

**DIGNIFIED HUMAN AVATAR AS AN UNDIGNIFIED ONE IN A CASTE
CONSCIOUS SOCIETY: A STUDY OF BHASKARAN'S MOTHER'S FOREST: AN
UNFINISHED STORY OF C.K. JANU**

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Prof. D. Amalraj

Vivekananda College of Arts and Science

Men and women have been created only by one God and not by too many Gods having joined together for the act of creation. Yet "It is this one God, [the creator], whom no [human] eye has seen, about whom no [human] ear has heard and of whom no [human] mind has conceived" (*Family Devotional Study Bible*, 1 Cor. 2.9). Christians have identified their creator in God, the Father of Jesus Christ. The Muslims always believe in their Allah as the creator of human beings. The Hindus have recognised their creator in Brahma. The Christians and the Muslims except the Hindus worship their respective one and the same God. But the Hindus, besides their Brahma, worship innumerable number of Gods and Goddesses. However, the people of all religions know that as men and women, they are only God's creations. This belief is still being common among all the sensible and religious human beings. As per God's will, the first man and woman became the creators of their own posterity and from their respective posterity all other descendents have come and occupied this earth. Besides, the creation of future human beings by the living posterity will continue and it will go on unchecked till the last day of the extinction of all the living things on earth. Every such thing does happen only with the blessings of unseen God.

As God's creations, all human beings are the most dignified ones, irrespective of the differences in castes and religions. Differences in caste are more dominant among human beings and it can be seen among the groups such as higher class, higher-middle class, middle class, lower class and the Dalits. The creation of human beings as men and women is by God alone but the creation of caste disparity among the human beings is mainly because of the attitudes of the human beings. All those who are caste wise higher only think of themselves as Godlike on earth, and they also feel that they are beyond the reach of the people born in lower and isolated classes. In doing so, they belittle the dignity of the human avatar in other caste. Just like the assassination of Julius Caesar lay in the hands of Brutus, Caesar's friend, dividing the human beings into upper class, upper-middle class, middle class, and discriminated class such as the Dalits lies in the dirtiest mind of the human beings. All types of castes other than the Dalits join together and mindlessly discriminate and oppress the fellow beings just because they are born as the Dalits. They also make all out efforts to keep themselves placed in dignified posts in all fields of human endeavour. Moreover, they never fail to display discriminatory attitudes and behaviour as and when they meet the socially inferior Dalits.

All deadly and infectious viruses like Corona will have certainly their own end one day or other, but the disparity of one group by other groups will last till the last day of the existence of the earth. The deadly viruses do not differentiate one social group from other social group when it spreads among human beings. Neither do they spare a group among human beings from the infection just because such a group belongs to superior social status. They infect all without minding the differences in their social statuses. Only when all human beings feel that they are only the children of one and the same God, the life on earth will be heavenly. Such a world cannot be a reality nor can such a world take any shape even in human imagination. All religious groups think that each group has been created only by its respective God and not by one and the same God. The world of the reality is the one where all higher social groups discriminate, suppress, and isolate the entire Dalit group on various grounds. If a higher caste is a dominant in one area, the

Dalits are to be always at the mercy of it for their peaceful coexistence. If one religion is dominant in one particular state or nation, other religious groups are to meet with all types of disparity and humiliation at the hands of those people of the dominant religious group. However, among all types of discrimination, only the caste discrimination, in particular about Dalit group, is the bane of Indian society.

The present study has been pursued to highlight the humiliation of the Dalits. This is not the group, which is isolated and discriminated, while living along with the higher caste groups in one and the same city or village. This is the group, which is known as Dalit tribal communities and these people have their own lands and houses in the mountainous areas and who have been living independently from time immemorial. Though these tribal communities are far from the civilized areas, yet they cannot also escape from humiliation and discrimination as and when the middle-class migrants invade their areas and covet the fertile lands belonging to the tribal communities. As usurpers, the middle-class migrants take possession of the lands and houses of the Dalit tribal communities as if they were their own, and then drive them to the waste lands so that they can mend for themselves. To drive home this truth that the lowest social class usually known as Dalits, wherever they are living, whether they are in the civilized areas or in the hilly regions far from the civilized towns, are meant only for being discriminated, oppressed, suppressed, and deprived of their own avenues of livelihood. The writer of this article has taken the autobiography of C.K. Janu, the member of the Dalit tribal community, written in Malayalam by Baskaran and translated in English by N. Ravi Shankar with the title *Mother's Forest: An Unfinished Story of C. K. Janu*. It is about the real-life events, which Janu, a Dalit woman, has experienced. Janu has fought for her people living in the hilly regions quite far away from the other castes who are living in the towns at the foot of the mountains. It conveys a bitter truth that the Dalits are unfit to live in this world along with the higher caste people. This type of attitude in the minds of the higher caste people is an incurable disease.

