

## Chapter-2

### *Why I am not a Hindu: A Collision of Ideas, Principles and Beliefs*

Indian society was divided by Aryans on the basis of *karma* to bring work efficiency in the society. A person, who was efficient in any kind of work, was having the right to switch to the related caste. There were no restrictions on the basis of caste. One was not bound to a particular caste but later Manu changed the focus from 'Karma' to 'Janma'. This created a complete shift in the society which further resulted in dominance of a particular group and exploitation of the marginalised group of the society.

In the present time, there are the mixed reactions about the change in the life of Dalits. On one side, social reforms, education and awareness have made the changes in the society but on the other hand sub-castes among Dalits have made it very difficult to come together and make this world a better place to live in.

The social structure in which I first became conscious of the world around me was a Kuruma social structure. My playmates, friends, and of course relatives, all belonged to the Kuruma caste. Occasionally the friendship circle extended to Goudaa boys and Kappu boys. We were friends because we were all part of the cattle-breeding youth. We took the cattle to the field and then began playing *chirra gone* (our cricket), *gooleelu* (a game with marbles), *dongaata* (a hide-and-seeK game), and so on. Surprisingly, whenever a Goudaa friend came to my house he would sit with us, but sit slightly apart; when we went to Kappu homes their parents would give us food but make us sit a little distance away. While eating we were not

supposed to touch each other. But later we could play together and drink together from the rivers and streams. (*Why I am Not a Hindu 2*)

These lines portray the contradictory life of Dalits who create distance from each other whereas Ilaiah only targets caste Hindus. These lines show as to how differences were there among Dalits also. Dalits started performing various tasks in the society and on the basis of these tasks their status got changed in the society. Those who decided to be farmers were having different status in the society than those who decided to skin the dead animals. There was a hierarchy of various tasks which were performed by Dalits. Those who chose works which were directly related to the day to day life of caste Hindus started attracting the attention of caste Hindus. This attention gave them more importance than other sub-castes among Dalits. They started considering themselves as caste Hindus and it created a rift among Dalits. These differences among Dalits became another reason of their backwardness and exploitation. Consequently, different groups of dalit population started establishing separate identities. Though they belonged to the same caste but sub-castes created a hierarchy among them and this hierarchy created huge differences among them. Children of those sub-castes used to play together, sit together and even go to same schools but they were not allowed to eat together. They worshipped different gods and goddess.

Every Dalitbahujan child learns at an early age that smallpox comes because Pochamma is angry. The rains are late because Polimeramma is angry. The village tank gets filled or does not get filled depending on the sympathies of Kattamaisamma. Crops are stolen by thieves because Potaraju is angry. For Kurumaas whether sheep and goats will proper depends on the attitude of Beerappa, a cattle-specific God. (*Why I am Not a Hindu 7*)

Dalits were having the status of outcastes in the society. They were excluded from all the social activities except serving other three castes. Hence they differentiated themselves on the religious grounds as well. They associated Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh with the upper castes and created their own gods and goddess. They worshipped their gods and goddesses with full devotion, showing intense faith in them. They recalled them in every good and bad time. This separation and creation of new gods and goddesses turned out to be a symbol of search for an identity different from caste Hindus. These gods and goddesses were looked down by the caste Hindus. They were not taken as replacements of the great trinity but accepted as negative powers.

In contrast to our skill-based vocabulary they learn words like Veda, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Purana, and so on. At an early age they hear names like Brahma, Vishnu, Rama, Krishna, Lakshmi, Saraswathi, Sita and Savithri. Their children are told the stories of these gods' heroism (mostly killing) and the goddesses femininity. Vishnu, for example, is shown to be reclining on a serpent, with Lakshmi at his feet, pressing them. (*Why I am Not a Hindu* 8)

These lines depict the picture of caste Hindu society and the development of a child's mind. Children of the upper castes are provided the understanding of the religion, gods and goddesses and their deeds. They are taught about the good and bad, gods and devils, and so on. They are made conscious of what they are and what is their status in the society and thus binaries are created. These binaries created a rift among various castes in the society during childhood. Caste Hindus associated themselves with the best in the hierarchy because of the status they have in the society. The depiction of their (caste

Hindus') gods and goddesses are portrayed ideally. Gods are portrayed as brave, intelligent and aggressive and goddesses are portrayed as devoted, faithful, feminine and defensive. On the other side, Pochamma, Maisamma and others are considered inferior because these goddesses are worshiped by Dalits.

