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BOOK REVIEW ON “THE PERSISTENCE OF CASTE: THE KHAIRLANJI MURDERS AND INDIA’S HIDDEN APARTHEID BY ANAND TELTUMBDE

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH

1. INTRODUCTION

A book review is a critical assessment of a book that goes beyond summary to analyze its themes, arguments, and overall impact. Writing a book review as an academic assignment is crucial because it encourages critical thinking and reflection on how the book contributes to one's field of study. Through a careful review, a student can evaluate the author's purpose, methodology, and effectiveness in delivering their message. This particular review focuses on Anand Teltumbde's seminal work, *The Persistence of Caste: The Khairlanji Murders and India's Hidden Apartheid*, a devastating and rigorous analysis of India's enduring system of hierarchical oppression in the 21st century.

The process of analyzing Teltumbde's book allows students to engage deeply with the text, extracting meaningful insights into how caste ideology is not a relic of feudalism but a dynamic, resilient force deeply integrated into modern Indian life. By meticulously examining the 2006 Khairlanji massacre—where four members of a Dalit family were publicly lynched—Teltumbde offers a chilling case study that links historical social stratification to the contemporary political economy. This helps in honing critical reading skills, enabling the student to approach texts with a more discerning eye regarding the intersection of caste, class, and state violence.

Teltumbde's argument hinges on the fact that institutions—including the police, the judiciary, and mass media—actively **collude in the perpetuation and concealment of caste atrocities** rather than acting as neutral arbiters of justice. He challenges comforting myths, such as the idea that globalization or economic development will automatically dismantle the

system. By systematically arranging the knowledge gained from this book review, students can organize their thoughts clearly and build a strong foundation for academic work focused on South Asian studies or global human rights.

Understanding how to review a book thoroughly contributes to improved comprehension, better writing, and greater academic success, as it enhances one's ability to present arguments clearly, support them with evidence, and draw informed conclusions about complex social phenomena. Ultimately, this assignment provides an opportunity to synthesize Teltumbde's powerful analysis, enriching one's own ideas about the pervasive nature of caste and the challenges inherent in achieving authentic social progress and democracy in India.

a. Rationale and Significance

The Persistence of Caste is not merely a book about one atrocity—the brutal Khairlanji

massacre of 2006 in Maharashtra—but a critical intervention in the discourse on caste, democracy, and justice in contemporary India. The rationale for this book lies in Teltumbde's determination to demonstrate that caste violence is not an aberration but a systemic reality deeply embedded in Indian society. By focusing on Khairlanji, he underscores how caste-based discrimination and brutality persist despite constitutional safeguards, modernization, and decades of legal reforms.

The significance of this work extends beyond its immediate subject matter. Teltumbde situates the Khairlanji murders in a broader framework of what he terms India's "hidden apartheid." Through this concept, he argues that caste is not just a relic of tradition but an active and pernicious force shaping socio-economic, political, and cultural relations in India. This framing is significant because it exposes the gap between the promises of equality enshrined in the Indian Constitution and the lived realities of Dalits.

Equally significant is the book's timing and context. Published in 2010, *The Persistence of Caste* emerged at a moment when India was being celebrated globally as an economic powerhouse and a vibrant democracy. Against this optimistic narrative, Teltumbde's work served as a stark reminder that structural oppression and violence continued unabated beneath the surface of "India Shining." By doing so, he challenged not only domestic complacency but also international perceptions of India.

Finally, the book's significance lies in its activist orientation. Teltumbde is not just an academic or intellectual but also a long-time Dalit rights activist. His writing bridges scholarship and activism, making the book a rallying point for those seeking social justice. It has inspired students, activists, and scholars to rethink caste not as an outdated institution but as a living, oppressive system that demands urgent confrontation.

b. Aims and Objectives of Study

The primary aim of *The Persistence of Caste* is to interrogate the deep-rooted nature of caste in Indian society through the lens of the Khairlanji massacre. Teltumbde's objective is not limited to documenting the atrocity but to analyze its structural causes and systemic implications. He seeks to show that such incidents are neither isolated nor accidental, but logical outcomes of India's caste-ridden social order.

