



INCLUSIVE QUALITY EDUCATION: UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEMS OF MINORITY AND DALITS

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ABSTRACT

Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong opportunities for all. The education institutions must enable all students of various caste, creed and colour to learn and participate equally. Inclusive education is an approach that considers how to change education system to respond to the diversity of learners for high qualitative education. Dalit is a constructive identity, which is a comprehensive term comprising the scheduled castes and tribes. Dalit implies those who have been broken and ground down by those above them in the social hierarchy in a deliberate and active way. There is in the word itself an inherent denial of pollution, karma and justified caste hierarchy. History suggests that working people, landless, poor peasant women who were exploited and systematically, institutionally deprived of their civil, political, economic, social, religion and cultural rights in every aspect of life. Noble men were deeply concerned about the plight of the untouchables and fought against all the unjust divisions in society. Their attempts to assert their rights have often met with the strong resistance from the higher castes, resulting inhuman torture and atrocities. Discriminated on the account of various factors the Dalits are victims of society. Long suppressed into submission and silence these have emerged out of the shadows of centuries of subjugation. Inspired by revolutionary social activists they have now given a voice to their identity through literature of their own. An individual who does not find an outlet for his/her tears, fears, anguish, anger and for whom identity becomes a struggle to survive with dignity, justice and equality for daily struggle for existence as the repressed, downtrodden and exploited will certainly come forward to change the spirit. We know that poor need courage, the life of people left neglected and made to suffer by society, they need courage to survive, to endure, to fight by fitting the unfit to survive better. In the present paper, a few of these motions will be analysed to bring a focus on the specific area of Dalit consciousness with emancipation oriented spirit. Discrimination at school, office, gathering and religious places will be highlighted. It will also highlight the pathway out of darkness towards the dawn of knowledge. It is to make the society aware of its hidden, dark truths that need to be confronted to bring out the change into a better future.

DR. BABURAM SWAMI

1Page



INTRODUCTION

The title suggests that ‘inclusive’ means, “including much or everything. It is including or dealing with all or nearly all elements or aspects of something. It is relating to or denoting a system of education in which students of all abilities from an area are educated in a comprehensive school or college. It is for showing extensive understanding comprehensive knowledge. An examination or series of examination covering the entire field of major study, given to a student in the years of graduate or under-graduate study. It also suggests a wide range of people, things, ideas etcⁱ. Here, the ‘towards’ means in which direction education system in Tripura is going in comprehensive way. ‘Quality Education’ means, “a good quality education is one that provides all learners with capabilities they require to become economically productive, develop sustainable livelihood, contribute to peaceful and democratic societies and enhance individual well-being.” It is to prosper. It allows students to align and integrate fully with their communities and access a range of services across sectors designed to support educationally, socially, morally, culturally and ethically. It is to determine the facts. In this sense, we must understand the problems of Dalits and Marginalised.

Dalit

As per Oxford dictionary Dalit means, “in the traditional Indian caste system a member of the caste that is considered the lowest and that has the fewest advantages.”ⁱⁱ Dalit means, crushed, ground, split degraded etc. and describes the living conditions for centuries of a large group of people in India; metaphorically, it extends to the meaning of oppressed, exploited, hated, rejected, tortured, dejected, deprived, neglected, ignored and so on, and has been accepted and assimilated into the modern Dalit vocabulary in preference to the Gandhian Harijan. Gandhi thought of the untouchables as an intrinsic part of the Hindu community. The appellation of Harijan or people of Hari; gave them in his eyes, a special place as God’s chosen people.ⁱⁱⁱ Dalit means broken people. (Sanskrit, Hebrew, Latin) A culture accommodative history resistance for justice, equality and peace strongly believes in equality, liberty and fraternity. A sense of culture with a balance between nature and human democratic principles based on consensus respect for women recognition and adoration of ancestors first used in modern Indian literature by Phule, Dalit Panthers popularised in 1970s with it anti-caste, anti-class movement.

