



Suraj Yengde's *Caste Matters*: An Exploration in the Pre-requisites of 'Dalit Love'

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Abstract

The spirit of isolation, separation, degradation, and domination of the caste system gets its water as the upper-class people's cultural and social capital is accepted as merit. Education may be one of the leading sources that we have in our hands to change this viewpoint. Casteist outlook could not be erased by being neutral to the issues. Education also starts by realizing this point. Yengde rightly points out that 'apolitical love is the mere demonstration' that makes no change; so we have to grow and love with a politically charged vision to resist inequality. Being political is being conscious of our ontology as well as our fellow beings. Yengde's 'Dalit love' shows the path to rethink the ontological exploration through Dalit identity for preparing a proper antidote to the malady of caste. Caste is not only a threat to the democratic society, in a capitalist production system it is the main threat to promote a binary social system, i.e. hetero-normative, anti-queer, and trans-phobic chambers. Rules and laws many a time could not promote equality in true sense. The sense of 'mutuality and respectability' is mostly demanded. What are the prerequisites to be free society where human beings may flourish individually and socially without negating the others? Babasaheb Ambedkar tried to make us understand these issues through different writings; however, we failed to practice his ideas again and again. This is the crucial time to face the meeting point of past and present to develop radical awareness to erase caste from our society

Keywords: Dalit Love, Caste Problem, Education, Communism, Democracy.

Introduction

In the age of the 21st century, we're still living in a country where the caste problem distorts and contorts our society every moment. The terms untouchables, unapproachables, and unseeables are true in the practical life of how a Dalit person would be looked at. It is worthy to note that not to think that the caste is synonymous with, in Suraj Yengde's words, "reservations, *Dalits*, Adivasis, natural scavenging, poverty, *Dalit* capitalism..." (2019, p. 3).

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It is very well known how the caste system runs in society till now using myths through interpretation and re-interpretation camouflaging with the tone of liberalism. However, the point is to change it. An easy-to-say solution would be 'love', i.e. mutual and reciprocal among human beings. Fraternity, equality, and empathy (i.e. democracy) are the way-outs to grow together without discriminating and dominating any person. As Ambedkar puts it in his *Annihilation of Caste*:

An ideal society should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a change taking place in one part to other parts. In an ideal society there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be varied and free points of contact with other modes of association. In other words there should be social endosmosis. This is fraternity, which is only another name for democracy. Democracy is not merely a form of Government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen. (2014a, p. 57)

It seems tough to engage in a conversation where the motion of the society itself shows false and pretentious solidarity with Dalits. How to recognize a Dalit as a Dalit is very crucial these days. Spivak once said in her lecture that if a person recognizes herself as a subaltern, then she is not. She seems to mean that the situation of being a subaltern is distinct from claiming herself as a subaltern. In the same way, it is important to recognise the representational structure of Dalit community. Yengde while describing various divisions who are Dalits (in constitutional terms), he has showed how the groupism develops throughout the years that hurt the Dalit spirit of liberation.

Notion of a Free Social Order

In his *India and The Pre-requisites of Communism*, B. R. Ambedkar elaborately has discussed what the pillars of free social order following the notions of equality, fraternity, and liberty are. It is important to summarize his idea to move forward to dive into the book *Caste Matters* by Suraj Yengde (2019). The reciprocal and associative functions that interplay between individuals and society are essential for the betterment and development of the individual's personality as well as social development. Society is the space where an individual is located and exercises her labor. Quoting from Jacques Maritan and Prof. Beard, Ambedkar showed how love is necessary to feel as a human person and to pour her heart out in her works. We need to understand the external value of the person as she is completely conditioned by her geo-political location. Along with it, how does 'mortal flesh' constitute its value in a free social order or an incarcerated society? Is it given or constructive application (of any authority), or natural right? Surely, it is a constructive approach as value is created only when there is other. This other is necessary and plays a crucial role in recognizing the problems of caste society.

Being dependent on the values of equality, fraternity, and liberty, humanity is not a fruit of barren abstraction. It is a constructive approach to grow together. Equality approves the ways to be treated as equal morally, socially, politically, and so on. It is a mere farce to discuss inequalities noticing the physical strength or talent. Therefore, equality is not naturally given or demonstrated. We earn it through the motion of the development of the free social order. Equality is totally and completely contradictory to hierarchy. Ambedkar has written "Fraternity is the name for the disposition of an individual to treat men as the object of reverence and love and the desire to be in unity with the fellow beings" (2014b, p. 97).