A crucial objective of the book is to expose the complicity of state institutions—police, judiciary, political parties, and media—in perpetuating caste violence. Teltumbde meticulously examines how these institutions either ignored, distorted, or downplayed the brutality of Khairlanji, thereby normalizing violence against Dalits. By doing so, he highlights the institutional mechanisms that sustain caste oppression.

Another objective is to challenge the myth of India's modernity. Teltumbde argues that while India has embraced neoliberal economic reforms and globalized aspirations, its social fabric continues to be torn apart by caste. By juxtaposing "new India" with caste atrocities, he demonstrates that economic progress has not translated into social justice. This objective is critical because it directly questions the legitimacy of India's development narrative.

Lastly, the book aims to contribute to the discourse on Dalit emancipation by situating caste oppression within broader frameworks of social justice and human rights. Teltumbde's objective is not merely analytical but transformative: he writes with the hope that exposing the systemic nature of caste violence will inspire movements and policies that can dismantle caste hierarchies and realize the constitutional promise of equality.

c. Hypothesis of Research

Anand Teltumbde's book, "The Persistence of Caste," hypothesizes that caste in modern India has not eroded but has adapted, with economic liberalization and structural inequalities

intensifying its devastating consequences for Dalits. The book argues that caste-based violence and exclusion are sustained by state institutions that are actively complicit in reinforcing caste hierarchies through flawed governance, diluting legal charges, and a biased mass media. This structural reality creates conditions where atrocities like the Khairlanji massacre are inevitable symptoms of a hollow democracy. After reviewing Anand Teltumbde's "The Persistence of Caste," the researcher confirms the hypothesis. Teltumbde successfully demonstrates that caste is a dynamic, modern political-economic reality where state complicity and globalizing forces perpetuate the vulnerability of Dalits, proving that true democratic transformation requires the annihilation of caste.

Chapter II: DEMOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND THE ARTICLE

a. Author as an Academician

Anand Teltumbde is an engineer, management professional, public intellectual, and one of India's foremost Dalit scholars. He has held senior positions in corporate India but is better known for his activism and prolific writings on caste and class.

Teltumbde has contributed significantly to critical scholarship through books, research papers, and his monthly column *Margin Speak* in the *Economic and Political Weekly*. His writing style combines rigorous data analysis with sharp political commentary.

He is also associated with the Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights, Mumbai, reflecting his deep engagement with civil liberties and human rights. His academic and activist credentials give him a unique vantage point to analyze caste.

Teltumbde's work consistently argues for the annihilation of caste and critiques the limitations of identity politics. He brings an analytical clarity that is both empirically grounded and normatively radical.

Thus, as an academician, Teltumbde stands out for bridging theory and praxis—his writings are not merely intellectual exercises but interventions aimed at catalyzing social change.

b. Demographical Information of the Book

The Persistence of Caste was first published in 2010 by Zed Books internationally and by Navayana in India. It spans about 190 pages, organized into nine chapters, beginning with a historical outline of caste and culminating in a critique of neoliberal India.

The book's structure allows the reader to move from the general to the particular—from theoretical explorations of caste to the specific case study of Khairlanji. Its style is lucid, making it accessible even to non-specialist readers.

The cover design and title are striking, signaling that this is not a neutral or detached academic work but a passionate indictment of caste violence.

The book has been widely cited in academic work on caste studies, Dalit politics, and human rights, making it an important reference for researchers and students.

Its publication by Navayana, a publishing house dedicated to anti-caste literature, places it firmly within the corpus of critical Dalit scholarship that challenges mainstream historiography.

c. Other Literature of the Same Author

Anand Teltumbde's other major works include *Republic of Caste*, *Anti-Imperialism and Annihilation of Caste*, *Dalits: Past, Present, and Future*, and *Ambedkar's World*.¹⁵⁹⁸ Each of these books deepens his analysis of caste and its intersection with class and capitalism.

Republic of Caste expands on themes introduced in *The Persistence of Caste*,

¹⁵⁹⁸ Teltumbde's intellectual project provides a sustained, decades-long critique of the failure of modernization and democratic institutions to eradicate caste, consistently advocating for a systemic, anti-capitalist, and anti-caste analysis.

exploring how neoliberal Hindutva shapes contemporary caste politics.¹⁵⁹⁹

In *Anti-Imperialism and Annihilation of Caste*, Teltumbde argues that any serious left politics must engage with caste annihilation as a precondition for class solidarity—an argument that complements the analysis presented in this book.¹⁶⁰⁰

His work *Dalits: Past, Present, and Future* provides a comprehensive historical account of Dalit struggles, showing how they have evolved over time and what challenges lie ahead.¹⁶⁰¹

Collectively, these works form a coherent intellectual project that seeks to dismantle caste while also critiquing capitalism, thereby offering a radical vision for social transformation.

