to use the same entrance as the 'Kaffirs'." It is a fact that the post office had only two entrances; it is also true that President of NIC petitioned to the authorities in connection with the separate entrances for the Europeans and Natives and Asiatics at the Post Office. However, Roy's writings make an impression that Gandhi demanded separate entrance for Indians and Kaffirs, and he demanded it because he felt offended to share entrances with Kaffirs need further verification. Since she did not give the source of her information and in the absence of the original petition, we can infer from the writings of Gandhi what might be the issue. In the report of the NIC dated August 1895 Gandhi mentioned that "a correspondence was carried on by the late President with the Government in connection with the separate entrances for the Europeans and Natives and Asiatics at the Post Office." He also mentioned that as its result "Separate entrances will now be provided for the three communities." However, he also writes that "the result has not been altogether unsatisfactory".²⁰ If Asiatics (Indian) were given separate entrances defiantly now they need not share entrances with Kaffirs, then why this result has not been altogether unsatisfactory according to Gandhi. It simply means that NIC did not demand separate entrances for Indians and Kaffirs because they feel offended for sharing common entrances with Kaffirs. Gandhi mentioned about the same issue in his appeal to the Indian public; in this appeal he writes "In the Durban Post and Telegraph Offices, there were separate entrances for natives and Asiatics and Europeans." He adds, "we felt the indignity too much and many respectable Indians were insulted and called all sorts of

names by the clerks at the counter. We petitioned the authorities to do away with the invidious distinction...".²¹ It is obvious now that Gandhi/Indian neither demanded separate entrances for Indian and Kaffirs nor he/they felt offended to share common entrance with them, indeed he/they demanded to do away with the invidious distinction because Indians were insulted by the clerks due to this invidious distinction made by the government.

Roy also mentioned that Gandhi was offended because Indians 'were treated on a par with native Black Africans'. It is a fact that on many occasions Gandhi writes about Indians being classified with the South Africans; however a proper investigation is needed to draw a conclusion that he was offended because of it. If we look that those writings of Gandhi in which he mentioned that Indians were being classified with South Africans, it appears he was referring either to the white government policy or biases of white people and not expressing his displeasure for classifying Indians with native Black Africans. Two samples of Gandhi's writings are given below for ready reference of readers:

In strict accordance with the policy of degrading the Indian to the level of a raw Kaffir and, in the words of the Attorney-General of Natal, "that of preventing him from forming part of the future South African nation that is going to be built"²²

A general belief seems to prevail in the Colony that the Indians are little better, if at all, than savages or the Natives of Africa. Even the children are taught to believe in that manner, with the result that the Indian is being dragged down to the position of a raw Kaffir.²³

Apart from all these, there are also some writings of Gandhi that can help us to understand whenever Gandhi writes on Indians being classified with Kaffirs, he was simply referring to the white government's policy or whites' prejudices, and not taking offence at it. For instance, in his *Letter To Maganlal Gandhi* dated August, 1910, he writes: "I regard the Kaffirs, with whom I constantly work these days, as superior to us".²⁴ On several occasions, he also writes about Kaffirs and their issues in his newspaper, *Indian Opinion*. *Indian Opinion* issue dated February 2, 1905, carried an article titled "Attack on the Kaffirs" in which he expressed his unhappiness because Johannesburg Town council passed a regulation that a Kaffir who had a permit to own a bicycle would be asked to wear this permit on his left arm. He writes that they have passed such a regulation because "the Johannesburg Town Council could not bear to see the Kaffirs riding bicycles like the whites..."²⁵ In another article titled as "The

