

The Process of Dalitization: A Brief Socio-Cultural Reading of Kancha Ilaiah

Anil M. R.

Research Scholar, MG University, Kottayam

1. Introduction

Kancha Ilaiah is a passionate thinker who is well known for his passion and commitment for raising the issues related to the dalits in India. *Why I am not a Hindu* and *Buffalo Nationalism* are his two important works through which he identifies himself as a dalit bahunjan, a member of the exploited and suppressed community of Indian majority. He holds the view:

„Having been born in a Kuruma (Shepherd Caste) family, I do not know how I can relate to the Hindu culture that is being projected through all kinds of advertising agencies' (*Why I am not a Hindu.X*).

Dalitization is a process. Indian social system is again and again being cursed by the caste system through the Brahminical religious books and their practices. The present situation of our country warns us of the need for a thorough evaluation of the past social and religious views and indeed there is a renewal of thought in all spheres of Indian life. The World witnessed the emergence of four major religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. The first three religions have been at least maintaining religious democracy. They all have in common democratic notion that God created all human beings equal.

Ilaiah mentions the fact that it is because of the process of institutionalization, the religions started establishing authoritarian tendencies and engaged in inhuman practices. Though barbaric atrocities have been committed in their name, they succeeded in codifying their religious books. Thus the scripture gives the followers the equal opportunity regardless of caste and colour. He further explains a fact that India as a nation lost its scope because of Brahminism. Brahminic philosophy itself makes others believe that God created human beings unequal. In India Dalitbahujans have been sufferings for many centuries. Hinduism was born out of a Brahminic philosophy. The Kurumas heard about Turukoollu (Muslims), Kristaanapoollu (Christians), Baapanoollu (Brahmins) and Koomatoollu (Baniyas). They have kept relation with Muslims and Christians. They mingle in the fields and touch each other and together celebrate festivals. The Brahmins and Baniyas made a kind of difference by not co-operating with Kurumas. Ilaiah expresses the shock that now his people have been told that they have common religious and cultural relationship with Brahmins and Baniyas. It shows the fascist nature of Hinduism.

The historical essence of Hindu fascism has been operated with the formation of modern Brahminic organizations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the Vishwa Hindu

Parishad, the Bajarang Dal, and so on. Here the youths belonging to Other Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are organized to provide the Brahminic muscle power for their programmes by giving them trishuls (tridents), chakras (sharpened throwing discs), bows and arrows (these two weapons are used by Brahmins to kill Dalit Bahujans in Ancient Hindu myths and legends). In the same way the children belonging to the lower castes are being forced to learn regional languages. Thus they become the modern slaves. The Brahminic aim is simple that the Dalit Bahujans are made not for themselves. Instead they are being used for the cause of upper caste education, enjoyment and wealth. (*Why I am not a Hindu.XI-XII*). The Ramayana itself is about Rama's struggle to win back Sita from Ravana and his bowing to rumour to send her into exile. (*Buffalo Nationalism.XXII-XXIII*). Both animate and inanimate symbols of Hindu religion carry racist and casteist unproductive cultural values. Swastika is one such inanimate valued symbol. It is common with minor differences to Hitler's and Hindu Aryanism. Aryanize means (Nazi doctrine) the removal of all non-Aryan persons from office, business, etc. The trishul or trident is a weapon of violence with three sharp spikes and a long handle. During the earliest nationalist period right wing Hindus have used the trishul as a consciously constructed weapon of violence against Muslims, Christians and other minority religions. In the battle plan, the Dalit-Bahujans are to be used as the trishul-wielding foot soldiers. In the political realm upper caste Hindus want the Dalit Bahujans to be Hindus for purpose of vote enumeration and electoral victory but shudras have no right to rule Brahminic Hindus. (Ilaiah. *Buffalo Nationalism.XIX-XX*). The fact is that Lionization of Brahminic culture made the human creative essence left *unknown*. (*Post-Hindu India.2-3*)

