

Speaking Tree: Issues in Printing and Publication of *Annihilation of Caste*

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ABSTRACT

Context remains always crucial when it comes to publication and printing of literature that society, polity or religion finds uncomfortable to face and deal with. One such incident was recorded as an expression of dissent that started with the withdrawal of speech by Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar to Jat-Pat Todak Mandal as it was carrying stark naked truth of caste system of India, placing several groups, including Mandal in uncomfortable situation. Later this speech was made published by Ambedkar himself under the title, *Annihilation of Caste*. Present paper focuses on three major aspects involved with publication of *Annihilation of Caste*: a) the causes of denial of printing of speech of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar by Jat-Pat Todak Mandal, b) how public responded to limited edition, c) how the journey of *Annihilation of Caste* is still in continuity in print-world. To deal with these issues, several editions, reprints of *Annihilation of Caste*, articles published in books, magazines and newspapers have been probed into. In addition to that several online videos have also been taken into consideration. The research concludes with the findings that; a) Jat-Pat Todak Mandal itself was captured into politics of being selective in its approach to face the truth of caste system according to its political convenience, b) starting from the first to the later editions, *Annihilation of Caste* received attention of masses, people from academia, society, polity and several other fields and is continuously gaining popularity and whirling into regular controversy, c) reaction on addition of annotation by S. Anand and introduction by Arundhati Roy shows the division of opinions in favour or against new additions is going deep to the identity of community and caste of writer and supporters. The whole research draws to a conclusion with an open-ended question that even after so many years, the speech stands the test of time. It also indicate gloomy state where several organisations have arose now to hold caste system in India in more-and-more conservative way and promoting ideas expressed in *Annihilation of Caste* at their suitability.

Keywords: *Annihilation of Caste*, Bhimrao Ambedkar, Jat-Pat Todak Mandal

INTRODUCTION

Publication of a speech that was once denied printing, today is catching attention of several sections of society. It seems that more we discuss on caste, more this speech of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar will keep gaining centre stage. That denied speech we know today as *Annihilation of Caste* was printed by Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar in 1936 at his own cost. Today *Annihilation of Caste* has become part of publication controversy and politics.

Before taking into consideration the history of publication of *Annihilation of Caste* into consideration, understanding of chronology of events and debate that forced Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar to take back his speech and get it published at his own. For this, one needs to re-look on the communication that took place between Dr Ambedkar and organisers of the event Jat-Pat Todak Mandal. Dr Bhimrao has provided details of the communication in Prologue of *Annihilation of Caste*.

Phase-I: Writing of *Annihilation of Caste*:

Shri Sant Ram founded Jat-Pat Todak Mandal with the aim to work for the abolition of caste system in 1922. To achieve this objective Mandal used to arrange inter-caste marriages. Ambedkar clarifies his understanding of Jat-PatTodak Mandal in Prologue itself that its an organisation of Caste Hindu Social Reformers with one and only aim, namely to eradicate caste system from amongst the Hindus. He further clarifies that he is not convinced of any movement which is carried on by caste Hindus (Third edition, 1945, Prologuep.II). Here Dr Ambedkar clarified his point why he was associated with Mandal.

Jat-PatTodak Mandal people had planned to organise a conference at Lahore and asked Ambedkar to deliver key-note address as President of the conference. From 12 December, 1935 to 27 April, 1936, several communications took place between people of Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal and Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar regarding conference, its speech to be delivered by him, printing, additions and deletions issues. Dr Ambedkar honestly put every communication on record in the form of Prologue and left it for the judgement of the reader to understand the case. He allowed a complete space to readers to check the chronology, issues, progress of events and final withdrawal.