Even a Brahmin family might talk about Pochamma, Maisamma or Ellamma, but not with the same respect as they would about Brahma, Vishnu, Maheshwara. For them Pochamma and Maisamma are 'Sudra' Goddess and supposed to be powerful but in bad, negative ways. A Pochamma according to them does not demand the respect that Lakshmi or Saraswathi do, because Lakshmi and Saraswathi are supposed to be ideal wives of ideal husbands, whereas no one knows who Pochamma's husband is, any more than they can name Maisamma's husband. (*Why I am Not a Hindu* 8)

These lines clarify the attitude of caste Hindus towards the gods and goddesses worshiped by Dalits. Caste Hindus also accepted the existence of these figures in Indian society but in a negative sense. They recalled them whenever they find themselves in tough conditions e.g. Pochamma is invoked when someone, in the house, suffers from smallpox. Even this invocation is derogatory. No caste Hindu child is named after these gods and goddess. But Dalits name their children after the names of these gods and goddesses.

These gods and goddesses were also considered inferior manner because of their gender roles. Caste Hindus do not give much respect to these regional goddesses because they perform those tasks which are considered to be trivial. They are not considered to be much brave, courageous and powerful. They compare these goddesses with Lakshmi and

Saraswathi. They perform their ideal duties of serving their husbands Brahma and Vishnu. But on the other hand Pochamma, Maisamma and Ellamma who save people from several diseases and epidemics are not portrayed as ideal goddesses because they don't have their husbands. Hence they are invoked only in those times when the problem is not considered to be serious. Dalits were never bothered about the husbands of these goddesses rather they took these goddesses as sacred powers among them.

Neo-Kshatriyas is a new group of Dalits who differentiated themselves from Dalits. They were treated differently by the caste Hindus. This different treatment was based on the works performed by the people belonging to different castes. Jobs were offered only to the people belonging to these castes. Hence they were trained just to follow the orders of caste Hindus. This was only reason which provided them a different space in the caste society.

The Maadigaa boys who were younger than me were jeetas (farm servants). Their family and cultural relations were very similar to ours. But what was different was that from childhood they were taught to be always fearfully obedient, addressing the young and the old of the so-called upper castes as ayya baanchan. While they were jeetas, at the age of five, they were supposed to look after the cattle and the buffalo and watch the crops. (*Why I am Not a Hindu* 10)

This is a depiction of caste Hindu mindset where they utilized Dalits for their benefits and even Dalits do follow their instructions. They nurture their children in such a manner that their mindset gets completely changed and they become mute followers of the authority. They get exploited in the hands of caste Hindus. They sow, cultivate and reap

their harvests, skin their dead animals and protect their fields. However, these tasks helped Dalits to earn their livelihood. Gradually, their economic condition got improved in comparison to others. This assimilation of two opposite castes created a rift among sub-castes of Dalits.

In fact brahminical culture eulogizes negative heroes and negative heroines. For example, Krishna who encourages one to kill one's own relatives is a hero and Arjuna who killed his relatives is a hero...In 'Sudra' waadas it is just the opposite. There are a number of real-life situations from which ideal heroes and heroines emerge. Their daily working interaction with nature provides the scope for their information. One who kills relatives, for whatever reason, and one who commits crimes, for whatever reason, becomes a crook. (*Why I am Not a Hindu* 17)

It portrays the understanding of the society by Dalits as well as caste Hindus. Here, sanctity, piousness and the authority of Indian epics is questioned. Though the sermons given by Krishna to Arjuna are considered to be pure to the Hindu society, Kancha Ilaiah criticizes Brahminical society for its false beliefs. He creates a sharp contrast between caste Hindu society and Dalit society. He portrays Brahmin culture as a culture based on false ideas where heroes belong to non-real life conditions and kill their relatives just to get private property. On the other hand, dalit culture and its heroes and heroines emerge from real life conditions. They do not raise weapons against their relatives and those who instigate them to do so are considered traitors. These descriptions show the sheer contrast between both groups of the society. Both have different ideologies, principles and beliefs.

These differences emerge only in the quest of different communal, religious, social or cultural identities.

