



The Cultural imposition on Dalits in India

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Abstract:

This article speaks of the cultural imposition that is going on Dalits in India. The reconversions of Muslims and Dalits in to Hinduism is a Hindutva strategy of making India a Hindu state. That's why so many incidents are happening in our society. The murders of Dalits in Haryana and a Muslim in Maharastra for eating beef is nothing but their hegemonic nature. Since India is a democratic country, everyone has fundamental rights. Nobody can dictate other's cultural habits and religious beliefs. Dalits are being suppressed even now in all spheres of life. I want to say that there should be a harmony among the people. Everyone should respect others culture and religions.

Key Words: Multi culturalism, Caste, Beef, Right, Dalit, Attack

As Prof. P. Keshav kumar commented the word "Development" has become a password to all the political parties in India. It is the word that is being used as concrete cement that covers all the differences and failures of the political leaders and parties as well. Every politician speaks of development. There is a big question mark. Whose development they are talking about? Is it the development of the corporate people? Or is it the development of the higher caste people? Since the formation of the BJP government in India they are many atrocities on Dalits and Muslim minorities. The imposition of many issues like what to write, what to talk, what to eat and other things shows that they are trying to subdue other lower caste people. With the advent of BJP to power, the Hindu militant organizations like VHP, RSS, Bhajarang Dal and other affiliated organizations have brought forth the Hindutva concept once again. As a result Dhobolkar, Kalburgi, Pansari and a few dalits have been killed.

India is a union of states. It is a land of many groups of people. Every state has its own language and culture. This multi-cultural and multi lingual quality is the special feature of Indian society. This is called unity in diversity. It is very clear that people who have different cultures and languages will have definitely different kinds of food habits. Indian community is not of the single race. Indian society is constructed basing on the caste. Even food habits also are manipulated by caste.

The present burning issue in India is about beef eating. The so called Hindus who are calling themselves as protectors of Hindutva are killing Dalits and Muslims. Even I heard people saying that Hinduism accepts all religions and it's a mixture of all. But in reality it is not. The fact is that it is not Hinduism that is followed in India but brahminism. Since ages the Brahmins have been dominating and always have been on the higher rung in the social hierarchy. There is a considerable doubt that whether the so called hindutva people accept the dalits as hindus or not. If they accept



dalits as Hindus they should also accept their culture- colour, professions, dress style, food habits and everything. If we see the history of dalits in India they were not treated as human beings at all. They were outcaste. They were not allowed to have equal rights with other caste people. So since the ages this social discrimination is going on and still it continues in many parts of India.

Many dalits are identified themselves as Christians and buddhists because the so called higher caste people did not accept dalits as a part of society. Dalits had no right to educate themselves, no right to study the Holy Books. Dalits were not even treated as human beings in the society. It is because the hindus rejected them the dalits have to go to other religions. And today for political reasons you are forcefully converting people into Hinduism.

Many Indian states have banned cow-slaughtering and selling beef is not permitted in public. Beef sellers and buyers in those states have to conduct their trade like drug-dealers. In Delhi, the cow protection enforcement team visits supermarkets to ensure beef is off the shelves. In Hinduism people worship fish as matya avatar of Lord Vishnu; pig as varah avatar; tortoise as kurma avatar. We have people eating fish, tortoise, and pig in India. I don't understand why only cow killing is banned. One should not forget that India is one of the biggest exporter of pork and beef in the world.

Common sense dictates that all these forceful bans prove that India has a significant beef-eating population. In fact, that consumption of beef and buffalo meat together top the list of highest meat consumption in India. Annually, India produces an estimated 1.5 million tons of

buffalo meat, of which only 24% is exported.

To deny the right to eat the traditional diet of dalits is the denial of the right to live with dignity and without fear. The ban of cow-slaughtering and the violence of the cow-protection movement – where a 'legal' ban exists – are nothing short of state-sponsored caste based discrimination. India is the world's third largest beef exporter. The vegetarian hypocrisy in India has no limits: the beef-hating project is carefully engineered to advance Brahmanical Hinduism.

