

CHAPTER 10

HINDUS AND THEIR WANT OF SOCIAL CONSCIENCE

I

Everyone who feels moved by the deplorable condition of the Untouchables begins by saying: "We must do something for the Untouchables". One seldom hears any of the persons interested in the problem saying: "Let us do something to change the Hindu." It is invariably assumed that the object to be reclaimed is the Untouchables as though untouchability was due to his depravity and that he alone is responsible for his condition. If there is to be a Mission, it must be to the Untouchables. Nothing requires to be done to the Hindu. He is sound in mind, manners and morals. He is whole, there is nothing wrong with him. He is not the Sinner.

What is the real state of affairs? This argument that there is nothing wrong with the Hindus and that the Untouchable is responsible for whatever wrong he suffers is very much the argument that is used by the Christians for defending themselves against the inhuman treatment accorded by them to the Jews. A very crushing reply has been given by Mr. Louis Goulding to the Christians on behalf of the suffering Jews. In discussing the source of the Jewish Problem Mr. Louis Goulding says:

"I beg leave to give a very homely instance of the sense in which I consider the Jewish Problem in essence a Gentile Problem. A close acquaintance of mine is a certain Irish Terrier of mixed pedigree, the dog Paddy, who is to my friend John Smith as the apple of both his eyes. Paddy dislikes Scotch terriers; it is enough for one to pass within twenty yards of Paddy to deafen the neighbourhood with challenges and insults. It is a practice which John Smith deplotes, which, therefore, he does his best to check—all the more as the object of Paddy's detestation are often inoffensive creatures, who seldom speak first. Despite all his affection for Paddy, he considers, as I do, that Paddy's unmannerly behaviour is due to some measure

of original sin in Paddy. It has not yet been suggested to us that what is here involved is a Scotch Terrier Problem and that when Paddy attacks a neighbour who is peacefully engaged in inspecting the evening smells it is the neighbour who should be arraigned for inciting to attack by the fact of his existence.”

If we equate Paddy to the Hindu and Scotch Terrior to the Untouchable the argument of Goulding will apply to the Hindus no less than it does to the Christians. If for the reasons given by Mr. Goulding the Jewish Problem is in reality a Christian Problem then the Problem of the Untouchables is primarily a Hindu Problem.

Are the Hindus conscious, do they recognise that the Untouchables are a problem to them? Are they worried about it? Is it weighing on their minds? Certain obvious tests may be applied in order to ascertain the truth. One test is the volume of literature on the subject. One can take the volume of literature issued on the Negroes of America as a standard measure. One is amazed at the huge amount of printed material that exists in the United States on the subject of the Negroes. It is said that a really complete bibliography on the Negro Problem would run up to several hundred thousand titles. The literature is really immeasurable. This proves as nothing else can, how much it is a problem to the Whites. It has disturbed through several generations all classes of people in America, the religious moralists, the political philosophers, the Statesmen, the philanthropists, the social scientists, the politicians, the businessmen and the plain ordinary citizen as well.

What is the amount of literature on the Untouchables that exists in India? Not more than half a dozen pamphlets!

Another test would be the test of social behaviour. I give below two cases reported in the papers. One is from the '*Pratap*' of 5th March 1926. It gives the following news:

“On the 23rd of February at about 11 o'clock in the day, a group of about 12 or 13 were digging earth in Begumganj, Lucknow when the quarry collapsed and they were all buried under heaps of earth. One boy and six women were rescued after the earth had been removed out of whom only one woman turned out to be alive, who belonged to Mirpur. She had received grievous injuries and her condition was very critical. The Hindu inhabitants of Begumganj however refused to give a bed to lay that woman on. At last a Muslim offered a bed; now there was no Hindu prepared to help to carry the poor woman as far as her house. At last, a sweeper was called and he undertook to carry the woman to her home as she lay on the bed.”

The best illustration of the absence of conscience in the Hindu towards the Untouchables is to be found in the following incident which is reported by the Correspondent of the '*Sangram*' and published in its issue of 10th July 1946. The correspondent says:

“A woman died on the 8th of July 1946 in the Anath Ashram (Beggars Home) called Azil situated in a village called Mhapse (in Goa) and maintained by Christians. The woman was believed to be a Hindu. She was alone and had no relations. Seeing that there was no one to dispose of the dead body and to perform funeral rites, the Hindus of the village came together and raised a subscription for the purpose. They brought the dead body out of the Beggars' Home. Just about that time some Untouchables, who knew the woman came there and recognized the dead body. The moment the Hindus came to know that the woman belonged to the Untouchables the Hindus who had gathered there deserted the dead body and started walking away. The Untouchables who had come requested the Hindus to give them the amount they had collected for buying the coffin and the shroud. The Hindus refused to part with the money saying that the money was collected from the subscribers on the representation that the deceased woman was a Hindu woman. As she is not a Hindu but an Untouchable, they can't spend the money on her funeral. The Untouchables had to do their best to dispose of their dead body. The Untouchables had good evidence of the love and affection the Hindus bear towards them. The following is from the '*Milap*' of 2nd October 1925. Its correspondent reports:

“News has been received from Ruddurprayag that one evening in the first week of September a Harijan came to the Dharmashala (or monastery) of Ruddurprayag. When he learnt that a tiger came there every night, he requested the pastor of the Dharmashala to let him lie hidden in some corner of the Dharmashala for the night, so that he may remain safe from the tiger. The callous pastor, however, paid no heed to the request and closed the gates of the Dharmashala. The ill-starred Harijan laid himself down outside in one corner, full of apprehensions of the tiger. Towards the end of the night the tiger came and attacked the Harijan. As the man was quite strong and healthy and despair made him fearless, he caught hold of the tiger's neck and shouted 'I have grabbed the tiger. Come and kill him'. But the high caste pastor did not open the door, nor did he offer any sort of help, so that very soon the grip of the Harijan loosened and the tiger also ran away. At present the man is lying wounded in Shrinagar (Garhwal) where he is getting himself treated. His condition is said to be critical.”