For us, marriage is a human and a worldly affair that performs the human functions of production and procreation. This is clear from a proverb that our people use very frequently: *janta leenidee panta pandadi* ('without the couple, how can there be a crop?'). For Hindus, marriage is a sacred ritual divorced from all kinds of productive activity even notionally. Even in procreation the main intention is to produce a son who can pave the father's way to heaven. (*Why I am Not a Hindu* 20)

Marriage is social event that takes place mostly between two opposite genders. Marriage has its different meanings according to different castes. This paragraph provides the same description of marriage. Ilaiah provides a sharp contrast between the meaning and value of marriage between caste Hindus and dalits. Marriage becomes a process of production and procreation among dalits because their main focus remains restricted to their survival. On the other hand, caste Hindus associates marriage with a process to produce male child that can pave the way to '*moksha-prapti*' or '*swarga*'. Dalits are not bothered about going to heaven or hell because of their depiction in the society. They are depicted as sinful beings of the society who can never have place in heaven. On the other side, caste Hindus are considered to be pious in the Indian society. Hence, their only focus remains towards acquiring place in heaven after their death. Hence they associate their action in relation to hell and heaven.

Marriage again becomes a deciding factor of the idea of hell and heaven. Dalits take it as process of procreation and production of wealth to live their life properly. They also

take marriage as process of fulfilling physical need. Caste Hindus take it as process of producing male child but that is to get place in heaven. This stereotypical idea of getting place in hell or heaven has different connotations for dalits and non-dalits. After marriage caste Hindu women mostly remain dependent on their husbands to lead their life properly. But it is not a case with dalits. Dalit women are mostly self-dependent and they can perform those tasks which are supposed to be done by men.

In this society, the man is abnormally strong and the woman is abnormally weak. For example, a peasant woman can at times move out of her traditional role of seeding and weeding to plough the land: a Kurumaa woman can become a sheep-breeder in the absence of the man. A Brahmin woman, however, can never become a priest. A Dalitbahujan woman within her caste/class existence is very much a political being and an economic being. Whereas, a Brahmin woman is not. (*Why I am Not a Hindu* 27)

This paragraph is a collision of two different ideologies in the society. Brahminical society is depicted as a male dominated society whereas dalit society is portrayed as a society aspiring to negate any dominance of one gender over others. Dalit women are trained and skilled to gender-neutral tasks. They perform their gender roles as well as they can perform those tasks which are supposed to be performed by dalit men. They are depicted as self-dependent and stronger than caste Hindu women. Brahmin women are supposed to perform some fixed tasks and serve their husbands only. They are never supposed to perform those tasks which should be done by the males. Ilaiah creates a line of difference between dalits and caste Hindus to show that dalits were always different from caste Hindus and they have their own identity.



## **Neo-Kshatriyas and the beginning of Rift among Dalits**

Neo-Kshatriyas is a group of those dalit castes which has gradually raised its social and political status. These castes were those castes which earlier belonged to dalit category but they were very much different from dalits. They used to serve caste Hindus and earn their livelihood which provided them different treatment from rest of the dalits. To maintain this respect and status they differentiated themselves from other dalit castes.

In all south Indian villages (this may be true of North India too), the Kshatriya caste which handled the institution of state power has become dormant and a neo-Kshatriya force from the 'Sudra upper' castes have begun to emerge. In Andhra Pradesh, for example, the Reddies, Velamas and Kammas are increasingly coming to believe not only that they form a part of the Hindu religion but also that they are caste who have the right to insult others. (*Why I am Not a Hindu* 37)

Though neo-Kshatriyas were dalits but this group of Dalit castes was used to serve caste Hindus and it was the main reason that they were given preference over rest of the dalits. They did not want to lose either those jobs or the importance which they were receiving from the dominating people of the society. They trained their children in such a way that they started distancing themselves from dalits and started following caste Hindus and their beliefs. This division from their own caste took them away from their roots and it created differences among them. They emerged as a social and political power and dominated most of the institutes. The emergence of neo-Kshatriyas could not bring any kind of social or political change in the society. The attitude of caste Hindus did not change even after the rise of this group. Here, Kancha Ilaiah shifts the attention of the readers

towards the other side of the problem. He shows his dissatisfaction towards those groups which have forgotten their past and have lost belongingness to dalit identity and issues. By luck or pluck, they have raised their economic status but at the same time they have become averse to their own brethren.