Marginalisation

“Tripura is the proud mother of remarkable traditional cultural heritage of Indo-Aryans and Indo-Mongolians like the Bengali and the Tripuris, the Reangs, the Jamatias, the Notias, the Kukes, the Halams, the Chakmas, the Moghs, the Lusais and other tribes. They play

DR. BABURAM SWAMI

2P a g e



prominent part in preserving the old cultural heritage. Hill tribes maintained commercial contact with the plains of Assam and Bengal. They and other minorities were aware of all these socio- economic- moral- cultural and literary values of India. They know Indian god and goddesses very well. Northeast India is always looking forward for development. They feel that we are treated differently for socially, physically, geographically, economically, linguistically, culturally and morally and community, religion, caste, creed and culture.^{iv} Marginalisation engenders further marginalisation. Ours is land highly rich cultural heritage. Mother India is pluralistic composite culture that has been enjoying all high tributes and appreciation from the dawn of world civilisation. Unity in diversity is mother India's virtue. Mother India is rich in art, culture and literature. Our state is proud mother of remarkable traditional culture heritage of Bengali and Indo- Mongloits.^v We are social animal and interacts with persons of socio-economical-moral-cultural-ethical-religious and behavioural values.

*"In the beginning, there was no centre.
In the beginning, there was no margin
In the beginning, there was no margin, for there was no centre?
If there was no margin, how did centre come into existence?
Then what existed before margin and centre?
There must have been something, for there can never be nothing."^{vi}*

To be marginalised is to be forced to occupy the sides or fringes and thus not be at the centre of things. In the social environment, too, groups of people or communities may have the experience of being excluded. Their marginalisation can be because they speak a different language, follow different customs or belong to a different religious group from the majority community. They may also feel marginalised because they are poor, considered to be of 'low' social status and viewed as being less human than others. Sometimes, marginalised groups are viewed with hostility and fear. This sense of difference and exclusion leads to communities not having access to resources and opportunities and in their inability to assert their rights. They experience a sense of disadvantage and powerlessness vis-a-vis more powerful and dominant sections of society who own land, are wealthy, better educated and politically powerful. Thus, marginalisation is seldom experienced in one sphere. Economic, social, cultural and political factors work together to make certain groups in society feel marginalised.

Adivasis

The term literally means 'original inhabitants' – are communities who lived, and often continue to live, in close association with forests. Around 8 per cent of India's population is Adivasi and many of India's most important mining and industrial centres are located in Adivasi areas. Adivasis are not a homogeneous population: there are over 500 different

DR. BABURAM SWAMI

3P a g e



Adivasi groups in India. Adivasi societies are also most distinctive because there is often very little hierarchy among them. This makes them radically different from communities organised around principles of jati-varna (caste) or those that were ruled by kings.

Adivasis and Stereotyping

In India, we usually ‘showcase’ Adivasi communities in a specified way. Thus, during school functions or other official events or in books and movies, Adivasis are invariably portrayed in very stereotypical ways – in colourful costumes, headgear and through their dancing. Besides this, we seem to know very little about the realities of their lives. This often wrongly leads to people believing that they are exotic, primitive and backward. Often Adivasis are blamed for their lack of advancement as they are believed to be resistant to change or new ideas.

Adivasis and Development

Forests covered the major part of our country till the nineteenth century and the Adivasis had a deep knowledge of, access to, as well as control over most of these vast tracts at least till the middle of the nineteenth century. This meant that they were not ruled by large states and empires. Instead, often empires heavily depended on Adivasis for the crucial access to forest resources. In the precolonial world, they were traditionally ranged hunter gatherers and nomads and lived by shifting agriculture and cultivating in one place. Although these remain, for the past 200 years Adivasis have been increasingly forced – through economic changes, forest policies and political force applied by the State and private industry – to migrate to lives as workers in plantations, at construction sites, in industries and as domestic workers. For the first time in history, they do not control or have much direct access to the forest territories. Adivasis have also lived in areas that are rich in minerals and other natural resources. These are taken over for mining and other large industrial projects.

Losing their lands and access to the forest means that tribal lose their main sources of livelihood and food. Having gradually lost access to their traditional homelands, many Adivasis have migrated to cities in search of work where they are employed for very low wages in local industries or at building or construction sites. They, thus, get caught in a cycle of poverty and deprivation. 45 per cent of tribal groups in rural areas and 35 per cent in urban areas live below the poverty line. This leads to deprivation in other areas. Many tribal children are malnourished. Literacy rates among tribal are also very low.

