

Address people 'right'ly

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December 10 is celebrated as International Human Rights Day. There are quite a few fundamental rights due to individuals as human beings. As human beings we have the right to live, love, and livelihood, and lead a life which we have reason to value. In India's constitution all citizens are conferred with different rights—right to free speech and expression, right to education, right to information etc. This list can go on to include one day right to toilet. However, here I would like to discuss one right, which appears to be most fundamental; but violated every now and then. That is the right to be addressed with dignity.

In all vernacular languages in India we generally have three divisions in second person address—'Tu', 'Tum' and 'Aap'. This gradation has ideally, two sets of logic. One is the degree of closeness. Many address their father for example by 'Tum' or 'Aap', but address their mother, who they consider much closer than father as 'tu'. In the same logic friends are generally addressed as 'Tu', whereas unknown persons are addressed as 'Aap'. The second logic of this gradation in second person address is that of age factor. Older ones are called 'Aap', whereas younger ones are called 'Tu', and 'Tum' is prevalent among peer groups.

However, there is a third dominant reason for this division of address, which is rarely discussed. That's when an officer addresses the peon. An owner addresses his servant or when a construction engineer addresses a laborer. Many a time this second person address is 'Tu'. Whereas the reverse address, viz., when the peon addresses an officer, the servant addresses the owner, and the laborer addresses the engineer, it's invariably 'Aap'. This logic of gradation of second person address is pegged to the positions and socio-economic statuses of the persons in question. Caste and religious positions also play a significant role. Generally, high caste people, priests of religious institutes are ad-

dressed with 'Aap', whereas low caste people are addressed 'Tu'. There is no question of 'closeness' or 'age factor' in these addresses. It's simply indignity attributed due to one's low social or economic ranks.

To get rid of this indignity, and uphold the right to 'human dignity', the second person address can be made universal as 'Aap'. 'Tu' and 'Tum' need to be abolished. This is in line with 'thou' word in English language, which used to express intimacy, familiarity or disrespect, have disappeared and what has remained is universal 'You'.

In order to accomplish a universal 'Aap',



we need to edit the portions of our textbooks and literature in vernacular mediums which promote this human indignity germinating out of divisions in second person address. For instance in school mathematics text books, in discussions regarding a money exchange between a rickshaw puller and passenger, the former is addressed as 'Tu', whereas the latter is addressed as 'Aap'. In literature and drama these divisions are more severe, and more prevalent.

Once we promote universal 'Aap' in literature and textbooks children from very tender age would be exposed to this equity aspect in second person address. And hence this habit of addressing 'Aap' to all irrespective of socio-economic status and positions will prevail in their adulthood. 'Tu' and 'tum', like 'thou' in English will have their natural death.

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