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ISSN - 2347 - 503X

# **Research Chronicler**

**International Multidisciplinary Research Journal**

**Vol IV Issue I : January 2016**

**Editor-In-Chief**

**Prof. K. N. Shelke**

# Research Chronicler

ISSN 2347 – 5021 (Print); 2347 – 503X (Online)

**A Peer-Reviewed Refereed and Indexed  
Multidisciplinary International Research Journal**

**Volume IV Issue I: January – 2016**

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**Dalitistan-- Towards the Formation of a Dalit Nation**

Sana Sulaikha

*EMEA College of Arts and Science, Kondotty, (Kerala) India***Abstract**

Dalit is a term of Marathi origin which means suppressed and exploited people. They are as the word itself denotes exploited more than anyone else in the world. As said by Aditya Nigam, for dalits India is a 'mere idea with a dubious past'. Gandhi as well as Nehru have failed in their attempt to make an India where equality prevailed. As Kancha Ilaiah has described, the Nehruvian state merely fulfills the brahmanical agenda of establishing upper caste control over state institutions (Ilaiaha, 1998). All the itch their lands. Even communism, which has brought a radical change in the class system, failed in the caste issues. The adivasis and the dalits were landless even after the land reform acts. The people who benefitted were the ones between the bourgeoisies and the dalits. So I would like to raise a question - whose nation is it then? If the benefits are obtained only by the elite classes, then what is the notion of being the citizens of India for them? Those who have brutally exploited the real owners of the land, the adivasis, they have power and money and does that make them the owners? The roles played by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Gandhiji to bring up the brahmanical Hindu society have worked well. Because it is only them who have held of almost all our resources. They treat dalits as their working class and still after 68 years of independence, they are seen as untouchables. So actually 'who' got independence? For the untouchables it was a mere transmission of their suppressed lives from colonial hands to brahmanical forces. But colonial forces were far better because they at least gave them education and tried to remove the curtains of untouchability. There are some dalit groups who worship the English Goddess. For them, it was the language that gave them liberation from the brutal systems of their religion-casteism. The idea of nation which is prevailing now is to be questioned. I propose a nation of Dalit-bahujans - a nation of all minorities of the country - a nation where minorities, even the untouchables go hand in hand with the majority. Casteism as a practice has to be shattered. It is not easy though. Without its death, there is no nation. Nation becomes an abstract idea. We will be just a society where the so called elite classes enjoy every leisure and the dalits carry every burden. I will go for a nation which is dalitized. Dalits live in harmony with nature. For them the wellness of the other member prevails rather than theirs. As said by Kanchaih Ilaiah, towards a dalitization of nation - where people live in collective consciousness and vision. A nation, which shows us how to live loving the earth and going with nature. A nation where equality prevails everywhere. A nation where the whole economy is shared by all classes and castes. A dalit nation which would theoretically pose a challenge to the cultural nationalism of the 'virat' Hindu nation. I would elaborate my thesis in the light of the works by Gopal Guru, M S S Pandian, Nivedita Menon, Sanal Mohan, Tm Yesudsan, Aditya Nigam and the like.

**Key Words:** Dalit, adivasi, oppressed, brahmanical, nationhood

Some recent happenings in the history of Kerala, one of the most 'progressive' states in our 'great' Nation is stated in the paper.

A recent report called 'black rain' which appeared in *Cobra Post* is much striking. A private army of the upper caste landlords in central Bihar called Ranvir Sena militia planned and conducted 6 major massacres, killing 144 dalits including several women and children. The fact to be noted is that according to reports they were allegedly helped by a former prime minister and finance minister and that they were trained by army jawans on leave or retired.

The Patel community in Gujarat has started agitation for reservation. They are one of the 'relatively prosperous castes in India.

Now let's have a look at some recent happenings in the history of Kerala, one of the most 'progressive' states in our 'great' Nation.

Soumya Devi, an entrepreneur of 'Be Positive' Software Company, who had completed her studies in UK, was ousted from techno lodge in Ernakulum because of her caste. Techno lodge is in Thirumaaraadi Panchayath where the rural IT entrepreneurship was initiated by Kerala government for the first time. This is a good example of the fact that though education is touted as a means of emancipation even an international degree counts to nothing in the face of caste discrimination.

We are living in a nation where the upper castes think of purifying the office and its premises once a dalit officer (Even if he belongs to as high a rank as that of IAS) leaves after completing his term.

In another corner of the state, in Payyannur Chitralkha, a Dalit woman who chose the untrodden path of supporting herself by driving an auto and upholding her dignity became the victim of constant attacks and threats by chauvinistic so called progressive elite around her.

The British rule gave the 'untouchables' the right to education but they were not allowed to sit on the benches with the upper caste students. The situation continues to be the same as reported from Govt. welfare school Perambra (Mathrubhumi weekly)

Reservations have been given to scheduled castes, tribes and OBCs. As said in the introduction of 'No Alphabet in sight'...

'.....reservations were considered compensations for past wrongs and not as remedy for the current suppression and marginalization.... They are merely 'target groups' for welfare programs extended by the state..."