Minorities and Marginalisation

The term minority is most commonly used to refer to communities that are numerically small in relation to the rest of the population. However, it is a concept that goes well beyond numbers. It encompasses issues of power, access to resources and has social and cultural

DR. BABURAM SWAMI

4P a g e



dimensions. The Indian Constitution recognised that the culture of the majority influences the way in which society and government might express themselves. In such cases, size can be a disadvantage and lead to the marginalisation of the relatively smaller communities. Thus, safeguards are needed to protect minority communities against the possibility of being culturally dominated by the majority. They also protect them against any discrimination and disadvantage that they may face. Given certain conditions, communities that are small relative to the rest of society may feel insecure about their lives, assets and well-being. This sense of insecurity may get accentuated if the relations between the minority and majority communities are fraught. The Constitution provides these safeguards because it is committed to protecting India's cultural diversity and promoting equality as well as justice. Every citizen of India can approach the courts if they believe that their Fundamental Rights have been violated.

Dalit Movements:

The Scheduled Castes are known as harijnas (children of God) a term coined by Mahatma Gandhi in 1933. The Mahar movement of Maharashtra has been all India movement. Dr Ambedkar was an all India leader. While bargaining with the British and the caste he represented all the Dalit of the country but his role in mobilizing the SCs outside Maharashtra is not documented. There is no full-fledged study or even an anthology giving information about various SC movements in different parts of the country in colonial and post-colonial period. The main issues around which most of the Dalit movements have been centered in the colonial and post-colonial periods are confined to the problem of untouchability. They launched movements for maintaining or increasing reservations in political offices, government jobs and welfare programmes.

Ghanshyam Shah classifies the Dalit movements into reformative and alternative movements. The former tries to reform the caste system to solve the problem of untouchability. The alternative movement attempts to create an alternative socio-cultural structure by conversion to some other religion or by acquiring education, economic status and political power. Both types of movements use political means to attain their objectives. The reformative movements are further divided into Bhakti movements, neo-Vedantik movements and Sanskritisation movements.

The alternative movements are divided into the conversion movement and the religious or secular movement. The latter includes the movement related to economic issues. In the context of Dalit identity and ideology Shah has classified Dalit movements into movements within cultural consensus, competing ideology and non-Hindu identity. In the 1990s with the increased political participation in elections and success of Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh some scholars consider their mobilization as a new political movement of the Dalits.



Bhakti movement in 15th century developed two traditions of saguna and nirguna. The former believes in the form of God mostly Vishnu or Shiv relating to the Vaishnavite or Shaivaite traditions. It preaches equality among all the castes though it subscribes to the varnashram dharma and the caste social order. The devotees of Nirguna believe in formless universal God. Ravidas and Kabir are the major figures of this tradition. It became more popular among the Dalits in urban areas in the early 20th century as it provided the possibility of salvation for all. It promised social equality.

Neo-vedantik movement was initiated by Hindu religious and social reformers. These movements attempted to remove untouchability by taking them into the fold of the caste system. Dayanand Sarawati the founder of Arya Samaj believed that the caste system was a political institution created by the rulers for the common good of society and not a natural or religious distinction. Satish Kumar Sharma's book Social Movements and Social Change is the only full-fledged study which examines the relationship between the Arya Samaj and the untouchables. The study is confined to Punjab only but some of the observations are relevant for other part of the country as well. Arya Samaj was against the political movements of the untouchables. It went against any move initiated by the untouchables for their solidarity and integration.

The neo-Vedantic movements and non-Brahmin movements played an important catalytic role in developing anti-caste or anti Hinduism Dalit movements in some parts of the country. The Satyashodhak Samaj and the self-respect movements in Maharashtra and the Tamil Nadu, the Adhi Dharma and Adi Andhra movement in Bengal and Adi-Hindu movement in Uttar Pradesh are important anti-untouchability movements which were launched in the last quarter of the 19th and the early part of 20th century.