Even in the national context, Brahmins have the monopoly over power structures in every sphere. The most powerful position in the village, that of the Patwari is even now a preserve of the Brahmins. The institutions that handle law and order are left to the neo-Kshatriyas. This gives the neo-Kshatriyas enormous control over caste divided village society. They use the power to acquire control over the land. However, the emergence of neo-Kshatriya political power did not in any way undermine the hegemonic control of Brahmins and Baniyas. (*Why I am Not a Hindu* 48)

Here, Ilaiah depicts the situation of neo-Kshatriyas in the society and the attitude of caste Hindus towards neo-Kshatriyas. Though neo-Kshatriyas were prospering in the society, they were no better than other dalits in the society. They get favour from caste Hindus just because they serve them and this favour has changed their mentality as well as status in the society. Neo-Kshatriyas were given less important jobs while the decisive jobs were retained by caste Hindus for themselves so that they can dominate the whole society. Though neo-Kshatriyas are presently participating in politics and other fields of society, they are not able to take decisions on their own because those institutions are still dominated by caste Hindus. Hence, they have gradually upgraded their economic status but socially they are still supposed to be inefficient. That was the main reason that they are not

given full liberty to take decisions on their own and this again becomes the reason of their passiveness towards other dalits.

The role of the neo-Kshatriyas is not historically reactionary but also dangerous in this period of democratic modernity. It will only help the Brahmins and the Baniyas to sustain philosophical, political and economic power while granting a small fraction of it to a section of neo-Kshatriyas. This will again destroy the revolutionary spirit of the Dalitbahujans who have now acquired specific and universal ideologies (Ambedkarism and Marxism, respectively) to overthrow the caste-class hegemony of bourgeois Brahminism. (*Why I am Not a Hindu* 52)

The passiveness of neo-Kshatriyas towards dalits has created a negative thinking among dalits. Caste Hindus have used neo-Kshatriyas as weapons to protect their situation in the society. They favoured neo-Kshatriyas and also made them responsible to answer for whatever steps and decisions they have taken. Providing jobs to neo-Kshatriyas was the most decisive point of Indian history because it ensured the authority of caste Hindus over Dalitbahujans. Dalitbahujans were not able to take decisions and this again became a reason for their criticism and it was taken as their inefficiency to decide, manage and lead. The reason behind the partial behaviour of caste Hindus was to break anti-caste Hindu spirit of dalits and sustain their hegemony over dalits.

### **Condition of Dalits in the Present World**

It is very difficult to say that in the present time the condition of dalits is better than what it was in the past. Marching back towards history, one may find miserable condition

of dalits where they were not allowed to drink water from one well. They were not allowed to eat the food, sit in the restaurants and take food and use the same roads that caste Hindus were supposed to take.

As I look back, it is clear from the English textbooks that in class societies—which also have conflicting cultures—there is much less of a conspiracy of silence in comparison to caste societies. In the Telugu textbooks the conspiracy of silence is as loud as a thunderclap. A class which is so brazenly casteist in theory and practice is also brazenly silent about its inhumanity in its inhumanity in its literary texts. What is amazing is the eulogization of this casteist culture in all the literary texts and the condemnation of our cultures in the same texts. (*Why I am Not a Hindu* 55)

Kancha Ilaiah traces the history of conflicts between various castes and classes. He gives preference to class-based differences over caste-based differences. This shows the deep influence of western societies over his mind. He favours the spirit of resistance of lower classes against upper classes and appreciates the literary figures of the West to raise the voice of subalterns. At the present time, he criticizes Indian literary figures for not raising the voice of dalits. He also shows his dissatisfaction towards Dalitbahujans for not showing any kind of rebellious spirit against the oppressive nature of caste Hindus. The only thing he observes in most of the literary texts is the praise of caste Hindus and their way of living. These texts do not talk about the condition of dalits and the oppressive nature of caste Hindus. Kancha Ilaiah criticizes such kind of hypocritical texts which praises caste Hindus and criticizes dalits.

