

NOT TO STOP UNTIL THE UNTOUCHABLES RECOVER MANHOOD

(Dr. Ambedkar's Message to the Readers of Jai Bheem)

“ You have asked me to send you a message on my 55th birthday for your Special Number. It is an unfortunate fact that in India the political leader is placed on the same footing as the Prophet. Outside India, people celebrate the birthday of their Prophets. It is only in India that the birthdays of both Prophets as well as the politicians are celebrated. It is a pity that it should be so. Personally, I do not like the celebration of my birthday. I am too much of a democrat to relish man-worship which I regard as perversion of democracy. Admiration, love, regard and respect for a leader, if he deserves them, are permissible and should be enough for both, the leader and the followers. But worship of the leader is certainly not permissible. It is demoralising to both. But I suppose this is all beside the point. Once a political leader is placed on the same footing as the Prophet, he must play the role of the Prophet and give a message to his followers in the same way as Prophet did.

What message can I give to the Untouchables? I cannot give them a message but I can tell them a tale from Greek Mythology and point out the moral. This tale is contained in a Homeric Hymn addressed to the Greek Goddess Demeter. This Hymn to Demeter relates how the great Goddess, in the course of her wanderings in search of her daughter, came to the court of Keleos. No one recognised the Goddess under the borrowed form of a humble wet-nurse; and Queen Metoneira entrusted to her care her latest born child the infant Demophoon, afterwards known as Triptolemos.

Every evening, behind closed doors, while the household was asleep, Demeter took little Demophoon out of his comfortable cradle and with apparent cruelty, though moved in reality by a great love and desires of bringing him eventually to

the state of Godhood, laid the naked child on a glowing bed of embers. The child, Demophoon endures the fiery charcoal, he gathers strength from the ordeal. Something Superhuman is fostered in him, something robust, something beyond all hope glorious. But Metoneira becoming anxious, says the legend, burst suddenly one evening into the room where the experiment was being carried on and guided by her mistaken fears, thrust aside the goddess at her work of foregoing the superman, pushed away the embers and took away the child with the result that she saved the child but lost the Superman and eventual God”.

What does this tale teach ? To my mind, it teaches that greatness can be achieved only by struggle and sacrifice. Neither manhood nor Godhood can be obtained without going through the ordeal of fire. Fire purifies, fire strengthens, so does struggle and suffering. No down-trodden man can achieve greatness unless he is prepared for struggle and suffering. He must be ready to sacrifice the comforts and even the necessities of the present for building up his future. To use the language of the Bible for the race of life all are called but only few. are chosen. Why ? The reason is obvious. Most down-trodden men fail to achieve greatness in this race of life because they have not the courage nor the determination to sacrifice the pleasures of the present for the needs of their future.

Can there be a better and a greater message than what is contained in this legend ? I can find one. It is the best and the most appropriate message I can think of for the Untouchables. I am aware of their struggle and their sufferings. I am aware that in their struggle for liberty they have suffered more than I have. With all this, I can give them no other message. My message is struggle, and more struggle, sacrifice and more sacrifice. It is struggle and struggle alone without counting the sacrifices or sufferings that will bring their emancipation. Nothing else will.

The Untouchables must develop a collective will to rise and resist and must believe in the sacredness of their task and develop a command determination to achieve their goal. Their

task is so great and the purpose so noble that as Untouchables should join in a prayer and say :

“Blessed are they who are alive to the duty of raising those among whom they are born. Blessed are they who vow to give the flower of their days, their strength is of soul and body and their mite, to further the campaign of resistance to slavery. Blessed are they who resolve-come good, come evil, come sunshine, come tempest, come honour, come dishonour - not to stop until the Untouchables have fully recovered their manhood”.¹

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¹: Jai Bheem, Madras, Dr. Ambedkar's Birthday Special Number, April 13, 1947.