

17. THE TWO SEGREGATIONS OF CASTE AND SEX

The Indian people are the saddest on earth. They are so because they are also the poorest and the most diseased. Another equally important reason, however, consists in the peculiar bend their spirit has received, particularly during their recent history. They profess a philosophy of non-attachment, immaculate in its reasoning and more so in its insight, but practise the coarsest kind of attachment. They so cling to life that they prefer to live it on the lowest levels of misery rather than risk it in some great effort, and of greed of money and power, no people on earth gives a greater exhibition.

I am convinced that two segregations of caste and woman are primarily responsible for this decline of the spirit. These segregations have enough power to kill all capacity for adventure and joy.

All those who think that, with the removal of poverty through a modern economy, these segregations will automatically disappear make a big mistake. Poverty and these two segregations thrive on earth other's worms.

All war on poverty is a sham, unless it is, at the same time, a conscious and sustained war on these two segregations.

The President of the Indian Republic publicly bathed the feet of two hundred Brahmins in the holy city of Banaras. To bathe another's feet publicly is vulgar, to restrict this vulgar privilege to the caste of Brahmins should be a punishable offence, to include among this privileged caste a majority of no learning nor character is complete loss of discrimination, an inevitable accompaniment of the caste system and lunacy.

That the president could have indulged in this vulgar display is a merciless indictment of people like me who can

only chafe and fume in impotent wrath.

I will not highlight the two accomplices in this crime, who adorn places of power in Uttar Pradesh. One of them is childishly anxious to have Banaras recognise him as a Brahmin and the other has probably admitted defeat and is now confusing the lowest depths of Hinduism for its sublime peaks of contemplation and culture.

Banaras has, in recent years, bred a vice, which strives to accord other groups of the twice-born the status of the Brahmin, which derides the 'Brahmin by birth' for the advantage of what it has chosen to call the 'Brahmin by deed.' The addicts of this vice have a funny complex towards Brahmins, whom they either insult or worship. Such Baniyas and Kayasthas are totally unable to have a normal human relationship of equality with those who are born Brahmins.

I must record that I got the full story of this evil act from a Brahmin. He had been included among the two hundred. He was the only one to have shrunk away in horror at the minute, before he could become guilty of this fell act of having his feet bathed by the President of his Republic. His place was rapidly filled up by a substitute.

But I shall ever cherish this poor teacher of Sanskrit, the only man in this ghastly devil's play. It is only such men and women, who, although they are born as Brahmins, are preventing the engulfment of the whole country by the perverted anti-Brahminism of the south.

I warn such Brahmins of Banaras and elsewhere as are gloating over this debasement of the human spirit and of the Indian Republic. Evil acts and pleasure in them recoil.

To bathe another's feet on the ground that he is a Brahmin is to guarantee the continuance of the caste system, of poverty and sadness. From this to Nepal Baba and a pledged vote under the spell of Ganga water is a chain.

The spirit, of which such evil acts are born, can never plan the country's welfare nor adventure with joy. It will ever keep the vast millions lowly and submerged. It will deny them social

and economic equality, just as much as it denies them spiritual equality.

It cannot improve the country's agriculture or industry, for it is the kin of the dung-heap and the cesspool, which breed bugs and mosquitoes, although it may well use the D.D.T., around the precincts of the high caste rich. Bugs, mosquitoes, famine and public bathing of Brahmin's feet sustain one another. They also sustain an incest of the mind, an inbreeding in the realm of ideas, for the adventure of conversation among minds, engaged in varying occupations and born in different strata, dies out.

A black sadness prevails, for there is no novelty, no possibility of free conversation between the priestess and the shoemaker, the teacher and the laundress in a land, whose president bathes Brahmin's feet.

One may disagree with one's president or consider his ways queer, but one would like to respect him. To deserve such respect, the president must not violate the elementary rules of civil conduct.