Despite their Egalitarian ideologies they were not comfortable about people who had names Ilaiah, Yellaiah, Malliah or Peraiah entering high educational institutions. Many of them considered most of as ‘undeserving’ and felt that our coming into higher educational institutional would only lead to the deterioration of standards. In the opinion of some Hindu teachers we did not deserve a place in the university. Some other argued that we deserved better wages and improved living conditions, but that should happen within the village setting and within the agrarian economy. (*Why I am Not a Hindu* 55-56)

After the independence, people of all castes were supposed to be equal before law, judiciary and it provided equal right of education and jobs to each citizen. But Ilaiah criticizes Indian context where caste Hindus continue practicing discrimination against dalits. Kancha Ilaiah gives an example of caste Hindu teachers and their unhappiness towards dalit students joining schools, sitting with them in the class rooms, receiving lectures and even eating with them in the same restaurants. They take it as a challenge to their superiority. Earlier, dalits were supposed to be good for nothing except serving and this was the only thing that was accepted about dalits. Right to equality and education gave dalits a weapon to improve their conditions but caste Hindus did not accept it and took it against the laws of Hinduism and kept demeaning dalits and continued behaving in a similar manner. The only way they supported the development of dalits was in agricultural field. They opposed education and equality for dalits. Hence, NGOs and government efforts could not work out completely. Though government and NGOs tried to provide legal protection for dalits, they could not change the psyche of caste Hindus.

The relationship between a rich Malla or Madigga and a wealthy 'upper' caste person was identical to the relationship between a poor 'upper' caste person and a poor Dalitbahujan. The poor 'upper' caste person thinks that he or she is always superior. Similarly the rich 'upper' caste people also think that they are always superior. Acquiring wealth does not change the relative social status of Dalitbahujans within a particular class. Even within a rich class, caste distinctions continue to operate. (*Why I am Not a Hindu* 60)

The text depicts the inhuman and oppressive behaviour of caste Hindus towards dalits and vice versa. Though dalits got equal rights through reservation which resulted in legal security to dalits but it could not change the prejudices of caste Hindus against dalits. This negative attitude of caste Hindus created vicious mindset among dalits which further led to conflicts between two groups of the society. Caste Hindus whether they belonged to elite groups or lower groups, did not change their orthodox habit of posing themselves as superior. They always looked down on dalits, particularly those who have somehow secured the government jobs. Hence, Kancha Ilaiah depicts the mental exploitation of dalits because even jobs could not change their social status. The clash between the two groups continued even after getting constitutional rights.

Thus whichever institution the Dalitbahujans entered, either through reservation (in south India mostly through reservation) or through other ways, such institutions became the centres of conflict between Hindu irrationality and Dalitbahujan rationality, Hindu closedness and Dalitbahujan openness, Hindu silent violence and Dalitbahujan loud self-

defence. Out of this very conflict there seems to emerge a new hope of a rational future for this country. (*Why I am not a Hindu* 65)

Though dalits were getting jobs, they were not taken as competent candidates for those jobs. They were blamed to be inefficient candidates who could get jobs on the basis of reservation. This behaviour further aggravated the conflicts between two groups. Reservation worked as fuel to the fire and increased the anger of caste Hindus towards dalits. Caste Hindus are generally dissatisfied with the entry of dalits in the same schools. They could not digest the rights which were given to dalits. On the other side, dalits also started responding to caste Hindus through various movements which rather increased the differences between the two caste segments. New generations belonging to dalit community were deeply affected by these movements and this gave them a new thinking or perspective to think rationally and take correct measures to improve their conditions.

In many south Indian institutions SCs, OBCs, STs and minorities and 'upper' caste persons work together. This makes these institutions melting pots in terms of culture and ideas. It must be remembered that in this country because of the caste system several cultures have existed side-by-side, but separately. Brahminism compartmentalized human thinking and human experience was so badly fragmented that no exchange took place between them. Because of capitalist casteism the situation in the urban centres was worse. (*Why I am Not a Hindu* 65)

Here, Kancha Ilaiah puts forth the condition of urban industries where every person was given equal opportunity to perform his duties. They were given jobs without any discrimination based on creed, colour or caste. These institutes became centres of conflicts

among various castes, cultures and classes. The orthodox view of caste Hindus was still not supportive enough to accept their upward mobility. Various governments took initiatives to provide jobs to dalits and illegalized discrimination against dalits. It resulted into participation of dalits in education and administration. People belonging to various castes, cultures and creeds started working together under the single roof. Ilaiah critically observes the reaction of those caste Hindus who were already well educated and employed. He finds them more harsh, discriminatory and hateful towards educated dalits. This attitude of caste Hindus towards dalits changed the mindset of dalits. They got divided into two parts; those who rebelled against caste Hindus and those who changed their lifestyle according to the lifestyle of caste Hindus. The second group of dalits started following the customs, beliefs and principles of caste Hindus.

