

THE TRAUMA OF DALIT EXISTENCE: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF *MURDAHIYA* AND *GOVERNMENT BRAHAMANA*

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ABSTRACT

Dalits, in Indian hierarchal caste society have been deprived of basic rights of human beings and oppressed in various ways. The present research paper highlights the pathetic condition of Dalits, who are discriminated, exploited, marginalized, and subjugated at every walk of life as they belong to the lower strata of society. Dalit, in the late nineties, started to resist from sharing traumatic lived experience in Dalit autobiographies. This research paper is a comparative study of the Arvind Malgatti's *Government Brahamana* and Tulsi Ram's *Murdahiya*. Dalit autobiography in contrast to mainstream life writing in terms of subject matter puts up the real experiences of Dalit society and attempts to trace the aspect of social, cultural and economic life. Dalit autobiographies exhibit, how hard it is to resist the existing practices and utilize the potential.

KEYWORDS: Autobiography, Trauma, Marginalisation, Caste and Dalit

Dalits are the people, who have been exploited in the name of religion, caste, god and other factors. 'Dalit' is a modern term for untouchables, who have been exploited and subjected to atrocities owing to the social stratification of Indian society. Their situation in the society is very precarious and unpredictable and they are always considered as a lower section of society. They were denied access to the education, because the caste hierarchy did not permit them to study. The dominance of upper castes made them politically powerless, socially untouchable, culturally inferior and economically backward. Thus, Dalits represent the marginal section of society, and are the victim of the Indian hierarchal caste system that is "famous for its hierarchical caste system, in which the highest rank is occupied by the Brahmins and the lowest by the untouchables" (Fox, 1988, p. 54). The institution of caste is the source of exploitation and discrimination of Dalits. It crushes the emerging potential for the continuation of supremacy. Dalits are socially, politically and economically disabled from centuries. Hutton (1933) categorizes these disabilities in three types:

Firstly, that under which they are barred from public utilities, such as, the use of roads and tanks, and secondly, their religious disabilities which debar them from the use of temples, burning grounds, mats and some other institutions. In addition to the above, but arising out of the second of these, there are the disabilities involved in relationships with private individuals, such as the services of barbers and the admission to teashops, hotels or theatres owned by private individuals. (p. 482)

Dalit had been destined for inferior activities such as Leatherwork, butchering or removal of rubbish, animal carcasses and waste. Dalit people worked as manual laborers like cleaning streets, latrines, and sewers. They were not allowed to enter into the Hindu temples and always remain the lowest in the caste hierarchy. Dalit's were commonly segregated and banned from the full participation in Hindu social life.

Dalits had been living a life of animals in caste based society for many centuries. They live outside the village. Dalit people suffer from various types of disease because of dirty water or filthy environment in which they live. Dalits were strictly prohibited to use the public property. They were not allowed to draw water from the common wells and barred to take a bath in the common tanks of the villages especially. There are still separate cremation grounds for Dalits like their settlement. The dead bodies of Dalits are not cremated on the same place where the bodies of upper caste are cremated. It shows how deeper the discrimination was in the psychology of upper castes that they did discrimination even after the death of lower castes. The practice of caste system is deeply rooted in the Indian society that does not permit any interruption in old traditions. According to the Government of India Act 1935, Dalit:

Who occupies a low position in the Hindu social structure; their representation in government services is inadequate; they are inadequately represented in the fields of trade, commerce and industry; they suffer from social and physical isolation from the rest of the community; and there is a general lack of educational development amongst the major section of this community. (As cited in Thorat, 2009, p. 2)

Though the Indian constitution has provided many rights since independence, but there is one section of society, who is not enjoying these rights as they are considered a blot on the society. The constitution of India has abolished 'untouchability', but it is not properly implemented in various parts of the country. According to William A. Haviland however "Although India's national constitution of 1950 sought to abolish caste discrimination and the practice of untouchability, the caste system remains deeply entrenched in Hindu culture and is still widespread throughout southern Asia, especially in rural India. In what has been called India's 'hidden apartheid,' entire villages in many Indian states remain completely segregated by caste" (as cited in Kumar S., 2012, p. 184). Representing about 16 percent of India's population- the widely scattered Dalit's endure near complete social isolation, humiliation, and discrimination based exclusively on caste status.