I had once before had occasion to write an unpublished comment on the president's view of social relations between man and women, but he had not then completely lost my respect. He has done so now with this irrevocable act of brother killing brother, for the hands that publicly wash Brahmin's feet belong to legs that may kick the Sudra and the Harijan.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad may not worry yet whether he had the respect of my likes, for, if socialism and even democracy were not as impotent as they are today in India, the youth of Banaras would have been hurt to the core of its being and would have demonstrated in such mass as to make the display of this vulgarity impossible.

There must be yet some means to bring to the president and his U.P. accomplices the enormity of their offence. For the moment, I must repeat that he has lost my respect and of many millions like me.

I will not accuse the prime minister and his government of

weakness in permitting the president of the Republic to so debase himself publicly. My charge against him is profounder. The man, who can cleverly cover up his traces on this issue of the caste system, is by far the more mischievous.

Pandit Nehru is on record for having extolled what he chose to call the "Brahminic spirit of service." What Dr. Rajendra Prasad seeks to do by commission, Pandit Nehru achieves by omission.

Aside from general and airy fulminations against the caste system, it would be interesting to know what the prime minister has done to smash caste and to encourage fellowship among all.

One may apply a very small test. On the day that marriage between Sudra and Dvija is designated as a qualification, among others, for recruitment to the administration and the armed forces and refusal to interdine as a positive disqualification, the war on caste will begin in earnest. That day is yet to dawn.

I must make quite clear that marriage between Sudra and Dvija is not to be mixed up with marriages between Bania and Brahmin and so forth for they are fairly easy and within the fold.

A false cry of holy horror at such infringement of civil rights may be expected, as if civil rights are not infringed by this fell custom of restricting a human choice to hereditary groups. One may also expect derision at such a qualification of inter-marriage for government service. Every state has the right to strive for its security and cohesion and the dispelling of that black sadness from which all novelty has fled.

That has already brought me on to the segregation of woman from man. These two segregations of caste and sex are inter-related and sustain each other. All spark goes out of conversation and life and vital juices do not flow freely.

I was part of a coffee-house group of talkers one day, when someone suggested that it was such coffee-talk that bred the French revolution. I boiled with rage. There was not one Sudra

among us. There was not one woman among us. A dull, effete and insipid lot we were, cattle ever cudding yesterday's feed.

All politics in the country, Congress, Communist or Socialist, has one big area of national agreement, whether by design or through custom, and that is to keep down and disenfranchise the Sudra and the woman who constitute over three-fourths of our entire population.

The woman's problem is undoubtedly difficult. Her slavery to the kitchen is an abomination, and the stove that smokes horribly. She must be given a reasonable time-table for food and also a chimney that spirals the smoke away. She must indeed take part in the agitations against under-feeding and unemployment. But her problem also reaches beyond that.

Mrs. Shakuntala Srivastava has been writing a series of charming articles on the position of the Indian women and I am glad to note that she has overcome the usual feminist passion of piling it on men and is now willing to recognise that both men and women are guilty in varying measure. But she will have to travel further.

I remember the day when the platform wished to have her at an important conference and she refused to move from the gallery, but I knew her remedy. I had only to threaten to hold her by the arm and she moved docilely from the gallery to the platform.

The issue of what is virtue and what is sin can no longer be shirked. I believe that spirituality is absolute but morality is relative, and each age and even individual must discover a specific morality.

Of two women, one who has given birth to just one child in all her life, although an illegitimate one, and another who has produced half a dozen legitimate brats and more, who is the more decent and the more moral? Of two persons, a woman who is thrice divorced and has married a fourth time, and a man who marries a fourth time because his earlier wives have died one after another, who is the more decent and the more moral?

I do not deny that divorces and illegitimacy and the like are somewhat of a failure and monogamous but spontaneous loyalty is probably the standard to attain in man-woman relationships. But the standard is often missed in this as in other human spheres, when man or woman strives for perfection.

What then? I have no doubt that just one illegitimate child is heaps more decent than half a dozen legitimate brats. There is equally no doubt that the death of three wives or husband cannot all be due to accident, and an amount of neglect and penury must have obtained and such neglect is lot more indecent than the frictions which may have occasioned three or more separations.