Kaffirs of Natal" dated September 2, 1905, Gandhi wrote: "this Mr. Dubey is a Negro of whom one should know. ... he imparts education to his brethren, teaching them various trades and crafts and preparing them for the battle of life".²⁶ In another article titled "Johannesburg Letter" dated March 3, 1906, Gandhi wrote: "Lord Selborne has returned from Masseroo, where nearly 2,000 Basuto Kaffirs had gathered to greet him. These Africans are a very intelligent people. They have their own Parliament, which they call Pitso."²⁷ In another article titled "Terrible Step" dated January 1, 1910, Gandhi wrote about one incident in which The Pretoria Town Council served notice on the examiners who allowed a Kaffir to sit with the whites in the same hall during examination. He wrote that when examiners asked for a separate room for the Kaffirs, this too was refused by the Council. He added: "such instances of injustice are a natural consequence of the whites' refusal to treat the coloured people as their equals. It is in order to put an end to this state of affairs that we have been fighting in the Transvaal,..."²⁸ Let us take a final example from Gandhi's *Satyagraha in South Africa* in which Gandhi describes life of Negroes in the following words. He writes: "before British rule men as well as women moved about almost in a state of nudity. Even now many do the same in the country. They cover the private parts with a piece of skin. Some dispense even with this. But let not anyone infer from this that these people cannot control their senses." He adds that "It is only vanity which makes us look upon the Negroes as savages. They are not the barbarians we imagine them to be".²⁹

Roy may not accept the last quotation of Gandhi as substantive evidence to accept that Gandhi had not 'shown disdain for Black African' because according to her it was written in 1924 much after the beginning of the project that Gandhi himself along with his followers started to rescue him from his past and to make him south African hero and Mahatma. However she might not find it difficult to accept other examples cited from Gandhi writings because they were taken from the writings of Gandhi before the beginning of his project to rescue himself from his past. At the end of this section, it is needed to explain that all the example from Gandhi's writings cited above and all the explanation given above is not to re-conform Roy's perception that Gandhi was born Mahatma. What is argued here is that if we examine Gandhi's writings and deeds within its historical context, and keep in the mind that he as a human being and as a politician evolved over a period of time, we can better understand his writings, works and contributions to human society.

II

Let us now consider Roy's charges against Gandhi related to the issue of caste. Writings of Roy create the impression that Gandhi was an outstanding casteist who was the latest in a long tradition of privileged-caste Hindu reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda and so on. She blames Hindu reformers for cleverly narrowing the question of caste to the issue of untouchability, and Gandhi for narrowing it even further to the issue of removing prejudices regarding the works of 'Bhangis'. She also blames Gandhi to "eulogise a mythical Indian past that was, in his telling, just and beautiful",³⁰ and ignoring inequality and exploitation present in Indian past. Another charge that Roy makes against Gandhi is that he was a hypocrite in his practices related to different caste restrictions. To reveal Gandhi's hypocrisy, she quotes from Vijay Prashad's "The Untouchable Question":

'You can offer me goat's milk, 'he [Gandhi] said, 'but I will pay for it. If you are keen that I should take food prepared by you, you can come here and cook my food for me'... Balmiki elders recount tales of Gandhi's hypocrisy, but only with a sense of uneasiness. When a dalit gave Gandhi nuts, he fed them to his goat, saying that he would eat them later, in the goat's milk.³¹

It is important to remember that since Gandhi had a habit of doing experiment with his food, and as part of his experiment he used to observe different rules (not caste restrictions) with respect to food, therefore it is quite possible that he should have asked dalits or anybody that 'If you are keen that I should take food prepared by you, you can come here and cook my food for me'. However, it must be due to his habit of continuous experiment with eating and not due to caste prejudices regarding inter-dining. It is a fact that in the very early years of his life Gandhi overcame the caste restriction of compulsorily dining within one's own caste and throughout his life he ate with people of different faiths as well castes including untouchables. In his autobiography Gandhi writes: 'I had no scruples about inter-dining'.³² Just to mention a few example; first inter dining was part of all the four Ashram founded by Gandhi; second Gandhi adopted an untouchable girl as his own child; she used to live, play, travel and share food with Gandhi; third in Sevagram Ashram, one local untouchable boy name Govind used to prepare food for Gandhi along with helping him in other activities as well. Apart from these few examples, Tanika Sarkar's description regarding Gandhi's attitude towards untouchables is worth quoting. She writes: "he [Gandhi]

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worked closely with low-caste coolies and invited Untouchable colleagues to live on his farms. He forced 'unclean' work on himself and on his family, and he accepted Untouchables in his social and domestic circles on equal terms."³³ The examples above and Tanika Sarkar's brief description regarding Gandhi's practice related to the caste restrictions can help us to understand that there was no hypocrisy in Gandhi's attitude towards untouchables. On the other hand it appears that from a very young age, Gandhi had overcome caste prejudices.

