

Anatomy of an Oppression: A Dalit Poet's Challenge to the Tyranny of Purity

V.Sandesh Keerthinath

Guest Faculty in English, YSR Engineering College of Yogi Vemana University, Proddatur.

Email: capsan246@yahoo.com

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Abstract: This reflection confronts the chilling reality of the caste system, an "invisible prison" built not of brick and mortar, but of psychological conditioning and inherited cruelty. Anchored by the visceral poetry of Gorenti Venkanna, this essay demands accountability for the systemic denial of human dignity, exposing the devastating hypocrisy that defines purity and pollution in India. It highlights the continuing crimes against Dalits and lower castes—from manual scavenging to sexual violence—and asserts that the struggle for justice is fundamentally a struggle for shared humanity, imploring every reader to participate in the necessary demolition of this "state of mind."

Keywords: Devastating, invisible, psychological, scavenging, and visceral.

1. INTRODUCTION

I remember the day those words shattered me. They weren't just poetry; they were a thunderous, agonizing question fired at the heart of everything we pretend to be

1.2. The Weight of Shared Air

Gorenti Venkanna, the poet of the people who live perpetually under the shadow, asked us:

"When we drink tea, the glass gets polluted! When we enter a temple, God loses his powers! But we breathe the air—will you boycott the air? We roam in the sun—will you forego the sun? If the air and the Ganges are clean, how then can you be polluted by our touch?" Read that again. *Slowly*. We share the breath that sustains us all. We draw life from the sacred river revered by millions. Yet, in this land, a simple, human touch is deemed contamination. How long can we keep living this lie? This isn't about devotion or ancient wisdom; this is about an engine of cruelty, designed to steal dignity and enforce an eternal hierarchy. We are told we are impure, and the tragedy is that many of us have internalized the poison.

1.3. When Breathing is free, but dignity is stolen

The pollution isn't in the human touch; it's in the system that created the label. If the air itself doesn't refuse us, if the sun doesn't withhold its light, who are we—mere mortals—to declare another human being unworthy of standing tall?

This oppression isn't a history lesson; it's the raw, aching reality of *this moment*. Venkanna describes the psychological warfare waged against millions:

"Lifting their head is 'arrogance'! Bending it down is 'befitting'! Wearing white is a crime! Being intelligent is a curse! Our temples are different! Our schools are different!"

Can you grasp the crushing weight of that? That the simple act of showing confidence—of lifting your head—is categorized as *arrogance*, deserving of punishment? Is achieving an education or pursuing excellence a *curse*? This is the daily, grinding suffocation faced by Dalits and lower castes.

We must look unflinchingly at the crimes committed in the name of this imaginary purity:

- The hands of human beings are forced to engage in *manual scavenging*, cleaning the filth of others, because society demands they remain disposable. This happens today.
- The innocent children segregated and humiliated in *classrooms*—the very places meant to promise them a future.
- The *denial of land rights*, ensuring economic bondage and perpetual vulnerability.
- The constant, brutal *violence* for daring to step outside the assigned lane, for daring to love, or for daring to seek equality.

These are not social issues; they are violations of the soul, happening every hour, in plain sight.

2. THE HYPOCRISY OF HONOR AND THE COST OF SILENCE

Perhaps the most devastating hypocrisy lies in the system's twisted concept of justice, especially for women. The demand for "honor" is policed with medieval severity, yet it shields only a select few:

“If we look at a high caste woman, they say we’d cut off their limbs.”

Then comes the knife-twist of truth, the question that slices through the pretence:

“Yes, punish the one who insults a woman—if we apply the same rule, how many upper caste heads will roll!”

The silence that greets this question is deafening. If we truly valued human dignity, where is the justice for the countless Dalit and lower-caste women who face relentless violence, assault, and murder from those who hold power? Their pain is dismissed; their dignity is irrelevant. We realize the “honor” being defended is not the virtue of women, but the architecture of domination itself.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who felt this weight in his bones, taught us that the prison is inside us. “Caste is not a physical object like a wall of bricks or a line of barbed wire... Caste is a notion; it is a state of mind.” The bars are psychological. The chains are forged in conditioning.

3. A SHARED FUTURE DEMANDS SHARED HUMANITY

Venkanna’s verses are not a lament; they are a fire in the night, a fierce call to tear down this internal prison. The caste system doesn’t survive because of divine sanction. It survives because we allow fear, economic control, and inherited prejudice to paralyze us. The shared air we breathe—the air that flows in and out of every single one of us—is the ultimate, undeniable proof. *We are all equally human*. We are all equally clean, capable, worthy of every right and every opportunity.

The separate temples, the segregated schools, the two-tiered standards of justice—these are relics of a brutal past that we have dragged into our future. They must end now.

The responsibility for this demolition rests on all of us. We must choose to reject the “state of mind” that Ambedkar warned against. We must stop pretending that we can share the air and the sun while simultaneously contaminating the ground another human walks on. We must listen to the voices of the oppressed, acknowledge the crimes, and understand that an injustice done to one is a moral wound inflicted upon us all.

4. CONCLUSION

We stand at a moral crossroads. The poet’s challenge is our final lesson: the concept of human pollution is a cruel, cynical fiction. We are united by the breath we take and the blood we share. To claim dignity for ourselves, we must first fight until it is secured for every single person denied it by birth. Let the walls fall. Let the chains break. Let us breathe freely, together, in a world built on the truth of our shared humanity.

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