A section of untouchables who could improve their economic condition either by abandoning or continuing their traditional occupations launched struggles for higher status in the caste hierarchy. They followed Sanskritic norms and rituals. They tried to justify their claim to a higher social status in the caste hierarchy by inventing suitable mythologies. The Shanars or Nadars of Tamil Nadu however have crossed the boundary of untouchability. The Iravas of Kerala have also blurred if not completely -destroyed, the line of untouchability. The Nadars organized movements in the late 19th century against the civic disabilities they suffered. They formed their caste organization in 1903. Accordingly, the low social status of the Iravas is due to their low social and religious practices. The association launched activities for Sanskritising the norms and customs of the Iravas. They launched a Satyagraha for temple entry in the 1920s. They bargained with a government for economic opportunities and political positions.

Dalits Demand for Separate Electorate

DR. BABURAM SWAMI

6P a g e



The Dalits demanded a separate electorate in the 1930s which led to a conflict between Ambedkar and Gandhi. In the early 1930s Ambedkar concluded that the only way of improving the status of the untouchables was to renounce the Hindu religion. He found that Buddhism was appropriate as an alternative religion for the untouchables. He preferred Buddhism because it was an indigenous Indian religion of equality; a religion which was anti-caste and Anti Brahmin. Ambedkar and his followers were converted to Buddhism in 1956. The movement for conversion to Buddhism has spread Dalit consciousness irrespective of whether Dalits became Buddhist or not. The Dalits of Maharashtra launched the Dalit Panther Movement in the early 1970s. Initially it was confined to the urban areas of Maharashtra not it spread to Gujarat, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and other states.

Dalits Migration

There are several local movements in which Dalits migrated from their villages protesting discrimination and atrocities. In the 1980s there were five such incidents. Desai and Maheria document one of the micro-level movements. In protest torture and beating the Dalits of the village Sambarda undertook refugees from their native village and camped in the open before the district collector office for 131 days in 1989. Their demand was for alternative settlement where their life and dignity will be secured. They wanted a concrete solution: alternative land to protect their dignity. They succeeded in their mission against all odds and collusion between the ruling elite and vested interests. The village level movements succeeded in mobilizing Dalits of different parts of Gujarat.

Dalit Demand for Identity and Reservation

Assertion for Dalit identity has almost become a central issue of Dalit movement. This involves local level collective action against discrimination and atrocities. Statues of Dr Ambedkar are found not only in urban Dalit localities but also in many villages where their number is large. Dalits contribute to installing Ambedkar statues in their neighbourhood. They struggle to get a piece of land from local authorities to install the statue. The statues and photos of Dr Ambedkar are an expression of Dalit consciousness and their assertion for identity.

The Dalit movements are dominated by their middle class raising issues related to identity and reservations of government jobs and political positions. There is widespread local level assertion against the practice of untouchability and discrimination. Their struggles have brought Dalits on the agenda of mainstream politics. In academic circles the movements have forced a section of intellectuals to critically review not only Indian traditions and culture but also the paradigms of modernity and Marxism. They have exploded number of myths created by Brahmanical ideology. The Dalit movements have also successfully built up a good deal

DR. BABURAM SWAMI

7 Page



of pressure on the ruling classes. However, several scholars and activists feel that Dalits have been reduced to a pressure group within the mainstream politics.

A major anti-touch ability movement was launched by Dr Ambedkar in the 1920s in Maharashtra. He saw the opportunity and possibility of advancement for the untouchables using political means to achieve social and economic equality with the highest classes in modern society. He organized the independent labour party on secular lines for protecting the interests of the labouring classes.

Dalit Problems

Dalit Problems are many. They are landless labourers and houseless living in a cluster huts or in slums. Their poor economy and illiteracy have forced them to live in misery. Untouchability is an age-old practice which is inhuman in the name of religion. Most of the bonded labourers are Dalits.

The reasons for the bonded labour system are inequality, illiteracy and unemployment existing in the society which has resulted in poverty. Loans borrowed to celebrate marriage, festivals and to avoid starvation are some of the reasons for this system. Bonded labourers are landless and houseless. They live in the place provided by landlords totally under their control. Dalit are harassed, threatened to withdraw their complaints in favour of landlords. Even judicial liberation of bonded labour is eyewash.

Dalit Sangarsh Samiti

Dalit educated employees and students started an organization in 1974 called Karnataka Dalit Sangarsh Samiti. In the early days, it organized protest marches and arranged conventions of Dalit students and Dalit writers. Many social problems and land disputes were taken on top priority. They also did dharnas in front of Dalit MLAs and MPs against their inaction to stop atrocities on Dalits. It is a broad based, mass based and cadre based organization. In 1982 the Dalit Sangarsh Samiti workers actively participated in the campaign and worked for the defeat of some prominent Dalit leaders.

