

## **BUT YOU, MUM, WHAT WOULD YOU CALL IT?**

*From the book of P. Ribes, s.j. "Foundry Workers or Gardeners"*

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### **Target audience**

- ✓ *General public.*
- ✓ *Very specially, those in education.*

### **Intent of the Event**

- ✓ *To create among those involved in education a realization of the social, cultural and educational disparities existing in our society between the children of the poor classes and those of the wealthy.*
- ✓ *To realize that those very social inequalities and discriminations are imbedded in the very fabric of society and perpetuated from one generation to the next by the very mechanisms of our legal, political and social structures.*
- ✓ *To understand that because of a static and unjust "status quo" and the deceptive 'social equality' of rights and opportunities for all the citizens proclaimed in all the national constitutions, the backward classes – especially their children - are excluded from those very rights and opportunities.*
- ✓ *To see through the subterfuges we employ to explain away social inequalities and injustices by mouthing words like luck, fate, fortune and destiny to keep people from knowing the true real situation and from doing something about it.*
- ✓ *To open our eyes to the fact that we even 'sacralize' those discriminations and injustices by baptizing them as 'karma', 'providence' and 'God's Will', thus lulling the victims of those injustices into a false sense of resignation and securing for ourselves a deceptive 'peace of mind'*
- ✓ *To create an emotional climate in which we can bring our love to bear on the seemingly hopeless situation of the children of the exploited.*

## **DAMU AND RAMESH (A STORY)**

**Narrator** It was the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 2007. Two babies were born at midnight. They came into this world at exactly the same time, under the same stars, under the same horoscope. Their place of birth was just 100 yards apart. One was born in a posh flat, the other on the pavement outside the flat. Let them introduce themselves.

**Ramesh**: My name is Ramesh. My parents are very rich. My father is a business man, my mother, Rohini, owns large properties. I feel very happy and cared for. I feel very cozy in these new, clean and soft diapers of mine. Mum has applied lots of baby powder on my body. I just got a good feed, my stomach is full. I feel satisfied. I am sleepy now. Allow me to sleep in this little, cozy cradle of mine.

**Damu:** My name is Damu. My parents are coolies, very poor and illiterate. Both of them are breaking stones to build a new road for Rajesh's parents' posh new car. I feel very uncomfortable in these dirty little rags on my body. I feel itchy and scratchy all over. No clean water, no soap for bath, no baby powder. I feel very hungry now. My mother Shalini cannot give me enough milk. I am tired and exhausted from crying. Allow me to sleep on this poky old sack on this pavement.

**Narrator:** Late in the evening Rohini and Shalini, the babies' mothers, were sitting close to their new born infants. Both were looking at them with motherly affection. After all, both were, equally mothers! Sitting close, beside their babies, the mothers were talking aloud to them as all mothers do. Listen to their talk:

**Rohini:** Courage, my little child, do not be afraid! I'll feed you with milk, butter, cheese and honey. You will never go hungry in life.

**Shalini:** Sorry, darling, I have too little milk in my breast to feed you and I am too poor to buy enough milk for you. You will have to go hungry today and tomorrow and the many morrows to come! Sorry baby! **It's our bad luck, our karma!**

**Rohini:** Be glad, honey dear, look what a lovely cozy room I have got made for you; a soft mattress, soft pillows, a soft blanket, pressed bed sheets and comfortable baby wear. No! No! You shall never sleep without a roof over your head; you will never shiver with cold, never, never my little boy!

**Shalini:** Too bad, son, I have no room to give you; no bed, no cradle, no mattress, no pillows and no bed sheets; only the cold, hard, dirty pavement. It breaks my heart, my little son, to think of the shivering and rainy nights waiting for you for days, months and years to come! **This is our sad lot, my darling!**

**Rohini:** Rejoice, my little one. I have already bought you all sorts of fancy clothes and baby suits that will make you feel good and look good. Dressed like a little prince, you will win the admiration of one and all. People will want to cuddle and coddle you little child, life will be grand for you!

