



Journey From Marginalization to Equality - Based on Tagore's 'Chandalika'

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Abstract:-

Now in 21st century, we live in Modern, globalised world. We usually think a society can be developed by education, technology, money etc. But the root cause behind our societal development is basically the way of thinking of the people. Every country including India has their own constitutional laws, amendments and rights for their citizens' protections in all aspects, for providing them all the opportunity by removing the barriers etc. But these constitutional laws are literally meaningless until people change their way of thinking and point of view. Progressiveness remains in our mind only which can turn a society towards the way of modernization.

Marginalization is a curse for a society which tends to treat someone based on their cast -class – creed. But we should treat everyone as a Human first.

Rabindranath Tagore, one of the greatest personality in India, dreamt of an 'Oneness' and 'Equality' by excluding the thought of 'Marginalization', which could seamlessly integrate all the civilisations and lead to the pursuit of the eternal truth that our greatest identity is, we are HUMAN, nothing much. By writing the drama "Chandalika" he tried to shout against untouchability and highlighting the facts of Humanity. In this article, by drawing the concepts of marginalization and equality, what was Tagore's vision regarding these, will be highlighted by following up his drama "Chandalika". By explaining the journey from marginalization to equalization, it is basically the motto to establish the thought of HUMANITY which is the eternal truth

[KEYWORDS – MARGINALIZATION, EQUALITY, UNTOUCHABILITY]

INTRODUCTION: -

"You and the Foreigner shall be the same before the Lord: same laws and regulations will apply both to you and to the foreigner residing among you." (Bible, Numbers 15:15f)

Well, we must say that the word EQUALITY, undoubtedly a broader concept. It's about ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents. It is also the belief that no one should have poorer life chances because of the way they were born, where they come from, what they believe, or whether they have a disability.

Which have been derived from Latin word 'Acqualis', stands for equal/even/level.

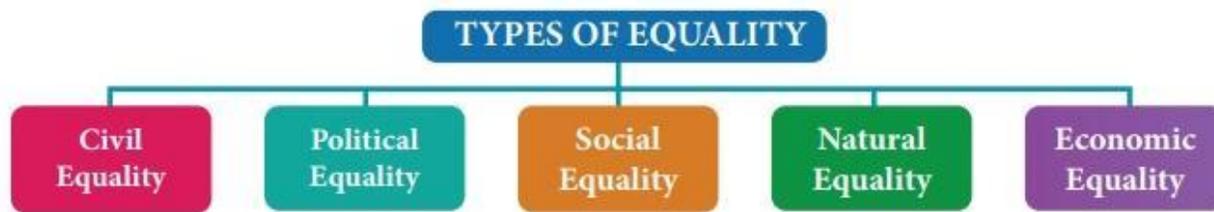
What is Equality: -

The word 'Equality' has been derived from Latin word 'Acqualis', which means equal/even/level. If we abbreviate the word EQUAL, it may stand for such way –

- E – Empowered
- Q – Queers
- U – United
- A – Absolute
- L – Liberation

Basically, it helps to preserve the 'dignity' of an individual. Historically, certain groups have faced discrimination for these characteristics, while lots of people continue to struggle against discrimination today, in Britain and around the world. Equality recognises these injustices and promotes a fairer society. Equality is not about benefiting some people at the expense of others, but rather benefiting everyone.

There are several types of equality. These are –



Civil Equality :-

Civil equality refers to persons in a society having the same status in terms of civil rights, freedom of expression, and equal access to various social goods and services. This denotes that law and order are equal for everybody, regardless of who they are.

Political Equality: -

Political equality is that the equal right should be given to vote and also to contest in election irrespective of caste, creed, religion, economic status. This is very important in achieving a democratic government.

Social Equality:-

The term “social equality” refers to the fact that everyone in society has the same status and no one is entitled to special treatment. All castes, creeds, races, groups and classes, clans, and tribes should be treated equally. Everyone should have the same opportunity to grow as a person.

Natural Equality :-

Natural Equality is that which is found among all men solely by the constitution of their nature. This equality is the principle and foundation of liberty. Natural or moral equality is therefore based on the constitution of human nature common to all men, who are born, grow, live, and die in the same way.

Economic Equality :-

Economic equality is about a level playing field where everyone has the same access to the same wealth. More specifically, it may refer to equal life chances regardless of identity, to provide all citizens with a basic and equal minimum of income, goods, and services or to increase funds and commitment for redistribution.