The Prologue opened with letter that Ambedkar received from Mr Sant Ram of Jat-Pat Todak Mandal. He objected Ambedkar of using his letter without his permission to propagate and print. Also he sought further clarification of the formula put forth by Ambedkar-”It is not possible to break caste without annihilating the religious notions on which it, the caste system, is founded” (1945 edition, Prologue, p.I)

Ambedkar provides his understanding on Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal. He opined that there was a difference of aim between him and Mandal. After cancellation of the conference, Ambedkar seems to reach out public for his ideas on caste. Mandal had difference of opinion on several views of Ambedkar. In the same letter it brought forth several agendas by saying that Hindus in Punjab were against Ambedkar’s being invited there. Resultantly, several people like Sir Gokal Chand Narang, Mahatama Hans Raj and organisations associated like Hindu Mahasabha broke ties with Mandal. Such information was a surprise for Ambedkar. With the arrival of Mr Har Bhagwan, real intention of Mandal got cleared to Ambedkar—to get contents of the address and ask for

amendments and deletions. Mandal objected to the use of word, Veda, in speech. It also objected of declaration by Ambedkar as his last speech as Hindu.

Still the dialogue continued for a while as the acknowledgement by Mandal people to get 1000 copies printed at their cost ensured Ambedkar that his speech shall get printed *in-Toto*. Hence, he handed over the manuscript to the Mandal people dealing with printing with 1000 copies order. Succeeding letter by Har Bhagwan, after Ambedkar handed over the script was a kind of shock as it pointed out several conditions as :

1. Its length was an issue
2. Last address as Hindu was extremely problematic
3. Questioning morality and reasonableness of the Vedas and other Hindu religious books was completely out-of-question
4. Irrelevant and Off the point passages
5. Complete annihilation of Hindu religion was suggested that was unacceptable

Mr Har Bhagwan insisted on either retaining old script on deletion of passages or only to retain part that emphasised on attacking Brahmanism. He found new script provocative and pinching. Finally, Mr Har Bhagwan made a request to Ambedkar to re-consider the whole issue and declare himself as leader who wishes to work for destruction of caste instead presenting it as his last speech as a Hindu. Mr HarBhagwan hinted at the cost involved as well. In the last paragraph, he again insisted to print the address *in-Toto* from first draft only otherwise to postpone conference *sine die*.

This letter was a last pushing effort by Mr HarBhagwan with a hint of postponing conference and holding back of printing of speech if not adhered to the suggestions, he made in his letter to Ambedkar.

On 27th April, 1936, Dr Ambedkar replied back. He made it clear in his opening remarks that he will not change/cut-short his speech according to the convenience of Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal. He challenged the order of Mandal on pretext of his speech as the right of the President of the conference to be at liberty to draft his address.

Taking Mandal on his stride, Dr Ambedkar cited the answer/explanation provided to Mr Sant Ram saying that-‘The real method of breaking up the caste system was not to bring about inter-caste dinners and inter-caste marriages but to destroy the religious notions on which caste was founded. Here Dr Ambedkar clarified that

such views were expressed earlier that was going in-discussion (Letter no.9 para-2, 27 April, 1936, *Prologue*, 1936)

Dr Ambedkar put forth his argument by citing the rule of relevancy on pretext of Mandal's claim of calling certain parts irrelevant and off-the-point. He emphasised that these points discuss the ways of breaking the caste system. Dr Ambedkar also addressed the issue of length of his address. He emphasised that Mandal himself had asked to deal with subject exhaustively. Mandal wanted it with better clarification to the opponent's objections.

Dr Ambedkar declared, 'it was only fools who were afraid of words', in reply to choice his words on religion and destruction of religion. He raised serious issue that if a person takes the position of the reformer and then refuses even to see the logical consequences of that position, let alone following them out in action' (Letter no. 9 para-4, 27 April, 1936, *Prologue*, 1936). Dr Ambedkar took plea of freedom of his speech and raised objection on change in Mandal's intention after 9th April visit to Bombay.

Dr Ambedkar pleaded that second draft was detailing of ideas expressed in first draft only. He emphasised that after due verbal and written communication only, draft was finalised and printed with 1000 copies. He made it clear that he could not accept any alteration and censorship over his address. He expressed his intention to own-up the responsibility of ideas expressed and conference people could pass a resolution to condemn those ideas. Ambedkar also hinted that cost on printing of speech could go high (Letter no.9 para-6, 27 April, 1936, *Prologue*, 1936).

He also raised the suspicion over his presence in Sikh Prachar Conference at Amritsar to be one of the reason of such pressure being exerted by the Mandal. Hence he asked Mandal to announce the cancellation of conference and that he will not accept it now at any cost.

Thus, the conference was finally called off.