The economic condition of Dalit is indigent, as they have been living the life worse than animals. A significant portion of Dalits population is indigent, living below the poverty line. Poor economic conditions control their living standard. Dalit children cannot continue their education as they are earning hand to their family. Dalit parents cannot bear the educational expenditure. That is why, the dropout rate of Dalit students is continuously increasing. They have to depend on the dominant class for their labor as they are mostly landless worker who form the backbone of Indian economy. According to the 2011 census, there are 167 million Dalits in India (Government of India, 2011, p. 50) and more than one million are still engaged in manual scavenging. Dalits are termed 'outcast' as the architects of social system do not permit their inclusion in the fourfold caste structure of Indian society. One of the best definitions of the term is given by a Marathi Professor Gangadhar Pantawane:

Dalit is not just a caste; Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution. The Dalit believes in humanness. He rejects the existence of God, rebirth, soul, sacred books that teach discrimination, fate and heaven because these have made him a slave. He represents the exploited man in his country. (As cited in Ganguly, 2005, p. 43)

Dalit started articulating the real picture of the Dalit community, its trauma and its struggle for social change. A revolutionary voice spiced with change, dejection and anger perennially run through Dalit writings.

Dalit writing also comes up with a strong desire aimed at deconstructing the whole archaeology of knowledge in

which Dalits has been treated as marginal and untouchable. Life narratives are preferred that are mainly concerned with the social, economic and political condition of Dalit and depicts the life of Dalit people who face the cruel reality of society. Dalit autobiographies are distinct from other autobiographical writings. Dalit autobiographies do not introduce the life of an individual, but incorporate the collective experiences of Dalit community. Readers associate the shared experiences to their experiences. Therefore, sharing of experience makes the fellow Dalits conscious about their rights and inspire to the members of a deprived community to achieve the outreach goals. The writer shares common grounding with the behaviour of people because similar incidents occur in the social life of both. In literary works, the writer responsively conveys social behavior which he or she experience in his or her real life. Toulouse Ram's *Murdahiya* and Aravind Malagatti's *Government Brahamana* are the outstanding piece of life narratives that renders the dilemma of Dalits in a passionate way and exposes the bitter truth of society.

Tulsi Ram was born in a minuscule village Dharpur in Uttar Pradesh. Right from his childhood, he could not get a proper environment to live a comfortable life. Tulsi Ram completed his school education in Azamgarh. As he grew up, he became more serious about his studies and this seriousness took him to the climax. He was very much committed to his community. He is not only concerned with his family, but treats all his neighbors as his family. The philosophy of Karl Marx, Gautama Buddha, and Dr. Ambedkar influenced Tulsi Ram. He has written *Angola ka Mukti Sangrash*, *CIA: Rajniti Vidwansh ka American Hatiyar*, *The History of Communist Movement in Iran*, *Persian of Iran (One Step Forward, Two Step Back)* and *Ideology in Soviet Iran Relations (Lenin to Stalin)*.

Aravind Malagatti hails from a Mali Community of Karnataka and the upper caste people call him by his community name. Aravind Malagatti was born on May 1, 1956, at Muddebihal, a small town in Bijapur district in Karnataka state. His father, Yallappa, was a teacher by profession and mother, Basavva, was a homemaker. He had two brothers, Ramasamy and Basavaraju. When Arvind Malagatti was only ten months old, his father passed away by scorpion biting. It was his uncle who brought up, educated and supported him to settle down in the village. Aravind Malagatti completed his primary education in his village. At primary level education, his performance was very poor. Most of the time, he used to leave home in the morning and return home at the end of the day by hanging around nearby places. As he admitted to M G V College, Muddebihal for Pre-University and Graduation he became serious towards the study. In 1978 he joined Karnataka University, Dharwad to continue further education. He completed his Ph.D. in folklore studies and won the Gold Medal for best thesis in 1985.