CHALLENGES IN EDUCATION:

Social oppression, political exploitation, economically deprived & culturally dominated. Menial job, service provider, facilitator untouchables, asparshiya, depressed classes, harijans, etc. the 15% reservation in Kendriya Vidyalaya, also reservation based on the population GOI also reserved 27% in Higher Education, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in primary classes, middle classes (I-VIII) is 71.86%, 38% Government schools, Dalits children have separate sitting arrangements. 20% Dalit children are not permitted to access drinking water

DR. BABURAM SWAMI

8P a g e



from the same source. Dropout at primary stage (I-V) – 36.56%, Dropout at middle stage (VI-VIII) – 59.42%, Dropout at secondary stage (IX-XII) – 73.13% (MoHR), Years Non-SC/STs CGAP Trends of Literacy rates – a comparison.

Problems & Issues Dalit experienced

Access to Education (The Enrolment), Retention in School (Problem of drop out), Educational Provisions (environment with school and outside), Policy problems, Analysis of Issues High level of enrolment as per government data but the data suggests that the higher the class the lesser the level of drop outs Quality of education Problems compelling children to drop out (within or outside). Social exclusion in education exists. Access to Education Dalit parents are not welcomed to the schools, Several prejudices and biases against Dalit community continue to be practiced, Discriminatory attitudes, body languages, approaches of teachers, Mid-day meal and untouchability practices, Economic issues and efforts to resolve it, denial of admission on various grounds, Retention in School, segregation in sitting arrangements, children being asked to perform tasks traditionally done by Dalits (eg: sweeping the school grounds, classrooms, bringing water for teachers etc.), in most of the classroom situations, Dalit children sit on the back seats, In many states the reports of untouchability in drinking water and mid- day meal scheme have been documented,

Faulty Educational Support

There are many provisions for encouraging Dalit children to study like scholarships, uniforms, books, mid-day meal (for all) etc. these are not in proportion to the population of Dalit children's. The access to these resources takes lot of pain and majority do not get and therefore give up midway. Even if it reaches to them, an insufficiency prevails. Dalit parents are treated inhumanly by administration. Many a times these resources are not provided to Dalit children. There is either delay or nothing is provided. In any country, the universities and colleges are not an academic cloister only, but are a major force in modern society- vital to industry, agriculture, medicine, governance, social health and welfare. It is the major producer in what can be called the knowledge industry and crucial as such to economic and social progress. However, these educational spaces, often, are monopolized by the elites or dominant sections, permeate with their socio-cultural norms and used as a powerful vehicle for their continuous hegemonizing in the society. These sections try to guard these spaces from intrusion by outsiders with utmost zeal. In our country, the reservation policy for SC/ST students has been instrumental in providing an entry point to a few Dalit students in universities and government-owned professional colleges but the country has singularly failed to attract them from the hostility, prejudices and discrimination occurring due to institutionalized casteism from within these institutions.



Generations of Dalit students have graduated or dropped out from such institutions, silently suffering from caste-based abuses and discrimination, without ever raising their voices. For many of them, it has been an inescapable fact which they must bear, to get a degree and a better future. The fact is that the caste-based hostility, prejudices and alienation for Dalit students increase in proportion with the name aura and the All India nature of the educational institutions. Most of these institutions lack diversity in terms of social composition of faculties as well as students and are monopolized by one caste due to historical reasons and they take every precaution to perpetuate their hold there. Not only caste but sub-castes and gotras also play a very important role in the appointment of the faculties as well as of other administrative posts. Given the autonomous nature of such institutions, there is no accountability what so ever.

