

DALIT'S ISSUES - POSITIVE ATTITUDE AND PERSPECTIVES OF LITERATURE

Murugavel S.* and G. Bhuvaneshwari**

Abstract: There is a fallacy among the ordinary people that untouchability is a part of our dharma and giving it off is a great sin. This presumption is the root cause of untouchability. Plethora of saints and leaders in various periods such as Sri Ramanujar, Gurunanak, Basaveswara, Shankar Dev, Swami Dayanandha Saraswathi, Sri Narayanaguru, Dr.Ambedkar, Periyar, Madurai Vaithyanatha Iyer, M.C.Raja, dedicated their precious lives to eradicate untouchability and struggled in all the ways to connect people beyond the chain of caste. The list is continuing without having a certain end. Despite the fact that all these great people worked to cleanse the strain on the fundamental philosophies of Hinduism, this taint still continues its role in society. Even today, those people who call themselves as upper caste people decline to treat untouchables, the people who are called as lower caste by birth, equal to their level. When we go deeper into the history and analyse, it is clearly understood that the untouchability is the consequence of the society and not of the religion. This paper aims at positive as well as negative attitude towards the term "Dalit" and Dalit's issues.

Keywords: Untouchability, Marginalised people, caste.

The ups and downs in society are stimulated from the religion. It is believed that allowing untouchables enter into the temples will defile the sanctity of the temple as well as the God. So those people are prohibited not only in temples but also in common places like reservoirs and graveyards too. Some great leaders analysed this problem perfectly and worked to rectify it. For this, almost thousand years earlier, Sri Ramanujar named the untouchables as 'Thirukulathar', which means 'honourable clans', and he brought reputation for suppressed people by his various efforts. The same was done by Mahatma Gandhi in the earlier of the Twentieth century. Gandhiji named those brothers as 'Harijans', meaning 'children of god Vishnu'. By calling them so, Gandhiji believed that it would help to reduce the distance between the suppressed and the suppressors. Leaders like Gandhiji and Sri Ramanujar worked to elevate the status of downtrodden people equal to the status of the upper caste people. Therefore their efforts were recognised.

People like Periyar also did the same but they are highly criticised due to their attitude and their way in handling this issue. Periyar criticised the upper caste people directly, especially Brahmins. He believed that Brahmins were the root cause of all these issues and so he abused them openly in his newspaper 'Viduthalai'.

* Research Scholar, School of Social Sciences and Languages, VIT University, Chennai Campus, Tamilnadu, India. Email: smvel92@gmail.com

** Assistant Professor, School of Social Sciences and Languages, VIT University, Chennai Campus, Tamilnadu, India. Email: bhuvaneshwari.sb@gmail.com

Brahmins should be driven away from this nation. (Viduthalai 29/01/1954)

If we need to devastate the God, we must devastate the Brahmins.
(Viduthalai 19/10/1958)

If you see a snake and a Brahmin simultaneously, leave the snake but attack the Brahmin. (Hinduthvavin Padaiyedupu)

This kind of attitude towards a particular community did not bring unity in society but it earned animosity on other community and also it enlarged the distance between upper caste and marginalised people.

Many NGOs raise their voices against of caste issues and most probably all of them generate determinations against of these issues. Some people do not execute them in practical where as some people try to insist them violently in society and this approach leads to precarious consequences.

Some years ago news had appeared in papers that a prominent social leader along with a group of 'untouchables' and non-Hindus wanted to make forcible entry into the temple of Vishwanath at Kashi. The papers had also reported that the priests of the temple had resisted and foiled the attempt. Some days after the incident, I happened to visit Kashi. I met the priests and asked them why they had resisted. They replied, "Well, thousands of devotees daily throng to worship the Lord. All of them enter the sanctum sanctorum, touch the sacred Linga and offer their worship. Nobody has ever enquired to what caste or sect they belonged. However, when that leader came with all the fanfare of propaganda and showing off to the whole world that he is a messiah with a universal outlook born to uplift the downtrodden and that we are the culprits, we naturally felt insulted. And we felt like paying him in his own coin." (Bunch of Thoughts 270)

This incident proves that a violent approach in these issues would give a negative impact only and it lead to a confusion and it would ruin peacefulness of society. Gandhiji also said the same, "Victory attained by violence is tantamount to a defeat, for it is momentary." It is clear that positive and convincing methods only would produce productive results. A poet, Bijay Kant Dubey, questions through his poem whether (some) leaders takes the Dalit issues to uplift Dalits' life and to eradicate the caste system or to persuade the people in wrong path for their personal benefits.

