



Shri Narayan Guru's Views on Caste Based Discrimination and Social Equality

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Abstract: *This research paper presents the Shri Narayan Guru's views on caste based discrimination and his effort to end this social evil and to establish equality among all human beings. Caste based discrimination is the curse of Indian Society and social reformers like Shri Narayan Guru proclaimed that India could not become a powerful and strong country without eradicating it. His views on this issue is totally different from his contemporaries. It is need of present time that we should study critically this concept. Caste based discrimination is totally against the sprit of Advait Vedant (Non-dualism) philosophy. The practice of untouchability based on caste is totally wrong and it's a crime against humanity as well as God because we believe that everything is created by God. Same essence of divinity is present in all humans we should respect this divinity. We are not going to trace the origin of caste based discrimination in any texts and it's effects on Indian society. It is nearly impossible to cover all the primary texts related with caste and all the teachings of our contemporary social reformers on caste system, caste discrimination and solutions in one research paper. It is not our purpose to go into the roots of caste system. Our concern here is the evil of inequality and exploitation it engenders across the entire spectrum of the Indian society, and the way Narayan Guru dealt with it. Our objective is to highlights Guru's commonsensical and spiritual methods for solving this problem.*

Keywords: *Caste, Varna, Jati, Discrimination, Untouchability, Equality, Oneness.*

1. INTRODUCTION

So many Great thinkers of India like Mahatma Phule, Swami Vivekanand, Babasaheb Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi, Naryan Guru and many others work for removal of the practice of caste discrimination (untouchability). But thier ideals are not fully realised yet. They wanted to free our country from such evil practices and for the realization of their dreams they had work very hard. Some of the Indian thinkers themselves experience practice of



untouchability, inequality. Peace and harmony in the world as well as will come only through equality, unity, brotherhood, love and respect. With true enlightenment a person will rise above the caste discrimination and untouchability. Unless our mental horizon and perception is broad we can't establish Kingdom of God (Ram Rajya) on this earth. Due to ignorance of people from past to nowadays are trying to establishing superiority of their caste and race.

Human being is a social animal and therefore he/she can't live alone. Man live in society and they work for their fulfillment of basic needs. In society they have to work together. And everyone is capable of performing a particular kind of work according to his/her quality, capacity and interest. This division of work on the basis of quality, capacity and interest is known as caste system. It is known as caturvarnavyavastha. It includes Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. For the healthy function of society there is a need of distribution of work according to ones quality and interest and it is also remember that every work has equal value. Therefore it is said that 'work is worship". But practice of untouchability is a dark stain on our society. We all are created by God as equal and therefore we should treat each other equally. We should know about what caste system is and how in later became caste discrimination.

If we want that our country should become developed in real sense then we should abolish inhuman practice of untouchability. By rejecting only religion our problem will not going to be solved, because it is a way of good life but practice of untouchability in the name of religion is totally unacceptable and we don't want this kind of practice in our society and we should reject this. If human being choose his/her profession for livelihood not according to his/her quality and interest but only to get only personal gains then he/she will definitely going to destroy himself/herself and society also.

There is a difference between caste and varna. Varna are only four in numbers namely Shudra, Vaishya, Kshatriya and Brahman. Castes are so many in India approximately more than four thousand. Varna is a vadic concept for the proper smooth functioning of the society with co-ordination and cooperation. Nowadays majority of discrimination is practised on basis of castes. Varna is based on the principle of each according to his worth, while caste is based on the principle of each according to his birth. Varna can be changed because it was flexible but now caste can't be changed because it has become rigid and have watertight compartment. Some thinkers hold that varna means colour and for some it represents hierarchical order.

We should try to give right type of education to the masses and try to make them aware about this inhuman practice. I simply call it(untouchability) a crime against God. Because He make us equal and therefore it is said that by birth we are all equal and all these discrimination, superiority, inferiority etc. are man made. According to the Advaita philosophy of Sri Adi Shankaracarya, Jeevatma (individual soul) is a spark of the Paramatma (universal soul). If all human beings are spark of Universal soul, how can there be difference between one man and another.

Caste system (caturvarnavyavastha) is essential for proper working of any society. Human being won't be able to live a peaceful life if there is no division of work. We are born as a human being therefore every one of us have a certain kind of duty towards our society and nation based on our qualities and interest. We will not achieve full development (material and spiritual) if we not follow division of work and stop practice of untouchability. It is only right type of education or we can say spiritual knowledge that can destroy this unethical practice of



caste discrimination. It is only through the knowledge of Advaita, Equality, Fraternity etc can end such kind of inhuman practices. According to Vedic philosophy, "God conveyed His message through His messengers that we all are His own creation. Does this message not enjoin us to live in unity, peace and harmony? We all are equal in His eyes. Why should we create unnecessary differences and manipulate things to act against God's design?"