Policy Issues

Trends and tendencies of universalisation, Schools situated in non-Dalit locality, Non-Dalits owe those schools not of Dalits, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) does not have any specific program for Dalit children. Ignoring the issues of untouchability and discrimination in education. A culture of non-implementation. A culture of dominance and violence, A culture of rule of the society. How do we look understand and address the question of Dalit Rights to Education, in the wake of globalisation? (week state, corporates, market, commodity, consumption, surplus, etc.) when the country itself has acquired a communal character? (Saffronisation, new syllabus, spreading hatred against indigenious and minorities, gender-biased, etc.) | when the country itself is casteist in nature? (non-preparedness to address the core issue of caste, freedom, wisdom, attitude towards similar groups) | when the entire phase of planned development in the post- independence era has failed to address the questions of marginalised? (development, upward mobility, subsistent economy, etc.), Possible way outs from co-option to co-operation; (from discriminatory educational patterns to inclusive one). From tokenism to Dalit agenda (shift in educational politics with special focus on Dalit girl education), Affirmation of identity (pro-human learning needs to be promoted), Towards a larger common agenda (Universalisation of Education with specific focus on Dalits), Rebuilding the culture of réistance (include history of Dalit leaders and stalwarts as part of educational curriculum), Alliance building with other marginalised and oppressed groups (history of oppression based on caste, tribe, gender, occupation should be exposed), The dominant current in sociological studies of the Dalit movement views Dalit protest as a necessary outcome of an obscurantist Hindu tradition with its deep-rooted prejudice against the dalits. It therefore assumes that the movement is limited to achieving the objectives of advance in socio-economic, civic and political fields within the existing order, without seeking a transformation of that society.



Civil society also treats them with awe, seeing them, as they do, as giants among mediocre. The only aberration to such an environment is the Constitutional provision of reservation for Dalit students. The reservation policy is something which the caste-Hindus could not stop from coming into force, the fall-out of which is that they consider Dalits as an intrusion in their legitimate private space and hence both caste-Hindu students as well as faculty members create an extremely hostile environment for students entering in these institutions through reservation.

However, the biggest impact of such institutionalized casteism is on the psyche of Dalit students. Dalit students, being branded as inefficient and non-meritorious, often internalize these prejudices and develop low self-confidence for the rest of their lives. On the one hand, silence on caste and caste-based atrocities in education curricula and media discourses lure Dalit students to think that higher education would be free of the caste virus, because of which, Dalit students are least prepared to tackle the reality of casteism in these campuses; on the other hand, the acidic and biased reservation debates generated by media often plays havoc with their self-respect and dignity.

Both these factors lead Dalit students to a state of mind where, as soon as one enters these places of higher education, opens an outsider non-meritorious and hence an undeserving student till the end of the course. He/She hardly mixes with the rest of students and remains wary of sharing her troubles with the rest of the Dalit students, as that will be deemed as playing politics and spreading casteism in an otherwise pure and sacred temple of Goddess Saraswati.

Need for a Dalit Student Movement

Despite glaring incidents of caste-based harassment, it is a pity that a strong and concerted movement of Dalit students has not come up till now. No amount of government provisions can solve the matter or induce change of heart of the caste-Hindu students as well as faculty and administration. The anti-Dalit environment of the higher education system in India can only be countered through organized resistance from Dalit students. There are different Dalit students' groups which are active in various universities and colleges but they are not very effective in the face of the grave nature of problems faced by Dalit students. I would like to invoke all of you-

*“mere sine me naa sahi, tere sine me hi sahi
Aag to magar aag he, aag jalani chahiye”.*

Besides, they have absolutely no interaction with Dalit students' groups in other universities and colleges. This fact does not reflect on these groups, given their limited resources and their less privileged socio-cultural background; rather it shows the failure of the overall Dalit

DR. BABURAM SWAMI

11P a g e



movement in creating space for its youth. None of the Dalit rights groups or organizations has shown any inclination to fight against institutionalized casteism prevalent in higher education, apart from making some stray noises here and there, when the need of the hour is to organize Dalit students and involve them in fighting against hegemony prevalent in every sphere of the Indian society. I would invoke Tennyson to inspire and motivate you—

*“we may be weak by fate and time but strong in will,
To strive to seek to find and not to yield”*