**Shalini:** No luck, my son! I go about in rags, your father goes about in rags and in rags you will go for the rest of your days. You will have to walk through life dirty and half-naked. People will despise you, keep away from you. **This is our destiny my sad little one!**

**Rohini:** Be glad, sugar plum, I'll buy you all sorts of toys and games to play with and happily while away your time. You will have plenty of friends, plenty of fun and frolic. No cares for you in this world!

**Shalini:** Pity, my boy, a thousand pities that I can't give you toys; there is only the pick-axe, the shovel and the gamela for your pastime. They will keep you busy from your childhood days to adult life. Son, no fun, no frolic for you. No friends, no social life. You will have to earn your livelihood the hard way. **Alas, this is our lot, my little darling!**

**Rohini:** Do not fret, my little prince: If ever you fall sick or feel out of sorts, I'll buy the best and costliest medicines for you. I'll take you to the best doctors in town. Soon you will be well. No expense will be too great, my little prince, to keep you well!

**Shalini:** O dear, pray, do not fall sick. If you do, you will have to suffer it all by yourself. You will have to go without doctors, medicines and nursing homes! We cannot afford to fall sick, my son! **This is our fate, darling**

**Rohini:** Be happy, my son. I'll buy admission for you in the plushiest and best school in town. There, you will receive 'good education', 'manners' 'politeness and 'refinement'. When you grow big, I'll get you admitted to a prestigious college. In due time, you will become like your Dad, a doctor, an engineer, or a business man.

**Shalini:** No need to cry my little one! I will not afford to send you to school and turn you into a little 'gentleman' and a 'good mannered' boy. You will never become a doctor or a big man. You are born a coolie, and a coolie you will till you die. Yes, to serve the educated, polite and wealthy people of our motherland. **Remember this is our fate, my darling!**

**Rohini:** Cheer up darling! When you become a man, I'll get you married to an educated, pretty, rich girl. You will be happy and enjoy life. You will get sweet little children like yourself! **Fortune favors you! Be glad! Bless your stars!**

**Shalini:** Sonny, no luck for you. When you grow big, you will marry a poor, uneducated, useless and ordinary-looking woman like me! Yes, my son, **this is our fate**, to beget poor, hungry, uneducated and useless coolies like ourselves. **No use crying, my dear, this is our karma and our destiny. We are born to be uneducated and bossed by the 'learned and educated 'gentleman' of our 'motherland'!**

**Narrator:** At these words, Damu raised his head and in an angry voice, asked his mother:

**Damu:** Mother, why should my birth condemn me for life to be poor, illiterate and bossed over by the educated gentlemen of our motherland? Why should life for us be a living death? Why? Why? Why?

**Narrator:** Shalini, softly, whispering into his ear said:

**Shalini:** Well, my darling, some call it 'karma', others 'fate,' others 'luck' or 'destiny' and still others 'providence'.

**Narrator:** With a squeak, Damu retorted

**Damu:** *But You, Mum, What Would You Call It" ???*

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION.

1. What were your feelings while reading or listening to the story of Damu?
2. Do you feel condemned by the story? How? Why?
3. Why are there, in our world, and in our country in particular, such great differences between child and child? How did those differences arise?
4. How do they stay put generation after generation?
5. Do people justify – or try to justify – those differences? How and Why?
6. What are their explanations? Why?
7. What are the ‘ideologies’ behind those explanations? Mention them, and discuss their worth.
8. Why did Damu get angry at his Mum? How would you have felt in his place?
9. Kindly, answer to Damu’s question “And you, Mum, what would you call it?”  
**And you, dear friend, what would you call it?**
10. Can these blatant inequalities and injustices against the poorer sections of society, especially to their children be remedied? How?
11. Can you? Can we do something to smooth them away? What?
12. Any other Ideas, Suggestions and Comments,

