

## Caste As A Source of Oppression

*\*Dr. Geeta Garwa*

To move in opposition to violence for peace and social impartiality is not only to struggle in resistance to the violence of our foreign and domestic policies, but also to face the dangerous society of oppression in our daily lives. It is very painful to face violence. Speaking of oppression or using words such as sexism or racism can often result in people feeling guilty or hurt or reacting defensively. Most of us benefit from some form of advantage; most of us suffer from inequity of one or more kinds, from one or more sources. because oppression distorts the power dynamics between us, and as a result, damages and divides, us it is harmful to everyone.

There is a need to end the institution of the oppression which is harming the society but none of us alone has the power to end the institutions of discrimination. It is both the individual and the community that together offer a combined challenge to these forms of discrimination that lead to the social and political changes that benefit us all. In India, caste is serious matter. If you are a Hindu, you cannot change your religion and you cannot change your caste: you are born a Hindu and you are born into a caste.

In Indian History it has been observed that caste decides the work you and your parents do. An untouchable now called Dalit, Dalit means downtrodden will usually be occupied in caste-ordained occupations that are unclean and also known as “untouchables”, they are a mixed population of numerous caste groups all over South Asia. The highest caste, the Brahmin was born earlier than a Kshatriya (warriors) out of the mouth of Lord Brahma. Brahmin will be employed in reading and writing-associated ventures. The Kshatriya (warriors) came out the next from the arms of the same God indulge in warrior and the Vaishya were third in the row that sprang out of the thighs of this supreme creator, they do the business activity. Finally Shudras appeared from the feet of Brahma to espouse the cause of servitude. The myth behind birth of castes out of mouth, arms, thighs and feet of the Lord Untouchables stood at the bottom to comply with the commands of all the three castes ranked in order. One can fight oppression with violence or one can fight oppression with education. Although the caste system has been abolished under the Indian constitution, there is still wide spread discrimination and prejudice against Dalits, particularly women. Dalits are frequently denied such basic rights as education, housing, property, freedom of religion, choice of employment and fair treatment before the law.

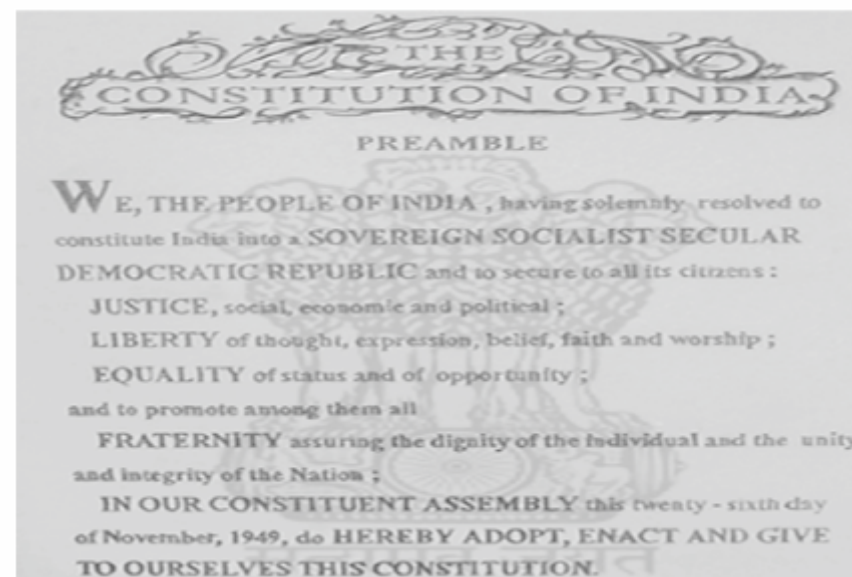
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In rural India, where caste origins are more apparent and Dalits often remain excluded from local religious activities, many elite class believe that Dalits will pollute the temples if they enter in sacred places.

Oppression is the devil of all society which needs to be removed. Oppression can be experienced through many sources, such as Racism, Sexism, Classism, Ageism, etc. Whatever the origin of the tradition of the caste system or varanashram in Hinduism – the tradition as defined by Manu or the tradition engendered over the years by serfdom that is supposed to have given birth to the sophisticated structure of casteism – the fact remains that casteism has emerged as a form of cursed human bondage. “The sweeper,” remarks Forster, “is worse off than a slave, for the slave may change his master and his duties may even become free, but the sweeper is bound for ever, born into a state from which he cannot escape and where he is excluded from social intercourse and the consolations of his religion”. (*Forster Preface v.viii Untouchable by Mulk Raj Anand: 1964*)

We are fond of hearing statements of wisdom like India being the biggest democracy in the world today. But millions and millions of Sudras and Dalits and untouchables in India did not have much to rejoice for a long time in this biggest democracy. It is true that Dr. B R Ambedkar, and other founding fathers of the Indian constitution crusading for the rights of the Indian untouchables saw to it that Indian constitution through its preamble commits itself to secure to all its citizens:



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And it is also true that Indian constitution through article 17 abolishes untouchability while declaring, "Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is prohibited. The enforcement of any disability arising out of 'untouchability' shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law." But the bitter reality is that in spite of these pious and sacred declarations, the wretched of the peer earth in this country; the untouchables have and often continue to suffer open and blatant discrimination. The year 2001 report of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes brings out that in comparison to the year 1999 when 27561 cases were filed under the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes Act, in the year 2000 this number increased to 28441. This fact must not be missed here that these figures in no way fully represent the horrendous ground reality. It is a minuscule minority of the persecuted Dalits, which dares to file complaints against persecution. Many studies and reports are available which clearly show that in very large number of cases either the caste discrimination is tolerated as a fact of life or official machinery in collusion with high caste tormentors is able to hush up the complaints. (*Undoing India The RSS way*: 2002 70)

President of India, KR Narayanan in his Republic Day address of 2001 had to concede, "Untouchability has been abolished by law but shades of it remain in the ingrained attitudes nurtured by the caste system." (*Untouchables in Manu's India*: #2004 12)

According to Ambedkar it is urged in some quarters that whatever tests are applied for ascertaining the liberation untouchable classes they must be applied uniformly all over India. In this connection, I desire to point out that in a matter of this sort it would hardly be appropriate to apply the same test or tests all over India. India is not a single homogeneous country. It is veritably a continent. The various provinces are marked by extreme diversity of conditions and there aren't uniform conditions races or language. Owing relatively little cultural of communication each province has evolved along its own lines with its own strange manners and modes of social life. In such circumstances the degree of regularity with which most of the tests of untouchability are found to apply all over India is indeed remarkable. For Instance, bar against temple entry exist

everywhere in India. Even the test of well water and pollution by touch apply in every province, although not with the same inflexibility everywhere. But to insist on absolute uniformity in a system like that of untouchability which after all is a matter of social behavior and which must therefore vary with the circumstances of each province and also of each individual is simply to trifle with the problem." (*On the Depressed Classes*: May 1, 1932)

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