Dr Ambedkar called such action of Mandal as tragic end of relationship between the reforming sect of caste Hindus and the self-respecting sect of Untouchables, where the former had no desire to alienate their orthodox fellows, and the latter had no alternative but to insist upon reform being carried out (action' (Letter no.10, 15 May 1936, *Prologue*, 1936).

The list provided in notes section of the Presidents who presided over conference earlier shows that Dr

Ambedkar was the first Dalit leader to be called for this conference to preside over. Later decision was taken by Dr Ambedkar to get printed 1500 copies of his undelivered speech to be sold at the price of 8 *annas* per copy in 1936. The *Prologue* to the second edition in 1937 was the copy of first edition where Ambedkar declared the warm reception of speech by Hindu public. Publication of self-funded 1500 copies that got exhausted within two months inspired Ambedkar further to translate his speech in more than six languages in second edition. The original speech remained popular hence minimum recasting of the content was done for next edition that included appendices and certain reviews. The speech gets blasted with opening observation of Ambedkar calling Hindus sick men of India. The third edition came bit late in 1944.

Phase- II: After Printing

Ambedkar died intestate in 1956 and by this time his works started gaining popularity. It gave rise to the issue of publication, copyright and royalty. People who remained associated with him in one or another way tried to get publication and copyright. From Balley (1958), Bhagwan Das (1962), Mulk Raj Anand (1996), to S. Ananda (2014), and few others kept claiming several editions of works of Ambedkar *Annihilation of Caste* remained one of the most sought-after work. *Annihilation of Caste* that was claimed high cost edition (he suggested that cost could be 2-4 *annas* instead of 8 *annas*) by Mahatma Gandhi, at one point of time (*The Doctor and the Saint* 2014 edition, p. 283), is available today from online *pdf* mode on certain websites (with several editions) to cheap copies to hard bound high cost value copies. Hence, it has rarely been out of print although the issue of rights/copyrights of the work remained murky and even legal.

In 2014, fierce debate started rolling with 124-page long introduction by Arundhati Roy done for *Annihilation of Caste*. Several print houses flooded with its opposition. For the present case, we have deliberately opted for the edition with annotation of S. Anand and Introduction by Arundhati Roy along with rest of the editions of 1936, 1937 available on various websites. It takes further narratives from Anand Teltumbde on not having any critical readings on this text. He emphasised that the history of printing and publication of *Annihilation of Caste* after the death of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar to Arundhati Roy needs a revisit to understand the reactions coming from different corners/segments of writers,

publishers, community representatives who are venturing turning Ambedkar either into personified form of god or god into human for Dalits (*Seminar* 2012, pp. 28-32).

Almost after a decade of the annotation of S. Anand (and Introduction by Arundhati Roy) on *Annihilation of Caste*, his call for search for its audience seems not only appropriate, rather a dire necessity in present scenario. In 1936 when Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal found the content of Ambedkar's speech 'unbearable' perhaps, it could be making more people more uncomfortable today. The attempts to portrait Ambedkar in paradoxical narratives than earlier times seem to be a deliberate attempt. Perceptions are being created around Ambedkar through narratives that hardly belonged to his thought process. Ambedkar's personification of god incidents like building temples and placing statue of Ambedkar for veneration are making his thoughts more vulnerable on caste eradication issues. Hence, to read-and re-read Ambedkar's original works and speeches is need of the hour. As in the editorial note of 2014 edition itself, editor calls for placing his work in historical context, hence it made a better case to use this edition only (2014 edition) for better understanding of the controversy.

In March 2014 article titled as, *BR Ambedkar: Arundhati Roy, and the Politics of Appropriation*, written by G. Sampath was published with the same background of Ambedkar and Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal controversy. Besides referring to self-publication by Ambedkar it claimed that even after three-quarters of a century of its publication, *Annihilation of Caste*, still remains largely unread by its target audience. Sampath also showed his concern for its circulation, multiple translations done largely by small Dalit presses and Dalit readers. It further claimed that this revolutionary classic is all set to gain a wider, *savarna* readership whom Ambedkar could not address. He arrowed satire to Delhi-based anti-caste publishing house, Navayana that published an annotated critical edition with an introduction by Arundhati Roy. Though widely welcomed in non-Dalit circles in India and abroad, Anand and Arundhati Roy's edition evoked fierce objections from Dalits, with many calling it an insult to the Dalit community as cited by Jishnu, another critique of the Anand and Roy's attempt.

