

After the Parsis were gone I sat for some time engaged in thinking to find a way out. I had hopes that I would soon get a State bungalow and my troubles would be over. My problem was therefore a temporary problem and I thought that going to friends would be a good solution. I had no friends among the untouchables of Baroda State. But I had friends among other classes. One was a Hindu, the other was an Indian Christian. I first went to my Hindu friend and told him what had befallen me. He was a noble soul and a great personal friend of mine. He was sad and also indignant. He, however, let fall one observation. He said, "If you come to my home my servants will go". I took the hint and did not press him to accommodate me. I did not like to go to the Indian Christian friend. Once he had invited me to go and stay with him. But I had declined preferring to stay in the Parsi inn. My reason was that his habits were not congenial to me. To go now would be to invite a rebuff. So I went to my office but I could not really give up this chance of finding a shelter. On consulting a friend I decided to go to him and ask him if he would accommodate me. When I put the question his reply was that his wife was coming to Baroda the next day and that he would have to consult her. I learnt subsequently that it was a very diplomatic answer. He and his wife came originally from a family which was Brahmin by caste and although on conversion to Christianity the husband had become liberal in thought, the wife had remained orthodox in her ways and would not have consented to harbour an untouchable in her house. The last ray of hope thus flickered away. It was 4 p.m. when I left the house of my Indian Christian friend. Where to go was the one supreme question before me. I must quit the inn and had no friend to go to !! The only alternative left was to return to Bombay.

The train to Bombay left Baroda at 9 p.m. There were five hours to be spent. Where to spend them ? Should I go to the inn ? Should I go to my friend ? I could not buck up sufficient courage to go back to the inn. I feared the Parsis might come and attack me. I did not like to go to my friend. Though my condition was pitiable I did not like to be pitied. I decided to spend the five hours in the public garden which is called Kamathi Baug, on the border of the city and the camp. I sat there partly

with a vacant mind, partly with sorrow at the thought of what had happened to me, and thought of my father and mother as children do when they are in a forlorn condition. At 8 p.m. I came out of the garden, took a carriage to the inn, brought down my luggage. The caretaker came out but neither he nor I could utter a word to each other. He felt that he was in some way responsible for bringing him into trouble. I paid him his bill. He received it in silence and I took his leave in silence. I had gone to Baroda with high hope. I had given up many offers. It was war time. Many places in the Indian Educational service were vacant. I knew very influential people in London. But I did not seek any of them. I felt that my duty was to offer my services first to the Maharaja of Baroda who had financed my education. And here I was driven to leave Baroda and return to Bombay after a stay of only eleven days.

This scene of a dozen Parsis armed with sticks lined before me in a menacing mood and myself standing before them with a terrified look imploring for mercy is a scene which so long a period as 18 years has not succeeded in fading away. I can even now vividly recall it and never recall it without tears in my eyes. It was then for the first time that I learnt that a person who is an unouchable to a Hindu is also an untouchable to a Parsi.

THREE

The year was 1929. The Bombay Government had appointed a Committee to investigate the grievances of the untouchables. I was appointed a member of the Committee. The Committee had to tour all over the province to investigate into the allegations of injustice, oppression and tyranny. The Committee split up. I and another member were assigned the two districts of Khandesh. My colleague and myself after finishing our work parted company. He went to see some Hindu saint. I left by train to go to Bombay. At Chalisgaon I got down to go to a village on the Dhulia line to investigate a case of social boycott which had been declared by the caste Hindus against the untouchables of that village. The untouchables of Chalisgaon came to the station and requested me to stay for the night with them. My original plan was to go straight to Bombay after investigating the case of social boycott. But as they were keen I agreed to stay overnight. I boarded the train for Dhulia to go to the village, went there and informed myself of the situation prevailing in the village and returned by the next train to Chalisgaon.

I found the untouchables of Chalisgaon waiting for me at the station. I was garlanded. The Maharwada, the quarters of the untouchables, is about 2 miles from the Railway station and one has to cross a river on which there is a culvert to reach it. There were many horse carnages at the station plying for hire. The Maharwada was also within walking distance from the station. I expected immediately to be taken to the Maharwada. But there was no movement in that direction and I could not understand why I was kept waiting. After an hour or so a *tonga* (one horse carriage) was brought close to the platform and I got in. The driver and I were the only two occupants of the *tonga*. Others went on foot by a short cut. The *tonga* had not gone 200 paces when there would have been a collision with a motor car. I was surprised that the driver who was paid for hire every day should have been so inexperienced. The accident was averted only

because on the loud shout of the policeman the driver of the car pulled it back.