Roy's next charge against Gandhi is that he was the latest in a long tradition of privileged caste Hindu reformers, and he narrowed the issue of caste exploitation to the issue of removal of prejudices against the works of Bhangis. Though it is true that Gandhi's methods to deal with the issue of the caste system, in more than one way, were similar to the social reform movements initiated by upper caste people, the differences between the methods of Gandhi and the upper caste social reform movements are too fundamental for the former to be considered as being in the same category as the latter. Most of the upper caste social reform movement works on the principle of upward mobility/logic of Sanskritization. In this method individuals or groups from the untouchable community are encouraged to imitate the customs and practices of the upper caste Hindus in order to get rid of notions of pollution attached with them. This insures their admission into the Hindu four-fold system. Some of upper caste social reform movements had developed a *Shuddhi* Movement in which individuals or groups of people from the untouchable caste need to undergo a purification ceremony in order to free themselves of the impurities attached to them; they would then be admitted into the Hindu four-fold system. Gandhi from the beginning of his struggle with caste prejudices rejected *Shuddhi* Movement/logic of Sanskritization/principle of upward mobility as an effective method to deal with the issue of caste difference and hierarchy present in Hindu society not just because it fails to bring any substantial changes in the socio-economic status of untouchables. His disagreement with such method was much more fundamental. He rejected it because he could see that the principle of upward mobility failed to challenge or weaken the false consciousness of caste differences and hierarchies in Hindu society. The logic of upward mobility did not attack the ideological and moral foundations of the caste system but was limited to achieving acceptance of untouchables within Hinduism's four-fold division. To Gandhi, the logic of upward mobility seemed to have a reverse effect- by accepting superiority of Brahminical tradition, culture, and practices. According to him, it consciously or

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unconsciously strengthened, legitimised and validated the false consciousness of caste differences and hierarchies rather than weaken or eradicate it.

Gandhi on the other hand, adopted a method that can be described as 'downward mobility'. In his 30 years' long struggle against caste difference and hierarchies, Gandhi through personal example, persuasion, argument and propaganda, tried to educate upper caste Hindus to give up their caste prejudices of purity and pollution in order to purify themselves. According to him, this constitutes real *Shuddhi* or upward mobility. He writes: "I must tell the Hindus [upper caste Hindus] to wash off the stain of untouchability. This will be true *shuddhi*".³⁴ At another time, when asked whether untouchables should go through the *Upananyan* (sacred thread) ceremony, he replied "no" adding that "it involves the assumption that they are low and that they have got to be raised to a higher status." He goes on arguing that indeed "we [upper caste Hindus] must come down from the high pedestal we have occupied all these years and take our natural place with them".³⁵ He idealized the work and position of Bhangis (lowest among the lower position in the caste hierarchy) and asked every Hindu to become a Bhangi in his thought, words and action. It is something very different from the logic of upward mobility that accepts superiority of the Brahminical tradition, culture, and practices and, strengthens the caste differences and hierarchy. Gandhi's method of downward mobility was something very radical, for by doing so, Gandhi was refusing to accept the superiority of Brahminical tradition, culture, and customs from which justification for caste differences was derived. By rejecting the superiority of Brahminical culture Gandhi indeed attacked the very root of the caste system, and perhaps better than any other social reform movement or anti-caste movement did. This is a basic difference between Gandhi's method and upper caste social reform movement's method to deal with the issue of caste difference and hierarchy.