His literary creation involves about forty-two books which include novels, nine volumes of poetry, one volume of short stories and two plays. He came to literary prominence with the publication of the first collection of the poetry *Mookanige Baayi Bandaaga (When the mute gets Speech)* in 1982. Second poetry collection *Kappu Kaavya (Black Poetry)* was published in 1985. It is in the form of a letter written by a dead man to his grandchild. It discusses the present and past of Dalit society. His third collection *Mooraneya Kannu (The Third Eye)* was published in 1996. Here Malagatti extends his concern from the Dalit problem to the problems faced by the country as a whole. His fourth collection *Naada-Ninaada (Rhythm and Melody)*, published in 1999 turns to folk influence. Recently in 2003, the collection *Silicon City mattu Kogile (Silicon City and the Cuckoo)* was released. It focuses on national and international issues. In the same year, *Sri Chandala Swargaarohanam (Sri Chandala Reaches Heaven)* appeared.

Though he is a poet and his fame rests on his novel *Kaarya (The Death Ritual)*, where he narrates funeral rites in

surrounding of the village. In this novel, Kaarya, he portrays a realistic picture of the Dalit's day-to-day life and expresses their condition in their narrow and confined world. 'Karya' is the ceremony held on the third day of the death. This novel exposes the exploitation of the religious and financial tolls of a society in a very lucid manner. Meanwhile, this novel also renders the means by which the upper-class people make use of the orthodox faith and practices of Dalits and also foregrounds the minute details of the life that helped to preserve the Dalit zeal.

The title of *Murdahiya* is metaphorical. *Murdahiya* means the culmination ground. *Murdahiya* is the lifeline for the Dalits of Dharampur Village. Toulouse Ram's *Murdahiya* elucidates the experiences of fight, oppression, exploitation, marginalization and the agonies of Dalit society, at distinct stages of life. Through the life story of Tulsi Ram, it exhibits the discrimination, harassment and repression of Dalits and their struggle for attaining pride, self-respect, freedom and status of human being. On the other hand title of *Government Brahmanaby AravindMalagatti* depicts the upper caste way of referring to Dalits who have taken the benefits of reservation. A Dalit who utilizes the legal opportunities, leaving their traditional occupation is called Government Brahmana. *Government Brahmana* is a story of ordinary Dalit entering into modern spaces where caste hierarchy does not end to operate and appear as a new mechanism to sustain the caste structure. Malagatti (2007) is revealed in the episode 'Some girls who flirt with the future,' many students reappeared for the exam because they failed to score minimum fifty percent marks. Then it was commented commonly, "Why do you need a second class at all? Apply somewhere for a job, you will get it. Anyhow, there is reserved for you people!" (p. 91).

Tulsi Ram works from the political science background, but AravindMalagatti in all genres of Kannada literature, his writings portray the realistic account of theodolite history and the contemporary Dalit world. Caste discrimination, hunger, poverty, physical exertion, exploitation are the recurring themes of their writings. The most significant aspect of Tulsi Ram and Malagatti writing is that they question the system that is responsible for the pitiable condition of Dalits. Tulsi Ram and Malagatti describes how the lack of guidance always haunt to the children of Dalit community. Their parents and relatives start opposing the attempt of Dalit students from getting the education. The children in a Dalit community, play the role of helping hand to run the family affairs. The poor economic condition forces them to stop sending their child to school. Everyone in Toulouse Ram's family was against continuing education in school. His parents refused to give admission fee. His uncle used to tease him by saying "kanvabdatejho" (p. 14). Malagatti also faced the rage of his parents, but his brother helped and encouraged him. Tulsi Ram (2007) was sent to the school. He was only hoping for the Dalits of his village. Tulsi Ram could help to escape from the exploitation. *Brahmins used* to ask for their household work for reading letters of Dalits as no Dalit was able to read. He states:

Only *Brahmins* of our village were educated. They connived to read letters and insult Dalits. Due to this behavior, the father chose me as I was the youngest child... Father took me school beating He used to say that who will read the letters if you do not go to school. (p. 24) (Translation of Mine)