We some how came to the culvert on the river. On it there are no walls as there are on a bridge. There is only a row of stones fixed at a distance of five or ten feet. It is paved with stones. The culvert on the river is at right angles to the road we were coming by. A sharp turn has to be taken to come to the culvert from the road. Near the very first side stone of the culvert the horse instead of going straight took a turn and bolted. The wheel of the *tonga* struck against the side stone so forcibly that I was bodily lifted up and thrown down on the stone pavement of the culvert and the horse and the carriage fell down from the culvert into the river. So heavy was the fall that I lay down senseless. The Maharwada is just on the other bank of the river. The men who had come to greet me at the station had reached there ahead of me. I was lifted and taken to the Maharwada amidst the cries and lamentations of the men, women and children. As a result of this I received several injuries. My leg was fractured and I was disabled for several days. I could not understand how all this happened. The *tongas* pass and repass the culvert every day and never has a driver failed to take the tonga safely over the culvert.

On enquiry I was told the real facts. The delay at the railway station was due to the fact that the tongawalas were not prepared to drive the tonga with a passenger who was an untouchable. It was beneath their dignity. The Mahars could not tolerate that I should walk to their quarters. It was not in keeping with their sense of my dignity. A compromise was therefore arrived at. That compromise was to this effect: the owner of the tonga would give the tonga on hire but not drive. The Mahars may take the *tonga* but find some one to drive it. The Mahars thought this to be a happy solution. But they evidently forgot that the safety of the passenger was more important than the maintenance of his dignity. If they had thought of this they would have considered whether they could get a driver who could safely conduct me to my destination. As a matter of fact none of them could drive because it was not their trade. They therefore asked someone from amongst themselves to drive. The man took the reins in his

hand and started thinking there was nothing in it. But as he got on he felt his responsibility and became so nervous that he gave up all attempt to control. To save my dignity the Mahars of Chalisgaon had put my very life in jeopardy. It is then I learnt that a Hindu *tongawalla*, no better than a menial, has a dignity by which he can look upon himself as a person who is superior to all untouchables even though he may be a Barristar-at-law.

FOUR

In the year 1934, some of my co-workers in the movement of the depressed classes expressed a desire to go on a sight-seeing tour if I agreed to join them. I agreed. It was decided that our plan should at all events include a visit to the Buddhist caves at Verul. It was arranged that I should go to Nasik and the party should join me at Nasik. To go to Verul we had to go to Aurangabad. Aurangabad is a town in the Mohammedan State of Hyderabad and is included in the dominion of His Exalted Highness, the Nizam. On the way to Aurangabad we had first to pass another town called Daulatabad which is also in the Hyderabad State. Daulatabad is a historical place and was, at one time, the capital of a famous Hindu King by name Ramdeo Rai. The fort of Daulatabad is an ancient historical monument and no tourist while in that vicinity should omit a visit to it. Accordingly our party had also included in its programme a visit to the fort of Daulatabad.

We hired some buses and touring cars. We were about 30 in number. We started from Nasik to Yeola as Yeola is on the way to Aurangabad. Our tour programme had not been announced and quite deliberately. We wanted to travel incognito in order to avoid difficulties which an untouchable tourist has to face in outlying parts of the country. We had informed our people at those centres only at which we had decided to halt. Accordingly, on the-way although we passed many villages in the Nizam State none of our people had come to meet us. It was naturally different at Daulatabad. There our people had been informed that we were coming. They were waiting for us and had gathered at the entrance to the town. They asked us to get down and have tea and refreshment first and then to go to see the fort. We did not agree to their proposal. We wanted tea very badly but we wanted sufficient time to see the fort before it was dusk. We therefore left for the fort and told our people that we would take tea on our return. Accordingly we told our drivers to move on and within a few minutes we were at the gate of the fort.

The month was Ramjan, the month of fast for the Mohammedans. Just outside the gate of the fort there is a small tank of water full to brim. There is all around a wide stone pavement. Our faces, bodies and clothes were full of dust gathered in the course of our journey and we all wished to have a wash. Without much thought some members of the party washed their faces and their legs on the pavement with the water from the tank. After these ablutions we went to the gate of the fort. There were armed soldiers inside. They opened the big gates and admitted us into the archway. We had just commenced asking the guard the procedure for obtaining permission to go into the fort. In the meantime an old Mohammedan with white flowing beard was coming from behind shouting "the Dheds (meaning untouchables) have polluted the tank". Soon all the young and old Mohammedans who were near about joined him and all started abusing us. "The Dheds have become arrogant. The Dheds have forgotten their religion (i.e. to remain low and degraded). The Dheds must be taught a lesson". They assumed a most menacing mood. We told them that we were outsiders and did not know the local custom. They turned the fire of their wrath against the local untouchables who by that time had arrived at the gate. "Why did you not tell these outsiders that this tank could not be used by untouchables !" was the question they kept on asking them. Poor people ! They were not there when we entered tank. It was really our mistake because we acted without inquiry. They protested that it was not their fault. But the Mohammedans were not prepared to listen to my explanation. They kept on abusing them and us. The abuse was so vulgar that it had exasperated us. There could easily have been a riot and possibly murders. We had however to restrain ourselves. We did not want to be involved in a criminal case which would bring our tour to an abrupt end.