Ilaiah uses the term Post Hindu India. He believes that caste hierarchy forms a kind of chain and it will be broken in future. In *Post-Hindu India* Kancha Ilaiah writes:

“The movement of India into the Post-Hindu Phase alone can release
The forces of production and scientificity. Then India
will become a
Nation of great wealth and virtues. (295)”

2. The Process of Dalitization

Ilaiah himself used the term „dalitization“: (*Why I am not a Hindu.115*). Dalit in Sanskrit and in many Indian languages literally means: (1) broken, torn, burst, split; (2) opened and expanded; (3) bisected; (4) driven as under, dispelled and scattered; (5) down trodden, crushed. After 1947, the Brahmins, the Baniyas and the neo-Kshatriyas have come to

power in the name of democracy. The post colonial development has been systematically cornered by these forces. The Brahmins have focused their attention on politico-bureaucratic power. To Ilaiyah, the Brahminic nationalism was made by Raja Rammohen Roy and Gandhi and they played key roles in recreating „upper“ caste hegemony. Dalitbahujan social systems are democratic in nature. Dalitbahujan society has negated private property because it has tremendous confidence in its own labour power and because of its concept of labour as life. Sharankumar Limbale says that the white settlers of America bought Blacks like cattle for farming people. Such was the condition of women in Brahmins“ houses. Though they live in a better economic condition, they needed to be dalitized. (Limbale 86) For my study I have included the constitutional provisions for dalits from the Constitution of India. The term dalitization does not mean Sanskritization or Hinduization. Now the term has got a new realm of meaning that it is the process of getting the provisions vested for Dalitbahujans. Recently a number of castes have been accepted by the Kerala Public Service Commission as Other Eligible Castes. 'At the beginning of this century' writes A. Sreedhara Menon "Caste and Fuedalism encircled Keralam. Institutions like untouchability, Polygamy ... did not have the freedom or the opportunity to grow or develop ..." (111) "Dalit" (Oppressed) is the name which the people belonging to those castes at the very bottom of India"s caste hierarchy have given themselves. Formerly, they were known as Untouchables, because their presence was considered to be so polluting that contact with them was to be avoided at all costs. The official label for them has been Scheduled Castes, because if their caste is listed on the government schedule, caste members become eligible for a number of affirmative action benefits and protections. Dalits have chosen the "Dalit" label for themselves for at least three important reasons. First, the label indicates that the condition of the Dalits has not been of their own making or choosing; it is something which has been inflicted upon them by others. Thus, secondly, there is an element of militancy built into the label; Dalits seek to overcome the injustices and indignities forced upon them so as to gain the equality and respect hitherto denied them. "Dalit" also indicates that all these castes (Pariahs, Chamars, Mahars, Bhangis, etc.) share a common condition and should therefore unite in a common struggle for dignity, equality, justice and respect under a common name. Mahatma Gandhi adopted the word "Harijan", translated roughly as "children of God", to identify Untouchables. However this term came to be considered disrespectful. The states of Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Andrapradesh and Punjab use the words "Adi Dravida", "Adi Karnataka", "Adi Andhra" and "Adi Dharmi" respectively to identify the people of former "Untouchable" castes in official documents.

R.S. Khare, an anthropologist says that the concept of jati refers to the experience of caste in the „concrete and factual“ domain of everyday social life... (Bayly 9). Caste system is a great threat in India. 19th century Indologist Max Muller, the scholarly missionary Abbe Duboi or even the sociologist Max Weber were of the opinion that the caste system continued to frustrate the attempts towards social and economic process (Gupta.54) The most unique feature of Indian society is the considering of the phenomenon of caste

as a status maker. The manifestation of caste system in the social life is so complicated that it is almost impossible to think of it as a „system“ with "rules" that can be articulated and reasoned out. Sociologists hold the view that while caste identities have continued to deepen, there also prevails the process of „sanskritization“ in Indian society which permits caste groups to evade their identity and achieve an upward social mobility. "Caste" is a lived experience in India more than a prescribed mode of social stratification. It is because of the scriptural sanction of Varna system. Social stratification and injustice arise because the concept of caste is attached to the accident of birth. It has been questioned by thinkers and social reformers. All functions involving labour except the function of governing, learning, and trading, were NOT reserved for shudras. The notion of pollution is always attached to their occupation. So the economic inequality has been continued for centuries. Thus their story becomes that of relentless suffering and injustice. (Limbale. XIV-XV)