Chapter III: BOOK As Whole

a. First Look of the Book

The first impression of *The Persistence of Caste* is striking – both visually and intellectually. The cover design is minimalistic yet hard-hitting, featuring dark tones and imagery that evoke the themes of exclusion and violence. The title itself is provocative: “persistence” implies endurance, survival, and even resurgence, challenging the widely circulated myth that caste is withering away in a rapidly modernizing India. For a reader unfamiliar with the Khairlanji massacre, the subtitle “The Khairlanji Murders and India’s Hidden Apartheid” immediately signals that this book is not a simple journalistic account but a profound sociopolitical commentary. The term “hidden apartheid” is deliberately evocative, inviting comparison with South Africa’s racial segregation regime and forcing readers to confront the possibility that

¹⁵⁹⁹ *Republic of Caste* details the political mechanisms by which caste perpetuates itself in the 21st century, serving as a broader theoretical extension to the lived reality of violence documented through the Khairlanji case in *The Persistence of Caste*.

¹⁶⁰⁰ This work directly addresses the conceptual challenge Teltumbde highlights in Chapter 9 (“Exploding Myths”) of *The Persistence of Caste*, where he critiques the orthodox Marxist tendency to ignore caste in favor of purely class-based struggle.

¹⁶⁰¹ *Dalits: Past, Present, and Future* supplies the historical and socio-economic context necessary to understand the deep roots of Dalit vulnerability, making the events of Khairlanji (Chapter 5) a recent, tragic illustration of an ongoing historical oppression.

India, despite its democratic institutions and constitutional guarantees, remains deeply segregated along caste lines.

b. Summary of the Book

The book opens with an extensive introduction on the history and resilience of caste, citing Ambedkar’s famous warning that caste is a “monster” blocking political and economic reform. Teltumbde traces caste from its origins in the varna-jati framework through its evolution under feudalism, colonialism, and post-independence capitalism. This historical backdrop is critical, as it situates the Khairlanji incident not as an isolated case but as a continuation of centuries-old social hierarchies.

Following this theoretical grounding, the author moves to examine the contemporary reality of caste in India. He argues that globalization, rather than erasing caste, has given it new forms of expression. Caste has become more violent because Dalits, empowered by affirmative action and new economic opportunities, are now asserting themselves in ways that challenge traditional hierarchies.

The centerpiece of the book is the detailed narration of the Khairlanji massacre of September 2006, where Surekha Bhotmange, her daughter Priyanka, and her sons Sudhir and Roshan were lynched by a mob of dominant-caste villagers in Bhandara district, Maharashtra. Teltumbde meticulously documents how the family was targeted because they refused to give up their land and because Surekha dared to file a police complaint against her tormentors. He highlights how sexual violence – Priyanka and Surekha were stripped, paraded naked, and allegedly gang-raped – was used as a weapon to humiliate and punish Dalit assertion.

c. Theme / Research Area / Central Idea of the Book

At its core, *The Persistence of Caste* is an exploration of caste as a structure of power that has survived centuries of social, political, and economic transformation. The central idea is

that caste is not an anachronism but a modern institution that adapts to and even thrives under neoliberal capitalism. Teltumbde argues that atrocities like Khairlanji are not random outbursts but systematic acts of caste discipline designed to crush Dalit assertion.

The research area of the book straddles multiple disciplines – sociology, political economy, human rights, and media studies. By using a single atrocity as a case study, Teltumbde is able to illuminate the larger issue of India's "hidden apartheid." He employs a critical lens to examine how state institutions – police, judiciary, media – function as instruments that uphold caste hierarchies rather than dismantle them.

d. Content of the Book

The book is divided into nine chapters, each dealing with a specific dimension of caste and the Khairlanji incident. The first chapter provides a historical outline of caste and its resilience through various epochs. The second and third chapters delve into the contemporary political economy of caste, showing how neoliberal reforms have restructured rural society and intensified conflict.

