

## LEFT-HANDED COMPLIMENT

(By M. K. Gandhi)

"I am writing this letter with a hope of getting proper and immediate response from you. Along with the whole of India I am well aware of your sweet will and affinity towards the *Mehetar* Community. Your "Harijan" has obliged us to a great extent by enabling us to see through your heart. Especially the recent "Harijans" have emphatically revealed your thoughts about the *Mehetar* Community.

"I now wish to reveal my interrogatory heart in order to be well nigh to your feelings towards us and to be definite about our position in the muddled and complicated Indian Political Field.

"By the time you will receive this letter it will be the last date of filling in nomination forms for the candidatures for the Constituent Assembly, which as it is learnt to be completed by the end of this month. Congress is proposing particular M. L. As and non-M. L. As for the same. It is believed that Scheduled Castes are also to be represented (adequately?). But is there any proposal from you or from Congress to elect adequate or at least some members from the *Mehetar* Community? Who, I am sure will discharge their duty of citizenship and pick up their legitimate share in the future constitution of Free India.

"2. Generous as you are towards us, May I assure myself and my community that *Mehetar* seats in the Constituent Assembly will not escape your notice.

"3. Who will be the components of the Advisory Board? Caste Hindus or Minorities including (?) the Scheduled Castes?

"4. Will the advice or proposals of the Advisory Board be binding to the Constituent Assembly? I think they will not. If so, what sense is there in appointing such a Board, which will be nonentity if the Constituent Assembly were not to pay heed to its advice. Is it not merely for the appeasement of the weak minorities?

"You might say you have been and will do every thing for us, but I wish to say 'let us be with you when everything for us is to be done. Let us be represented democratically.'

"I strongly hope that my questions will be fully and satisfactorily answered by you with an obligation of immediate reply to me. I further humbly request you to be good enough to publish your answers in your weekly "Harijan".

"Hope to be excused for troubles."

I have reproduced the foregoing in order to show what havoc dangerous knowledge of English has produced in our society. This is a specimen not of English English nor yet of Indian English. It is bookish English which the writer probably half understands. I suggest to him that if he had written to me in the national language Hindustani or in his provincial language, it would not have evoked an unfavourable response from me.

The writer has paid me a left-handed compliment and that perhaps in order to teach me how

to express my love for the *bhangis*, otherwise known as *mehetar*. The writer is a discontented graduate, setting no example or a bad example to *bhangis*. He has isolated himself from them, though he professes to represent them.

He will certainly become my teacher if he will be a graduate in the art of being a good *bhangis*. I very much fear that he does no scavenging himself, he does not know what scientific scavenging is. If he became an expert in the art, his services would be wanted by all the cities of India. When *bhangis* really rise from the slumber of ages, they will successfully sweep the Augean stables everywhere and India will be a pattern of cleanliness and there will be in India no plague and other diseases which are the descendants of filth and dirt.

In the place where I am living in Bombay, my room and the adjoining lavatory are fairly clean, but I am in the midst of suffocating dirt. I have had no time to examine the tenements in front of me. They are as crowded and as dirty as the ones in the quarters where I was living in New Delhi. Had my graduate fellow *bhangis* been an expert in the art, I would, without doubt, have requisitioned his services as my guide and helper.

As it is, not only have I no use for him, I have to risk his displeasure by telling him that he should not think of the Constituent Assembly or other assemblies. Let those go to them who are wanted there. Instead of getting rid of the wretched caste mentality, he argues that any Harijan is not good enough for the purpose but preference should be given to the *mehetar* caste. I suggest to him that it is a harmful method, doing no good to anybody.

Anyway, he has expected the impossible from me. I am not made for these big institutions. I have never interested myself in the periodical assembly elections. I have not attended Working Committee meetings where they make these selections. What I know of the present selections is from the newspapers. I have become a *bhangis* because I think that that is the vocation of every Hindu, that the hoary institution of untouchability as we know it today in its ugly shape will die a decent death only when the Hindus will be casteless by becoming *bhangis* from the bottom of their hearts. That cannot be done by aspiring after the membership my correspondent has in view.

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