



**WORLD'S FIRST CRUSADER OF
UNTOUCHABILITY:
RESORTED TO HUNGER STRIKE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Retold by Chandra B Varma 'Metteya'

Often the first name that flashes across our mind for resorting to hunger strike or peaceful protest for social justice is Ruskin, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu and so on. The Buddhist record, however, tells us the name of Bodhisatta Matanga in the above context. The account is narrated below.

World's First Account of Peaceful Protest for Social Justice

One day, a rich and pretty maiden Ditthamangalika and her friends in their frolic were on their way to an amusement park. However, upon seeing Matanga approaching from the opposite direction she had to abandon her journey and turn around because according to the prevalent belief of the time it was considered inauspicious to tread a path which was to be just trodden by an 'untouchable' because Matanga was reckoned to be 'lowly born' and therefore he too was an 'untouchable'.

The maiden's abrupt retreat made her friends furious. Considering Matanga responsible for causing interruptions in their amusements, they in their rage battered him and left him bleeding on the roadside.

Upon regaining consciousness on the third day, Matanga wondered, 'Why was he thrashed with no fault of his! When he discovered that his very birth or *jati* in a particular family was the cause for his ill-treatment, he resolved to challenge the evil system of caste and untouchability. He then walked to Ditthamangalika's house and demanded explanation for his ill-treatment. When the house did not respond to his demand he resorted to hunger strike in front of the house and sat there without taking food for seven days. **This is the first reference to the hunger strike in the annals of the human history.**

On the seventh day, when Matanga looked emaciated and appeared to die in front of Ditthamangalika's house her father thought that the death of an untouchable in front of his house might lead to his excommunication from his caste so, he forcibly drove his daughter out of the house flinging her to Matanga and shut the door.

Matanga, instead treated the maiden with dignity; and upon her consent married her.

Eventually, Matanga not only convinced his wife but also her kinsmen and the whole society that one becomes 'noble or great' not by mere birth or *jati*; but *only* by the merit of good acts and knowledge.