There is another significant difference between Gandhi's method and upper caste social reform movement's method to deal with the issue of caste system. Many upper caste movements were not just concerned with the removal of untouchability. Rather, the removal of untouchability was an approach designed to establish the spiritual superiority of Hinduism in the midst of challenges posed by Christianity and Islam, and to nurture the self-confidence and pride of the humiliated and nervous Hindus. The method adopted by these upper caste social reform movements was that of mobilising a sense of pride among the upper caste Hindus to remove certain practices

in order to rediscover their glorious past. Lajpat Rai writes that Dayananda's objective was not to give the Hindu matter and occasion for boasting, but to lift the Hindu from that slough of despondency into which he had fallen, and to give him leverage for the removal of the great burden that lay on his mind. Rai adds that Dayanand "wanted to inspire the Hindu with just pride and with confidence in the great value of his heritage".³⁶ On the other hand, Gandhi wanted to remove the false consciousness of caste hierarchies and differences from Hindu society. He therefore rejected this method of some of the upper caste reform movements which created and fostered militancy among Hindus about their religion and caste superiority. According to him, this fake consciousness about caste superiority is the main source of the practice of untouchability and hierarchies present in Hinduism. Hence, Gandhi believed that the best method would be one which did not evoke any false sense of caste superiority in the Hindus. The method he adopted was to mobilise the feelings of shame and guilt among the upper caste Hindus, and his movement against the practice was a penance for them. He demanded that upper caste Hindus, not just abandon their false consciousness regarding caste but also wanted them to participate in the social, economic and political upliftment of untouchables as part of their penance. Gandhi imbued his movement with the character of penance. And if ideology of Hindutva is an offshoot of upper caste social reform movement's method to create and fostered militancy among Hindus about their religion and caste superiority, it may not be an exaggeration to say that Gandhi's movement to mobilise the feelings of shame and guilt among the upper caste Hindus enable (may be in limited sense) the government of independent India to enact appropriate legislation to safeguard the interest of untouchables without fear of popular resistance.

Roy also charges Gandhi to "eulogise a mythical Indian past that was, in his telling, just and beautiful"³⁷, and to ignore inequality present in Indian past. Though, it is a fact that Gandhi appreciated some aspects of Indian past, it is not the case that Gandhi appreciated everything about Indian past. Gandhi himself very categorically said that his "is not an attempt to go back to the so-called ignorant, dark ages".³⁸ He was well aware of the totalizing nature of traditions, especially Hindu tradition, and was not any less opposed to the traditional modes of domination. However, for pragmatic reasons alone, he preferred to tackle traditional modes of domination and hierarchy indirectly. It is important to remember that when Gandhi was talking about his ideal society he was not referring to any geographical area (i. e. western, eastern or Indian society) or time (i.

e. modern city or ancient village). “Gandhi though”, Sukumar Muralidharan, writes “recognised neither past nor present, preferring to focus his attention on the eternal virtues invested in mankind through its intimate contact with divinity”.³⁹ Indeed, Gandhi in his whole life neither idealized India’s mythical past as authentic and ideal era of Hindu society nor he started any movement to go back to the Vedic golden age as Dayanand Saraswati and some upper caste social reformers had done. Gandhi, as Muralidharan informs us, was concerned with nurturing eternal virtues invested in every individual through his intimate contact with divinity.

Roy holds that “Gandhi never decisively and categorically renounced his belief in chaturvarna, the system of four varnas.”⁴⁰ If we look at Gandhi’s writings alone, Roy’s observation seems to be a fair enough picture of Gandhi’s position regarding issue of the caste system, because Gandhi indeed appreciated some of the positive aspects of the chaturvarna on many occasions. However, Raghavan N. Iyer suggests that political thinkers are properly studied without reference to their personalities and practice, but when we turn to Gandhi we find it peculiarly difficult to ignore his personality and his activities. Gandhi also very categorically says: “to understand what I say one needs to understand my conduct...”⁴¹

