

## **CULTURED & ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR**

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“What do you think of the Hindu caste system in India?” a foreign journalist asked me in an interview during the World Congress of the International Catholic Union of the Press (UCIP) at Sherbrooke, Canada.

“The caste system in India is an iron chain which ties down India against development and progress,” I said as a matter of fact way.

The journalist had asked me about the Hindu caste system and I made a sweeping statement about whole of India. The caste system is like an iron chain, which ties down India against development and progress.

Am I justified in my sweeping statement? I think so. Many will agree with me that the caste system is very prevalent among the followers of the Hindu religion. But I also hold that under the direct or indirect influence of the large majority population of Hindus in India the followers of other religions are not completely free from the evils of caste system.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was so exasperated with the Hindu caste system that he said, “I was born a Hindu but I would not die a Hindu”. He not only embraced Buddhism but he also took with him lakhs of his Dalit (untouchable) followers to Buddhism.

Christianity claims that the religion is casteless. The places of worship like churches, chapels, shrines and pilgrim centres are open to all Christians and the people of other faiths too irrespective of caste, creed, language and culture. The Christians of all castes and of all social backgrounds worship together in the same church participating in the same religious ceremonies without any distinction.

And yet the Christians are not completely free from the Hindu caste mentality! Christians from different socio-religious background do not mix freely. Christians of all background may eat together but marriage between different socio-caste background is rare.

Recently I was flabbergasted when I heard a dear friend speaking disparagingly about a person because of the person’s so called ‘low caste’ background. At least in same ways like education and earning that person was better qualified than my friend. Still due to caste mentality looking down and speaking disparagingly came naturally to my friend without any ill will!

The Bible and Christian teachings are against any discrimination in Christian living. Yet I feel that the Christian mentality is not fully assimilated the equality of all believers irrespective of their socio-religious background.

The Bible is unambiguous about the equality and unity of all people. St. Peter, a traditional Jew, learnt the lesson of equality of believers through a vision. So he said “God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean”. Subsequently when Peter confronted foreigners and unbelievers he preached that, “Now I really understand that God is not a respecter of

persons, but in every nation (read in every caste) he who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10, 28 & 34-35).

Perhaps the great teacher and preacher of Christian faith, St. Paul is more forceful in proclaiming the equality and unity of all who believe in Christ irrespective of their social standing or cultural background. He says, “There is no longer any distinction between Jew and Greek, or between slave and freeman, or between man and woman, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3, 28).

At the centre of Christian teachings two principles are accepted by all believers: First, God is the Father of all people and all are called to be saved, and second, God has sent his Son Jesus so that, we recognize ourselves as children of God through Jesus, our brother. In the words of St. Paul, “From eternity he (God) destined us in love to be his sons and daughters through Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1, 5).

In this Christian vision a Christian person is called to accept all other people as his brothers or sisters irrespective of their caste, creed, language and culture. This vision calls for love and respect for each and every person irrespective of his/her socio-cultural and religio-economic background.

This Christian vision is not a monopoly of the Christians. This vision is at the root of the belief that the whole world is one family (ॐwÄið fwxwkff{T). But it is totally different from the vision of “One Cultural, one religion and one nation”.

The question is, can all people accept irrespective of their caste, creed, language and culture that they are created by God and saved by God? If we accept, then, it follows that each person is good and equal before God. Each person deserves love and respect of the other. So looking down at other persons or people and speaking disparagingly should not be accepted as cultured and acceptable behaviour in an enlightened religion or rational society.

Finally let me recall a Sanskrit poem which says, “All you walk together; Dialogue with one another. Be of one mind; Let your policy (Mantra) be similar. Your meeting be together. You think alike; Be of one opinion. Resolve to be one. Be one in your heart that you may be able to live together. (contact the author: [ciss@satyam.net.in](mailto:ciss@satyam.net.in))

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