A strong and vibrant Dalit student movement will not only become a platform for Dalit students to get organized and fight against cases of caste-based harassment in campuses, it will also infuse new blood in the over-all Dalit movement and become a training ground for committed, well informed and articulate leadership, deeply rooted in the community. The immense contribution of the Dalit Panthers movement in Maharashtra (1970s), though short lived, is a case in point. The Dalit Panthers movement was the result of frustration and resentment of Dalit students and youths, who organized themselves and fought against caste atrocities in Maharashtra. However, their main contribution remained in the field of literature and arts. A separate genre of literature highlighting casteism and the resistance shown by the Dalits was born in Maharashtra, which facilitated the growth of such literature across the country later. I would invoke John Milton to inspire and motivate you—

*“Awake arise, or be ever fallen,
What thou the field be lost
All is not lost, the unconquerable will..”*

Thorat committee report says AIIMS plagued by Caste Virus

Having stood first in a selection examination in lab medicine, Sukhbir Singh Badhal, a postgraduate from AIIMS should have got the more coveted of the two senior resident posts that were on offer at All India Institute of Medical Sciences. Except that, he subverted an unstated rule. He topped the general category although he belongs to Dalit community. He had no business to do so well, or so the AIIMS administration seems to have felt. It gave the coveted post in the main department of lab medicine to the second-rank holder in the general category, while Badhal was shunted to the trauma centre.

Umakant Nagar, another Dalit student, was allotted a room in Hostel 1. However, the caste-hindu students resented his presence in the wing and scrawled an abusive threat on his door. Since he refused to move out, he was repeatedly locked inside his room over five days. Each time, he had to call his friends from his mobile to get released. Subsequently, he was told that this harassment would stop only if he shifted to Hostel No 4 and 5.



Like Umakant, 29 other Dalit students were forced to shift in these hostels making them Dalit Ghettos. These are but a few of the many instances of untouchability and caste-based harassment in AIIMS brought out by a Committee headed by the Chairperson of University Grants Commission, Prof Sukh Deo Thorat. Since long, there had been several reports of caste-based harassment of Dalit students in this campus. However, the AIIMS administration refused to take any action and was itself found involved in creating a hostile environment for Dalit students.

On 12 September 2006, the Central Government constituted a three-member committee to consider the complaints of harassment of SC/ST students in AIIMS. However, the Committee had a tough time, as the AIIMS administration refused to cooperate and created obstacles in the inquiry. Thus, the Committee had to record the testimonies of Dalit students outside the campus.

On 5 May 2007, Thorat Committee submitted its report to the Central Government. Its findings clearly proved the prevalence of severe forms of caste-based harassment suffered by AIIMS Dalit students both from the faculty as well as the caste-hindu students. It mentioned that SC/ST students faced segregation in AIIMS hostels when it came to issues like allocation of rooms, sharing of dining facilities and participation in sports and cultural events.

The Committee interviewed 25 reserved-category students half their total number at the institute. Each of the 25 interviewed said that despite a ragging ban, they were humiliated when they had joined. They would call us to their rooms and order us tell us 10 reasons why you should get reservation if you do not they will beat you one Dalit student said in his testimony before the Committee. The Committee also confirmed the finding that Dalit students were bullied into vacating their hostel rooms, leading to an SC/ ST ghetto being formed on the two floors of Hostels 4 and 5. From the testimonies gathered it was clear that teachers ignored Dalit students in class and deliberately failed them in exams, especially the practical tests. Even in internship, they are harassing. Last year, out of seven students six were failed nearly by one or two marks. Dalit students are continuously agitating in AIIMS campus for justice but their voices remain far from being heard.

CONCLUSION

At last, I would like to conclude that they must be imbued with original ideas for the development of their personality by inculcating human values since, this is important need of the hour and then the rest will follow automatically. The poor need courage, the life of the people left neglected is made to suffer in society. They need courage to survive to endure, to fight the daily fight of survival and the assertion of the marginalised consciousness through literature is one fight more to make the society aware of its hidden, dark truths that need to confront to transform into a better and equalitarian tomorrow. The Dalits, the individuals, the

DR. BABURAM SWAMI

13P a g e



groups, the communities were marginalised either in the name of religion, race, region, caste, gender community and ideology. But this relation is temporary and short lived. The centre can subdue and suppress the Dalits and marginalised voices but can never silence them forever. Once they find their true voice they cease to be Dalit or marginalised. Now I would like to conclude with these lines that-

*In the end, there will be no margin,
In the end, there will be no centre,
In the end, there will be no play,
Without margin
Without centre*^{vii}

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