Sampath further detailed that an Ambedkarite website, *Round Table India* (RTI) (<https://www.roundtableindia.co.in/?s=Arundhati+Roy>) published an open letter to Arundhati Roy questioning, among other issues, her motive in writing this introduction, her suitability

for such a task, her excessive focus on Gandhi in her essay, and the politics surrounding her decision to write this piece. On this site, one can find translation of objections raised by Joopaka Subhadra, the writer of *Hatred in the Belly*. Her objections are sharp, deep and emotional indication of caste issue, struggle and denied privileges. It also questions opening statement of Arundhati calling her identity as Brahmin (<https://www.roundtableindia.co.in/hatred-in-the-belly/>)

Both Roy and Anand presented their response to such objections accusing Dalit voices of intolerance, fanaticism, misogyny, and of trying to curb the freedom of expression of non-Dalits in *Outlook* of March 10, 2014. Sampath admitted that given the complexity of this debate on the politics of publishing a seminal text of Dalit resistance with an introduction by a celebrity non-Dalit, who has almost no history of engagement with Dalit politics, nor any track record of Dalit scholarship, he (Sampath) for all its good intentions, appreciates it a typical example of the politics of appropriation. He challenged the biased notion of Dalit writers, such as Anoop Kumar that, to represent Ambedkar without bearing or having borne the burden of being Dalit in a society such claims have no base.

Roy too defended her work by questioning: "If it is your case that only Dalits can write an introduction about Ambedkar, then I must disagree with you. What if tomorrow Gujarati banias say only they can write about Gandhi? Or Mahars say that their understanding of Ambedkar is more authentic and more radical than that of other Dalits?" Roy raised the question of "essentialism" with further argument that a Dalit cannot take a stand on an issue unless she can also demonstrate that it is the unified stand of the entire Dalit community, whereas no *savarna* intellectual is ever expected to be a representative of all *savarnas*. Also the point is, whatever privileges are, are we fighting against Brahminism or strengthening it? (<https://www.livemint.com>)

Anand, in his statement, presents a similar case, asking, "what is it to do with privilege? Sharpen it into a weapon and wield it against the very banyan tree of brahminism that entangles us with its roots in the air? Or should we just enjoy the shaded comfort of this tree? I believe it is the former that this edition of the book attempts." He further adds, "While I understand the anxiety and politics over who gets to introduce or annotate Ambedkar, I do strongly believe Ambedkar belongs to all." Well, does he, now, is what some of his Dalits

interlocutors are asking (<https://www.livemint.com/>).

Sampath challenged this 'equal power notion' on the ground that how should a Dalit interpret a savarna's assertion that they both have an equal right, (if not) as an instance of insincerity? Roy's writing of the introduction and Anand's annotations are an exercise of exactly the same privilege that is being denied to Dalits day-in and day-out on some ground or the other. That is why Dalits find it offensive. He also challenged the publishing house Navayana on the pretext of its belief that Ambedkar's text would be better amplified by a celebrated writer who commanded a ready audience across the globe. Sampath also hinted the debate of turning Ambedkar into another 'God' instead of recognizing that he too is a human being, with his merits, flaws, and so on.

Sampath acknowledged in his article in *Mint* printed in 19 April, 2014 that *Annihilation of Caste* embodies Dalit labour, Dalit pain and Dalit humiliation that has gone into its creation and post-publication process. But the royalties, as well as the social and cultural capital accruing from this Navayana edition – which is a private, cultural property and not part of the Dalit commons — would not be flowing into the estate of a Dalit writer. He asked in the same article, 'If even this is not appropriation, then it is difficult to understand what appropriation means. Such intervention on the side of the oppressed from those occupying positions of privilege needs to be done with sensitivity to the immediate political context of inequality and exclusion that structures all such engagements'. (<https://www.livemint.com/>)

According to Sampath, Roy has produced a brilliant piece of writing that not only situates *Annihilation of Caste* in its historical context but also carries out the epistemologically and politically important manoeuvre of reprising the Dalit perspective on Mahatma Gandhi for a non-Dalit audience. Even so, Dalits have pointed out serious flaws in it, especially in its presentation of the Ambedkar-Gandhi encounter. Also he called the enterprise essentially a casteist one with not merely an exercise of Brahminical privilege but a Brahminical exercise of privilege.