The fourth chapter examines the legal framework, particularly the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, and shows how it is undermined in practice. The fifth chapter offers a detailed account of the Khairlanji massacre, while the sixth chapter chronicles the state's repressive response to Dalit protests that followed.

Chapter IV: Critical Analysis

a. Key Issues Raised in the Book

One of the most important contributions of *The Persistence of Caste* is its ability to reframe the Khairlanji massacre not as an aberration but as a structural phenomenon. Teltumbde repeatedly reminds readers that caste violence is endemic to Indian society. He argues that atrocities like Khairlanji perform a social function – they are mechanisms of discipline meant to terrorize Dalit communities and suppress their aspirations. This is a powerful

analytical move because it forces us to see the event not as a breakdown of law and order but as the deliberate enforcement of a hierarchical social order.

Another key issue the book raises is the complicity of state institutions. The police delay in registering the FIR, the tampering with evidence, the refusal to acknowledge sexual violence – all of these are documented in detail. Teltumbde argues that this is not bureaucratic incompetence but active participation in the perpetuation of caste hierarchy. When the state itself becomes a partisan actor, justice becomes structurally denied, and Dalits are left with little faith in constitutional protections.

Media invisibilization is also a major theme. Teltumbde documents how the Khairlanji case received minimal coverage until Dalit protests forced it into public discourse. Even then, coverage often framed the protests as a "law and order problem" rather than legitimate political mobilization. This silence and distortion by the media ensure that caste atrocities do not receive the sustained attention they deserve, allowing the cycle of impunity to continue.

The book also addresses the larger political economy of caste violence. Teltumbde links neoliberal reforms, land alienation, and privatization to the intensification of caste conflict. Dalits who begin to access education, government jobs, and small landholdings become targets of resentment from dominant castes, leading to violent reprisals. This argument is crucial because it connects macroeconomic policies to micro-level social realities.

Finally, the book raises the moral question of democracy itself: can India call itself a democracy when such violence continues unabated and often unpunished? Teltumbde suggests that unless caste is annihilated, democracy will remain formal but not substantive – a shell that fails to deliver equality and justice to all citizens.

b. Comparing this Book with Other Literature on Same Issue by Other Authors

When compared to Gail Omvedt's works such as *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution*¹⁶⁰² or Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd's *Why I Am Not a Hindu*¹⁶⁰³, Teltumbde's *The Persistence of Caste* takes a different analytical path. Omvedt focuses on the history of Dalit movements and their role in democratizing Indian society, while Ilaiah emphasizes cultural assertion and identity politics as tools of resistance. Teltumbde, in contrast, is far more structural and economic in his approach. He insists that without a radical transformation of the socio-economic base – including the dismantling of neoliberal capitalism – caste cannot be annihilated.

Compared to academic literature that views caste primarily as a cultural or identity phenomenon, Teltumbde foregrounds its material and economic dimensions¹⁶⁰⁴. This makes his analysis closer to Ambedkarite-Marxist synthesis, where caste is seen as a division of laborers and a mechanism of economic exploitation. His book thus fills a critical gap in caste studies by linking cultural humiliation to economic exploitation and political power.

Another unique contribution is his sustained critique of the media¹⁶⁰⁵. While scholars like Christophe Jaffrelot have studied caste politics electorally and politically, Teltumbde interrogates the discursive field – how news,

representation, and narrative erasure reinforce caste hierarchies. This focus on media bias is particularly important in an age where public opinion is shaped by information flows.

In terms of style, Teltumbde is less ethnographic and more polemical compared to some sociological works. His tone is sharper, and his objective is explicitly emancipatory. This might make his book less "neutral" but more effective as a political intervention, which is arguably what caste discourse needs.

Thus, in the wider literature on caste violence, *The Persistence of Caste* stands out for combining rigorous empirical detail with radical critique and for refusing to dilute the political message in the name of academic detachment.

c. Comparing this Book with Other Literature of the Same Author

Placed alongside Teltumbde's other works, *The Persistence of Caste* represents an important moment in his intellectual trajectory.¹⁶⁰⁶ Earlier works like *Khairlanji: A Strange and Bitter Crop* were shorter interventions focusing specifically on the massacre, while this book expands the analysis to include globalization, neoliberalism, and the structural persistence of caste.