Place of Equality in Our Constitution :-

The third section of the constitution provides several fundamental rights to every Indian citizen, regardless of caste, ethnicity, place of origin, gender, or religion.

There are Six basic Fundamental Rights –

1. Right to Equality (Article 14-18)
2. Right to Freedom (Article 19-22)
3. Right against Exploration (Article 23-24)
4. Right to Freedom of Religion (Article 25-28)
5. Cultural and Educational Rights (Article 29-30)
6. Right to Constitutional Remedies (Article 32)

These, according to Dr B. R. Ambedkar, are the most citizen-friendly aspects of the Constitution. The fundamental rights are considered a crucial aspect of the constitution because they safeguard people’s rights and freedoms against abuse or interference by the government given the authority assigned to it within a democracy. These rights attempt to accomplish the values of justice, equality, liberty, dignity and fraternity outlined inside the Preamble.

Everyone in society must be treated fairly and also without prejudice for democracy to grow and develop. Thus, the writers of the Constitution believed that including such a clause would eliminate the barrier of existing socioeconomic and cultural disparities and allow the nation’s different groups to embrace the liberties and rights provided by the constitution. It became critical to eliminate inequities based on religious beliefs, social standards, and age-old practices prevalent in areas of India, such as casteism, untouchability, and racial discrimination. This gave rise to the Right to Equality clause.

Equality as Human Right :-

The right to Equality guarantees equal treatment to all people by prohibiting legal discrimination based solely on class, ethnicity, religion, gender or birthplace.

Here are the articles along with it’s detail description -

Article	Brief Description
Article - 14	Equality Before the Law – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All citizens will be treated equally before the law
Article - 15	Prohibition of Discrimination – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The state shall not discriminate against any citizen on the grounds only of religion, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them.
Article - 16	Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There shall be equality of opportunity for all the citizens in matters of relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State.
Article - 17	Abolition of Untouchability – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any disability arising out of Untouchability is made an offence.
Article - 18	Abolition of Titles – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The State shall not confer any titles except those which are academic or military titles. It prohibits citizens of India from accepting any titles from a Foreign State.

So, we are living in Modern, Globalised world, hiring high designation in societies, introducing ourselves as civilized, educated people, well known about the constitutional laws and regulations, shouting for Human Rights and protection but still, some words like ‘Marginalization’, ‘Inequality’, ‘Discrimination’ – these are very familiar to us till date.

Marginalization – it’s concept: -

It’s basically a process of making a group or a class of people less important, a process by which something or someone is pushed to the edge. It is basically a form of social inequality, based on several determinants such as –

1. Poverty and lack of resources
2. Treating others without any Dignity
3. Discrimination in the basis of Cast and Gender.

Marginalized people don’t necessarily belong to one particular demographic: Marginalization occurs due to ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability status, socioeconomic level, and age. Marginalized groups are often at a disadvantage when it comes to obtaining health care, decent education, and employment that would improve their well-being.

Types of Marginalization:-

Marginalization puts people in powerless positions based on one or several dimensions of exclusion:

1. Economic marginalization:

Economic marginalization refers to disparities in amassing wealth or getting a job. For example, many forms of employment marginalize racial minorities due to harmful stereotypes about what types of people make good managers or workers.

2. Political marginalization:

Politically marginalized communities struggle to participate in parts of the civic process, like voting or gaining access to their political representatives. Jim Crow–era laws that prevented Black Americans from voting were examples of political marginalization.

3. Social marginalization:

When someone can’t participate in everyday leisure activities, it’s known as social marginalization. Denial of access to clubs and organizations is an example of social marginalization.

Basically, marginalization can result from intentional campaigns that exclude certain people (like ethnic groups) from society. It can also occur unintentionally due to structures that benefit some members of society while making life challenging for others.

But, the root cause of marginalization is not based on any political or economical. It is social. This is a condition not only prevailing in India, but among all through the nations. Therefore political freedom does not give us freedom when our mind is not free.

Equality in Tagore’s View (Based on “Chandalika”) :-

Rabindranath Tagore, one of the greatest personality in India, dreamt of ‘Oneness’ and ‘Equality’ by excluding the thought of ‘marginalization’ which could seamlessly integrate all civilisations and lead to the pursuit of the eternal truth that our greatest identity is we are HUMAN, nothing much.