There are several Dalitbahujan officers, politicians, academics and doctors who try to be more Hindu than the Hindus themselves. They brazenly celebrate Hindu festivals. Even in public they speak of their parental culture as low as mean. They refuse any connection with Pochamma and Maisamma. They condemn these Gods as 'Sudra Devathalu'. Short of turning themselves into twice-born castes, these people make every attempt to Sanskritize themselves. (*Why I am Not a Hindu* 69)

The discriminatory behaviour of caste Hindus made it very difficult for dalits to live their life properly. This dominating and discriminatory behaviour disturbed dalits, very deeply. They reacted in two ways; one part of dalits started following caste Hindus and another part was of those revolutionaries who rebelled against them and showed their anger through different movements and in the form of literature. Hence, the revolutionary spirit



of Dalitbahujans got divided into parts and could not get success. Most of the dalits started following the norms, principles and beliefs which were earlier followed by caste Hindus and this further resulted in differences among dalits. They started differentiating themselves from the rituals, customs, beliefs and principles of Dalitbahujan society. Kancha Ilaiah deeply analyses this problem and also tries to provide an alternative to it.

### **Dalitization: An Alternative by Ilaiah**

Throughout the text, Kancha Ilaiah remains aggressive towards caste Hindus. He attacks the culture, ethos, principles, mythology and thinking of caste Hindus. He presents these aspects as anti-dalit and dangerous to the dalit identity. He traces the history of caste system in India and finds out that castes were there even before independence. Discrimination was there in society before independence and it is there in society even after independence. During the period of national freedom movement, the discriminatory behaviour of caste Hindus was reduced just to get favour from each and every caste and class of the society. They did not directly demean dalits during that period but on the other hand gave preference to brahminical institutions. Social reformists like Raja Ram Mohan Roy established Brahma Samaj (1828) which was one of the finest examples of the brahminical institutions in India. Later, Mahatma Gandhi started a journal called *Harijan* (1932) just to get the favour of dalits and he became successful in it also. During the war of independence, these leaders and institutions led the freedom struggle and got the favour from dalits. But after independence the whole scenario got completely changed. Discrimination erupted from where it was left earlier. Caste Hindus took the political and social charge of the society in their hands. Hence the discrimination was again restored and it is prevalent in the society even today. Kancha Ilaiah focuses on the lifestyle of dalits and

requested caste Hindus to understand the lifestyle of dalits and the problems they face in the society. Here, he puts forth some positive aspects of dalits which can be helpful in developing Indian society.

What are the implications of Dalitbahujan collective consciousness? Everything—good or bad—that takes place within the dalitwaada is shared by everyone. Pleasure, pain and social events are all shared. If there is a birth in one house, both the pleasures and the pains of that birth are also social. The mother's labour pains are at least emotionally shared by all the womenfolk of the Dalitwaada. The pleasure of giving birth to a new human being, who will add to the number of working hands, a human being who is never regarded as a burden on society, this pleasure is not merely that of the mother and the father but of the whole waada. If there is a death, the whole dalitwaada shares in it emotionally. (*Why I am Not a Hindu* 116)

Kancha Ilaiah recites the positive aspects of dalits and portrays the collective consciousness of dalits regarding themselves. He presents dalits in common by portraying their emotions, feelings and experiences. He portrays a unified picture of dalits without any discrimination. Dalit children are not seen as burden on their parents or society but as helpful human beings who contribute in the development of society. Here, Ilaiah tries to urge upon the fact that dalits are the positive contributors of the society and they should not be taken as a burden. He takes Dalitwaadas as a symbol of Indian society and dalits as human beings staying in it. Their staying together without any differences becomes a symbol of his desire of casteless society.

