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**PORTRAYAL OF CASTE DISCRIMINATION PRACTICED IN
CHRISTIANITY AND HINDUISM: A DISCOURSE ON JOOTHAN AND
KARUKKU**

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Abstract

To explain the real life struggle of Dalit Community through their writings. The research paper is titled as “Portrayal of Caste discrimination practiced in Christianity and Hinduism: A discourse on Joothan and Karukku”. The two autobiographies gives us an idea , how even after universalizing free education in constitution , Dalits were kept away from it. The paper also tells us their childhood experiences. The paper brings out the dark realities of other cultures. It also highlights how Dalit writers Om Prakash Valmiki and Bama , with the help of their autobiographies were able to speak about their sufferings , pain and unheard voices. Many critique have often called Dalit Literature as trauma narratives.

Keywords: Dalit Literature, untouchability, marginalisation, caste discrimination, Dalit autobiographies, patriarchy, subjugation.

Introduction

Dalit literature or Dalit writings are a Post-Independence literary phenomenon. Arjun Dangle has defined Dalit Literature as, “one which acquaints people with the caste system and untouchability in India. Dalit

Literature emerged in the 1960’s in Marathi language . It is a literature written by Dalit about their lives. Dalit’s were always marginalized in Indian society, whether they belongs to Hindu , Muslim , Christianity or Sikh community . When they start voicing against the injustice faced by them , it became a literature of their own . In this paper I tried to look into various aspects of caste discrimination practiced in Christianity and Hinduism. It also deals with how Dalit Autobiography contributed in upliftment of Dalit's . Dalit Literature act as an instrument to showcase the caste discrimination, gender bias and construction of Dalit identity both in terms of male and female. The paper also brings out the dark realities of other cultures that dominated the Dalit culture.

From the beginning of the civilization, Dalit’s have always been subjugated. The subjugation was faced by both male and female. Here, I will be focusing on the autobiographies of a male and a female and on the extent of subjugation faced by them. Females were always subjugated in patriarchal society but being a Dalit female, it was more difficult to survive as she had to face double marginalization. First in terms of being a Dalit in Indian or in Christian society and other of being a female in her own caste.

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This journey is about Dalit's trying to make sense of their life as an individual and their quest for identity and equality through their writings.

Introduction to Joothan and Karukku

The autobiography of Bama was published in the year 1992 . It is called "Karukku". The motive of writing this autobiography was to deal with the personal issues she faced as she left the convent . The main area of the writing deals with the believes , labor , conflicts , festivals , lives and games for her community members.

All of these people were converted to Christianity . She succeeds in precisely mentioning the issues faced by her people and linking it with casteism that is increasing in almost all religions in India. Here, both the autobiographies have a certain amount of political consciousness.

In 1993 another autobiography was written by Prakash Valmiki. This autobiography was primarily written in Hindi as a reply for, "Harijans se Dalit". Joothan mentions the life of

Valmiki at his village in Uttar Pradesh. Valmiki's cast was chuhra and his community was sent to the outskirts of the village. In his autobiography he states the issues, problems and humiliation that the whole community faced by the upper castes. He tells about the difficulty he faced in getting accepted in general public even though he got a job in an ordinance factory. In the second half of the autobiography we see the questions which were put against the

identity of his community. Valmiki's life has been more of an activist than a writer.

Denial and Disbelief

In order to write an autobiography, writer have to continuously engage themselves in the selection of relevant incidents of their lives. Mostly all these incidents are personal and private memories. In Dalit autobiographies a major portion incidents selected are the memories of denial, difficulty, anger, anxiety, shock, fear and disbelief. These incidents are majorly of individual stress as well as collective stress.

The story in most of the autobiographies by Dalits generally focus on individual stress which primarily starts with physical pain and slowly gets into emotional and mental stress through insults and frustration.

Both of the selected autobiographies, "Joothan" and "Karukku", question that how even after open and free education availability in the constitution, there are exclusions which keep Dalit children away from it.

The children in the stories are symbols and victims of humiliation. Here, we understand that schools are the very first place where the child leaves the households and understands that the uppercastes look them with a different mindset. Louis Althusser had beautifully explains what a child learns at school, "Children at school also learn the 'rules' of good behavior, the rules of the order established by class domination." (Althusser 132). Where Althusser spoke about a child's learning in a class based culture, Dalits explain how it is a

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task to get accepted in the world because of the caste.

Bama describes a school incident which troubles her in Karukku. As she was unable to prove to her headmaster that she is innocent while she was declared guilty for something she did not do.

She is in pain because she, “was in agony as (she) had been shamed and insulted in front of all the children” (Karukku 16).

The same thing continues while she was in college and a lecturer shamelessly asked, “Harijan students” (19) to stand up. Similar issues at the educational institutions were faced by Valmiki as well. He was often ordered to sweep the school and was told, “It is after all, your family occupation” (Joothan 4). Here we understand that once it gets visible that a person’s body is tied to his community it becomes very difficult for the person to stand out of the group. Once, Valmiki, on the third day of school, sits quietly in the classroom, the headmaster learns that he is sitting without sweeping and immediately he makes Valmiki to sweep. The author states, “From the doors and windows of the schoolrooms the eyes of the teachers and the boys saw the spectacle. Each pore of my body was submerged in the abyss of anguish.” (Joothan 5) In Joothan, we read that once a Brahmin teacher orders his students to tear away multiple pages of their books. All these torn pages dealt with Ambedkar. The author looks at this incident as the only one which gives him a feeling of hostile environment: “This incident had become a symbol of Dalit oppression. The board of

education had not taken any action against the teacher.” (Joothan 112-113).

This incident shows an effort of distorting the history of Dalits (Ganjarawala 168).

