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To

All the Acharyas and Saints of Hindu Society

Revered Sirs,

*pratyagvastuni nistarangasahajAnandA vabodhAmbudhau
viproyam shvapachosyamiyapi mahAn kosyam vibhedabhramah*

(Sri Sankaracharyarkritat manIshApanchakAt))

“In the Inner-Self which is the waveless ocean of consciousness of the nature of innate Bliss, what is this great illusion of difference between a Brahmana and a Chandala?”

The same question is relevant even today. There is caste discrimination in our society even though in our Constitution it is prohibited. Caste is a word having Portugese origin which meant purity. The original word in Sanskrit, which distinguished one group of people from the other is *varna*. This division was made according to the profession and not decided by birth. Sri Krishna says in the Bhagawadgita:

chaturvarnyam mayaa srshTam GuNakarma vibhAgashah

“I have created the four varnas according to the qualities and action (of people)”

Here Krishna could have said *janmanA* (birth) instead of *karma* (action). But, He did not. There was no hierarchy of castes. People may quote Purusha Sukta, 29.90 tenth mandala of the Rig Veda where the Brahmana is said to be the mouth of the Cosmic Man, Kshatriya the arms, Vaisya the thighs and Sudra the feet. Brahmanas’ profession being learning and teaching he is said to be the mouth of the Cosmic Man (those days as there was no books written or printed teaching was done orally), Kshatriya has to use his strong arms to take care of the law and order. In the same way Vaisya needed strong thighs and Sudra needed strong feet to do the manual (not menial in any sense) job. Without any of these limbs, the whole body cannot be healthy. So also, for a healthy society all the varnas are equally important. As long as people followed their *svadharma* (Bh. Gita3.35) there was no confusion. But, in these days when people choose *paradharam*, there is confusion. Birth which became the criterion for caste at a later stage cannot be accepted now. *Adhikara* or eligibility to learn the scriptures etc cannot be decided by birth. So, all those who are seekers (irrespective of their birth) should be allowed to learn our *shastras*

In the same way gender discrimination which was not there in our own Vedic period is very much prevalent now. We had Brahmacharinis and Brahmvidinis like Gargi, Maitryi etc discussing Vedanta. Now-a-days women are prohibited from even uttering Om. Gayatri mantra is out of their bounds. They cannot also perform yajnas, while we have references in the Vedas, Mahabharata and Ramayana where women offered oblations in the fire. While Sati custom has almost disappeared, widow remarriage is even now not wholly accepted. It is high time that we accord the right place to our women in society.

Revered acharyas, if you do not give access to our scriptures to our youngsters (both men and women, irrespective of their caste), they will drift away. In my fifty-five years of experience of teaching Vedanta, I find that there is an urge in our youngsters to know more about their heritage. They do not want to believe in superstitions. Let us give them the right understanding. Even though, these days they have access to printed books, thanks to Max Muller who first printed and published our heritage works, they need proper guidance and explanations to those texts from the right gurus. So, please do not close the doors on them. I may go even a step further and request you all, to open the doors to the knowledge of our scriptures to all those aspirants irrespective of their RELIGION. Let us not forget the Vedic prayer—

*sangacchadhvam, sanvadadhvam
sam vo manAnsi jAnatAM*

Let us got together, let us speak together and let us know each others' mind.

Yours in the Lord

Sita Krishna Nambiar (nee Bhatt)