One young muslim in the crowd kept on saying that every one must conform to his religion, meaning thereby that the untouchables must not take water from a public tank. I had grown quite impatient and asked him in a some what angry tone, "Is that what your religion teaches ? Would you prevent an untouchable from taking water from this tank if he became a Mohammedan ?" These straight questions seemed to have

some effect on the Mohammedans. They gave no answer and stood silent. Turning to the guard I said, again in an angry tone, "Can we get into the fort or not? Tell us, if we can't we don't want to stop". The guard asked for my name. I wrote it out on a piece of paper. He took it to the Superintendent inside and came out. We were told that we could go into the fort but we could not touch water anywhere in the fort and an armed soldier was ordered to go with us to see that we did not transgress the order.

I gave one instance to show that a person who is an untouchable to a Hindu is also an untouchable to a Parsi. This will show that person who is an untouchable to a Hindu is also an untouchable to a Mohammedan.

FIVE

The next case is equally illuminating. It is a case of an Untouchable school teacher in a village in Kathiawar and is reported in the following letter which appeared in the '**Young India**' a journal published by Mr. Gandhi in its issue of 12th December 1929. It expresses the difficulties he had expressed in persuading a Hindu doctor to attend to his wife who had just delivered and how the wife and child died for want of medical attention. The letter says:

"On the 5th of this month a child was born to me. On the 7th, she fell ill and suffered from loose stools. Her vitality seemed to ebb away and her chest became inflamed. Her breathing became difficult and there was acute pain in the ribs, I went to call a doctor—but he said he would not go to the house of a Harijan nor was he prepared to examine the child. Then I went to Nagarseth and Garasia Darbar and pleaded them to help me. The Nagarseth stood surety to the doctor for my paying his fee of two rupees. Then the doctor came but on condition that he would examine them only outside the Harijan colony. I took my wife out of the colony along with her newly born child. Then the doctor gave his thermometer to a Muslim, he gave it to me and I gave it to my wife and then returned it by the same process after it had been applied. It was about eight o'clock in the evening and the doctor on looking at the thermometer in the light of a lamp said that the patient was suffering from pneumonia. Then the doctor went away and sent the medicine. I brought some linseed from the bazar and used it on the patient. The doctor refused to see her later, although I gave the two rupees fee. The disease is dangerous and God alone will help us.

The lamp of my life has died out. She passed away at about two o'clock this afternoon."

The name of the Untouchable school teacher is not given. So also the name of the doctor is not mentioned. This was at the request of the Untouchable teacher who feared reprisals. The facts are indisputable.

No explanation is necessary. The doctor, who inspite of being educated refused to apply the thermometer and treat an ailing woman in a critical condition. As a result of his refusal to treat her, the woman died. He felt no qualms of conscience in setting aside the code of conduct which is binding on his profession. The Hindu would prefer to be inhuman rather than touch an Untouchable.

SIX

There is one other incident more telling than this. On the 6th of March 1938, a meeting of the Bhangis was held at Kasarwadi (behind Woollen Mills) Dadar, Bombay, under the Chairmanship of Mr. Indulal Yadnik. In this meeting, one Bhangi boy narrated his experience in the following terms:

“I passed the Vernacular Final Examination in 1933. I have studied English up to the 4th Standard. I applied to the Schools Committee of the Bombay Municipality for employment as a teacher but I failed as there was no vacancy. Then, I applied to the Backward Classes Officer, Ahmedabad, for the job of a Talati (village Patwari) and I succeeded. On 19th February 1936, I was appointed a Talati in the office of the Mamlatdar of the Borsad Taluka in the Kheda District.

Although my family originally came from Gujarat, I had never been in Gujarat before. This was my first occasion logo there. Similarly, I did not know that untouchability would be observed in Government Offices. Besides in my application the facts of my being a Harijan was mentioned and so I expected that my colleagues in the office would know before-hand who I was. That being so, I was surprised to find the attitude of the clerk of the Mamlatdar's office when I presented myself to take charge of the post of the Talati.