Fraternity develops in plurality, not in inclusivity. Here, inclusivity denotes including 'others' as others in our terms under the same roof that could not promote any equality or

liberty. We must engage in a conversation where mutual respect and reciprocity would be maintained along with the acceptance of individuality. Nevertheless, liberty develops there where there is no room for exploitation. Otherwise, civil or political, both liberties would fall apart. Now, we must be meticulously conscious to designate a situation, or a state, or a system to call it a free social order. Disguised oppressors are too hard to point out. Even if, they are pointed out, it is hard to demolish them. Yengde perfectly swims in his literature so that anyone may recognize them if they want to.

Discourse of Casteist Society

The discourse of casteist society is a constructive effort to dominate fellow beings to maintain self-interest. The self-interest grows and expands in such a way in our ideology that we hardly recognize it. Cultural hegemony is one of the easy ways to keep the questions that may arise from the depressed class. There are different interpretations to interpret how caste comes into existence. Without going into the elaborative effort, following Ambedkar (1917), it can be claimed that that customs like maintaining endogamy, solving the problem of surplus men and women, etc. slowly society has developed so many rules and punishments for infringing the customs, therefore, over time, as rulers understood how they are being privileged by the spirit of isolation, separation, degradation, and domination of the caste system, they justify the system as *Shastric* and approved by the *Dharmagranthas* and *Puranas*. Even nowadays among Dalits, there are divisions by subscribing different narratives of their origin of jaat. They (Token, Self-obsessed, etc.) although lack societal acceptance by the upper-caste masters, they eager to prove how they are different from the 'distressed, poor, lower-caste, working-class group' *Dalits*. Carrying a patriarchal spirit Casteist society always maintains a binary system to subjugate women as well as a menace to so-called non-productive sexual orientations. These are the concerning issues that we must be aware of while discussing anything related to Indian Society.

However, we many a time muddle the caste issues with the content of opportunities, reservations, merit, etc. We join a conversation where there is a loop without any end. The main problem is we still practice the same complex strategically hegemonic structure to maintain the caste system whether we admit it or not. Teltumbe (2018) in his *Republic of Caste* elaborates these nuances minutely. Constitutional reservation could not give space to develop liberty, equality, and fraternity in this Casteist society as removing the social barrier is too hard to create economic and political equality. Moreover, it is important to represent the common people of India on any political front. Are we listening to their voices or is their voice itself a fabricated one? Let us move on to envisage why *Caste Matters*.

Anathema of Indian Society: *Caste Matters*

Caste Matters introduces the anathema of Indian society, i.e. caste system- a discrimination culture through a fluent narrative. It attacks the sublime ideologies people are carrying. Caste-blindness and the false pretension of melting away caste's existence are attacked and at the same time, the narrative exposes the people who are harming the Dalits community who are from the so-called lower caste or Dalit community. The quest for constituting a democratic society is sewn in the care and love of the depressed class who has the longing to love others and to be loved. If transformation could not happen from the lowest class of society, it would not be for all. As Cornel West puts these in the forward of the book:

Yengde lays bare the painful truth that in caste-ridden capitalist India, *Dalit* freedom is subversive, *Dalit* hope is transgressive and *Dalit* love is a crime. On the moral and spiritual levels, this means that any genuine *Dalit* hope is a threat to the status quo and any real *Dalit* love pursues a quest for *Dalit* justice which must fundamentally transform culture and society in India. On the political and economic levels, this

means that any authentic *Dalit* freedom should be radically democratic in content and international in character. (Yengde, 2019, p. xii)

The sexist and misogynist caste system brings 'the horrors of untouchability, the tradition imposed inferiority' and 'a cascade of violence' upon the Dalit community as a whole. This is a well-known, normalized, non-internalized truth. Yengde (2019) shows, "In India, casteism is a measure of destruction, pillage, drudgery, servitude, bondage, unaccounted rape, massacre, arson, incarceration, police brutality and loss of moral virtuosity for 300 million Indian Untouchables" (p. 2).