The heartlessness disclosed by these instances shows that the Hindu does not bother about what he does to the Untouchables or about what happens to the Untouchables.

A third test would be the test of service and sacrifice for the uplift of the Untouchables. Here again, one may adopt the service and sacrifice of the Americans for raising the Negroes as our standard measure. Here are some figures.

Consider the bequests¹ made by the Whites for the benefit of the Negro education.

Testator	Amount (in Dollars)	Testator	Amount (in Dollars)
Kane	50,000	Mason	1,00,000
Harton	5,000	Naunbert	40,000
Troughton	1,60,600	Harrison	2,30,000
Ottinger	500	Munger	75,000
Gambrille	35,000	Corliss	45,000
Jarepki	1,000	Rosenbanin	1,000
Strock	500	Burton	1,000
Kidder	5,000	Conroy	1,00,000
Clodin	10,000	Kent	10,000
Wood	500	Duke	1,40,000
Harkness	12,50,000	Marciliat	5,000
Beatie	2,90,000	Masey	25,000
Marquant	5,000	Nicholas	20,000
Newton	5,000	Garretson	15,00,000
Hummington	25,000	Hatcher	20,000
Phelps-Stokes	2,80,000	Wright	10,000
Butler	30,000		

These figures relate to the period before 1930. They do not take account of residuary bequests.

Compare the Educational funds² that exist for the advancement of education among the Negroes. They are:

- (i) The Avery Fund.
- (ii) The Vilas Bequest.
- (iii) The African Fund.
- (iv) The Buckingham Fund.
- (v) The George Washington Educational Fund.

(1) This Table is prepared from the list given in the 'Negro Year Book' 1931-32, p. 202.

(2) *Ibid.*, pp. 213-18.

- (vi) The Miner Fund.
 (vi) The Steward Missionary Foundation.
 (viii) The Daniel Hand Fund.
 (ix) The John Slater Fund.
 (x) The Phelps-Stokes Fund.

In addition to this, there are general Funds such as the Carnegie Corporation Julius Rosenwald Fund and the Rockefeller Foundation which also help the Negroes. The amounts distributed by these funds is not known. But they must be amounting to millions.

Compare the amount spent by Religious organizations on the education of the Negroes. Here are some interesting¹ figures.

	Annual Expenditure (In Dollars)	Permanent fund for Negro Education (In Dollars)	Value of school plants, etc. (In Dollars)
American Baptist Home Mission Board	116,247	1,597,700	3,594,251
American Church Institute for Negroes (Episcopal)	185,100	450,000	3,000,000
American Missionary Association	368,057	3,228,421	3,200,000
Church of Christ (Disciples)	91,072	500,000
United Christian Missionary Society			
Lutheran Evangelical Synodical Conference of North America Board Colored Mission	74,900	175,000
Methodist Episcopal Church Board of Education. Institutions for Negroes	259,264	1,962,729	5,000,000
Methodist Episcopal Church Woman's Home Missionary Society of	104,975		360,000
Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Division of Missions for Colored People	405,327	1,994,032	3,560,000
United Presbyterian Church Board of of Mission for Freemen	98,000	645,000	1,000,000

It is estimated that the total amount spent for the religious and philanthropic organizations between 1865 and 1930 comes to 135,000,000 dollars on the advancement of the Negroes. Of this amount, 85,000,000 dollars have been contributed by the Whites.

What is the measure of service and sacrifice of the Hindus for the elevation of the Untouchables. The only organization the Hindus can

¹ This Table is prepared from the list given in the 'Negro Year Book' 1931-32. p. 213.

boast of is the Harijan Sevak Sangh¹. Its capital fund does not probably go beyond 10 lakhs. Its annual expenditure does not go beyond a few thousand rupees on petty and insignificant and insubstantial purposes. The Fund is not a welfare fund. It is essentially a Political Fund intended to make the Untouchables vote with the Hindus.

Why is this difference? Why do the Americans exert so much in service and sacrifice for the elevation of the Negroes and why have the Hindus cared to do nothing for the elevation of the Untouchables? The answer is that the Americans have a social conscience while the Hindus have none. It is not that the Hindus have no sense of right and wrong, good and bad, moral and immoral. What is wrong with the Hindu is that his sense of moral obligation towards others is restricted to a limited class of people, namely, the members of his caste. As Mr. H. J. Paton says²:

“Clearly a man may be a good member of a limited society without being a morally good man. There seem indeed to be already shadows or anticipations of moral excellence even in the man who carries out coherently an individual policy of life; and we begin to find something which we may almost mistake for virtue itself, when we consider the man who is a loyal member of any society, even of a gang of thieves. Yet although there must be honour among thieves, a thief is not therefore an honourable man. The morally good man seems to be the man who is good as a member not of a limited society but of an unlimited society—of a society of societies whose purpose includes all purposes, and beyond which there is no other society to be a source of conflicting claims of duties.”

The Untouchable does not belong to the society of the Hindus and the Hindu does not feel that he and the Untouchables belong to one society. This is the reason why the conduct of the Hindu is marked by a moralistic unconcernedness.

Not having conscience, the Hindu has no such thing in him as righteous indignation against the inequities and injustices from which the Untouchable has been suffering. He sees no wrong in these inequities and injustices and refuses to budge. By his absence of conscience the Hindu is a great obstacle in the path of the removal of untouchability.

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¹ For details see my Book “What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables.”

² The “Good Will” by H. J. Paton. p. 281.