Those who want to promote Dalit literature,
May I ask,
Are they themselves
Or the problems and concerns of them?

What the agenda, what the motto behind,
 Are they for the Dalits
 Or for themselves
 Like the backwards of Indian politics
 Talking of reservation
 And seeking to sit on chair
 After instigating the unemployed youths
 To burn on the streets
 By pushing the country into the civil war,
 Partitioning India as per caste, creed and sect lines
 Between Backward India and Forward India,
 Murdering genius? (What Is Dalit Literature? What the Agenda Behind,
 What the Motto?)

Various terms are in practice to call the suppressed people. Though they are classified into various divisions and castes in themselves, there are some common terms to correspond them such as Dalits, Harijans, and Thirukulathar. Each name was given in a certain period and with a certain reason.

A group of ants were sailing on a cardboard. The board gets soaked gradually and started drowning into water. After a certain limit, those ants are struggling to sail. On seeing the pathetic condition of the ants, a man from the bank throws a new cardboard and the ants emigrate to the new cardboard and continue their voyage safely. Again the cardboard starts to get soaked and gradually drowns into the flow of water. Again another man throws a new cardboard at them and the ants migrate to the newly thrown cardboard. It goes on like this.

Likewise, naming the suppressed people as Harijans gave them a recognition and societal position for a few years but later it drowned in the course of time and they are given a new name 'Dalits'. Soon there will be a need for a new cardboard that is the term 'Dalit' will go off from practice and it will be substituted by a new term. The term 'Dalit' cannot be seen at anywhere in Indian constitution. As per the Article 341 of the Constitution, all official files use the term 'Scheduled caste' to represent the suppressed people.

By calling those suppressed people as "Untouchables", "Harijans", and "Dalits" will not seek and provide them a reputation and it will never help to eradicate the caste system from the society. Instead of eradicating the issue from society, those terms are still reminding the differences in the name of caste to the people and those terms by themselves keep the suppressed people a distance from the upper caste people. M.S. Golwalkar says,

In fact, emphasising and harping on the word 'Harijan' itself is not conducive to the eradication of the sense of segregation that those sections of our people have been suffering. Once, when I had an occasion to meet Gandhiji, I had expressed my apprehension that the coining of the new name 'Harijan' – however holy its literal meaning – may lend itself to separatist consciousness resulting in the formation of a group with vested political interest and endangering social unity. However, Gandhiji felt that it would not happen. Unfortunately, since then, the gulf has not diminished but is increasing year after year. And the dissension is now taken to the political forum as well. (Bunch of Thoughts 270)

The government should take prominent actions in abolishing caste. But in contrary, it indirectly supports the importance of following caste system. When our nation got independence, Dr. Ambedkar said that suppressed people would be given offers and special quotas for ten years and later on he wanted to bring equality in nation. Unfortunately, the reservation system is still followed across the nation. In addition to this, those quotas are increased for some political profits of some so-called politicians.

