

Your Excellency, the Foreign Minister of the Netherlands, the esteemed Jury of the Human Rights Tulip Award, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I feel greatly privileged that the jury of the Human Rights Tulip Award deems me worthy of receiving this year's award and I am grateful for the opportunity to present before you an account of the atrocities on Dalits in India and the persecution of Dalit Human Rights Defenders. I recognize that this award has been bestowed on my work and not on me as a person and has strengthened my resolve to struggle for the realization of the rights of the marginalized and prevention of their violations. Today, 9th January is my 52nd birth day and it is a great honour that I am given this award and I receive it on behalf of the 200 million Dalits of India.

I commend the Government of Netherlands for establishing such an award to recognize the efforts of human rights defenders who strive to protect and promote rights of their fellow human beings, braving the odds that prevail in their respective nations. I am profoundly grateful to the Jury of the Tulip Award 2012 and the loving masses of this civilized and humane country. I also take this opportunity to acknowledge the support given to my work in India by CRY (Child Rights and You), the Chairperson of Forum Asia and the National Honorary Working Secretary of Human Rights Defenders' Alert – India , Mr. Henri Tiphagne of People's Watch, India, the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes Government Employees Union in Tirunelveli, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and the nominees for the Tulip Award.

I am sorry about my inability to be present in The Hague at this time to receive the statuette, meet fellow human rights defenders from across the world and see the Human Rights Tulip adorning the Knight's Hall. The police in my country, India, has denied me a clearance for issuance of my passport and hence I have been unable to make it to The Hague. The person designated to be my representative has also refused to be there on my behalf since he feels that his presence would amount to siding with the State that

prevented my participation by design. Thus both of us could not be here today.

Let this day bring peace and goodwill to all of you. I am an ordinary person born in a Dalit family involved in agricultural occupations. A Dalit is nothing but an outcaste untouchable to the Hindu Caste people. India is a country contained within Caste boundaries in bondages. Indian caste system has been in practice for more than 3000 years. We, the Dalits are the natives of this country. But, we are living a life of slaves. We have almost lost our dignity in this country. Indian constitution assures protecting the dignity of its citizens. Also it declares that the practice of untouchability has been abolished in India. However, even today there are 450 types of untouchability practices still continuing in this country. India has been assured and signed that India has been following the United Nations Human Rights Declaration to protect the dignity and equality of all human beings. However, implementing the policies and programs is not done due the Hindu Caste oppressive mind set.

What is Caste? It is an artificial social class based on birth. The Hindu people of India were categorized into four Varna's, the *Brahmins*, the priest and advisors to kings, the *Shatrias*, the warriors and kings, the *Vaishyas* the mercantile community, the *Shudras* the workers to serve the other three upper castes of the Hindu Caste order. These four castes only form the Hindu society. There is another community that has been kept outside the villages of Hindu communities called outcastes, the untouchables. These people were given different names during the history like *avarnas*, (no Varna), Panchamas, Chandalas, Harijans, Scheduled Caste and now popularly known around the world as Dalits, the broken people.

A defeated outcaste comprises nothing less than 200 million people as on today living a life of slaves. Why should I speak about caste while addressing on the issues of Human Rights? **The Hindu caste system itself is a violation of Human Rights**. Because, the Hindu Caste system sees, accepts and adheres to hierarchical caste values, faith and belief. The Hindus believe that human beings are born not

as equals but as superiors and inferiors by birth and therefore they should not claim equal rights. One can change his occupation, life partner, religion and political followings. However, he or she cannot change his/her caste identity. A Brahmin born as Brahmin cannot become a *shatriya* and vice versa. Hence, an untouchable born as an untouchable can never become a caste hindu. Hindu social code punishes persons who proposes inter-caste marriages.

The untouchables, according to the hindu law as written in *manusmriti*, should not touch or come near a caste hindu, should not own land, properties or productive resources, should not keep arms, should live only in segregated places called *cheris* located away from the Caste Hindu Villages. Dalits were not allowed to study and enter into Hindu temples to worship God. This had been the practice and faith that was alive in the thinking and practices of Indian Hindus for more than 3000 years. To make it clear, the untouchables are productive slaves with no access to knowledge, productive resources and arms to defend their life.

They are made to live totally powerless and naked in front of the Hindu Caste communities for thousands of years. To the caste Hindu, an untouchable or a present day Dalit is an inferior species that is born to serve the interest of the Caste Hindu Masters. And any violation of this cultural practice is severely punishable and even by death sentences. There were many reformists like Periyar, Dr. Ambedkar, Poet Kabir and Dukaram against the inhuman social practices. Buddhism and Shamanism took its roots among the Dalits during 6th century BC against the Hindu Dharma and religion. There were mass conversions among Dalits to Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity from the Hindu fold to find emancipation. The historical struggle is tactfully co-opted and made castrated.

Today all these inhuman practices against Dalits are legally made punishable. The present constitution of India declares that all its citizens are equal before law. Practicing untouchability is a crime. The constitution guarantee is truly progressive and wishes to bring all Indians into a life of brotherhood. However, the real conflict

sharpens when the Caste Hindu mindset, culturally tamed at home, comes into confrontation while implementing the progressive constitution. The real issue has been that the socially progressive constitution is in contradiction to the socially backward cultural practices of Hindu mindset. The present day Caste Hindu, whether he is a worker, landlord, businessman, industrialist, government officer, administrator, politician, party leader or ruler, writer or thinker, with of course a few exceptions, could not implement the constitutional provisions and guarantees that had been enshrined in the Indian Law. The social, economical, political and communicative power is still vibrant in the hands of Indian Caste Hindus. The constitution and its guarantee have been made to stay ineffective and impracticable. It is like the devil holding and preaching the Bible!