The future is that of Dalitbahujan in India. In order to dalitize society, the Dalitbahujan leadership must know its strengths and weaknesses. The Dalitbahujans of India have suffered hardships all through history. Modern democratic socialist revolutions have now given them some scope to liberate themselves. It is only through their liberation that the rest of the society, namely, the 'upper' castes, can be librated. (*Why I am Not a Hindu* 127)

Kancha Ilaiah further talks about the future of dalits in Indian society. He gives some suggestive measures to dalits about understanding the positive and negative aspects of their life. Dalits have faced discrimination throughout their lives because they have always evaluated their lives in relation to caste Hindus. They never ever calculated their own importance in the scheme of things. Here, Kancha Ilaiah focuses on the importance of their lives and the struggle they undergo to live with some sense of dignity. He eulogizes modern democratic system of India where each and every person is given full chance to live his/her life with full freedom. Democracy has provided due space to dalits to live their life the way they desire to live. It has given all important rights to dalits, so that they may enjoy their independent identity. It has made it possible for dalits to live their life properly and independently. This liberation from the clutches of mainstream caste Hindus has made dalits self-dependent and now their identity has become almost independent.

In an interview printed in *Outlook* on December 25, 2000, Kancha Ilaiah focuses on the need of modern education to be given to Dalits. He talks about the adverse circumstances of dalits that deprive them of good education. Even education in government educational institutions is based on the mercy of *zamindars* and *merchants* who sponsor their education. If these dalit children succeed in entering schools they are prone to face the

tyranny of the teachers. They never have the option to live their lives with propriety and respect. Their choices, desires and even lives are observed to be dependent on the upper caste society.

Just as the Brahmins are shouting Hinduisse India, we should shout Dalitise India. Shout that we hate Hinduism, we hate Brahminism. Capture the Hindu temples by expelling the Brahmins from them,” he says. “The hated must hate. They must become powerful and organized. I want to create anger.” (*Outlook* 25 December, 2000)

Here, Ilaiah seems to be instigating dalits to retaliate and behave rudely with those who troubled them throughout their lives. He seems to be very aggressive towards caste Hindus. But this aggression emerges from the perpetual negative and hateful behaviour of caste Hindus. His resistance against Hinduism is a sign of his search for identity. He takes Hinduism as a set of orthodox ideas which are supported by a particular caste and group. He tries to generalize Dalitization where he asks all dalits to come together and create their own identity. He shows his worries against brahminical texts where Hindu gods and goddesses are portrayed as protagonists (not heroes or heroines). They are depicted as heroic and brave figures, though they brutally kill those who challenge their superiority. Kancha Ilaiah suggests reworking on Hindu mythological works.

Kancha Ilaiah shows his sympathies towards women of all castes and classes because they always become victims of the male exploitation. He equates women’s struggle with dalit struggle for identity because both become victims of exploitation. He asks both groups of the society to come together for their quest of their liberal identity.

Later in his interview, published in *The Times of India* on February 15, 2013, he focuses on the need of English education to be given to dalit children. He says that even today dalits are not able to get good education. He gives his own example for the changes that have come in the lives of dalits in the field of education. Lack of education is the biggest hindrance in acquiring higher official positions. In politics, there are some dalit leaders who have even acquired the position of chief ministers and cabinet ministers but still the general condition of dalits has not changed. Passiveness of dalit leaders is one of the reasons of dalits' exploitation and backwardness.

### **Dalits and the Current Scenario**

“Mann Ki Baat” is a programme which is hosted by the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi. It happened for the first time in the history of India that a Prime minister started a programme based on various issues happening around in the country. He also gives references to various mails, letters and calls which he receives from the people of India. The Prime minister has expressed his views on various contemporary issues of the country. In his introductory speech which was delivered on October 3, 2014, he emphasizes on the use of Khadi by each and every citizen of India. He has also emphasized on the importance of *svachchhta abhiyaan* (cleanliness campaign) and eulogized common people for supporting and making it a great success. He has also advised the ministry of Human Resource Development to make education easily accessible to specially disabled children by providing them more scholarships, and by providing differently abled friendly buildings. On behalf of his government, he has also showed his commitment to bring back black money.