In *Republic of Caste*, Teltumbde goes on to deepen his analysis of how Hindutva and neoliberalism are mutually reinforcing, showing how caste hierarchies are reproduced through majoritarian politics and market logic¹⁶⁰⁷. *The Persistence of Caste* can be seen as laying the groundwork for that more comprehensive analysis.

When compared to *Dalits: Past, Present, and Future*, this book is more focused and case-study-oriented, whereas the former offers a sweeping historical and theoretical overview¹⁶⁰⁸.

¹⁶⁰² Gail Omvedt's *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution* emphasizes the political agency and mobilization of Dalits as key drivers of change. Teltumbde, while acknowledging this history, centers his critique on the structural mechanisms—economic and institutional—that constantly undermine these democratic gains (see Chapter 2).

¹⁶⁰³ Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd's work primarily uses a *shudra* perspective and critiques *brahminism* through a cultural lens, emphasizing the value of *dalit-bahujan* knowledge and labor. Teltumbde synthesizes this with a focus on political economy, arguing that cultural assertions are fundamentally crippled by the persistence of caste within the capitalist system (see Chapter 9).

¹⁶⁰⁴ This approach is evident in Teltumbde's analysis of "The Political Economy" (Chapter 3), where he frames caste violence not merely as cultural prejudice but as a consequence of economic transformation (Green Revolution, neoliberal reforms) that empowers dominant *shudra* castes while structurally weakening Dalits.

¹⁶⁰⁵ Teltumbde dedicates an entire chapter to this subject, "Mass Media: Massive Prejudice" (Chapter 7), analyzing how the media establishment—lacking Dalit representation (p. 137)—systematically colludes with the state to suppress or distort the reality of caste atrocities, a focus largely absent in macro-political studies.

¹⁶⁰⁶ Teltumbde's analysis represents a shift from focused activist commentary toward a robust, structural critique integrating Ambedkarite and Marxist thought, a trajectory solidified by his subsequent major works.

¹⁶⁰⁷ The analysis of institutional complicity and the role of the state in the Khairlanji tragedy (Chapter 4) provides the necessary empirical proof for the wider theoretical claims concerning the operation of Hindutva and market logic that Teltumbde develops in *Republic of Caste*.

¹⁶⁰⁸ While *Dalits: Past, Present, and Future* provides the essential historical backdrop for Dalit oppression, *The Persistence of Caste* utilizes the immediate,

Nevertheless, the thematic continuity is clear: Teltumbde consistently argues that neither neoliberal development nor identity-based politics can deliver emancipation unless they are tied to a radical project of social transformation.

A significant difference is that in *The Persistence of Caste*, the emotional and moral charge is stronger. The graphic brutality of Khairlanji gives the book an urgency and immediacy that his more abstract works may not evoke in the same way. This makes the book an ideal entry point for new readers of Teltumbde's writings.

Chapter V: CONCLUSION

The Persistence of Caste is a powerful indictment of the Indian state, media, and civil society for their collective failure to confront caste violence. It is not just a book about Khairlanji but about the everyday reality of Dalit life in India. Teltumbde's analysis forces readers to confront uncomfortable truths: that caste is alive and thriving, that violence is often used as a tool of social control, and that state institutions are complicit in sustaining this order.

The book is also a call to action. By linking caste to neoliberal economic reforms, Teltumbde warns that development without social justice is hollow and can even exacerbate inequalities. The solution, he argues, is not mere reform but the complete annihilation of caste – echoing Ambedkar's radical vision.

For scholars, this book offers a rigorous framework for analyzing caste atrocities using a combination of empirical data and critical theory. For activists, it provides moral and political ammunition to demand accountability from the state. For policymakers, it is a sobering reminder that legislative measures like the SC/ST Act are meaningless without proper implementation and without dismantling the social structures that enable violence.

The book's greatest strength lies in its intersectional approach – connecting caste to

class, gender, media representation, and globalization. This makes it relevant not just for students of sociology or Dalit studies but also for those studying political economy, development studies, and media studies.

In conclusion, *The Persistence of Caste* is both a scholarly resource and a political manifesto. It is a text that demands to be read, debated, and acted upon. Its relevance has only grown in the years since its publication, as caste atrocities continue to make headlines and as India grapples with the question of what kind of democracy it aspires to be.

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