

THE PANJ PYARAS OF MANU

• By Dr. M.N. Buch

My Gita, Bible, Quran, Guru Granth Saheb in all temporal affairs is the Constitution of India. This Basic Law, parts of which cannot be amended as per a landmark ruling of the Supreme Court in the Keshvanand Bharti case, binds all Indians to certain fundamentals which we must accept, or cease to be Indians on their rejection. These are contained in the Preamble, reinforced in the Fundamental Rights, amplified in the Directive Principles of State Policy and enshrined in the Fundamental Duties. They are:

1. The secular and democratic underpinnings of the Republic.
2. Justice, Liberty, above all Equality and Fraternity.
3. Total prohibition of discrimination on account of religion, race, caste (underlining mine), sex, place of birth or any other such factor.
4. Freedom of speech, movement, association, personal liberty and the right to preach, practice and propagate the religion of one's choice.
5. The duty of the State to establish a just social order which promotes the welfare of the people.
6. The duty of every citizen and presumably the State to promote the spirit of common harmony and brotherhood and respect the dignity of women.

Article 15 and 16 specifically rule out caste based discrimination. The exception to this is Article 15 (4), which permits the State to make special provisions for the advancement of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. For the rest, any positive discrimination to give equality of opportunity to persons who are socially or educationally backward or to give them adequate representation in the public service can only be based on class, not caste. Caste is a concept confined to the Hindu religion and because equality of opportunity is meant for all, our Founding Fathers have deliberately introduced the concept of class in Articles 15 and 16. Caste, therefore, is irrelevant in the context of equality.

Caste, or 'varnashram' is a concept which goes back to the Rig Veda, one hymn of which states:-

“Brahmano asya mukhmasidh,
Baahu Rajanye kruta,
Uroo tadasya yadveshya,
Padma Shudra ajayata”.

In translation this reads: -

“His mouth was the Man of the Word (Brahman),
Into the Prince His arms were made (Rajanya),
While the thighs produced the People (Yadveshya),
His feet gave birth to the Servant (Shudra)”

[R.V. x 90.12]

Rishi Manu, in his Manusmriti, only codified the hierarchy given in the above quoted verse of the Rig Veda. What Manu did was to state that the Hymn of Creation had created Man in descending order of status, natural attributes and intellect, with specific duties being assigned to the priestly caste, the warriors, the traders and producers and to those condemned to menial and dirty tasks. Into which caste one was born depended on one's karma in the past life, this status has to be accepted as final in this life and one had a chance of betterment only if one's karma in this life justified it. One can change one's class status by wealth, deeds, education, profession, feat of arms or the benevolence of the rulers. Caste is there for life. Can anything be more unjust, more iniquitous than the caste system? Can there be anything more violative of our Constitution? Stratification is bad, but can caste fossilisation ever be accepted?

In 1931 the British decided to delete caste when conducting the decennial Census. Eight casteless census operations, those of 1931, 1941, 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001 have been conducted from that date. Suddenly for the 2011 Census government has decided to bring in caste in enumeration. I am still recovering from the shock of this announcement. Has the Manmohan Singh government become collectively insane? Has Sonia Gandhi, who apparently gave the nod to this decision, decided to wreck what little remains of social harmony in India?

There is a sinister design to this decision. The OBC lobby of Mulayam, Lalu and Karunanidhi has always wanted to play the backward caste card. Mandal was the fountainhead of this game. Manu only spoke of four castes, these people talk of thousands of sub castes. Our Constitution nudges us towards a casteless and classless society. Our politicians want to make caste the only lodestar of our polity, our society and our economy. The Khalsa had Guru Gobind Singh's Panj Pyaras. Modern day Manuwad has also acquired its Panj Pyaras, Manmohan Singh, Sonia Gandhi, Mulayam Singh Yadav, Lalu Prasad Yadav and M. Karunanidhi. All I can say is, "Cry the beloved country!"