Then appeared an article by LathaJishnu in *Down-to-Earth* on 30th April, 2014 (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/>) under the title, 'Annihilation of Caste and Copyright Claims', that took the issue of new edition of B R Ambedkar's, *Annihilation of Caste* (published in 2015) to a new level of publisher and introduction writers' caste by stating that the annotated

critical edition of *Annihilation of Caste*, by S. Anand of Navayana nor Arundhati Roy, who has written lengthy introduction, titled *The Doctor and the Saint*, is a Dalit. Jishnu hinted on the copyright and ownership battles over Ambedkar's seminal work.

Phase-III: Debate-in-continuation:

So far as the 'appropriation' of *Annihilation of Caste* by writers and publishers was concerned, there appears a long list of claimants on Ambedkar's writings, speeches or interviews. The name of Mulk Raj Anand appeared in the list who published an interview with Ambedkar in 1996. He copyrighted the work. So did Oxford University Press, Delhi, in 2004 when it published, *The Essential Writings of B.R. Ambedkar*, edited by Valerian Rodrigues. This volume includes *Annihilation of Caste*. In 2011, Oxford University Press brought out Ambedkar's, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, edited by Aakash Singh Rathore and Ajay Verma and again claimed copyright. Jishnu made an addition in this list with the information that Planning Commission member Narendra Jadhav also published *Ambedkar Speaks: An Expensive Selection of Ambedkar's Speeches* with the copyright going to his wife Vasundhara Jadhav. At the other end, organisations such as Dalit Murasu in Tamil Nadu have been bringing out inexpensive copies of the classic with the claim to sold over 17,000 copies. So, in a sense everyone appears to have owned Ambedkar's works over the decades since he passed away.

Additionally, Jishnu informed in *Millennium-post* in 2014 (<https://www.millenniumpost.in/>) that since Ambedkar had died intestate, the Maharashtra government was ordered by the Bombay High Court to take charge of his voluminous writings which were rotting away for want of a custodian. It set up the clumsily titled Babasaheb Ambedkar Source Material Publication Committee (BASMP) which, since 1979, has been publishing omnibus volumes titled *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*. Till 2014, 23 such volumes have been published in English and these claim the copyright vests with the secretary, Education Department of Maharashtra. But that is not strictly true. BASMP has been selectively giving permission to those who have sought its consent to republish Ambedkar's works—some like Jadhav have not bothered to do so—to clear the legal issues that would allow them to copyright their value-added books. It was not till Navayana filed a suit in the Delhi High Court—its letters to BASMP went

unanswered for months as did their RTIs (right to information) applications—that the truth finally emerged. In February, BASMP admitted that it did not own the copyright and only had the lease for it. The copyright, it said, is owned by members of the Ambedkar family which had given the rights to the state of Maharashtra on payment of royalty. Following this submission, the court said Navayana was free to publish *Annihilation of Caste* at its own risk. This information appeared simultaneously in *The Millennium Post* (dated 17 April, 2014) and *Down-to-earth* (dated 30 April, 2014).

The Navayana edition was out and claimed its own copyrights: for Anand's copious and illuminating footnotes, for Roy's book-size introduction and the entire edition. What the case highlighted was that the Indian copyright law despite major amendments made in 2012 makes no provision for orphan works—not that Ambedkar's writings can now be said to fall in that category. Jishnu too has raised the issue of the absence of a copyright board. Till that is set up, copyright will continue to be appropriated or annihilated.