The situation of Dalits is fragile and hopeless even today in India. The Dalits are categorized as illiterates, landless, ignorant, unorganized workers, migrant laborers, child laborers, and rag pickers, malnourished and so on. More than 70% of the constituent members of the above categories are hailing from Dalit communities. The bottom 20% of the Indian population has been constituted by 90% of Dalits. However, the politicians and bureaucrats do not want to say that Indian Dalits are kept at the bottom of the social ladder and they are the major work force suffering in the hands of the socio, economic and political systems sustained and supported by the powerful capitalistic and Hindu Caste forces.

Given the above situation, I, as an individual born as an untouchable found that **my meaning of living is to die for the cause of Dalits.** Christ was crucified on the cross for the liberation of the oppressed and neglected masses of the world. Today 200 million Dalits are being nailed on the cross every moment in India. The Dalit women and girl children are raped mercilessly by the oppressors. The police and officials are acting in snail's speed. Either they close the file as false or file false complaints against Dalits. Today in India, Dalits are like a little lamb appealing for justice against the jackal in the court of jackals.

The historical onslaught on the lives of Dalits made deep psychological divisions between the Caste Hindus and the Dalits. The Dalits are living a life of under constant threat, fear and frustration at every relationship with the Caste Hindus. They continue to live a life without self worthiness, self dignity and equality. I can call every person around the world as my brother or my sister. But the irony is that I cannot call a caste Hindu in India as my brother or sister. If I dare to call him like that then I have to bear the worst consequence.

There are officially 167 million Dalits in India according to 2001 government figures. NGO and expert estimates however, say the figure is closer to 200 million. As the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) rightly notes, “the exclusion of ‘caste-affected communities’ by other groups in society and the inherent structural inequality in these social relationships lead to high levels of poverty among affected population groups and exclusion from, or reduced benefits from development processes, ...” and “... involves massive violations of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights”. According to IDSN, it is estimated that 260 million people are affected by caste discrimination worldwide. One has also to keep in mind that many cases go unreported. In my home state Tamil Nadu the atrocities on Dalits are on the rise and more than 1500 people were rendered homeless in a recent incident of communal violence on three Dalit villages in the Dharmapuri district on 7th November 2012 causing a damage of over Rs 12 Crores [120 million Rupees]. This has resulted in a state level movement being led by senior political leaders belonging to the dominant castes in the state now who are carrying on a movement speaking out against inter-caste marriages terming them to be stage-managed !!

You would have been acquainted with the facts of the persecution I faced at the hands of the State for working for the rights of the Dalits. ‘Untouchability’ which the State claims to have abolished is still prevalent in the country and in my state of Tamil Nadu in myriad forms. What I personally do for the cause of Dalits and to protect Human rights has been already presented to the Jury of the Tulip Award 2012. However, I would like give a brief of my work in India.

The basic activity is to work against any form of human rights violations perpetuated against Dalits, women and children through involving the affected communities and its victims by creating people's organizations. We question the inactiveness of the officials and politicians for their derailment from the constitutional principles and provisions made to protect the rights of its citizens as given as basic rights in the constitution.

During her first Country Visit of India in January 2011, Ms. Margaret Sekaggya, the United Nations' Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights pointed out that Dalit human rights defenders faced particular risks and ostracism and that the central and state government as well as the National Human Rights Commission must do more to protect the rights of human rights defenders. She specifically noted, "Collectivities striving for their rights have in fact been victimized". While she praised the legal framework in India – including the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act, which is meant to protect Dalits – the Special Rapporteur noted that despite such laws, there are "widespread deficiencies in their full implementation."

Adopting a historic resolution on Dalits, the European Parliament very recently - in December 2012 - condemned the high number of atrocities committed against them; and deplored the non-intervention by state actors such as the police in acts of communal violence against Dalits. It expressed concerns that thousands of Dalits are being tortured by the police, and that those who force Dalits into prostitution are not being prosecuted. "We as the EU can make an important contribution to change that. India has to bring in reforms in the judiciary and social services. Let us introduce that as a precondition when the EU is negotiating with India on a new trade agreement", Peter Van Dalen of the European Parliament said.

As a Dalit Rights Activist fighting a relentless but oftentimes unrewarding battle against the State for turning a blind eye on perpetrators of Dalit right violations, I seek stringent implementation of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of

Atrocities) Act. After existing for the past 22 years there is a national movement calling for making the legislation more stringent and effective.

The false murder charges slapped on me and the constant threat to my life and that of my family have not weakened my will. I will continue to fight for the rights of my people and wish for our future generations an equal and just society. I have the audacity to believe that it is possible.

Every Indian Caste Hindu needs to look deep into himself about their attitude, values, behaviors and their actions in relation to Dalits and human rights violations. Loving is an art carefully learned. Hating and harming does not need efforts.

“A loving man is a true man and Human rights defenders are a herd of real lovers to make the humanity live in loving and sharing to coexist in peace. ”

Thank you.

Marimuthu Bharathan.