In his adolescence, Valmiki had to live in an environment where he was terrified. This was the time when his personality was being shaped. He asks, “ how will those who have never suffered the needle prick of hatred and jealousy feel my pain? Who have never endured humiliation? How will they know what it feels like? Dreams, like and dunes , do not make a sound when shattered(Joothan 48)”.

Leftover Food:

In Dalit autobiographies , the cultural stress arised through making the Dalits eat the leftover food which was provided by the dominant caste. As the Dalits were dependent on their employers (agricultural masters , owners , zameendars) these practices got emerged. The sense that food is not just about hunger but also it is one of the most important part of persons identity was highly not considered.

Bama tells us in Karukku that she realized that Patti brought the food which was kept to be thrown away by the Naickers. This was happening from a very long time. One day Bama went with Patti at the Naickers residence. As soon as Naickers finished all the food she wanted Patti placed the bowl. The Naickers lady , from some distance started to put the leftover food in the bowl which Patti bought. After some days Bama told Patti to not accept or be open to such a disappointing and ridiculous behavior.

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In the Valmiki's autobiography the stress of being treated with the leftover can clearly be understood just by the title of the autobiography.

Separation within in the Nation :

The most common method of segregating the people of other communities is residential separation. Such separation is a common method of spreading untouchability in the country. This strategy spreads a collective stress in the form of racism. This practice is mentioned in the autobiography to show how the Dalits were not accepted by other communities.

A close connection related to caste and territory can also be seen in Karukku's first chapter. Bama was unable to understand why the upper and lower communities were separated into various parts of the territory. They always stayed in their territory and the other stayed in theirs.

Dalits used to enter other sides only if they had some work to be done from there. But people from the other communities never ever came to the Dalits territory. All the necessary things and offices like milk depo, post office, temples, panchayat and school stood in the territory of the other communities.

Collective Stress

Most of the points or instances that have been mentioned above are related to the collective stress that is only existing because one is born a Dalit. Human rights basically should focus on the personal and social growth & development but through the above mentioned instances we understand that in the

case of Dalits it was not the same. Moreover a Dalit life according to both the authors does not step at repetitive personal stress, it travels from the personal issues and stress to social hatred as discretion. Valmiki tells about his personal trauma by saying that to cuts which he has received by dominating castes cannot be ever healed. This trauma is not only faced by Valmiki alone but also by whole Dalit community. The whole community was forced to work without pay and if refused the community members beaten black and blue. The members who were beaten didn't even know their crime. Valmiki tells that the screams of the community members was so loud that they made the birds sitting on the trees fly away. Valmiki is furious that none of the Hindi writers who come from the villages and have directly or indirectly experienced or observed this monstrous behavior of the dominating castes towards the Dalits have ever spoken or written about this. He feels that this is an irony.

Dalit Writings

Multiple Dalit writings have revealed how Dalits have been betrayed in the nation. These writings have explained how the Dalits were ill-treated by the dominating caste.

The writings of a Dalit's life doesn't stop with some minor recounting and recalling of the stress, trauma and victim stories. It also sends a strong message about the freedom, personal and social identity.

Humans who are still sleeping must open their eyes and look towards the ones

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who are being illtreated, bashed and humiliated under the same sky where the other castes are getting everything they need. The injustice should not be done and accepted by any of the community towards the other. The mindset that whatever happens is our destiny and we have to live with it should not be appreciated and everyone should be daring enough to stand up for a change. Humans must crust their belief towards any institution or community that uses casteism to bully others which increases differences between one another. Humans must be kind enough to be with each other in their good or bad, high or low. Those who are happy and satisfied by troubling, humiliating and exploiting others will not stop so easily. It is the responsibility of one and all to show them the right place, the place where they belong and change the mindset that in a society everyone is equal. All the writings by the Dalits including both of these autobiographies by Valmiki and Bama give the same message.

Love is blind

Generally the cliché that love is blind is accepted, whereas in Dalit writings this gets revealed that love is a state of mind where one is surely willing to be with someone but at the same time the eyes are also wide open to all sort of personal , social and religious questions. Other questions might get excluded but the question of caste always exists.

In Dalits writings the lone theme has been explained upon in many different ways. Mostly it has been stated that loving a women

who is upper cast is often painful and because of casteism the lone gets refused and is not able to move forward.

Through both the autobiographies we get to know that in love, a Dalit body unnecessarily becomes an obstruction between the desires of both the lowers. The obstruction can be removed or ignored at a personal level but surely it doesn't as such issues in this nation are not treated to be issues of personal interest but they automatically become political and social arguments.

Universally caste is acquired through birth but in the case of male caste is unchangeable. Therefore , Dalit female is completely desirable by a male of other community but in the case of a Dalit male the scenario is not the same. He has to always maintain his limits is expected to not desire for any other woman who is out of his reach , specially any woman who is upper caste from a dominating community.

The Unheard Songs in Joothan and Karukku:

The Dalits and Chuhras do not have the right to even ask for their hard earned wages. The dominating communities call the areas arise 'the Bhangi Basti' because of the caste which lives there. In both the autobiographies the writers have stated that they often worked without pay and nobody could refuse the unpaid work even though the work neither gave them money nor grain. Instead they got crossed, sworn and abused . Valmiki indicates a similar incident of the dominance of the Tyagis over the Chuhras.

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Conclusion:

All the pain, sacrifice , hated , humiliation and disrespect experienced by the communities of Valmiki and Bama cannot be healed but their tears and pain cannot be ignored and unheard. They were always dominated , their rights were taken away, they were forced to work without wages and they could not even love the girl they desired. Both the autobiographies portray the limitations in which the Dalits and the Chuhras were bound

and how they were dominated by the upper caste. Both the writer's voices are considered to be one of the most recognized and empowered voices even heard by the nation.

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