



DALIT FICTION AND POST TRUTH; "JOOZHAN"-THE LIFE OF A DALIT

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ABSTRACT

The paper analyses "Untouchability" as a social evil that continues to prevail in this 21st century. "Untouchables" refer to the marginalized section of the society.

Mahatma Gandhi has rightly said "It is the hateful expression of caste". It is considered as an inhuman institution of Hindu society. It is a custom where lower classes are kept away from the basics of life like education, status, employment, equality etc...

There have been many Dalit writers who have fought all odds and have come to the forefront by writing about their lives. By doing so, they have tried to show the world the dark face of untouchability and how that has forced them to become focused and determined in their journey of life.

KEYWORDS : Untouchable, Dalit, Chuhra, Caste, Marginalized**I. INTRODUCTION**

"Dalit Literature" is a genre that has gained its place in the current society. It is a genre where Dalits write about their lives. This kind of genre took its birth during the 1960s in Marathi Literature followed by Hindi, Kannada, Telugu, Bangla and Tamil through poems, short stories and autobiographies. These narratives stood out because of their true portrayal of the lives of Dalits. The earliest among the group is Madara Chennaiah, an eleventh century cobbler-saint who lived during the reign of Chalukyas. The roots of Dalit literature can be traced from the Buddhist times in the works of Dalit Bhakti poets like Gora, Karmameli to Tamil Siddhas who wrote "Hagiographies" such as "Periyapuram" in the twelfth century.

The term "Dalit" in Sanskrit or Hindi means "Broken or Scattered". It is a term used to point out ethnic groups who were subjected to "Untouchability". Dalits are not a part of the four-fold Varna system of Hinduism. They are known by the "Pancharna" or the "Fifth-Varna". Dalits comprise 16% of India's population who follow various religious beliefs like Hinduism, Sikhism, and Christianity etc... The term was used by Britishers to classify them as "Depressed Classes". Dr B.R Ambedkar was the person who made this term gain popularity. He included all the depressed people of his caste. So, the "Labour Party" the first group which included all the members of the Dalit community which included women, small scale farmers and persons from other backward castes. "Dalit" in official use was used by the India's National Commission for Scheduled Castes. "Scheduled Castes" is now an official term used to represent India's all oppressed people. The Britishers gave separate electorates for Dalits in the Communal Award. After Independence, India gave birth to the reservation system for the Dalit's political representation, for education and for obtaining government jobs. In 1997, we had our first Dalit president, K.R. Narayanan.

"Autobiography" is a literary genre that gives an account of the life of the author himself. William Taylor was the first person to use this word in the English periodical "The Monthly Review" in 1797. Roy Pascal has noted that "Autobiography is a review of a life from a particular moment in time". Works of this kind are subjective and it also offers the author a platform to recreate history. "Dalit Autobiography", gives the lives of Dalit writers as described by them. This paper discusses the lives of Dalits as presented in "Joozhan" an autobiography by Omprakash Valmiki. The book is an autobiographical account of his childhood years as an untouchable in a village in Uttar Pradesh. In this book, he talks about the discrimination he had to face in school, in gatherings and even in his later life which gave him strength to be an accomplished person later on. The book also gives an insight into the sufferings of Dalits and their forced circumstances.

II. OBJECTIVE

To critically analyze the text as a reflection of the life of untouchables.

III HYPOTHESIS

The book deals with the life of the "Chuhra" community, and the

discrimination they had to face. The book also gives an insight into the domination of upper class over the lower class

III. METHODOLOGY

The paper analyses the ill-effects of untouchability that is still prevailing in independent India by taking instances from Omprakash Valmiki's autobiographical work "Joozhan" which is translated from Hindi by Arun Prabha Mukherjee.

In this book, he describes his life as an "Untouchable" or to be precise a "Dalit" in independent India. Although, Untouchability was abolished before independence, Dalits still continue to face discrimination, violence and mockery from the black hands of society.

IV. ANALYSIS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

"JOOZHAN" refers to scraps of food left on a plate intended for garbage and animals. The untouchables of India affectionately named as "Harijans" by Mahatma Gandhi have been forced to tolerate and accept this status for decades and this same word envelope's agony and poverty of the backward community living at the bottom of society.

The story is set in "Muzaffarnagar", a small village in Uttar Pradesh. The author from the "Chuhra" community used to live in the "Chuhra Basti". His family consisted of his father, five sons, one daughter and uncles i.e., two chachas and one tau. The chuhras used to work for the "Tyagas" who were the upper class people of that village. They used to clean their homes, do agricultural work and general labor etc. for them without pay.