S J Raja argues that to apply for a government job, you need the stipulated educational qualifications; you should demonstrate that you will be able to do the job. What is the qualification for owning the land? He asks the current landowning castes: can you prepare the fields? Can you irrigate them? Can you supervise the irrigation channels day and night? Can you crush the sheaves of grain using bullocks in the crushing ground? If merit or efficiency is to be the norm, he tells them, "you cannot own even a handful of this nation's land'. <>

Ernest Renan says- 'what is a nation': a nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Only two things, actually, constitute this soul, this

spiritual principle. One is in the past, the other in the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of remembrances; the other is the actual consent, the desire to live together, the will to continue to value the heritage which all holds in common.' {What is a Nation?, Ernest Renan}

For dalits, the idea of nation is a myth. They don't have land, any good jobs, or any facilities. For them the legacy of remembrance is that of slave memory. (*Modernity of Slavery*, Sanal Mohan). They have to do their duties towards the nation. For them, there is nothing like rich legacy.

As Sanal Mohan says in his preface to *Modernity of Slavery*, '...the situation of untouchable slave castes in Kerala was much worse as slaves could not approach their masters, enter their dwellings or offer worship in the same place of worship as the upper castes. This situation made the missionary scholar Samuel Mateer to comment in the late nineteenth century that 'the Pulayan was, therefore, in an infinitely worse condition than ever the American slave was'.

If they try to obtain their rights it is seen as a revolt against the government and they are named as dalit terrorists (Papilio Buddha, DHRM). It is well known that they do the lowest paid and the meanest jobs like cleaning toilets and manholes (drainages) and carrying shit which makes lives easier for the privileged.

That's why Ilaiah has said, all the upper caste people must be forced to do the productive works. Only then can the differences be erased. As long as one society enjoys all the good things and leisure and

another suffers deeply to meet their ends, a state of equality, liberty and fraternity cannot be attained as said by our constitution.

Hindu mythology is built by destroying dalitbahujan cultural ethos. During anti colonial struggle brahmanical leaders and ideologies did not attempt to build an anti caste egalitarian ideology. On the contrary, they glorified brutal Hindu institutions. In the building of brahmanical nationalism, Raja ram Mohan Roy , at one stage ,and Gandhi, at another ,played key roles in recreating "upper class" hegemony .we reject the hinduization program in Toto for two reasons . One, Hinduism has never been a humane philosophy. Second, even if Hinduisation expresses a desire to humanize itself in future, there is no scope for this to happen, since the history of religion itself is coming to an end. We must therefore dalitise our entire society as it will establish an egalitarian future for Indian society as a whole {page: 113-114: Why I Am Not a Hindu: second edition: Kanchah Ilaiah: Samya publications}

In this context, I propose a nation-Dalitistan...a nation which provides equal rights and opportunities for all the people of the country, which continues its policy of affirmative action in the case of the disadvantaged. By naming it 'dalitistan', I mean a nation of dalit bahujans. As said by Kanchah Ilaiah, the term dalitbahujan indicates 'people and castes who form the exploited and suppressed majority'. 'Bahujan' simply means majority. The confidence that stems from the idea that bahujans, if they succeed to organize themselves into a political force could



change the fortunes of millions of deprived in the country was what led Kanshi Ram to form Bahujan Samaj Party.

I use the term 'Dalitistan' as a counter for Hindustan or Hindu Nation, thereby rightly giving back the dalits what was once theirs.

Dalit is a term actually of Marathi origin which means oppressed or broken. Usually the term is accredited to the 'untouchables' but I would like to include all the oppressed minorities which includes the minority people from all communities like the LGBTs, women etc. they are all oppressed in the name of caste, sex, gender etc. all these are likeminded people as they are on the 'weak' side. That's why I call them all 'dalit bahujans'.

The term 'dalitistan' is an already used one. Dalitistan.org was a dalit advocacy website launched in 1999 which was active until mid-2006. The website was claimed to be run by Dalitistan, a 'Human Rights Organisation' working for the upliftment of the untouchables (dalits) of India.

To create the nation Dalitistan, many things are required and one of the key areas is education. The current educational system perpetrates brahmanical hegemony which has been followed from the time of Independence. Contemporary education paves way for discrimination. We can see this even in the books of history where we see leaders of elite classes like Gandhi, Nehru, Patel and all glorified and leaders of the other classes like Ambedkar, Phule, Ayyankali as neglected. In history textbooks, everything must be shown from different perspectives. Teachers have a big role to play in it. They must teach the

students to look from marginalized including Lesbian-women perspective. We have to bring reforms in the educational system.

Another thing is that the oppressed need to unite as a political power. Kanshi Ram formed the party and first used the term 'bahujans' to include all the oppressed including OBCs. Our country calls for a revolution and as Ambedkar advocated an annihilation of caste. (For the time being) "So what do we do till the caste is not annihilated completely? I believe that until the time we are not able to form a casteless society, we need to use caste to annihilate caste. If Brahmins can use caste for the benefit of their society then why cannot we use it for the benefit of our society...?"

