

Ellappa's Story

For almost 50 years now untouchability has been illegal in India. It is against the law to treat another human being as if they are inferior or dirty just because they belong to a Scheduled Caste.

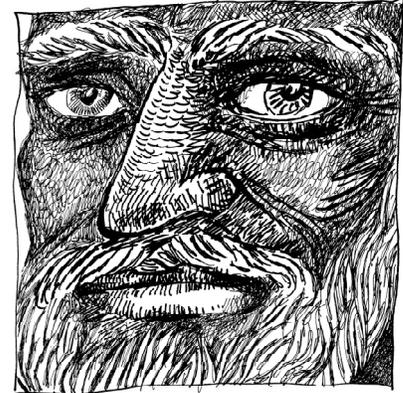
Ellappa is a dalit resident of Kanmanur, in Andhra Pradesh. He says, "Every tea shop here has a two glass system." If he goes to a tea shop, he will not be able to drink tea from the same glasses that upper-castes use. Separate glasses meant for dalits are kept in a basket outside the tea shops. In some places, dalits do not even dare to visit upper-caste shops anymore.

"Not only that," Ellappa says, "the barbers here also refuse to cut our hair. The dalits cannot enter temples even today. During the Vinayaka (Ganapati) festival, the pujari told me to leave Rs. 2 on the floor." He could not take two rupees from the hand of a dalit.

Why aren't these people being punished for their illegal actions?

Ellappa has confronted the Revenue Divisional Officer and the local MLA. The MLA says, "Why not have separate tea shops for the different castes?" A senior official in the administration suggested the use of disposable plastic cups to serve tea.

"But," Ellappa points out, "this sidesteps the issue. And not merely because it pushes up prices and introduces large-scale use of plastics in places where it is still minimal. "Why should we be treated as lesser human beings?" Ellappa wants to know. "The officers don't want to take on this obnoxious system. They just want to avoid crossing the big people here."



Write your own thoughts on the following questions:

- (1) What is the problem?
- (2) What, or who is the cause of this problem?
- (3) Suppose you are Ellappa. What would you do? Suggest three different ways you could try to solve this problem. Then tell which of the three you think is best.
- (4) What should the government officials do? Suggest three different ways they could try to solve the problem. Then tell which of the three you think is best.
- (5) What do you think will probably happen in the future in Kanmanur?
- (6) Are you or any of your ancestors dalits?
- (7) Who do you know that is a dalit?
- (8) Who do you know that is upper-caste?
- (9) Is it important to know which caste people you know belong to? Why or why not?
- (10) Have you seen or heard of other ways people are mistreated because of their caste?
- (11) If you are not a dalit, have you ever treated a dalit as if they were dirty or untouchable?
- (12) In your house do servants use the same glasses that everyone else uses?
- (13) Are there both dalits as well as upper caste children in your school? If so, are they treated equally?