## INPUT; SUGGESTED THOUGHTS

### Discrimination and Injustices done to the Poorer Classes and to their children.

- The story of Ramesh and Damu is too real to be classed as just a ‘story’: **it is history, everyday history!** Daily, we see it enacted before our own eyes
- For instance, as a rule, in our schools, the children of the prosperous are programmed to be prosperous themselves, while the children of the poor are programmed to be poor themselves.
- The uneducated hamal’s child will be, in all likelihood, a poor hamal, while the rich bania’s child will be, one day, a rich bania. The illiterate sweepers’ son will likely be a sweeper, while the big doctor’s son will be a doctor or an engineer like his parents.
- The very structuring of our society tends to perpetuate the existing disparities between rich and poor.
- Moneyed people have at their disposal resources and influence and other power connections.
- They can get what they want in all areas of life; such as economic, cultural, political, and educational fields by pulling strings
- *Consciously or unconsciously*, they will use their power and influence to protect their interests and those of their children.
- The poor, the illiterate and the lowest strata in society cannot compete with the rich and the educated in any sphere of life. They have no means, no education, no expertise, and no pulls
- In our highly competitive society, the poor are always playing a losing game. In the rat-race, that is life today, we cannot expect the socially, financially and educationally

handicapped children to compete with the children of rich, highly literate and influential parents.

- The vaunted equality of rights and opportunities, written in all constitutions of modern societies, is a smokescreen to hide a sordid reality. It is one of those chimeras that keep continually eluding the socio-political rainbow chasers.
- The most tragic part of it all is that we try to “**sanitize**” and even “**sacralize**” the existing social injustices and discriminations by investing them with a ‘religious’ aura.
- In one religion they are referred to as ‘**karma**’, in another as “**inshallah**” and in yet another, as ‘**divine providence and God’s will**’.
- We know that social injustices, economic discriminations, exploitation, cast distinctions, oppressions of all kinds are social evils.
- We also know that God cannot countenance evil. Therefore all those social evils cannot be the will of God!
- Let us not be rash and blame God for those evils – evils of our own making – Let us not try to sanitize them off with soothing labels like ‘**karma**’, ‘**destiny**’ and ‘**providence**’.
- Injustices are not the doings of God’s providence! They are the direct offshoots of human malice, cruelty, greed and selfishness and of man’s inhumanity to man!
- Any religion that connives at injustice, that blesses exploitation and sanctifies discrimination dishonors God. It is not religion but an ugly manifestation of the evil side of human nature masquerading as religion.
- **True religion means**
  - To love God and man.
  - To accept, in theory and in practice, that all men and women are brothers and sisters
  - To especially love and serve the poor, the weak and the downtrodden.
  - Sharing with others all one is and has. .

## **APPENDIX ONE;**

### **Inequality of Opportunities Between the Rich and the Poor Children**

**Facts of Daily Life, Consciously or Unconsciously they are ‘accepted injustices’.**

#### **(1) FOOD:**

**The Rich child** has a surfeit of the choicest food – table delicacies, chocolates, sweet drinks, pastries, and ice creams – food to please his taste and even to waste.

**The Poor Child** has barely enough to keep down the pangs of hunger away; just a plate of rice and curry, or chapatti and dal, simple, monotonous, unappetizing food, day in and day out.

#### **(2) CLOTHING:**

**The Rich child** struts about in the best of fashionable garments the world can offer. He looks smart and attractive.

**The Poor Child** hides his nakedness in rags. He looks ugly, unattractive and shabby.

3) **SHELTER:**

**The Rich Child** has a room all to himself, with bright pictures on the papered walls, softly curtained windows, plush chairs, taped music, a library of books, friends to keep him company. He is coddled with comfort from the cradle up.

**The Poor Child** shares with his parents, his brothers and sisters, the only room they call their home, cow dunged, smelly, noisy, cluttered up. He has the hard floor of his mother's hut for a cradle.

(4) **TOYS:**

**The Rich Child** has all the toys that money can buy, from Meccano sets to teddy bears and video and electronic games.

**The Poor Child** has no toys : the only 'toys' he can boast of are the tools his dad brings from work – pickaxe, spade, sickle, ploughshare – if these can be graced with the name of 'toys'.