S. Anand published his article, 'May 15: It was 79 years ago today that Ambedkar's' *Annihilation Of Caste*', on 15 May, 2015 in *Scroll.in*. He opened his introduction with the reference of hurdles Dr Ambedkar faced for printing of his works throughout his life. He mentioned that his usual publisher, Thacker and Co. in Bombay, who published his several books, also found it difficult to raise money for Dr Ambedkar's works. Anand has referred to heart rendering incidents that took place to publish and place *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, the last work of Ambedkar in library. Anand did not find it surprising that Ambedkar's posthumous publications easily outstrip the works he could manage to publish in his own lifetime. Among these are *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Ancient India*, *Philosophy of Hinduism*, and *Riddles in Hinduism*. When the last-mentioned work was published, the Shiv Sena protested and the Maharashtra government banned the work in 1988.

Jishnu informed that in all subsequent editions of Volume 4 of the *Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* series, the Maharashtra government, which claimed proprietary rights over all Ambedkar's works, carried this caveat: "Government does not concur with the views expressed in the chapter." She furthered the argument of several Dalit writers and scholars, and Ambedkarite publishers in small towns and cities of India,

many of whom have, with no resources other than passion and political will, strived to make public the writings of Ambedkar after his death in 1956. Among them, Jishnu mentions, two names specifically; Lahori Ram Balley and the late Bhagwan Das.

Balley was credited to have continued the legacy of *Bheem Patrika*, the oldest and perhaps the only magazine on Ambedkarism published uninterrupted since 1958. On September 30, 1956, Balley had gone to meet Ambedkar at his house in Delhi on a day when the Dalit icon was extremely unwell. After Ambedkar's death, he counts among his achievements the rescue and publication of scores of his speeches and writings, many previously unpublished, that were locked in six trunks and in the custody of the Bombay High Court for almost two decades after his death. But by 1979, Bheem Patrika Publications had already brought out several translations of Ambedkar's classic essay, *Annihilation of Caste*, Bhagwan Das had worked with Ambedkar as a research assistant in the last years before Ambedkar passed away. At Navayana, Anand published his memoir, *In Pursuit of Ambedkar*, and the first of four volumes of his pioneering series, *Thus Spoke Ambedkar*.

Thus, there is series of publishers and publications that claim, *Annihilation of Caste as their part of edited volume. Certainly popularity of Ambedkar's ideas passed through the test of appreciation and criticism, both, and still continuing. Keer's observation on the work was, 'It was logic on fire, pinching and pungent biasing and fiery, provocative and explosive. It was to the spirit of the caste Hindu leaders what silver nitrate is to gangrene' (Keer, 1954, p.269). YouTube channels like Indian Cultural Forum, We are Many Media, Dalit Camera and several others are full of appreciation and criticism of addition by Arundhati Roy and Annihilation of Caste.*

Royalty part never appeared on surface but it was always a consideration because of the popularity of work. Also death of Ambedkar as intestate raised monetary and royalty interests of people towards his works. The roots of his ideas went so deep that it deepened and is still deepening with time.

Conclusion:

Annihilation of Caste is undoubtedly *magnum opus* produced by Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, with immense scholarly value. This denied speech captured not the audience but the readers with a continuous legacy it

meant for. When Dr Ambedkar published the speech at his own expense, he chose to make public his entire correspondence with the Mandal, thus offering a prehistory of the speech in the very first edition. Second edition was an improvement in paragraph settings.

Later after his death, printing and publication of *Annihilation of Caste* became a subject-matter of state, community, individual ownership and even caste claim. Royalty part was also involved but hardly discussed. On the whole, controversy of claim for publication and royalty one should not miss the point whether all claimants really wanted to help the ideas of Ambedkar to keep floating (expressed in *Annihilation of Caste*) in the society for the betterment of future generations or they had certain vested interests in its printing and publication. Also no one can deny that *Annihilation of Caste* as an idea is growing like Speaking Tree where its shadow is shared by all, with sharp differences on certain issues.

The whole controversy on printing and publication has so far went as an addition and admiration of attempt taken by Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar in *Annihilation of Caste* when Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal refused to support his ideas. Objections to new editions remained never on critical assessment of this *magnum opus* rather on writers and their background. Hence, new venture of critically assess *Annihilation of Caste* by Anand Teltumbde (article by Sonam recently in *The Hindu*, April 13, 2023 and in *Seminar* 2012) cannot go without controversy for sure, but just because of that new approach cannot be halted for the sake of reaction. Speaking Tree needs more to grow in all directions.

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