Let us now try to understand Gandhi’s conduct related to different caste restrictions in order to better understand his writings. Gandhi, from a very young age, revolted against the practice of untouchability and it may not be an exaggeration to say that in his whole life he did not practice untouchability in any form. It is also mentioned above that throughout his life Gandhi ate with people of different faiths as well as castes including untouchables. It is worth taking into consideration the fact that Gandhi not only allowed his son Ramdas to marry someone who was from a different sub-caste but also allowed his son Devadas to marry a girl who was from another varna altogether. He also, by design, married off his adopted daughter Lakshmi, who was untouchable, to a Brahmin boy in 1933. It may not be a coincidence that in the first paragraph of his autobiography, Gandhi writes that over the last three generations, starting with his grandfather, his family had not been pursuing their hereditary or traditional duty assigned to them according to the caste system. He himself never earned his bread and butter by following his ancestors’ calling. He also let his children choose their own professions, and never pressed them to follow any pursuit prescribed for their caste. Moreover, he tried to master many activities prohibited for his caste, such as the work of a scavenger, barber, washer- man, cobbler, tiller and tailor. Though it is a fact that Gandhi on several

occasions said that he believed in the *Shastras*, it is also true that he did not accept them as the ultimate authority or the word of God. When he was asked “Where do you find the seat of authority?”, Gandhi, pointing to his breast said: “It lies here.” He also explains:

I exercise my judgment about every scripture, including the *Gita*. I cannot let a scriptural text supersede my reason. Whilst I believe that the principal books are inspired, they suffer from a process of double distillation. Firstly, they come through a human prophet, and then through the commentaries of interpreters. Nothing in them comes from God directly.⁴²

Margaret Chatterjee writes that Gandhi was not a temple-goer⁴³; Joseph Lelyveld in his recent biography of Gandhi notes that “Gandhi hardly ever prayed in temples”.⁴⁴ Apart from all these let us look at his attitude towards some other caste restrictions; for instance, during his time, it was prohibited for his caste to voyage abroad. Although his fellow caste members were agitated and the caste head – *Sheth* - declared that if he went to England for studies he would be treated as an outcaste, he still sailed for England to study Law. Gandhi also writes: “on the eve of my going to England, however, I got rid of the *shikha*”.⁴⁵ He also gave up his sacred thread – *upavita*. It is also important to remember that none of his Ashrams were built on the basic principle of caste system or varnashrama dharma. And none of the caste restrictions were observed in his Ashram. It seems difficult to accept that a man who violated almost every caste restriction throughout his life and who built Ashrams where no caste restriction was observed, held the caste system or varnashrama dharma as an ideal form of organizing human society.

If we look at his socio-political activity, we do not find him attempting to restore the dharma of the discredited varnashrama. Nevertheless like Roy many scholars believe that it was this ancient original *varna* system that Gandhi was trying to reinforce and establish in India. However, Gandhi himself rejects such a possibility when he says:

I have gone no-where to defend varnadharma, though for the removal of untouchability I went to Vaikom. I am the author of a Congress resolution for propagation of Khadi, establishment of Hindu-Muslim unity, and removal of untouchability, the three pillars of swaraj. *But I have never placed establishment of varnashrama dharma as the fourth pillar. You cannot, therefore, accuse me of placing a wrong emphasis on varnashrama dharma.*⁴⁶

Therefore, it seems more difficult to accept Gandhi held the caste system or varnashrama dharma as an ideal form of organizing human society, as his practices speak otherwise.

On the other hand Roy who entirely focuses on Gandhi's writings and ignores his practice reaches an erroneous conclusion that Gandhi never decisively renounced his belief in chaturvarna. Even while focusing on Gandhi's writings she treats them a part of sermon of a saint, and take them literally. She forgets that Gandhi was a politician too and hence misses to notice possibility of any kind of strategy in Gandhi's defence of some of positive aspects of the caste system. What she misses can be understood in Rajmohan Gandhi's metaphorically explanation. He writes "I See the Varnashrama remarks as sugar-coating for his [Gandhi's] pill for caste Hindus. He wants them to swallow his reforms" he adds "the 'caste system' he [Gandhi] was 'defending' was nonexistent. Attacks on his 'defence' by his foes of the caste system only assured caste Hindus that Gandhi was not their enemy which he was not."⁴⁷

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