From schools to almost all sort of government jobs, special quotas are given to the suppressed people in the name of caste. Even in those castes too, there dwell plethora of economically as well as academically sophisticated people and they too get these concessions in the name of caste they belong to. While talking about the reservations in the name of castes, Bama says,

Reservation actually dehumanizes us rather than solving our problems. It aggravates our situation. We are objects of contempt in public places. People say, he or she doesn't have any talent or merit. He or she has found a way in through a quota set aside for him. It shocks us to be addressed as scheduled castes and not as Dalits, as the former is derogatory. (Bama 2001)

Nevertheless, there are plenty of economically backward people in upper caste too but they do not get any concessions at anywhere in the nation. These ill-advised deeds of government naturally sow the seeds of diversity in our nation. Instead of giving concessions and reservations on basis of one's caste, it should be given on the basis of one's economic strength. If the government does so, it will leap the grains of equality in society; and moreover, it will reduce the distance between the upper caste people and the suppressed people.

Most of the people in society stand against to the issue when they stand individual. When the same person comes to society, he gives importance to the caste system. So the medicine for caste system should not be given to society but to every individual. Because, every individual joins together and make society. Each one should think, "I will not follow the practice of untouchability and I will

treat people equally". In school days, everyone takes pledge "All Indians are my brothers and sisters" in morning prayers. Those words are uttered from the mouth of the people not from their heart. If every Indian feels and realise the meaning of it and bring it in his day-to-day life, certainly the next generation people will search meaning for the term 'Untouchable' in dictionaries.

Of course, untouchability is a dreadful sin and the people who marginalise the fellow human beings in the name of caste should be punished. Nowadays, prominent writers as well as some political leaders create an illusion like major religion only in India has the cancer of untouchability and other religions in our nation do not have ever heard about that term. Their point is that Varnashram system taught the caste system and it insists the untouchability. Though their point is valid, there raises a question that no other religions except Hinduism follows Varnashram system; in that case, why is the untouchability in practice in other religions too when they, indeed, do not follow the Varnashram system?

In Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, the protagonist finds three ways to overcome his problem (untouchability). Switching his religion is one among the three solutions. Since Ambedkar period, marginalised people have been switching their religion with a hope that other religions do not treat them as untouchable and it will fetch them a reputation and treat them prestigiously. In contrary, the name of their religion only gets changed but their condition remains as same. The much imposed thing that Dalits are made to believe that they belong to so called lower caste is the perennial problem persisting in society. When they try to convert from one religion to another religion, it shows their eagerness to be accepted in society as upper caste (note: not as equals). In a way their complex is increased by the so called saviours and messiahs. Bama gives a solution to this kind of attitude in an afterword at the end of *Karukku* "Dalit endru sollada; talai nimirndu nillada (Tamil): Say you are a Dalit; lift up your head and stand tall." (*Karukku* 106)

Bama, who holds a significant place as a writer in Tamil Dalit literature, explains her own bitter experience in her first novel *Karukku*. She openly condemns Christianity, in which she belongs to, for practising untouchability in common places such as some Christian missionary schools and even in some churches. They label the Dalits in Christianity as Dalit-Christians. At the end of the nun-training, a nun-sister said, "... in certain orders they would not accept Harijan women as prospective nuns and that there was even a separate order for them somewhere" (*Karukku*22). In this context, one thing is clear that untouchability does not have a certain religion and trying to incarcerate it into a particular religion is senselessness.

Suppressors are suppressing the suppressed people. If this problem should be eradicated from our society, the suppressors should give their space and treat them as equal to them. The renowned write Indira Parthasarathy expresses a good sign in his novel, *Kuruthipunal*.

In Indira Parthasathi's novel *Kuruthipunal*, (translated as *The River of Blood*), the protagonists Gopal and Siva belong to upper caste but they want to experience the difficulties of the Untouchability, so they come to a remote village in Tamilnadu where they face many difficulties which they had never imagined earlier. They support the suppressed people and try to uplift their economic status and of course they face certain consequences.

Once upon a time marginalised people were not even considered as human beings; but the things are changed now. They have got some reputation and honour in society. Unity beyond the caste system is blooming in both sides. Even then some issues happen here and there and off and on across the nation. In addition to the government, many social workers in various NGOs have joined hands in the mission of uplifting the class of the marginalised people. People from lower caste are working sincerely in various departments and serving the nation whole heartedly. These are the good signs of growing unity in society. Society is getting gradually changed day-by-day.

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