

BUDDHA, AMBEDKAR AND MARX

## “Dalit intellectuals and Leftist intellectuals”

Ranganayakamma

I have gone through Mr Gopinath's article titled “Dalit Intellectuals and Leftist Intellectuals” (*Surya*, dated November 3, 5 & 9, 2010). Gopinath has made some suggestions to facilitate coordination between Dalit movement and Left movement. He raised some questions and made some formulations. Out of the questions which Gopinath raised, Communist Parties have to answer some while Rationalists' Associations have to answer certain other questions.

Anyone from among the readers could intervene in the discussion but the details which Gopinath gave concerning the contexts are not at all adequate. Hence it is not possible for others to discuss those issues. However, one can make an attempt to respond to a couple of issues he raised.

‘We find only lower caste people and not upper caste people among those who are accused of sorcery (black magic) and lost their teeth and life, don't we?’— This sort of questions are worth considering. The lower caste people are not simply victims of such attacks but they are the ones who resort to such attacks. Has Gopinath ever not observed this fact? He mentioned in his essay an incident that occurred recently in which two lower caste men were accused of sorcery and burnt alive. This atrocity was committed by the lower caste people, that too by women. We have seen in the newspapers the photographs of those women who sat merrily, as if they came to attend a function, around those helpless creatures who were being reduced to ashes. Those who understand that it is none but the lower caste people who are subjected to cruelty and humiliation under the pretext of sorcery — must also realize that it is the lower caste people who resort to such cruel acts.

I will limit myself to those comments which Gopinath made against me while raising some questions. I will respond to those comments only. Depending on the context, I will also refer to other issues wherever necessary.

Gopinath found ‘caste chauvinism’ in my book *For the solution of the ‘caste’ question, Buddha is not enough, Ambedkar is not enough either, Marx is a Must!* But he has not pointed out even a single context in which he saw my caste chauvinism. Moreover, he said, “rejoinders to that book have already been given”. They are not rejoinders; they are simply curses. Cursing and book-burning cannot constitute rejoinders. What did I discuss in that book? I did not say that Ambedkar was ‘useless’ for the solution of the caste question. I said he is ‘not enough’. How should dalit intellectuals respond to it? They ought to explain how Ambedkar is enough. None has done that job.

You may write that Marx is ‘not enough’ for the solution of the social problems. I will not curse you for criticizing Marx. I will try to answer and discuss your comments to the extent possible. But, you have not done so. Throughout my book, I gave an explanation as to why I said that Ambedkar is not enough. Concessions such as reservations which are available within the limits of bourgeois constitution are the most minimal. They are the concessions that are limited to the most minimal number of people. Why two major sub-castes, namely Maalas and Maadigas in Andhra Pradesh, are fighting over the distribution of reservations like sworn enemies? It is because reservations are not adequate.

Imagine a society which takes the responsibility of providing jobs to each and every person who reached the age of performing some labour or the other! There will not be scope for these hostilities and fights among people. But reservations cannot offer such a society even in future. Which means, we need

a society that is superior than reservations. Reservations offer temporary relief. That too for an insignificant number of people. Hence they cannot lead lower castes to the path of liberation.

Another path which Ambedkar had shown is Buddha's *Ashthanga Marga* (Path of Righteousness). This is a ridiculous path which is of no use to either 'livelihood' of dalits or 'annihilation of caste'.

Buddhism contains rationalist outlook towards nature. It does not have rationalist outlook towards society. Buddhism was in favour of slavery during its time. Ambedkar invoked a socially irrational path and showed it to dalits as a means of annihilation of caste. Ambedkar did not learn rational outlook towards nature which he ought to have learnt from Buddhism. One of his principles is that humans must have 'spirituality' in addition to food. (One can see this point in my book in little more detail). Since, spirituality does not find place in Marxism, Marxism is a philosophy of pigs, which satisfies itself with food only. What did Ambedkar, who could not give up 'spiritualism', learn from Buddha's rational outlook towards nature? Why did he embrace Buddhism? Did he embrace it for the sake of its rational outlook or spiritualism which is absent in Buddhism?