(5) **SCHOOL:**

**The Rich Child** goes into an elitist school clad in a smart laundered uniform, shod in shining leather shoes and looking well-washed and well-fed.

**The Poor Child** trudges along to a free or subsidized government or municipal school, in bedraggled clothes, barefoot or in chapels, half-hungry and in dread of his teachers.

(6) **GAMES AND SPORTS:**

**The Rich Child** has easy access to the world of sports in all its splendor and variety and invitation to fame. He plays all the ball games familiar to the rich from cricket to soccer to polo.

**The Poor Child** is allowed to play the simplest and crudest games within the reach of the poor – marbles and tops, country cricket, hu-thu, thutya patya.

(7) **HIGHER EDUCATION:**

**The Rich Child** acquires not only the three RS, but also all the refinements of 'civilized' society. He can buy admission to prestigious schools, management institutes and professional colleges.

**The Poor Child** has to be content with the rudiments of knowledge and have his capacity for study and development stifled forever.

(8) **JOB OPPORTUNITIES:**

**The Rich Child** has both the education and the pull to compete for the most and attractive job opportunities offered by the employment market, becoming one day a banker or a technocrat or a doctor or a top business executive.

**The Poor Child** with barely any education at all, ends up by stepping into his father's shoes as a mill hand, a laborer or a daily wager.

(9) **STANDARD OF LIVING:**

**The Rich Child** flaunts expensive clothes, rides a posh car, dines and wines in classy hotels, makes the social rounds. At home he is surrounded with status symbols: telephone, mobiles, and internet, fridge, air condition, T.V., wall-to-wall carpets, Chippendale furniture.

**The Poor Child** has no standard of living worth talking of. With a hand-to-mouth existence, the very thought of luxury is ridiculous.

(10) **MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE.**

**The Rich Child** enjoys security, freedom from want, easily acquired satisfactions and a predictable future. The rich child is destined to marry rich. The event, when it takes place, is marked by the customary pomp and pageantry. It is attended by the elite of society. It is splashed in the papers, a wealthy and charming bride by his side; he glows with happiness and pride.

**The Poor Child's** family life is insecure and unpredictable. The mother is worn out with outside and the house chores as well. The father comes home late. The children are left to fend for themselves.

For the poor child, marriage is a humble affair, although it is accompanied by a display of revelry and warm-heartedness. It means one more family to raise, more mouths to feed, more hands to the pump.

(11) **DEATH AND BURIAL:**

**The Rich Child** will die like the poor child. Death is the common leveler. But the rich child, brought up to forget that there is such a thing as death, dreads its visitation when death knocks at the door. The rich child is consigned to the beyond, with the same pomp that ushered him into the world.

**For Poor Child** death has lost its terrors. For him life is a daily dying. When death comes he accepts it with resignation. He is consigned to the earth unhonored and unsung!

**Why? Why? Why Such Differences? Can you tell?**

## **APPENDIX TWO**

### **Suggested Closing Prayer.**

- The event may close with a general group-prayer.
- Participants will be invited to pray spontaneously and aloud
- Participants will be enjoined to pray for one another.
- Those who wish may disclose to the group their response and commitment to fight for the rights of the poor, especially for the poor children.

### **N.T. TEXTS SUITABLE FOR THE CLOSING PRAYER**

- |                              |                  |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| • Rich Man and Lazarus.      | Luke 16/19-31.   |
| • The Rich Fool              | Luke 12/13-21    |
| • The Last Judgment          | Matthew 25/31-46 |
| • Warning against Prejudice. | James 2/1-9      |
| • Warning to the Rich.       | James 5/1-6      |
| • Faith in Actions           | James 2/14-20    |
| • Love one Another           | John 3/11-18     |

### **Coment and Sing Some Modern Hymns on Concern**

- When I Needed a Neighbor.
- Whatsoever You Do.
- The World Stands in Need of Liberation.
- Go Tell Everyone.
- We Shall Overcome.
- In God's Family.
- Seek First the Kingdom of Heaven.
- This is my Commandment.