These judgments are no longer of marginal value. They have acquired a universal significance because conditions relating to marriage and after are today sinful, if anything can be called a sin. A girl without a dowry is a person of no consequence, like a cow without her calf.

Parents have told me with tear-sodden eyes how their daughters are maltreated and sometime put to death if there is difficulty in paying out the arranged dowry in full. Just as there are agricultural situations in which a person earns more by leasing than by labouring, a less educated girl is superior to a better educated one, for her dowry is smaller.

India is perverted today; with all their talk of sex purity, the people are by and large dirty in their ideas of marriage and sex.

The giving and taking of dowry must, of course, be penalised, but a change has also to take place in the mind and its values. To arrange marriages on the sight of a photograph or in the nervous atmosphere of a cup of tea brought by a shrinking phantom is any day more ridiculous than the earlier marriages through the barber or the Brahmin. It is like buying a horse who is indeed brought before the buyer, but whose hoofs one may not touch nor closely examine the teeth.

There is no half way house. India will have to recover her ancient virility, which is another way of saying that she must become modern.

It is no responsibility of a parent to marry his or her daughter; the responsibility ends at providing a good education and good health. If a girl knocks around and elopes and mischances into illegitimacy, that is all part of the bargain to achieve normal relationships between man and woman and no stain at all.

But society is cruel. And women can be exceedingly cruel. It is annoying to see how married women behave and gossip about females, particularly if they are unmarried, who go about with different males. With such cruel minds, the segregation of man from woman will not end.

Sri Vinoba Bhave has been tempted to corrupt his estimable Bhoodan movement with unholy notions on birth-control and on the caste system or at least its surcharged allusions.

I believe that every couple who have produced three children should be sterilised and that facilities of sterilisation, or at least birth control, should be made available to every man or woman, married or unmarried, who does not wish to risk pregnancy.

Celibacy is generally a prison-house. Who has not met such imprisoned souls, whose virginity shackles them and who eagerly await a liberator?

Has not that imprisoned virgin, Mr. J.C. Kumarappa, given a public exhibition of his condition by praising Russian boys and girls for going about in separate packs, they were probably mass coquetting or mass courting without his knowledge, and has already expressed his yearning for a liberator of his soul?

It is time that young men and women revolted against such puerilities. They should ever remember that there are only two unpardonable crimes in the code of sexual conduct, rape and the telling of lies or breach of promise. There is also a third offence of causing pain or hurt to another, which they should avoid as far as possible.

How coarse life has become? Leaders of society are known to spend as much as fifty thousand rupees on the printing of wedding cards. The magnificence of their weddings consists

not in the amities of soul, which the marrying couple may have been able to explore, but in necklaces which are priced at twenty lakhs and saris at fifty thousand and more.

I ran into one such multi-millionaire at a tea party, who had the added impertinence to tell me that such saris did not exist and I felt like sending him to the school of mink coats. Only once before years ago had I met this man, when he called on me and tried to flatter me for a whole two hours, for some naughty person had telephoned him to say that his factory would be blown up by my men for his wicked deals. He was coarse enough to suggest that he could be of some use to my party and, as I was not coarse enough to accept his offer in ransom for his misdeeds, he has never again repeated his generous impulses.

It is at moments like these when one is temporarily blinded into the evil temptation for the bomb and the acid bulb.

Religion, politics, business and publicity are all conspiring to preserve the slime that goes by the name of culture. This conspiracy of the status-quo is terrific in its power to spell infamy and death. I am perfectly certain that I am in for a still more horrible retaliation for whatever I have written, not necessarily directly or immediately.

When young men and women suffer infamy for their honesty, let them remember that this is the price they have to pay for clearing away the slime so that the waters may flow freely again.

There is no greater virtue today than to smash these abominable segregations of caste and sex. Let them only remember not to cause hurt or pain or be coarse, for the relationship between man and woman is of delicate texture. They may not always be able to avoid it. But the striving should never cease. Above all, dispel this black sadness, and adventure into joy.

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