Most of the states of India have hilly areas far from the dwelling places of the human beings. Even in some hilly areas, tribal communities have their own houses and fertile and dry lands, and they eke out their living by cultivating their fertile lands without being a nuisance to the city dwellers. They have had their habitation for as long as if anyone can remember. There is one such hilly area in the state of Kerala and it is in the district of Wayanad. The Dalit tribal communities have their own lands, which are very fertile and such lands cater to all their needs for thriving without much ado and without depending on the people of the towns at the foot of their hills. They consider their entire mountainous fields as the mother's forest as they have been living there for many generations. Since all such places are very fertile round the years, the middle-class farmers from the mainstream civilized Kerala towns situated at the foot of the mountain have driven these voiceless tribal communities away from their homes and fertile and vacant lands towards the wastelands. As they are illiterate and socially inferior, they do not have any courage to resist from being driven away from their mother's forest. They have no individuality of their own and so they are not able to establish their rights over the lands in the mountainous areas against occupations of the migrants. They simply reconcile themselves to their fate for being born as Adivasi Dalits.

C. K. Janu is an Adivasi Dalit woman from the wastelands in the mountainous areas of Wayanad district. Her family is living with all other fifty-three families in the hills. She is illiterate but she is practically wiser than all her people. Besides being a Dalit, she is a social activist and she lives only to protect her community from having been discriminated and exploited by others belonging to the middle-class migrant farmers. Her main aim for the people of her community is to ensure their rights to live in dignity with their own lands in the mountain areas as their mother's forest. She is of the strong belief that the God who has created middle and middle-higher class farmers has also created them without any disparity as His children. But the people of the middle

and higher middle-class farmers of the plains treat them as if Adivasi Dalits were not their equal. Moreover, the Dalit Adhivasis have no right to coexist with the migrant middle-class farmers. Their act of claiming the rights to the lands of the Dalits is like a thief claiming his rights over his stolen things. Janu knows well that just like the people of middle and higher middle-class having lands of their own in the plains, her Dalit people have their own places and lands in the mountainous areas. Her people follow their own cultural habits quite different from those of the people in the plains. They have their own Gods to worship and own rituals to practice. As a fighter for the sake of her own people, she has to face physical tortures from the civilized society and the police. She has brought to light her first hand experiences of the unbearable hardship of her entire neglected and belittled community including her sufferings in this translated autobiography.

The loss of cultivable lands to the migrants leads to fragmenting the lands and the total absence of any kind of cultivation. The migrant middle-class farmers who have usurped the fertile lands of the Dalits do not keep quiet. As and when the Dalit men convert their wastelands into cultivable one, the migrant farmers make all out efforts to get even such lands transferred to them by tempting the Dalits with the offer of alcohol. Becoming addict, the Dalit men cannot but succumb to the temptation and thereby they get exploited. Janu looks helpless at the vulnerability of her men to such kinds of exploitation. She thinks of the weak-mindedness of her men. Instead of standing with her fight as a kind of moral support, they let her down when she needs them most. She simply thinks of the inherent frailty of her men and their exploitation:

There are still some of her men who own their lands. Besides, there also Dalit men who have cleared the woods, burnt the undergrowth, [converted the land into a cultivable one] sowed thina, the jenmi and the migrants [have appeared] before such men. They befriend our men, give them arrack or a small sum of money and transfer the land in their names. (31-32)

The rightful Dalits have to depend on the usurper of their lands for their livelihood since they have nothing to fall back now. The Dalit women become the labourers in their own usurped lands and as such they become literally the slaves of the migrant middle-class farmers. As and when the Dalit women begin working in the fields like the bonded labourers, they have to bend down their heads and do their works silently. But on seeing a migrant man standing and watching them with his eyes rooted at their back, they look always frightened of him and his presence. While they are working, His presence creates some kind of unknown fears in their hearts. Janu has highlighted this fear of her women in the following words:

When our people [are working] in their own [grabbed] fields, there [is] a man dressed in a sleeveless shirt standing on the ridge, supervising our work. We [are] quite frightened of him. In those days we were afraid of almost everything. The backs of our people seem to be so bent because they have been terrified of so many [imagined] things for generations. When our people speak [to him] they don't raise their eyes and that must be because they are so scared. (13)

Moreover, the cultivable lands become converted into vacant sites for carrying out other works other than agriculture. It results in reducing the Dalits to the state of pennilessness. Even with whatever money they have, they are forced to spend it to buy things in the shops at the foot of the hills. Those who do not have sufficient money at hand open their accounts in the shops and settle it periodically as and when they have money. This kind of living after losing everything has made them indebted to the shop owners who are selling essential commodities. As the days and nights pass, their needs rise up and so they are in need of more money to make both ends meet. When the entire hilly region has been their mother's forests, they have never visited any doctor for any ailment. The forests themselves have acted as the provider of natural medicines to them. They do not also belong to any religious group but they have to change themselves according to the life seen in the Hindu society at the bottom of their mother's forests. Yet they are not treated

on far with other people of the society. Their human avatar is belittled to a greater extent by all and sundry belonging to the migrant farmers from the plain.