No dalits are given seats in general quota. Their presence is only in the reserved seats. The case of women is also like that.

In current day politics, almost all the political parties have started a dalit wing. That shows the need for dalit votes. But this will split dalits and prevent them from becoming a major power.

Kanshi Ram has shown that it is practical to unite all the minorities together. If effectively organized, they can rule the country.

Kancha Ilaiah said 'We must dalitize our entire society as Dalitisation will establish a new egalitarian future for Indian society as a whole'. {Page: 114: Why I Am Not a Hindu: second edition: Kanchah Ilaiah: Samya publications}

What is dalitization? Dalitisation requires that the whole of Indian society learns from

dalitwadas. It requires that we attend to life in these Waadas, that we appreciate what is positive, what is humane and what can be extended from dalitwaadas to the whole society. What is most striking is their collective living and collective consciousness. {Page: 114: Why I Am Not a Hindu: second edition: Kanchah Ilaiah: Samya publications}

He speaks specially of the scheduled castes

As said by TM Yesudasan, 'One of the lessons learned from history is that only a people who initiate a politics of self-representation and maintain record of their discursive practices will find a place in history and culture'.

As Ambedkar said, we cannot build up a nation...we cannot build up morality...Anything that we will build on the foundations of caste will crack, and will never be a whole. This is what we are seeing in India. The nation which we built, struggling against the colonial powers is cracked because it is still on the foundations of caste.

Ambedkar produces a narrative of Indian history as one of the perennial struggles between the subjugated Dravidians and the subjugating Aryans. His search leads him to the discovery of the dravida self, which he occasionally expands to include the shudras and ati-shudras of the north- often, this history was not 'memory'; it was instituted as memory to fill the big absence that was the denial of the adi dravidas and shudra past. But this mode of modern scientific history 'as against the Vedas, Ithihasa and the Puranas which he relentlessly critiqued as "irrational & unscientific was a necessary

condition of emancipation for it framed the entire constitution of the non-Brahmin dravida self {page:4265:Secularism, Modernity, Nation: Epistemology of the Dalit Critique: Aditya Nigam}

Dalits have been suffering for ages and they still are. We can say that they are the owners of our land because they constitute the adi dravidas, the original inhabitants of the land. But they still are forced to agitate for a piece of land to cultivate and have a dignified life.

The much celebrated land reforms in Kerala failed. The adivasis and the dalits were landless even after their land reform acts. The ones who benefitted were in between the dalits and the bourgeoisies. All the wealth is accumulated by the elite groups. Even the Gandhian and Nehruvian policies were against them. It only strengthened the brahmanical powers.

Ilaiah sees the process of the secular state becoming the private property of the brahmanical caste as a conscious act of Nehruvian state elite, not as an unintended byproduct of its working {page: 4260: Secularism, Modernity, Nation: Epistemology of the Dalit Critique: Aditya Nigam}

Ranjit Guha {On some aspects of the Historiography of colonial India; in selected subaltern studies: page 38: ed: Ranjit Guha and Gayatri Chakravathy Spivak, Oxford University Press, 1988} says Indian nationalism often reads as 'primarily an idealist venture in which the indigenous elite led the people from subjugation to freedom. The history of Indian Nationalism is thus written as a sort of spiritual biography of the Indian elite'...In Guha's view, nationalist

representations support elitism and failed to bear witness to the activities and arguments of the people {page: 109: Nationalism, representation and the elite: Beginning Post colonialism: John McLeod: Manchester University Press, 2000)

Dalitistan is against the cultural Nationalism. It is a nation where dalit icons and symbols dominate the public sphere. The so called cultural forms of elite will be discarded.

‘The institution of caste illustrates the spirit of comprehensive synthesis characteristic of the Hindu mind with its faith in the collaboration of races and the cooperation of cultures. Paradoxical as it may seem, the system of caste is the outcome of tolerance and trust’

This is said by S. Radhakrishnan in ‘The Hindu View of Life’, 1927. His birthday is celebrated as Teacher’s Day in India.

This is a big example for the dominance of the upper caste. Savitribhai Phule was a social as well as an educational reformer of

that time, especially for women. She even started a school for women at a time when education was denied to all the ‘lower castes’. Dalits celebrate her birthday (Jan 3) as Teacher’s Day.

Leaders like Mahatma Ayyankali, Sahodaran Ayyappan, Sree Narayana Guru and all have tried hard to remove untouchability. Ayyankali travelled in bullock cart through the paths which were restricted to the untouchables. Sahodaran Ayyappan thought ‘interdining’- different people of different castes eating together- will reduce caste atrocities and he actually made it effective. Ambedkar suggests inter caste marriage as a solution for removing discriminations in ‘Annihilation of caste’. These can all be used as a step towards dalitising the nation.

This is why dalitisation of the nation is an urgent necessity. The upper castes have to yield space for the marginalized. Let the meaning of nation be true for the whole populace and everyone gets opportunities to dream their dreams.

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ISSN - 2347 - 503X

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