The Karkun contemptuously asked, “Who are you?” I replied, “Sir, I am a Harijan”. “He said,” Go away, stand at a distance. How dare you stand so near me. You are in office, if you were outside I would have given you six kicks, what audacity to come here for service? “Thereafter, he asked me to drop on the ground my certificate and the order of appointment as a Talati. He then picked them up. While I was working in the Mamlatdar's office at Borsad I experienced great difficulty in the matter of getting water for drinking. In the verandah of the office there were kept cans containing drinking water. There was a waterman incharge of these water cans. His duty was to pour out water to clerks in office whenever they needed it. In the absence of the waterman they could themselves take water out of the cans and drink it. That was impossible in my case. I could not touch the cans for my touch would pollute the water, I had therefore to depend upon the mercy of the waterman. For my use there was kept a small rusty pot. No one would touch it or wash it except myself. It was in this pot that the waterman would dole out water to me. But I could get water only if the waterman was present. This

waterman did not like the idea of supplying me with water. Seeing that I was coming for water he would manage to slip away with the result that I had to go without water and the days on which I had no water to drink were by no means few.

I had the same difficulties regarding my residence. I was a stranger in Borsad. No caste Hindu would rent a house to me. The Untouchables of Borsad were not ready to give me lodgings for the fear of displeasing the Hindus who did not like my attempt to live as a clerk, a station above me. Far greater difficulties were with regard to food. There was no place or person from where I could get my meals. I used to buy 'Bhajhas' 'morning and evening, eat them in some solitary place outside the village and come and sleep at night, on the pavement of the verandahs of the Mamlatdar's office. In this way, I passed four days. All this became unbearable to me. Then I went to live at Jentral, my ancestral village. It was six miles from Borsad. Every day I had to walk eleven miles. This I did for a month and a half.

There after the Mamlatdar sent me to a Talati to learn the work. This Talati was in charge of three villages, Jentral, Khapur and Saijpur. Jentral was his headquarters. I was in Jentral with this Talati for two months. He taught me nothing and I never once entered the village office. The headman of the village was particularly hostile. Once he had said, 'you fellow, your father, your brother are sweepers who sweep the village office and you want to sit in the office as our equal? Take care, better give up this job.'

One day the Talati called me to Saijpur to prepare the population table of the village. From Jentral I went to Saijpur, I found the Headman and the Talati in the village office doing some work. I went, stood near the door of the office and wished them 'good morning' but they took no notice of me. I stood outside for about 15 minutes. I was already tired of life and felt enraged at being thus ignored and insulted. I sat down on a chair that was lying there. Seeing me seated on the chair the Headman and the Talati quietly went away without saying anything to me. A short while after, people began to come and soon a large crowd gathered round me. This crowd was led by the Librarian of the village library. I could not understand why an educated person should have led this mob. I subsequently learnt that the chair was his. He started abusing me in the worst terms. Addressing the Ravana (village servant) he said, 'Who allowed this dirty dog of a Bhangi to sit on the chair?' The Ravana

unseated me and took away the chair from me. I sat on the ground. Thereupon the crowd entered the village office and sun-rounded me. It was a furious crowd raging with anger, some abusing me, some threatening to cut me to pieces with Dharya (a sharp weapon like the sword). I implored them to excuse me and to have mercy upon me. That did not have any effect upon the crowd. I did not know how to save myself. But an idea came to me of writing to the Mamlatdar about the fate that had befallen me and telling him how to dispose of my body in case I was killed by the crowd. Incidentally, it was my hope that if the crowd came to know that I was practically reporting against them to the Mamlatdar they might hold their hands. I asked the Ravana to give me a piece of paper which he did. Then with my fountain pen I wrote the following on it in big bold letters so that everybody could read it:

“To,

The Mamlatdar, Taluka Borsad.

Sir,

Be pleased to accept the humble salutations of Parmar Kalidas Shivram. This is to humbly inform you that the hand of death is falling upon me today. It would not have been so if I had listened to the words of my parents. Be so good as to inform my parents of my death.”

The Librarian read what I wrote and at once asked me to tear it off, which I did. They showered upon me innumerable insults. ‘You want us to address you as our Talati? You are a Bhangi and you want to enter the office and sit on the chair?’ I implored for mercy and promised not to repeat this and also promised to give up the job. I was kept there till seven in the evening when the crowd left. Till then the Talati and the Mukhiya had not come. Thereafter I took fifteen days’ leave and returned to my parents in Bombay.”

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