

WADA Nagara and Sankar VENKATESWARAN (India)
**“Goodbye, and good wishes for your success
 – a response to *Annihilation of Caste* – (…)”**
 First Report: Launch of Project
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“*Goodbye, and good wishes for your success – a response to Annihilation of Caste – (…)*” is a project in which Sankar VENKATESWARAN, an internationally acclaimed theater director based in Kerala, South India, and WADA Nagara, a theater director based in Kyoto, Japan, collaborate on co-directing a theatrical piece focusing on the theme of “social exclusion,” which exists in all societies, taking the appeal for the abolition of the caste system in *Annihilation of Caste* as their starting point.

About *Annihilation of Caste*

Annihilation of Caste, which is the focus of this project, is a speech manuscript written by Dr. B.R. AMBEDKAR (1891–1956), a central figure in the drafting of the Indian Constitution and a leader of the fight for social equality for the Dalits (the so-called untouchables). In 1936, Ambedkar was invited to be the chairman of the annual conference of a caste abolition association (Jat-Pat Todak Mandal) and prepared this manuscript for his keynote speech. However, Ambedkar’s views, which fiercely attacked even Hindu members of the association, were difficult for the association to accept. After they requested revisions and negotiations broke down, the invitation was withdrawn, and the speech was never delivered. This manuscript, self-published by Ambedkar himself, has become an important work in India’s anti-caste resistance movement.

First Stage of Production: Online Meetings and Rehearsals

This project is an extension of the dialogue in an online study group on *Annihilation of Caste* led by Venkateswaran and Wada since 2021. The project aims to explore the performative aspects and intentions behind Ambedkar’s words, focusing on the fact that the text was originally intended to be heard as a speech, and to bring it to the stage as a theatrical production. As the first stage of production, online meetings and rehearsals were held using Zoom.

Participants (titles omitted)

From India: Sankar Venkateswaran (director),
 TSURUDOME Satoko (producer), Anirudh NAIR (actor),
 Chandra NINASAM (actor)
 From Japan: Wada Nagara (director), TAKEDA Aki (actor),
 MORIYAMA Naoto (dramaturge),
 KAWAHARA Miho (producer)

Online Meeting (September 30, 2022)

The performance format had been tentatively decided as a post-performance talk following the speech. To realize this, the direction of online rehearsals was discussed on a level playing field without distinguishing between actors and directors. It was decided at Wada’s suggestion to have the actors try reading the text as a speech. Even among the participants from India, the sense of distance from the text varied. Some recalled experiences around them, whereas others

reinterpreted the issues in connection with their own experiences. There were also remarks like not knowing if they could break away from what has shaped them within a culture based on “caste” and “Hinduism.” As for the Japanese side, there was a gap between the logical context and reality, and both the actor and director could only grasp it abstractly, but they felt the importance of this incomprehensibility. Thus, they decided to discuss the issues of power and hierarchy within the text after physically capturing them through the process of reading aloud in rehearsals.

Online Rehearsals (October 21–30, 2022)

For several chapters, Anirudh Nair read the English text, Chandra Ninasam read the Kannada text, and Takeda Aki read the Japanese text in sequence. By speaking and listening, they were able to understand the intentions and energy of the words in the text. Differences between languages, such as the English version’s barrage of short sentences and the pacing of the Kannada version, were also pointed out. The original speech manuscript was written in English, and it was mentioned in the meeting that the Kannada translation was adapted to be more acceptable to the translator’s caste, which was the ruling class. This is one example that demonstrated this point viscerally. After the reading, the actors who actually read the text raised questions actively about the content and their feelings while speaking, leading to lively discussions.



Zoom meeting before coming to Japan

Observing a Rehearsal

The point carefully discussed was how and what to present from among the issues written in the text to an audience of a different culture, namely Japan. There was also an awareness of the multicultural nature of the performers. Although the discussion aimed to bridge the cultural understanding gap, the Japanese participants tended to lean toward

learning about “caste” as an outsider. This led to consideration of the structure of discrimination internalized even in Japanese examples, with Wada bringing up discrimination against women. The author initially felt that the Indian participants had a question as to why the issue was not about Japan’s *burakumin* (discriminated social minority) problem. However, the issue of women seemed to function well as a common ground, and in the latter half of the rehearsal, it was pointed out that while the upper classes have various ways to cleanse themselves of various impurities, the lower classes and women do not, and the social structure itself is designed to be more comfortable for the upper classes.

During the rehearsal, Venkateswaran repeatedly pointed out that the

problem of caste is not an issue of the untouchables or the non-dominant classes, but of the dominant classes. Those who have experienced discrimination desire its elimination, but many who benefit from the structure of discrimination are unaware of it. Moreover, culture exists within the connections between people, such as families, and some struggle with the idea of abandoning everything because it fosters discrimination. Viewing an event in a different culture as an outsider reveals the structure but does not solve the problem. It will be interesting to see how the questions raised through their own experiences and physical sensations will be spatially developed in the future.



Rehearsal in India