The untouchables had the lowest economic position and were traditionally subjected to onerous social and civil disabilities. It is believed that the practice of untouchability began during the Pushymitrah Sunga"s rule (187 BC onwards). He was a Brahmin but the Commander-in-chief of the last Mauryan King Bruhadatra was a shudra by caste. Pushyamitra killed Bruhadatra and established Brahmin rule, which continued till 800 AD. He feared that the untouchables would attack him. So he asked Manu, a Brahmin pandit to suppress the revolution. He codified all inhuman and unethical laws against the shudras in the name of religion. His work was later known as *Manusmriti*. The Brahmins this time acquired the highest status in the society. It was the Kings who enforced the caste divisions. Their rule was to protect Dharma. Varnashrama Dharma was often supported, propagated and reinterpreted through the *Upanishads*, the *Sutras*, the *Smritis* and the *Puranas*. It was to keep the interest of the upper caste intact. The ancient *Dharmasastra* of the Hindus imposed a series of social, political, economic and religious restrictions on the lower castes. The untouchables had no access to Sanskrit language (Rajkumar 122-123).

A number of atrocities and attacks being carried out in India by Hindu Brahminic society. Beating some dalit boys openly is one of the instances of these uncultured practices. On another incident, 30 Dalit and Adivasi students and activists were arrested from Shastri Bhavan in New Delhi when they demanded to meet the Union Minister of Human Resource Development, Smriti Irani, over unfair budgetary allocations in education of Dalit and Adivasi students. At the time of the arrest, the delegation, including Paul Diwakar, well-known Dalit activist and general secretary of National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), were about to submit a Memorandum of Demands to the Minister asking for reallocation of funds. The activists were taken to Parliament Police station where another Dalit activist Beena Palliccal was forcefully dragged inside the police station. With regards to the question as to how long should caste based reservation continue there can only be one answer. Until and unless the attributes of the caste system vanishes how could people belonging to different castes as arranged in an iniquitous relationship be treated equal. It is only the complete annihilation of the caste system that would justify

the need for doing away with the caste based reservation. Those who believe in political democracy must also believe in social land economic democracy or else the goal of establishing an egalitarian society based on the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity would remain meaningless. On July 15, 2012, Tika Ram was among the youths from Ramgarh village in Dadri who attended the Convention on Bathani Tola in Delhi, and spoke of their struggle against the grab of land allocated to dalits by the gram Pradhan Kuldeep Bhati. On July 20, Tika Ram was found on the railway tracks, his body was mutilated and both legs severed. Doctors at the AIIMS Trauma Centre have had to further amputate his legs to save his life, which is still in danger.

The Indian Constitution is one of the glorious constitutions in the World. On 26th January, 1950 the constitution of India came into force and declared India as a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic. The word sovereign means a supreme and absolute power to conduct its affairs without anyone else's consent or permission. The Indian Constitution guarantees six types of Fundamental Rights and they enumerated in part III of the constitution. They are – Right to Equality, Right to Freedom, Right against Exploitation, Right to freedom of Religion, Cultural and Educational Rights and the Right to Constitutional Remedies. The preamble of the constitution of India clearly states that India is a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic. It showed the responsibility to secure to all its citizens:

- a) Justice, social, economic and political;
- b) Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;
- c) Equality of status and of opportunity;
- d) Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation.