Capitalism is a system where a human being's essence, i.e. labor is exploited and simultaneously it attacks human creativity, self-creativity, and capacity by the measurement and manipulation of time management. Casteism is a fuel to it. It approves a social, economic, cultural, and political hegemonic system of oppression, degradation, and subjugation. Sometimes silently, in its crude explicit forms, it reveals how capitalism in India has benefitted from its caste-based structure. The central problem of this society is that those who face the cruelty of casteism decide to remain silent, or even if she speaks, she is not heard. The discrimination developing through the mythical stories of the origination of the castes and sub-castes brings a gap to construct a unity to revolt against discrimination.

Many people who have seldom experienced the above don't bother about these issues. By choosing to remain silent, the dominant castes effectively practise a thinly veiled 'caste terrorism' by pleading 'ignorance' over caste issues. This 'ignorance' is practised, it is intentional to not have to face up to reality and instead continue living in a cocooned world. Therefore, their problems become the rest of the world's problems. (p. 10)

In a caste-embedded structure, one could not be a part of another's misery as the social-political reality we share seems to be antagonistic to each other. The common people are continuously being puppets by swinging within the ruling classes' interests. *Caste Matters* (2019) boldly declares,

In fact, these are specific caste-nation issues but consensus is created by lies and deceit. And the common citizen who is suffering at the hands of dominant-caste nationalism buys into the false propaganda and effectively becomes the martyr of someone else's national imagination. Due to the obvious divisions, everyone holds on to his/her caste. Such feelings produce hostility and insecurities. Thus, the 'nationalistic feeling has to be constantly manufactured by the ruling classes to obscure the divisions, often seeking opportunities to display their angst. Due to this, India continues to be a nation of repeated riots and atrocities imposed by one caste nation upon another. (p. 18)

Caste pathology attunes the whole superstructure of society to preserve the benefits of generational pride of upper castes from film institutions to academia, from business to bureaucracy.

Implication of 'Dalit love'

Dalit love is embedded in the social reality of the deprivation and hatred that Dalits receive from generation to generation, for many years. They know how it feels if someone hates or alienates them by demeaning their identity. Moreover, they are counted as an integral part at the same time in society as the tormenting machine of caste culture needs slaves to maintain the hierarchy. Even, this oppression starts from the very childhood. A child of Dalit parents is

nothing but a slave to upper community people. Slavery is constituted and molded in various ways through many ages in their lifestyle. Therefore, their metaphysical and ontological ways of seeing the world are different. Their spiritualism is not bound by the confinement of alienation. In literature or stories of great people, we may find how they (Dalits/ oppressed people) react when the so-called upper caste person behaves with love and care or eats their cooked food. Yengde (2019) refers to Kancha Ilaiah regarding this point,

Dalits loathe the pre-eminence of Brahmin gods that takes the form of what Ilaiah describes as ‘spiritual fascism’. According to him, this is a manifestation of violence in an anti-democratic set-up. The Hindu religion in principle banks on this concept to advocate violent forms of suppression. Thus, the *Dalit* spirit is found in the natural obeisance of non-material values. (p. 24)

Inventing and re-venting this *Dalit* spirit and love could be our fundamental task to internalise the pain, and miseries *Dalits* have gone through. It may help us to be empathetic. Caste is not any cultural exposition of diversity. It should be understood at every moment of our life. Love is more powerful than hatred as it can connect two opposite standpoints, it transgresses boundaries. Badiou (2012) wrote, “We shouldn’t underestimate the power love possesses to slice diagonally through the most powerful oppositions and radical separations” (p. 29).

Being an inherently hierarchical social order, caste system closes the doors for the human space where love develops in many ways. Phenomenological explorations of the caste culture show us how caste differently affects the different castes. Alienation, being phenomena of Dalit experience is one of the bridging ropes to maintain the caste system. The feeling of being alienated by the other (upper) castes deeply makes the individual numb and she always stays within the existential crisis. However, this very person many a time embraces another person with love, kindness, and hospitality if she ever feels any kind of friendly approach from the person. This Dalit love is blended with the possibilities to change the world’s approach to her and the deep pain that she tolerates through her ancestral memory and in her life.