Anyway, rational outlook is absent in Buddhism. (It is not its fault; it is a two thousand-year old theory). Ambedkar has not acquired rational outlook present in Buddhism. Thus, Ambedkar showed dalit community a path which is not useful in any manner and did not take even a glance at the path that opposes exploitation of labour. He did not understand as to why lower caste people are subjected to abject poverty and unemployment. He did not turn his face towards exploitative relations of property that enable upper castes to dominate lower castes. He was not concerned with the fact that the majority people in the lower castes were tied down to the bottommost kinds of labour. Ambedkar had great confidence and deep reverence for bourgeois constitution that keeps in tact the relations of exploitation of labour. He became a minister in the government after taking oath that he would act in accordance with those laws. What do all those laws in the bourgeois State tell? What is the objective of that constitution? All the laws would say, 'The entire land belongs to landlords. They can live without doing any labour and by exploiting the labour of peasants over whom they have the right to receive rent. Means of production other than land belong to capitalists. They too can live without doing any labour by exploiting working classes by mean of their rights to get interest and profit. All the castes can remain as before in the laws of India.'

Ambedkar was one of the framers of such constitution which permits exploitation of labour. He was one among the framers of such laws which subject people of the lower castes to unbearable exploitation! Ignoring the wicked nature of those laws and undertaking the gigantic task of decorating them by Ambedkar appeared as a great and noble deed to the dalit intellectuals. If any Leftist intellectual refers to Ambedkar as 'bourgeois intellectual', dalit intellectuals become furious. What else the framers of bourgeois constitution become other than bourgeois intellectual? Will they become Marxist intellectuals? Can't the dalit intellectuals understand such a simple point? Why should they become furious when someone calls an intellectual who supports bourgeois laws and bourgeois constitution a bourgeois intellectual? Why can't they say, "Yes, he is a bourgeois intellectual!"

Among the bourgeois intellectuals, those who attempt at certain reforms will be 'liberal bourgeois intellectuals'. Thus Ambedkar is also a liberal bourgeois intellectual. Ambedkar, who considered Marxism – a theory that insists on the abolition of exploitation of labour – as philosophy of pigs – will be a bourgeois intellectual who hates Marxism and who defends relations of exploitation of labour. In case some one calls him a Marxist intellectual, it is something that he does not like. It will not amount to respecting him but insulting him.

There is a new path which Ambedkar has shown regarding 'property relations'. According to this path, the State must take the entire land and give it to individuals for rent. Those individuals, along with their family members, would cultivate that land and pay rents and taxes. (One can see all this in my book

in greater detail: Para numbers and page numbers from Ambedkar's books – everything is there in my book.)

Renting out land by the State to individuals is a modified form of system of exploitation. There is nothing new in it. System of rent has no place in Marxism. For it, 'land is merely a means of production of the society. It does not require rent'. But, if the government grabs rent and if Governors and Presidents eat (consume) it, it is a great revolution, according to Ambedkar.

To understand as to why I said that Ambedkar is not enough for the solution of any problem, one has to examine some more observations of Ambedkar.

The means for annihilation of caste which Ambedkar suggested is inter-caste marriages and it is totally correct. But he did not have clarity with regard to the possibility of inter-caste marriages. According to a suggestion which cropped up from his vagueness, the inter-caste marriages should not begin among lower castes. First, marriages must begin between lower castes and upper castes – This is his principle. Why and how such inter-caste marriages ought to take place – we don't get answers to such doubts as these. (One may see all these points in my book). The essence of the matter is: except the path of reservations no other path which Ambedkar showed is useful. Yet the path of reservation gives dalits some relief. Hence, I said Ambedkar is not enough. Whereas Buddha is not enough as much as Ambedkar in solving social problems.

When I pointed out several wrong notions of Ambedkar in my book, the dalit intellectuals equated my discussion with 'caste chauvinism' as if it was a crime to discuss ideas of Ambedkar. They gave me a great title "Upper caste Mistress".

When someone, however wicked and chauvinist that person may be, raises a question, a reference to the chauvinism of that person is irrelevant. One has to concentrate on the question raised. One has to answer the question. If you call the person who questioned, "You are a chauvinist", it cannot be an answer.