Narayan Guru's life becomes a crusade against ignorance, poverty, exploitation and casteism in the name of religion and tradition. A sense of ultimate oneness is the basis of equality and social solidarity. If we are all able to experience this oneness that bound can prevent all conflicts; ethnic, racial, caste and religious. Narayan Guru considered education as the only means to human progress and prosperity and the supreme panacea for all social evils like superstitions and unhealthy traditions.

Narayan Guru consider caste something as unnatural, artificial and therefore unreal. Thus he proclaimed the word "One Caste, One Religion and One God". For Narayan Guru unethical and selfish enjoyment of desires by few leads to exploitation and discrimination. In contemporary world some people believe that they are superior in race, nation, religion and caste such feelings leads to prejudices, discrimination, conflict and genocide etc. causing gross miseries to the humanity. Narayan Guru certainly considered caste as curse on humanity, a cancer eating way the vitality of a society, add a stumbling block in the progress of the individual. For him caste have to be ignored. Any system that divides humanity into compartments is against the spirit of Advaita Vedanta of Shri Sankaracarya.

Sri Narayan Guru's great movement for equality and social justice was a silent bloodless revolution. Sri Narayan Guru considered education as the only means to human progress and prosperity and the supreme panacea for all social evils like superstitions and unhealthy traditions. Human nature is the reality. Brahmin and Shudra are ideas superimposed on this reality which is essentially One.

Through his twin poems Jati Mimamsa (Critique of Caste) and Jati Lakshanam (Characteristics of Caste) he expressed his views in practical terms. The gist of the first stanza are as follows: " All those have human qualities are human beings. Just as a cow's characteristics is bovinity, a man's distinguish feature is human quality." Second stanza goes like this: " One Caste, one Religion and One God fir all human beings. They have one form and are born in the same way difference there in none".

Narayan Guru once said "Man may differ in their faith, language and way of dressing but there can be no evil in inter dining and inter caste marriage because all belongs to the same kind of creation". He practiced this in his own life. In his all residencial school and ashram people from different caste were admitted. Following his example many so called high caste people use servant of so called lower caste people and later on they become their family members. Guru exposed the truth that basic desires of human beings like food, clothing, home, health, education, self respect are the same for all irrespective of individual's sex, caste, religion and nation. The unethical and selfish enjoyment of desires by a few leads to the discrimination and exploitation. Sri Narayan Guru said that all the human beings have same mind body and spirit like us therefore they have the same rights like us. He believed in happiness of all, equality of all, and freedom of all.

The Guru's awesome message that 'one caste one religion and one god for man' is most mentioned in society. The Guru did no longer say that caste should be violated or denied.



Rather, he cautioned that "Do not ask for caste and do not think" and that the thought of caste ought to leave. The grandeur of Guru lies right here in his nonviolent and bloodless revolution for bringing an intensive transformation in Kerala and in India as well. Guru adopted and accommodated students in Shivagiri and Advaita Ashram in Aluwaye for the propagation of Brahma Vidya and Vedanta without any consideration of caste, creed or religion.

Guru supported inter-caste marriages and inter-dining. "Whatever be the difference in the form of worship, dress, habits or language of man, they are of the same caste (jaathi) and hence there is no harm in intermarriages or in dining together". All human beings belong to the same community. Caste should not be mentioned anywhere. All men should live together as one caste. 'In substance, all religions are the same'. "He proclaimed that there was no distinction of Religion or God between human beings and called upon people to abstain from violence and religious conflicts to promote universal peace, harmony and prosperity", he added. All human beings are born from a mother. Brahmin and Paraya both are born in the same way. Hence they belong to the same Jathi, Narajathi (humankind)".

If we are able to experience oneness then that bond can prevent all conflicts like caste, racial and religious. Guru states that all things here are real and have equal status because they all have the same essence of one Brahman. According to Guru, our fragmentation on the basis of caste, race, language, nations, religion etc. are false and creation of ignorance. Guru says distinction like caste and race are artificial division and irrational with no scientific basis as all human beings belong to one single species called Homo Sapiens. The Guru's concept of human equality make us aware that of the fact that the inherent dignity and equal rights of all could be realised only when we are free from tyranny of ignorance, superstitions and prejudices.

Caste-discrimination forbids marriage between people of different caste-groups, and their cooking and dining together. Those of the lower caste were not to enter the houses of the upper caste people. Touching each other was considered to pollute those of the upper caste. In certain cases, even seeing each other, be it accidental, was counted as polluting. Even those of the lower caste had their own orthodoxy and sense of pollution and purity. Economically, those of the higher strata owned all landed properties and the others had to be satisfied with being workmen mainly in agriculture.