The opening articles of the constitution define union, its territory and citizenship. Then a lengthy section of Fundamental Rights follows. The first of these rights is equality. Article 14 affirms equality before the law and equal protection of the laws to all persons. Article 15 talks of the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste sex or place of birth. This specifically covers "access to shops, public restaurants, hotels and places of public entertainments" as well as "the use of wells, tanks, roads and places of public resort" generally denied to dalits. In 1951 the Supreme Court of India ruled that communal quotas for educational institutions violated article 29(2) of the Constitution which prohibits denying admission on grounds only of religion, race, caste and language to educational institutions maintained or aided by the state. Thus the Constitution was amended to add to article 15 a provision which linked the principle of compensatory discrimination to that of equality. The amendment states clearly that nothing in this article or in clause (2) of article 29 shall prevent the state from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially or educationally backward classes of citizens or for the scheduled castes and scheduled Tribes. Article 16 protects equality of opportunity for all citizens in matters of public employment. Article 17 states "Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden". The other fundamental right set forth in the constitution which deserves special attention here is freedom of religion. This included the right of every

religious denomination subject to public order, morality and health," to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes" as well as "to manage its own affairs in matters of religion". The most significant component, provided in Article 330 and 332, is the reservation of seats, in proportion to their population for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. The second important element in the system of compensatory discrimination is found in Article 335. It talks of the including of the SCs and STs in administration by making of appointments to services and posts in connection with the affairs of the Union or of a state. The other important element in the compensatory discrimination system was both the reservation of seats in educational institutions as well as the provision of financial assistance for dalit, ST and other "Backward Classes" Students. It was Article 341 which gave the President the important responsibility of specifying "the castes, races, or tribes or parts of or of groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purpose of this Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Castes" and allowed Parliament to add to or delete from the President List (John C.B. Webster. 130-137). According to the Constitution, the state has no official religion. The most important components of secularism are the following:

- 1) Samanata (equality) is incorporated in article 14.
- 2) Prohibition against discrimination on the ground of religion, caste etc., is incorporated in article 15 and 16.
- 3) Freedom of speech and expression and all other important freedoms of all the citizens are conferred under articles 19 and 21.
- 4) Right to practice religion is conferred under articles 25-28.
- 5) Fundamental duty of the state to enact uniform civil laws treating all the citizens as equal, is imposed by article 44.

Kancha Ilaiah uses the term Dalitization not in the sense of Hinduization. Hindu thinking and the ways of Dalitbahujans are different from each other. The environments created by both cultures are specific and distinctive as they have been considered in the two developmental processes. Hindu thinking is set against the interests of Dalitbahujan Castes. As an example we can raise the strategy in the way Hindu mythology is established to destroy the Dalitbahujan ethos. The culture maintained by the upper castes is hegemonic and violent, and they always keep the superiority complex. They sought to destroy Dalitbahujan productive structures, culture, economy and its political institutions. They attacked everything which they have felt challenges to their supremacy. This process is still continuing in present India in various forms. It is vivid to note that the Brahminical leaders never tried to build an anti-caste egalitarian ideology during the anti-colonial struggle. Postcolonial development has been systematically reached into the hands of upper castes. The Brahmins have focused their attention on politico-bureaucratic power.

The Baniyas established their hegemony on capitalists markets and Neo-Kshatriyas establish their control over agrarian economy. Alienation and Marginalization of the productive people played a major role in the process of Dalitization. The social context of dalitbahujans is productive and distributive. In the current repressive social