I like Mao, the Communist leader, a lot. But, I felt so contemptuous toward his feudal ideas such as personality cult and declaration of Lin-Piao as his 'successor', that I did not hesitate at all to put my anger on paper. My question is, how can one become a Communist who resorted to personality cult? When I got that question, it was my right to raise the question. Similarly when we read a book and like it we feel happy. If we get doubts and serious questions, we raise them. Since I got many questions when I read Ambedkar's writings, I wrote about them. If such questions did not arise among dalit intellectuals, it is their whim! If they have right answers to my questions and if they are rational, I would like to learn from them and give up my questions. I would feel happy for finding right answers.

If someone says, "one has to read Ambedkar's writings but they should not raise questions and debate over them", what sort of command is it? Why can't people, who debate over the ideas of great communist leader, debate over the ideas of a bourgeois intellectual?

Is it 'upper caste chauvinism' if someone conducts discussions such as: 'Ambedkar was not concerned with exploitation of labour which is the basis of poverty and unemployment; that he was not concerned with exploitative division of labour that chains the majority population to bottommost labours, that how can *Asthanga Marga* (the path of eight virtues or path of righteousness) and bourgeois constitutions do good to dalits?'

No one is born in a given caste by choice or by one's own decision. Even the upper caste people too cannot choose their caste before they are born. None is responsible for their caste origins. One has to assess others not on the basis of their caste origins but on the basis of their ideology. [However, one may

claim affiliation with an egalitarian ideology but behave contrary to it in the actual life. Hence, one has to assess others based on their practice.]

As far as Gandhi is concerned, he argued that untouchability should go but *varna system* may remain. Which means, some people will always remain as upper castes while others remain as lower castes and they ought to devote themselves to their caste occupations. This is the essence of 'Mahatma's' ideology. Call Gandhi or some such Mahatmas as 'caste chauvinists'! It will not be unfair. How can you accuse those persons as 'caste chauvinists' who gave up castes and who oppose castes? In the debate on 'how caste should be eliminated,' if the discussants do not listen to one another and turn their faces away from one another and if people of lower castes say, "You belong to upper caste. You are a chauvinist. We don't want to hear you", while people of upper castes say, "you belong to lower caste. You don't have intellect. Why should I hear your argument"—how will the debate take place? If there is no debate how do we find right solution to any problem?

Gopinath considered the Communist understanding, namely 'Division of Labour is the basis for the formation of castes', as 'criminal theory'. But his formulation regarding the formation of castes will also lead to the same criminal theory. It is because his explanation proceeds as follows: The original inhabitants in India were '*Dasyas*'. Among these *Dasyas*, there were kings and emperors. The Aryan tribes invaded *Dasyas*, defeated them in wars, imposed menial occupations on them and made them outcasts or excommunicated. —This is Gopinath's formulation. One need not differ with this formulation. In every country invasions by enemies take place. Oppression takes place. We may assume that the same thing had happened in India too.

"Imposing menial occupations" implies some change either in doing labours or in making others do labors. What does the expression 'excommunicated' or 'made outcasts' mean? It is the beginning of 'untouchability'. The menial labours which Gopinath is referring to, that is labours that involve cleaning of the dirt, were in existence even when *Dasyas* lived independently. Society cannot survive without those menial labours. (No labour is 'menial' if it is necessary for human life. But we call them so due to our angry protest against the situation that chains people to some unbearable labours.)

If we follow Gopinath's formulation, how did castes form? There were no castes when *Dasyas* lived as free people. After Aryans defeated *Dasyas* and imposed menial labours on them, those who performed menial occupations became lower castes. Owing to the conditions of those menial occupations, people were excommunicated and that excommunication assumed the form of 'untouchability'. Aryans, who performed higher kinds of labour became upper castes. This means castes had begun based on the kinds of labour which people performed. During the rule of Aryans over *Dasyas*, there occurred a kind of division among the labours that were being performed by *Dasyas*. Although there existed various kinds of labour always, the fact that some division had taken place during the Aryan rule — is the first point. Gradual establishment of separated labours as occupations, their conversion into castes is the result of the first point.

Perhaps, confinement of *Dasyas*, the original inhabitants of India, to the menial occupations might be due to Aryans. It is a different question as to who were responsible for it? If this had happened in that manner, it will reveal that confinement to menial occupations had happened first and the same confinement crystallized into lower castes.

