

Untouchability

This is not a defense of Untouchability. It is not a defense of any form of injustice, but it is a challenge, a challenge against the argument that the existence of some particular evil vitiates against the establishment of an institution because the locus of the evil and the institution are the same.

Once upon a time a nation of slave-owners rose in rebellion against a foreign power which held them in subjection. They won their independence through warfare and they kept their slaves. It was not presumed that they were unable to establish their government because they owned slaves. Neither was it insisted that the nation was not respectable on this account. In fact neither the imperialists nor the revolutionists considered the slaves at all. Both agreed that the status of such persons was a concern only of their owners, who were then establishing their government, called the United States of America.

The argument about India appears like this: A man is incapable of owning his home because he will not permit the scavenger to enter the living room and carry garbage through the front door. But such a man is in a better position if he pays a good stiff rent to the landlord. The existence of the Untouchable in India and the various statements we read are not less ridiculous than this. Nor does their presence as human beings affect the status of the overwhelming majority of the people in regard to their ability or their right to establish self-government.

Meanwhile what have the imperialists actually done for those poor down-trodden masses? What have they done which rulers of India have not previously attempted? And why has this question suddenly become so important that nothing else can be settled beforehand, and that great care be taken to see that it is not settled.

The lack of sincerity in the imperialistic position is evident when we turn to other countries. One need not criticize the Polish Republic. The Polish people certainly have the right to govern themselves. Yet in spite of many rumors or reports concerning the treatment of minority groups there, other powers have held that the rights of the government were supreme and the minority would have to conform to the wishes of the majority.

To a certain extent Europe has had and still has in some vicinities its outcasts in the Jews. True, in many sections they are today admitted into society on equal terms with others, but they are outcasts nonetheless in several quarters. Under such circumstances it is entirely out of place to point to India with its complex social order and parade this matter before the world as its worst evil.

And if India has its outcastes, what of South Africa with its double standard? Is there a need to call it vicious? Shall we demand that certain countries be expelled from the League of Nations because of laws recently enacted against the dark skinned races? Surely there must be mirth in Heaven when politicians point to India saying, "none of these people are fit to rule because some of them do not shake hands with others" and then they go and prohibit the poor natives of Africa from even appearing on certain streets, entering certain industries, and attending the same churches!

Yes, outcastes do exist; yes, there are untouchables, but it is time to call public attention to them anywhere and everywhere. Japan has its Ainu, China its wild aborigines, the Jews are not much better off even today in certain countries, and in our Southern states the descendants of former slaves are not to mingle in all social circles. And when has conversion to Christianity carried with it social equality?

Untouchability is based upon assumed or actual economic, social or educational differences. This is true in all regions so India cannot be made an exception. Scientific evolution and psychological tests demand and prove the inequality of individuals and of racial if not social groups. An absolute democracy would be a biological miracle. The Sudra may have sprung from the feet of Siva, yet even that proves his origin divine. Divinity does not predetermine equality.

It is admitted that the institutions of caste and outcaste are not founded on Vedic tradition. True, but why do non-Hindus who are so irreligious constantly mock the Hindu in this regard? How many of them understand the spirit of Arya Dharma, a spirit perhaps more fundamental than any book or any theology? The fair-minded person everywhere should consider all factors and all conditions, and not like Miss Mayo, particularize the premises, whether true or false, upon which conclusions are drawn.

What relationship is there, after all, between customs and social usages and the rights and capabilities of a people to establish their own government? Especially we Americans should hearken to the literature of our revolutionary period when certain foreign writers held we were incapable of self-government because we were slave-owners; in fact we were too immoral therefor. Others in the same era declared the stability of our national institutions was doubtful for that very reason—that we built them upon the foundation of slavery.

Time has exposed the worthlessness of such arguments. In a like way Providence may also demonstrate that the existence of caste and outcaste at this time cannot be regarded as the measuring stick of the intelligence of the inhabitants of Bharata. Every nation has its problems, but until its people are properly organized and authorized to cope with existing evils, we are only adding to the evil by constantly laying blame at their door. Give the Hindu his opportunity, let him prove himself with his own free, untrammelled and independent government, and until then, judge no man.