structure of the village, it is only the Dalitbahujan masses that have had the strength to survive as productive beings. Here human beings relate to each other basically on humane terms. The material basis of the society is rooted not in wealth but in labour power. But the labour power of dalits earns unsatisfactory returns. Such diminishing returns have the effect of completely alienating them. Three ways of alienation happened to their lives such as alienation from village production and marketing, alienation from main village social setting and at last they are alienated from themselves. Exploitation is playing an important role in the process of Dalitization. The Brahmins are non-productive and lazy. Their notion of private property is inhuman and exploitative. On the other hand Dalitbahujans keep working for the well-being of the so called upper castes. Here the unethical behavior of Brahmins must be changed. They live by exploiting Dalitbahujan labour and convert the fruits of the labour into their property. Ilaiah again stresses the Brahmins' leading a life promoting inequality. The principle of „selfishness as natural“ has become the foundation of Hinduism. He views that Brahminic scholarship legitimized leisure, mantra, puja, tapasya and soothsaying, but these are not knowledge system in themselves. We can notice that „upper“ caste political structure is basically authoritarian. This authoritarianism begins within a brahminical home and extends to the rest of civil society. In the Dalitbahujan communities they lead a democratic social life. It is a big danger that the democracy of Dalitbahujans and brahminical authoritarianism conflict each other in civil society. Hinduism has made a number of attempts to destroy Dalitbahujan culture. It has not succeeded. Dalitbahujans culture and dignity was respected with the emerging steps by Jyothirao Phule and Ambedker. The hegemony of Dalitbahujan was established during the Mandal struggle in 1990. But the struggle posed several new questions. Thus a kind of polarization took place between minorities and Brahmins. This polarization places the Dalitization of society on the national agenda. (114-126)

3. Conclusion

The topics related to the Dalit studies are always challenging because there occurs the discussion of the real life conditions of the suppressed and marginalized ones. The condition of dalits is almost the same everywhere in Indian sub continent. When we have the opportunity to talk about the racial discrimination in US between the blacks and the whites, and the pathetic condition of blacks in South Africa, they also have the stories of liberation from the clutches of the hierarchical social powers. The struggles and wars related to these are always inspirational in maintaining equality in society irrespective of castes, colour, religion and other criteria. Human beings are equal and there is no need of polarization among the people. The religious hegemonic powers have always, knowingly or unknowingly made their contribution in society so that it is sometimes hard for dalitbahujans. The reality is, the unlimited authority of religions and their customs create blindness in the mindset of the people so that they cannot see the things openly and naturally. The societies are divided and subdivided into various groups. The privatization in the modern world has affected the societies to be more selfish. Brahminic culture

had created this kind of supremacy long before. The over focus of religious practices made the nation more anti-national. Aravind Kejriwal, without any doubt asserts that the Hindus are the anti-nationals. Why such opinions are being raised from the main corner of the society? It is an avoidable fact that there are people who can think and perceive the issues that happen around the Indian sub-continent. Dalitization is a process. It has certain social and religious elements to discuss with. India is a nation which is religiously deep rooted and socially caste based. The Varna theory developed by the Aryan Literature still has its effects on the life of the Indian people. The people are getting educated and a thorough transformation is happening everywhere. Modern media is alert on the issues related to the discrimination. It is a curse that the generation after generation continues to believe in caste hierarchy and supremacy. It is a surprising fact that the people of India are not ready to abandon the caste system though there is a widespread expansion of development in Knowledge and education. For them culture is somewhat different from what the nations of the World think of. Indian Brahminical system must think of the changes and transformative powers that have been brought about by different religions and modern movements. The modern World is witnessing the cruelties and inhuman practices, especially the ISIS terrorist's brutal killings and destroying civilizations. The western countries have Hindu temples and Yoga programmes are being conducted everywhere. These are good signs of others accepting our social ingredients. But what is going on here in India. On one hand the Caste Hinduism, without any doubt trying to dominate the dalits in order to maintain a kind of hierarchy. On the other hand the minorities in India are leading a life of fear these days. They are not at all satisfied with the present leadership of Narendra Modi. The entire India has great expectation on Modi when he took charge as prime Minister. The short history of a few months makes it clear that will happen nothing unusual. He takes pleasure in travelling abroad to have warm meetings with heads of Government. He is busy with industrialists for inviting them to invest in India. How long such investments prosper? A nation without harmony cannot have a healthy future and strength of the nation is its unity and oneness. *Caste, class and power* writes Andre Beteille:

“In reality, of course, caste, class and power are closely interwoven. They can be treated separately and particularly the last two only by a process of abstraction”. (185)

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