Ever since the dawn of social renaissance in India, the awareness against the deep rooted and long practice of untouchability has seen a serious concern for all social thinkers, philanthropist and creative artists. Tagore, having his firm faith in the religion, tried to establish that each individual is unique and retains his identity even when he attains union with godhead. 'The great sentinel', as Gandhi had called Hui, Tagore believed in cultural progress. Untouchability was a sore point with him. He felt that it was one of the darkest spots degrading humanity in the estimation of the civilized world and if not foiled it would remain an everlasting shame and agony.

The discriminate in the society on the basis of caste has its roots in traditional social conventions, deep – rooted blind orthodoxy and the monopoly of ruling class over economic resources. The caste in India are armed with the feeling of six thousand years of social and class superiority. Manu, the codifier of the laws of Hindu religion, declared in 'Manu Smriti' :-

“Chandals and untouchables should live out side the village, they should use earthen pots instead of utensils, should have dogs and monkeys as their property and should put on the clothes as taken off from dead bodies.”

Tagore’s faith in the freedom and dignity of man derived from his religious faith and reinforced by his acceptance of humanism which was the prevailing intellectual attitude. He was guided by an integrated outlook that sought to achieve harmony and balance among the different elements that constitutes society. He believed that India’s special contribution to human civilization lies in her exaltation of the principle of unity in diversity. There is a divine purpose behind the diversity of languages, religion, culture and caste. He advanced the view that even religion must survive on the grounds of logic but the religion that fails to protect the dignity of individual should not be encouraged. Reason and judgement should be the basis of religious ideology.

Hence in his writings, there is a rare intensity of feeling and indignation whenever he wrote of injustice and misery flowing from caste and untouchability. Tagore’s refined sensibility is perhaps rooted in his enlightened family background, which fostered his internationalism at a very young age. Besides coming under the influence of the social reformer Raja Rammohan Roy and Brahma Samaj, he himself was deeply conversant with the 'One God' (Monotheism) thought of Upanishads. The reformist Brahma Samaj that had strong reservations against Hindu orthodox rituals and polytheism perhaps sowed the seeds of an intense spiritual bonding and altruism. Besides Gandhiji and his untouchable movement shook him from the root.

Tagore’s Chandalika was written in the year 1933. Chandalika, an untouchable and the daughter of a black magician Chandal emerges as a voice of the silenced and marginalised in history. She was a rebel who questioned societal norms that relegated her to an existence of a lesson being, an untouchable. Basically he wrote this play when the caste system was in it’s peak.

Inspired by the story of “Shardulkarna Avadana” (Originally a Buddhist literature, 'Avadana Shataka', english translation done by Dr. Rajendralal Mitra, named as 'Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal), Tagore wrote his play, where he wanted to reflect the social status of untouchable Prakriti. Here he conditioned by the oppressive society, the central protagonist Chandalika (Prakriti), believed in being socially inferior (belonging to the lowest stratum), so much so that she was convinced of defiling other castes by mere touch or contact, it has been reflected clearly in this drama when the flowers seller, card seller or ornaments seller came to sell their product and the moment Prakriti went there to buy those, other villagers alerted them by saying –

“Don’t touch her as she is daughter of Chandal”

(Oke Chuyo Na Chuyo Na Chi O Je Chandalinir Jhi) (1)

Prakriti didn’t know what was her sin for which reason she was being punished by this curse – called 'UNTOUCHABILITY'. She asked her mother, why she even gave her birth!

Such conviction forced her to desist from giving water to the thirsty monk Ananda (deciple of Lord Buddha) who came her to give him water. But Prakriti duly reminded him of her social status as an untouchable and apologized for her inability to provide drinking water from the well –

“Pardon me oh my Lord ! I am daughter of Chandal and the water of my well is unclean like me. I have no right and I’m not even being entitled to do that virtue to give you water!”

(“Khoma Karo Prabhu Khoma koro More / Ami Chandaler Kanya/ Mor Kuper Bari Osuchi / Tomare Debo Jol Heno Punner Ami Nohi Odhikarini / Ami Chandaler Kanya”) (2)

Notwithstanding Prakriti s inhibition, the Bhikshu (Ananda) insisted and drank water from her, underlying the fundamental spiritual unity of all human beings, reminding her not to humiliate herself as he thought.

Moreover he said –

‘Je Manabo Ami Sei Manabo Tumi Kanya

Sei Bari Tirtha Bari Jaha Tripta Kore Trishitere

Jaha Tapito Srantere Shikto Kore Sei to Pabitra Bari’ (3)

(As I am a human being, so also are you, and all water is clean and holy that cools our heat and satisfies our thirst)

Empowered by this experience and realisation, Prakriti managed to disentangle herself from her absurd social entrapments, feeling a deep sense of bliss and enlightenment. In her version –

‘e notun janmo, notun janmo, notun janmo amar...