Many are the theories sociologists and psychologists put forth about the origin of this phenomenon. Whatever such theories, the undeniable fact is that the senseless caste-system and its discriminations existed and continue to exist as a social actuality, somewhat like a bad dream. Awakening the dreamer is the best and direct way to save him from a nightmare. Likewise, what is required to save the social integrity from this nightmarish dream of casteism and its ill-effects, is awaking it from the bad dream it is in. And that is exactly what Narayana Guru did.

Affirmative actions, though helpful to mitigate economic disparities to a certain extent, do not help get rid of casteism as a social evil. The positive actions the government resorts to are that of allowing special privileges such as free education, reservation in public jobs and democratic bodies and so on, to the under-privileged caste-groups. What actually happens as a result is that people of different castes organise themselves to gain strength to bargain for more and more such privileges and also to keep secure the ones already availed. Caste-identity eventually became more pronounced, more necessary, to the extent that it has a lot of



say even in political power-sharing. What was intended to be cast away thus became all the more firmly rooted, a situation somewhat like shouting for silence in a noisy crowd which only makes the scene all the more noisy.

Casteism basically is an evil social phenomenon caused by ignorance, both of the orthodox and the heterodox, both of the privileged and the under-privileged. Altogether, it is something negative in nature. Anything negative can be eradicated only through a negative way. The roots of casteism lie buried deeper than what social reforms can reach. Jati is the Sanskrit word for caste. Literally it means 'birth'. Jati is something that has no real existence, a baseless notion, a man-made social prejudice. The best way to eradicate this negative phenomenon has to be equally negative. The Guru therefore directed to ignore it conscientiously. Hence his directive, Do not ask caste, do not tell caste, do not think of caste'. A slow and steady educative process, this includes also doing away with references to caste in official records.

It is in the light of all this that we have to comprehend the connotations of his well-known dictum, 'One in kind, one in faith (religion), one in God is man'. The Guru does not deny outright jati in the scientific sense of 'kind', or 'species'. Therefore, instead of denying jati altogether, he says the entire human race belongs to one jati or kind. No different jatis are there, therefore, amongst human beings, but rather all belong to one jati.

Hinduism is criticised by many people because of this Varna and Jati vyavastha. But we have to accept that the caste and class system which is present everywhere nowadays is in distorted conditions. Originally it was pure and flexible and interchangeable. But problem is that people without knowing that there is a difference between System and Discrimination criticize Hinduism. This Varna vyavastha was originally for proper, smooth, harmonious, balanced and healthy functioning of the society but this 'vyavastha' changed into 'bheda' and all the chaos, disorder and all social evils started and this system turned rigid after changing the basis from work to birth of individuals. The practice of untouchability and other forms of discrimination is against humanity, God and Constitution of India. It's also against the real spirit of Hinduism and Advaita Vedanta of Sankaracarya. We need 'System' which is based on Quality, Capacity and Interest but we don't want 'Discrimination' and 'Untouchability' based on Birth of Humans.

Whether we accept or not but it's a naked truth that discrimination and untouchability exists physically in various forms in rural and mentally in urban areas of India. Rejection of Hinduism is not a lasting solution for this problem but we try to reform our society and heart of its people. Caturvarnyavastha is related with society and it is believed that a Brahmin represent Head, Kshatriya is Hands, Vaishya is Stomach and Shudra represent Feet. We all very well know that for the proper development and functioning of a man all these four parts must coordinate and cooperate with each other. If a person have no legs he/ she can't move and walk properly. Every man and every part is important and it has its own specific place and importance. In the same way if we want to develop our society both materially and spiritually then all the four class have to work together irrespective of superior or inferior caste which is depend on quality, capacity and interest and not on birth.



2. CONCLUSION

Varna vyavastha, caste system, discrimination and untouchability, are one of the most debated topic in India among common people and scholars in general. There is always tension, quarrel and debate between supporters of Varna and Jati and those who criticize it in general. We should use all our abilities and interest for making this world a better place for living through proper coordination and cooperation of everybody instead of wasting our potentialities and time on hatred, jealousy, greed, lust, inequality, discrimination on the basis of caste, religion and race. In the context of the current conditions in India today, the Guru's philosophy has a very strong relevance. The latest incidents of attacks on the dalits and other marginalized sections of the Indian people spotlight the need to adhere to the values propagated by means of Guru – 'the oneness of humanity'. For solving this evil inhuman practices of untouchability inequality and discrimination can only be permanently eradicated by Right Type Education which includes Religious Teachings, Sanskrit, Morality, Ethics, Humanity and Ideals of Our Indian Constitution like Liberty, Equality, Justice and Fraternity. We find that all our thinkers like Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Babasaheb Ambedkar, Narayan Guru, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule etc. all of them irrespective of their views on this issue said that this problem can be permanently solved by Right type of Education. I hope that this paper will serve the purpose for which it is intended.

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