If it is proved that Aryans had imposed menial occupations on *Dasyas* and thus *Dasyas* became lower caste people, it amounts to arriving at the theory that states, "Division of labour is the basis of castes". Even if there is no specific reference to Aryans and *Dasyas* and if one assumes that division in labours gradually turned into occupations and finally crystallized as castes, how does it amount to criminal theory? What sort of theory is it which Gopinath assumed? It too turned into a theory that is connected with division of labour. To understand the origin of castes, if we disregard the occupations (caste

occupations) which those castes have been doing, we will not find the root of the matter. We will not find any meaning in the caste.

Just as we find clear cut occupations (labours) behind labels like 'washer man' and 'barber', we may not find a clear-cut occupation for each caste. It is because, many occupations and castes have been on the increase since the beginning of castes till today. Division has been taking place in the old occupations and castes. We find certain castes now which once did not exist. Certain castes of the present day do not confine to definite occupations. Yet these castes too pursue some occupations. No caste exists without performing any labour. If it so happened in the history that *Dasyas* became lower castes while Aryans remained upper castes, it is a matter of several millennia.

Gopinath's understanding leads to the assumption that the population of the present day upper castes descended from Aryans while the people of the lower castes descended from *Dasyas* and therefore the people of the lower castes must have anger towards the people of upper castes just as *Dasyas* had towards Aryans in the past. This is Mr Gopinath's understanding. The anger of other dalit intellectuals is also of the same kind.

It follows that the nature of anger which the dalit intellectuals showed towards me for writing on Ambedkar implies that I am a descendant of Aryans! It also means that I was one of those who imposed menial occupations on *Dasyas* and made them as lower castes! Therefore, whatever I say amounts to chauvinism! They may later give me the title of 'Mistress of Aryan race'! It also follows that the people of the present day lower castes must keep exhibiting hatred towards the people of upper castes! This is the programme of the intellectuals of the lower castes.

There is nothing strange if one realizes that the Aryans, who invaded and defeated *Dasyas*, depicted themselves as gods and *Dasyas* as demons in their literary works. In all countries, we find that the victorious races have composed such texts. The really strange thing is different. If one does not realize the fundamental truth that there existed classes of Masters and Labourers whether it is among Aryans or *Dasyas*; that they were hostile classes and that kings and emperors among *Dasyas* too were anti-people—then such lack of realization will be really strange.

The most strange thing is that the dalit intellectuals ignore the fact that there exists class of exploiters not only among the upper castes but also among the lower castes. Moreover, there emerged such dalit intellectuals who raise the slogans, 'let dalits too develop as dalit bourgeoisie!' It is such a joy which ignores the fact that, when a dalit bourgeois emerges, he would consume the flesh and blood of a thousand dalit labourers.

The caste consciousness which an intellectual like Gopinath has is based on the racial distinction between Aryans and *Dasyas* and not on the realization of the fact that there exist hostile classes in every caste. That is why, Gopinath was ready to carry the *Dasya* kings and emperors on his head. He declared that the dalit cultural armies were making preparations to celebrate the birth days and death days of those great kings and emperors who were branded as demons (*rakshasas*) and thereby establish real people's culture. It appears that this intellectual is not aware as to who the emperors are, who the people are, how many types of cultures are there and how one can establish people's culture by eulogizing emperors! Whether Aryan kings such as Sri Rama or Sri Krishna or *Dasya* kings like Naraka and Ravana, whom Gopinath cited — they were the representatives of feudal lords who lived in riches and luxuries by exploiting the then existing labouring masses. Those kings by themselves were exploiters. We don't find peace or comfort which kings of any race gave to people. Kings, in the course of their exploitation, do not let people have enough food even. The kind of rule that they knew was to hang thousands of people every year.

Had Aryans faced defeat and *Dasyas* became victorious in those wars which Aryans waged against *Dasyas*, the histories of those races would have reversed. Then Aryans would have been placed in such a situation wherein they would confine to menial occupations and turned into lower castes. Whatever

cruelties that victorious Aryan kings would commit, the victorious Dasyas kings also would commit the same cruelties. In a fight between two kings, why should we bother whether this king was victorious or that king was defeated? The ethics of kings and emperors of any or every race involve nothing but oppression and cruelty.