Shiure uthlo deho amar/ chomke uthlo pran’ (4)

(it’s a new birth for me, a new birth, my new birth... my body awoke with a jolt/ My soul got conscious all of a sudden).

Thus, after sensitising to her own existence as any other human being, irrespective of caste, colour and creed, Prakriti discovered herself as a human being in her own right, she learnt the meaning of dignity – she learnt what it is to be a woman, to serve others as an equal.

This realisation of Prakriti’s selfhood is intermingled with the conscious negation of her socially imposed caste and class as well as an acknowledgement of herself as a woman, proud of her self worth.

Thus, Prakriti, who had internalised herself as a victim of social stigma and negated her selfhood was suddenly elevated to a moment of recognition.

Chandalika was an epitome of the master dramatist’s experiment with three significant issues that is ‘Spirituality’ and ‘Untouchability’ and ‘Self realisation’. The play was a perfect labyrinth of Indian society, had three prominent themes. The most prominent being the ‘spiritual liberation’; while emancipation from the scourge of untouchability and self realisation, constitute the other two underlying themes. The play displayed close interlinking of caste, gender and religion in subtle and significant ways.

During, the 1930s, Tagore was concerned with abnormal caste consciousness, both in Bengal and in India as a whole with his acute sensitivity and worldwide experience, he perceived its insidiousness with greater clarity than any other Indian. But for all his effort he could do little to remove it – least of all around religious differences. In 1932, November, he again took up the cudgels against untouchability : what Gandhiji called this white ant which must be touched at it’s source. The Poona Pact between Gandhi and Ambedkar had changed nothing on the ground. This problem occupied Tagore for months and in 1933, he wrote Chandalika.

Though Prakriti in Tagore’s Chandalika deliberately withdraws from braving the world and fails to bridge the cleavage between religion, caste, gender, and sexuality. This ending seems to be satirical, but Tagore’s intension was to show the plight of Indians. The absence of the union thus affirms the presence of imperishable difference between details and non – Dalits

Though we are currently living in an Independent Modern country of 21st century along with constitutional rights and facilities – which will suppose to be formed to protect us, from any suffering, but are we really free? To be honest, political freedom does not give us freedom until our mind is not free.

Based on this statement if we ask ourselves, are we literally living in a modern society with all the equal mindset, then why did Dr. Payal Tadvi committed suicide, after being harassed and tortured at her place of work, her medical institution, based on her caste? Why the whole country shook, when Rohit Vemula, a brilliant PhD scholar was institutionally murdered for standing up against the casteism of the chancellor of the University of Hyderabad?

Do we really believe in equality! Have our society removed their vision for untouchables from it’s root? Well I guess no. Based on some newspaper reports, it may be clearly statgender t we are free politically, constitutionally, but not mentally. Just want to highlight some of those reports at a glance –

- On 12th April 2021 – Tamil Nadu
Two Dalits youths killed by upper castes
- On 5th April 2021 – Uttar Pradesh, Jhansi
An 8-year-old Dalit girl was brutally beaten to death.
- On 26th April 2022 – IIT Kharagpur
An associate professor misbehaved with his SC-ST students during online classes.
- On 5th May – 2019,
A Dalit youth was beaten to death while sitting in a chair during a wedding ceremony, by a group of upper caste man.
- On 24th May 2021 – Ahmedabad
Dalit man was attacked by 11 people on charges of possessing a long moustache.
- On 19th May 2021- Bihar, Purnia District,
Around 100-150 people attacked Dalit families.

So, inspires of having all the constitutional laws to protect Human rights and all, these articles have proved that we can’t set free our mind from the curse of caste system. Basically, these are the evidence to show us exactly how much we can accept untouchables and give them freedom to live their lives with full of dignity.

Conclusion:-

By using this drama “Chandalika” as a medium, Tagore tried to motivate Indians, to act against the practice of untouchability. He used this drama as a social tool, aimed andate, inform, educate, and arouse the consciousness of individuals in society with a view of making them aware of their responsibilities as members of society, whose duty is to take their destinies in their hands and make the world a better place. Tagore posits the action in multiple polarities of the 20th century India—religion, gender, caste, spirit and matter—capturing a universal human search for love and peace and highlighting the way through which human mind can start their journey to reach the galaxy of equalization from the darkness of marginalization.

Notes:-

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