Mother's forests have lost their grip when the children of the Adivasi Dalits have started pursuing education for their advancement in the schools in the plains. Those who have had no work in the mother's forests have resorted to using sensual drugs and remain inactive and intoxicated. Even women have given themselves to be sexually enjoyed by men as and when these men have offered tobacco or food or some kind of stones these women are after. This kind of immoral activity on the part of Dalit women has resulted in their violation of their cultural habits and in their earning bad name. The migrant middle-class farmers always keep the Dalits poor, starved, and helpless. Only when these migrants like the Dalits become homeless and landless, and stand at the mercy of the higher castes, they will realise the bitterness of the life of discrimination. The Dalits are not at all considered as human beings and their movement to different places is decided with restrictions. Their burial places have been separated with fences. Thus, Janu's entire Dalit community has experienced poverty, starvation, and powerlessness. They become feelingless mute beings. The places, which they have occupied in the hilly regions, have gradually become unlivable ones and yet they have their own huts built for their living in the wastelands with the help of women under Janu's leadership. However, some middle-class migrants have made all out efforts with the help of the police to drive them away even from their present places but they have resisted attempts strongly under Janu's leadership

The politicians for the sake of getting votes from their middle-class migrants have even gone to the court against the occupation of the lands in the hills by the Dalits. Even before the court takes their cases, these politicians have adopted various inhuman methods such as denying water and electricity supply to them. They have even stopped issuing ration cards. If issued, they fear that these ration cards with the residential addresses of the Dalits in the hills will ensure them that this is only their own mother's forest and none can deny it. All politicians and middle class immigrants have looked not only indecent but also their deeds against the voiceless Dalits are devilish. Adding fuel to the fire, the politicians and the illegal migrants have started defacing the walls of their houses of the Dalits with the pictures of different gods, actors and actresses. There has been no decency and decorum in the behaviour of the illegal occupants of the mother's forest of the Dalits. The pastness of the happy gathering of the Dalits in front of their houses, and of spending their time by narrating stories of great interest among themselves, of enjoying cool and fragrant breeze and sun shine, and of hearing the lullaby of the smooth flowing streams have become the past now. Besides, they have also become quarrelsome over petty things among themselves at present. Moreover, disharmony among them reigns supreme because of their addiction to sensual drugs. The innocent and peaceful life in their mother's forest has gone into oblivion

However, Janu has to digest all these unavoidable happenings in the life of her Dalit people, knowing full well that she cannot alone bring unity among her people. She becomes a teacher and instructs her women how they should live in unity so that they can establish their individual identity and independence and claim their rights over their usurped lands through legal fight. She has also become a member in the communist party to stabilize her place as someone important in her Dalit community and to give them hope of getting back what they have lost. When she has come to know that the communists are also not real as they appear, she has started a separate group for the welfare of the natives of the mother's forests. She is not all alone in her fight against the oppressors and usurpers of their rightful lands. She has Lakshmi Devi and Valli as her close companions wherever she goes and whatever she does. Both are a great help to her in time of need. Janu confesses to her close relationship with them. She also gets boost to her spirit to fight against any kind of discrimination of her people.

Janu has staged dharnas along with her tribal people to get back what they have lost to the illegal migrant farmers. She has not stopped with fighting through agitations only for her tribal community. Her fight has been for all the tribal communities spread over entire Kerala. She has experienced physical torture at the hands of the police for having led an agitation and undergone imprisonment. Yet, she has not lost her spirit of fighting for the sake of her tribal people. For her yeoman service to her tribal people, she has been honoured and recognized as the greatest tribal leader all over the world. But before her dream of achieving the lands for all the landless tribal people of Kerala, she has lost her life by being shot dead at the hands of an assassin. Though her work has remained unfinished, her name has been inscribed indelibly in the heart of every tribal of Kerala. The government too has flattered her to deceive by siding with the other superior classes. Prof. P. Malathy in her article “Tribal Education: A Case Study with Reference to C. K. Janu of Wayanad” has exposed the bitter reality behind the seemingly good nature of the Kerala government.

The tribal people, the original inhabitants, indigenous people are always subjugated by the illegal encroachers. Having lost their land to outsiders, the tribal communities worked for meager wages. Their population, which exceeds 40 million, looks forward to the solution from the government. Both their Isolation and minority status prevent them from moving with the main stream society, which has majority higher and middle higher class. Though the government takes steps to mingle the minority groups into the mainstream society, it is doubtful whether these tribal people will enter the main stream society with their social and cultural beliefs intact. (28)

All human beings belonging to different castes and following different faiths are neither completely good nor completely bad. The good outnumber the bad in every community but many have the tendency to exaggerate the reality by talking and writing about only bad exceptions. There are good and bad officers but people always talk about the bad as if there were no good among them. There are teachers both exemplary and ordinary but the students find fault only with the teachers who work for the sake. There are both sincere and time passing students in the class but the teachers always blame the students who attend the classes for the sake. There are more people belonging to all social classes who consider the highly educated and professionally well-placed Dalit men and women as their equal and respectful one. Whatever might be the social status of one, one can establish one’s individuality by being exemplary from all others. Just like the character being destiny, it is the behaviour of the people outside that may invite respect or hatred whatever might be his social status. Something good is to happen in the life style of the Dalits so that they can establish their respectful personalities in the society.

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