As the story progresses, he tells us an instance on how they had to pay a high price for the brave front they put up when they refused to work without pay. Once a government employee came to the basti. They needed some people for cleanup work for which they would not be paid. When the Chuhras refused to do it without pay, they were severely punished. Exactly fifteen days after their refusal, they were taken by two policemen and beaten up mercilessly and tortured by forcing them to sit in a squat rooster position. He still remembers the family of those men crying in front of the office.

The Chuhras were not seen as humans. It was quite okay for an upper class person to touch a cow or a buffalo but not a chuhra. If by chance, a member of the upper class chanced to touch a Chuhra, it was assumed that they got polluted or contaminated. If they saw an older Chuhra, they called them out as "Oe Chuhre" and if they saw a younger Chuhra, they called them as "Abe Chuhre".

Valmiki refers to his education. Since he was an untouchable, gaining education was something beyond his dreams. During that time, there used to be a Christian teacher named Sevak Ram Masihi. He used to come to his village and teach the untouchable children reading and writing. It was in an open air that the author had his first lessons. One day, an argument arose between the teacher and Valmiki's father which nearly put a stop to his studies. After that incident, his father took him

to the Basic Primary School. Gandhiji who loved untouchables had advised the government schools to let untouchables study. Valmiki's father begged the headmaster of the school, Har Phool Singh to let his child have education at the school. His father had to beg for several days and at last he was admitted to the school.

Valmiki's school life was as miserable as any untouchable kid could have been. He was not allowed to sit on a chair or bench and instead he had to sit on the floor. He had to sit away from everybody. The Tyagi boys used to tease him by calling him "Chuhre Ka". This continuous mistreatment that he received made him an introvert. If he wanted to drink water, he used to run to the hand pipe to drink water. All the students and teachers of that school used to play tricks to drive him away from the school.

Even though he had to face a lot of ill-treatment, he found his solace in his two friends named Ram Singh and Sukhan Singh. Ram Singh came from the "Chamar" caste and Sukhan Singh came from the "Jhinwar" caste i.e., both came from the untouchable community. All three of them used to study well but since they were untouchables, they were not given a proper place to display their talents. But their lives went on until one day a dark shadow fell on them in the form of a new headmaster named "Kaliram".

The headmaster hated the three of them and used to thrash them badly on the slightest excuse. The headmaster used to ask Valmiki to climb a tree, break its twigs and sweep the classroom every day. Tears used to roll down his cheeks as he did the work. One day, Valmiki's father happened to see his son sweep the classroom. He rushed to the classroom, took away the broom and headed to the headmaster's cabin. Kaliram tried to threaten him but his father stood fearless. He told Kaliram boldly that not only his son many more will come to study in this same school and will reach great heights. Not only that, he went from door to door of each Tyaga homes and pleaded for his son's education. He even did sathyagraha and thought of ways to educate his son. At last, he went to the house of Pradhan and pleaded with him to help his son receive education. Since the Pradhan was a kind-hearted person, he allowed Valmiki to continue his education in the same school.

These small instances tell us how much a person has to suffer due to his caste in a society where the constitution guarantee's the fundamental right of "Right to Equality" for everyone. His father's bold stand was what made him successful in his later life. His father set an example not only for his son but to all downtrodden people that "No one is superior or inferior in the eyes of God; everyone is equal and one should stand up and speak up for one's rights".

As he ends the book, Valmiki says that as his life moved on; his caste followed him like an albatross around the neck. He was seen as an innocent, educated and respected person as long as no one knew his caste. But once he said his caste name, those who earlier respected him, showed their true nature or saw him as stinking garbage. But despite all that he rose high in life and became a respectable figure around the globe.

V. CONCLUSION

"Untouchability" is a social evil prevailing from centuries. It has damaged the harmony and has created a distance between two groups of people. It has created a sense of inferiority and has damaged their self-esteem. It is because of this evil that even foreigners took us for granted and treated us as slaves. The reading of the book, gives an understanding of the bane of untouchability that existed in India and how it began to change. So what the experience described in the book makes clear is that untouchables are also human beings with flesh and blood who need help and encouragement to be able to lead independent lives in the society. By doing so, the caste system can be abolished and they can become positive contributors to the development of the Nation.

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