Educate the educators: “No such thing as a bad student, only a bad teacher.” (Avildsen, 1984)

‘Educate, Agitate, Organize’- the famous slogan of Babasaheb would be merely some eye-catching words if we do not focus on the ontological exploration of the worldview running through the teachers. Learning, self-respect, and character-building must be the aim of our education. Education is not merely to earn our livelihood or preserve our self-interest. After so many years of Independence, the caste system is still there in our country. The political party plays mind games with people for their benefit by using the caste system.

It is not the case that changing the societal structure or revolutionary change is only dependent on teachers. Even, it is the mass awareness and critical consciousness which are mostly needed. However, at the same time, we know teachers are those pillars that can motivate us to think and act against the chains of patriarchy, discrimination, corruption, and inhumanity in society. I would like to cite the detailed study of Suzana Brinkmann’s (2020) article *The Invisible Barriers to India’s Educational Reforms* which demonstratively explores how the teachers’ (exceptions are there) mentality and worldviews suppress and dominate the students to carry out the same old caste system in praxis. They not only humiliate the students coming from the so-called lower caste or poor family or a family without having so-called status, but also generate these ideologies to the students who have to be believed in a good background because of high caste, power, or status. Brinkmann has given research data

following the methods of critical realism that show the unfortunate picture of our Indian society despite the words of constitutional claims of equality, liberty, and fraternity. The only way to solve this problem would be the step by educating the teachers first. She must learn new techniques, and methods to make learning dynamic to others as well as interesting. Teaching and learning things are not the topic of competition. Commensurability must be there to be a part of an education system.

Gramsci's organic intellectuals, or Ambedkar's intellectuals are those who could be identified as real educators to change society. Contrary to this, we get teachers who are nothing but proponents of *The "Banking" concept of Education* (Freire, 1970) promoting the culture of silence, dependence, and narration sickness. Students as future citizens; it would be fair to call them laborers who are normalized and neutralized to be receivers or executors of the culture of oppression. They even become oppressors slowly as within the oppressed the tools of hegemony grow so well that they do not even want to change it. Being alienated from the existential reality, a student does not become conscious of what the reality is. Some are dehumanized; some are glorified by referencing their cultural memory. The transformative motion of critical consciousness is ruthlessly attacked and murdered.

The intellectuals are the symbol of hope we have. The traumas of caste-embedded society should be represented by them again and again in the discourse of daily life. Edward Said wrote, "...the intellectual is an individual endowed with a faculty for representing,...to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under rug" (1994, p. 11). This vocation to be activity willing spirit to change the present societal condition expands through the education. Paulo Freire (1970) advised, struggled, and showed the ways to announce the war against the inequality, oppression, and dehumanization by using the means of education by spending his life by constituting more than 20,000 cultural circles. The education is not what we get only in educational institutions. He showed how love emerges within us by the activities that promote communication in his book *Pedagogy of The Oppressed* (2005). The thorough theoretical discourse of this book develops the tools within the reader to break the chains against the hegemonical ideological discourse.

Conclusion

In his book, *Pakistan or The Partition of India* (1945), Ambedkar has written, "No matter what the Hindus say. Hinduism is a menace to liberty, equality, and fraternity. On that account it is incompatible with democracy" (2014c, p. 358). He depicts many pictures of the problems of the caste system and untouchability in his writings and speeches. He believes in Buddhism which gives the message of equality, love, and fraternity among all people. He wants to abolish the fear of radically thinking beyond the 'dharma's' and 'shastras'. He always considers Education as the most important element for social and moral progress. He understands the problem of untouchables. Being the most progressive and innovative persons, the so-called untouchables considered themselves incapable and impure for so many generations. In this way, they lost their 'inner strength and self-esteem which are the two pillars of emancipation'. Therefore, the realization of a subjective consciousness of a class of people is not very easy as long as caste exists. It is a perpetual journey to revolutionize our thoughts, behaviors, and actions. Political power and education strategy are two important ideological pillars to orchestrate the reproduction of the conditions to move a society as usual. The fettered system of education that propagates the caste system, not only harms the *Dalits*, but also creates an atomistic, intrinsically empty and void, and alienated person, just a means of production by promoting slavery discourse. However, the long history of oppression must be understood by the so-called upper caste/ class people. The change starts opposing own class interests and developing Dalit love. There would be innumerable obstacles to fight against the cultural sludge. One has to be patient, develop the ability to

listen to others and be empathetic. Short-term benefits are not good for the greater future as we all know- 'United we stand, divided we fall'.

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Bio-note

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