In his other speeches, he spoke on drugs and its disadvantages. He also interacted with students twice or thrice. He talked about exams and the pressure that students take over themselves. He suggested students not to take much pressure of exams just to prove themselves better than others. He suggested the parents to motivate their children to perform better than their last attempt. He also raised the problems of poor farmers who feel themselves neglected due to the lack of appropriate policies of the government. He clarified his stand on *Land Acquisition Bill* and presented it as farmer friendly. He criticized the opposition for spreading rumours regarding this bill. He also gave emphasis on the use of science, new agricultural techniques, and yoga.

### **Criticism of the Right Wing**

“It is unfortunate that the PM did not touch on issues that are prevalent and in the heart of every Indian. He did not even condemn the killings of Dalits in Haryana and the atrocious language used by his minister against the Dalits.”

“He dwelt on detailed itinerary of his proposed visit to Great Britain and his plans to visit BR Ambedkar’s house in London. But he did not say how to safeguard the interest of Dalits in the country,” Singh said in a statement following the PM’s ‘Mann Ki Baat’ radio address. (*FIRSTPOST* 25 October, 2015)

Though PM Modi’s “Mann Ki Baat” is quite touching and impressive, it gets criticized due to the indifference shown so far towards dalit issues. The prime minister was observed to be silent even when the incidents such as Faridabad massacre of two dalit kids

and Rohith Vemula case took place in the country. Dalit population of the country looks forward to the Prime minister's special session on 'Dalit issues' in his forthcoming telecast of "Mann Ki Baat"

### **Right Wing and its approach towards Dalits**

Right Wing of India was earlier seen as anti-dalit, mostly focusing on the elite class of the society. But with the changing time and changing perspective this idea has also changed. Now there are the instances when right-wing politicians criticize Hindus for maintaining caste differences. They have expressed their views regarding dalits in their weekly *Panchjanya*. They have favoured dalits to be trained and appointed as head priests in various temples across the country. They have requested Hindus to come together by mitigating all caste differences among them. The main reason of the request is to erase caste differences among Hindus. Perhaps, the main motif of the article published in newspaper is to bring Hindus together and create a peaceful atmosphere in the country. Another reason for writing such kind of articles may be to bring dalits in their confidence and break their caste Hindu perception among people.

In the present time the right wing seems to have revisited its perspectives towards dalits. They have broken the stereotypes of being groups and parties related to caste Hindu categories or more specifically Baniya parties. Now they are taking Dalits as well as Adivasis in their confidence and appointing them on prestigious positions.

## Constitutional Provisions

“There are now laws protecting Dalits and affirmative action programmes. And dalits have worked hard to increase their political power – several states have been elected Dalit chief ministers.” (*BBC* 27 June, 2012)

Indian constitution has provided equal rights to each and every individual. It has prohibited any kind of demeaning behaviour against dalits. Article 17 of the Constitution of India deals with the abolition of slavery and declares its practice, completely illegal. Article 16 gives the right of equal opportunity in employment to all the citizens. This article clearly omits any kind of differences on the basis of caste, class, creed and religion. Hence, these articles in Indian Constitution provide some relief to dalits in improving their social and political condition. These rights have provided them an opportunity to improve their economic status also. Now they have become able to get good jobs and other career opportunities. The powerful condition of dalits can be seen in politics where several dalits have been elected as chief ministers of their respective states. But still dalits are not completely developed. They are still struggling to improve their condition in the society.

“Despite the fact that untouchability was officially banned when India adopted its constitution in 1950, discrimination against Dalits remained so pervasive that in 1989 the government passed legislation known as The Prevention of Atrocities Act. The act specifically made it illegal to parade people naked through the streets, force them to eat feces, take away their land, foul their water, interfere with their right to vote, and burn down their homes.” (Hillary Mayell)



The condition of dalits has always remained very bad and pathetic. They have remained socially discriminated and exploited. Before the appearance of Babasaheb Ambedkar they were not much better than slaves and puppets in the hands of caste Hindus. No doubt, Indian constitution worked as a weapon in the hands of dalits but still lack of education, awareness and the passiveness of political leaders could not help in bringing designed improvement in the condition of dalits. Surprisingly, the incidents of violence against dalits are reported even today. There are the instances which suggest that they are not permitted to enter many of the temples in their own country, even today. The incidents of rape, murder and mental exploitation of dalits are also recorded quite often. Prevention of Atrocities Act which was formed in 1989 is a result of such atrocities that took place against dalits. These kinds of acts tell the story of pathetic condition of dalits in Indian society.

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