The 'holy cow' construct is plain food-fascism, and this culinary politics by Brahmanical Hindutva forces is an attempt to wipe-out cultural identities of Dalits and Muslims and discriminate their basic rights. The construction of today's India as a vegetarian-loving and cow-praying country is an outright lie and a false cultural-propaganda by right-wing upper caste forces to oppress Dalits, lower-castes and Muslims.

It is definitely a cultural imposition, more particularly on indigenous groups – tribals and Dalits. As Prof. Ilaiah said "Culturally, the democratic state is being used to destroy their food culture, their protein availability and food choice." Choice is very important in a modern democracy. I respect those who don't want to eat beef or mutton.

The food right is a civil and democratic right. No religious community can ban the food of another religious community until and unless a particular community turns cannibal. The discourse that vegetarian food is morally superior has no validity for those who are historically habituated to eat meat and beef. Among many caste and communities in India, for



example, a festival cannot be imagined without meat. Vegetarian food in such communities is treated as inferior food.

Brahmins have hegemonised everything, including food," says Prof. Kancha Ilaiah. " when the Iyengar Brahmins produce a vegetarian cookbook , they are expressing pride in their traditions. But we are denied that right. We cannot celebrate our food; we cannot hold, say a beef festival to celebrate our beef dishes."

Cow was neither sacred nor unconsumable by Brahmans according to D.N.Jha who has studied Rigveda in detail. This vedic scripture – written roughly between 1100 and 1700 BC – has frequent references to the cooking of ox meat for every day consumption and offering to gods. Jha's *The Myth of The Holy Cow*, offers detailed evidence that ox, bull and cow were both killed in public sacrifices and domestically slaughtered to be consumed in every-day life.

Later, Buddhism and Jainism became critical of ritual and public sacrifices of animals and introduced ahimsa (non-violence). According to Ambedkar – Dalit leader, architect of Indian constitution and a strong critique of Gandhi's ideals – 'the clue to the worship of the cow is to be found in the struggle between Buddhism and Brahmanism', a strategy to establish its Brahmanical supremacy over Buddhism. This explains why Ambedkar advocated Dalits to convert to Buddhism.

During the colonial period, the cow became a tool of mass political mobilisation to unite Hindus by upper-caste led freedom movement. Gandhi said, "my religion teaches me that the conviction of cow-killing is a sin and that, therefore, it ought to be abandoned" and

then declared, "I worship it and I shall defend its worship against the whole world."

In today's independent India, the beef-hating Brahmanical vegetarianism made cow slaughtering and beef-eating not only a taboo but also illegal in many states of India. It has even secured a supportive-protection in the Indian constitution: Article 48 of the Indian constitution directs the State to take necessary steps for prohibiting the slaughter of cows and calves.

Beef has been traditionally a part of the Dalit diet and part of our identity. Dalits do possess their own distinct culinary traditions. High-caste Hindus refrained from eating meat because they could afford a range of vegetables and dairy products. These are the items Dalits could not afford, so they took their protein where they could find it, from the pigs they raised, in offal, and from cows, because beef was cheaper than mutton or chicken.

If beef is banned in India, that will be the beginning of the end of our multiculturalism. Cultural plurality has been the essence of Indian society. The very caste system synthesized multiculturalism in India right from the ancient days. The food culture - habits and tastes- of a particular group of people should not be controlled or changed by another group of people whether they operate in the term of a political party or a governing authority. It is an attack on the cultural rights.

As Dr. Ambedkar writes "... If beef-eating had remained a secular affair – a mere matter of individual taste – such a bar between those who ate beef and those who did not would not have arisen. Unfortunately beef-eating, instead of



being treated as a purely secular matter, was made a matter of religion. This happened because the Brahmins made the cow a sacred animal. This made beef-eating a sacrilege.”

Dalits are living in the country without a right to life, security and minimum needs for hundreds of years. The Indian state is slowly undergoing the transformation to a caste state where a few dominant castes control the state power and resources. Food habit is an individual choice and should be left to them. No one should interfere with it. By interfering and attacking one's right is not correct. It is against the constitution and individual liberty.

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