Like the present day upper caste intellectuals, dalit intellectuals too have not come out of the intoxication of the fame of kings and emperors. They have not yet realized how slavish to have such intoxication.

“Let us do whatever the upper castes do. If they rally around their kings let us also rally around our kings. If they eulogize their gods let us eulogize our gods with more noise and exceed them.”—This is the revolutionary consciousness of dalit intellectuals!

“Is it all correct which the upper castes do? Should we also do the same thing as they do? What is the purpose of devotion (*bhakti*), celebrating sixtieth birth days (*shashthi purthi*), birth days and death days? Are these celebrated in the case of poor people and women? Even if they are celebrated, is it correct?”—Dalit intellectuals do not raise such question as these. No rational outlook towards nature. Nor rational outlook towards society.

There is no sense of realization that ‘celebrating the birth days and death days of Dasya kings is Dasya chauvinism just as celebrating the birth days and death days of Aryan kings is Aryan chauvinism.

Gopinath, who made assumptions with regard to the origin of castes, has not touched upon the question of annihilation of castes. If Dalit intellectuals leave the actual problem aside and walk several millennia backwards to the days of Dasya kings and consider eulogy (*bhajan*) of those kings as real people’s culture, it proves that the social consciousness of those dalit intellectuals is lagging behind so many millennia and their self-respect has fallen on the feet of the emperors.

The problem of caste distinctions is not confined to lower castes only. It harasses the people of upper castes as well in many ways. It creates a plight where the young men and women of upper castes, who dare to go for inter-caste marriages, turn into dead bodies before their marriage. The annihilation of caste is necessary for all the castes. We need to discuss the issue.

The present day problem is not how castes had originated and what had happened between Aryan and Dasya kings. The current problem is to find a path for caste annihilation. Those who would like to understand this problem need to know clearly the distinction between castes and classes.

Instead of understanding things in terms of ‘exploiting classes’, ‘working classes’ and ‘ruling classes’, Gopinath separated those characteristic features from the classes and attributed them to castes. See the following words: “...toward the leftist intellectuals who came from the background of exploiting castes....”, “...as a part of oppression of labouring castes....”, “Of the officers of the ruling castes”. (One can see the full sentences in his essay).

In those sentences, he wanted to say that there are ‘exploiting castes’, ‘labouring castes’ and ‘ruling castes’. But the features that apply to ‘classes’ do not apply to castes. One can call a class ‘exploiting class’. Since every person of that class consume/enjoy more or less the income that they receive by means of exploitation, it is ‘exploiting class’. We, however, cannot call a caste like that. Every person in a given caste does not consume exploitative income. Take any upper caste. In castes like Brahmins, Kammars or Reddys, every person does not have exploitative property rights and exploitative incomes. Therefore, we cannot call that caste a ‘exploiting caste’. Same is the case with the distinction between ‘labouring caste’ and ‘labouring class’. We can call a class ‘labouring class’ but we cannot call a caste ‘labouring caste’. Same is the case with terms ‘ruling class’ and ‘ruling caste’.

What Gopinath has done is this: He attributed the features of classes to castes. It is not 'science' if one changes things as he likes. Unless we understand the difference between classes and castes, we cannot understand why castes are still alive. The term 'classes' sound like an 'electric shock' to the dalit intellectuals because of the knowledge which their bourgeois leader taught them. The disciples, however, need not remain throughout their life at a point where their teacher stopped. If the teacher is a 'spiritualist', his disciples can become 'materialists'. If the teacher satisfies himself with bourgeois reforms, his disciples may acquire the knowledge of class ideas. If disciples transcend their teacher, it will be an honour and not an insult to the teacher.

Gopinath began his essay with a good intention by stating that there exists misunderstanding between dalit intellectuals and leftist intellectuals and it is necessary to dispel it and 'coordinate' their efforts. But how can he dispel the misunderstanding between the two groups by attributing caste chauvinism to those, who with an objective of annihilating caste, discussed Ambedkar's writings? By making such accusations, how can he achieve 'coordination' or alliance which he expected? □□□

[Translation from Telugu: B R BAPUJI]