Toulouse and Malagatti portray the Dalit's livelihood in which they have been living without proper house, water, electricity and sanitation. Tulsi Ram remembers it due to lack of electricity supply to houses. Malagatti exhibits traumatized state in which he used to read under kerosene lamp light and street light. People of his village have been wandering in the darkness of illiteracy and that is why the author failed to receive any co-operation for study because they did not understand the importance of education. Malagatti remembers:

My study would take a serious turn only when there was a month or two left for exams. Electric bulbs

had just then made an entry into our village. But they had not yet entered any of the houses. I had hence made it a habit of studying under the street lamp. Sometime even when there was no power, I would light a kerosene lamp and study under the same pole, waiting for the electricity to be restored. (p. 57)

The striking state of poverty has a close relationship with Dalit community, which has weakened the backbone of Dalits. The Even basic need of a human being remains a dream to them. Tulsi Ram has portrayed the panic condition of Dalit *waste* in winter and rainy season. In the rain, the thatch of their hut is accustomed to ooze. They do not have a sufficient number of the quilt. In such condition, they used to cover themselves with grass. They could not sleep due to the paucity of warm clothing:

The nights of the winter season were very painful. Our joint family was large, but in our house, there was not a single quilt. (p. 34) (Translation of Mine)

The community has been an inseparable part for Tulsi Ram, because, whenever his family was not able to fulfill his essential needs like food, and financial aid, he was supplied by his community people. Since his childhood, he has lived with his community people who greatly influenced him. He participated in almost all the social activities, whether they were superstitious or not. In his community, there was a custom of sacrificing animals like pigs, cocks and goats and so forth. To their deities. He performed every ritual, although he was not interested. Once he sacrificed a pig to 'Camera Mai.' On the other hand, unlike Tulsi Ram, AravindMalagatti was not much connected to the society. He suffered a lot at the hands of non-Dalits and became a victim of social inequalities in his village. The feeling of togetherness was absent in his society that's why his interaction with society was not like Tulsi Ram. He was only guided and supported by his elder brother.

In *Murdahiya*, women are portrayed as hard workers. They work calmly inside and outside the home as a machine at every step of life. As Tulsi Ram discusses sweeper women who sweep the roads and houses before marriage are a doll of the father. After the wedding, they continue the job to satisfy the hunger of the family. They are mostly blamed as characterless by their husband and sometimes face the beatings of their husband. On the other hand, *Government Brahmama* portrays many exploitative customs and traditions that are imposed on Dalit women. In tradition, belief, they are forced to perform nude or half nude dance with non- Dalit men for the betterment of the society. Malagatti discusses four traditions in which Dalit women are exploited to entertain and fulfil the lustful desire of the upper caste people. Every tradition was celebrated differently as:

Okuli – women had to remove blouses and wear andugachche, BevinaUdge- only Neem leaves are worn around the waist, GandhadaUduge- only Neem sticks are worn and BettaleSeve- demands celebrations in the nude. (p. 43-44)

Both AravindMalagatti and Tulsi Ram show their anger against the injustice. They express their anger in the same way by their actions against the accused whether they are Dalits or non- Dalits. Tulsi Ram expressed his anger against his father when he beats his mother. He slapped his father with great force. Similarly, Aravind Malagatti does, when the lecturer wrongly blames him. He rejected his indulgence and replied in anger:

- Get out now!
- Go to that girl and advise her.

- Why do you tell me all this? (p. 90)

Malagatti had bitter experiences in school. He never got a similar sort of treatment. Students were from different caste backgrounds, but only four students were from the Dalit community. Sitting arrangement was, according to the different community; high caste students were allotted wooden benches. Dalit students had to sit on the ground and the duty of sweeping the classroom was reserved for them. In *Murdahiya*, Dalit students were allowed to sit on the ground close to the classroom door. They were called 'Chamarkit' by the teacher and branded as untouchables and treated inhumanely. Even they were not allowed to touch any object and any person of upper caste because it was believed that they're touching might pollute them. The untouchability was visible. Upper caste student used to avoid to meet Dalit students. Derogatory words like a *chamarkit* meaning son of lower caste, were mostly used to insult them. Once, Tulsi touched the well in the school in the curiosity. Mihir, an upper caste student, shouted by seeing his "Chamara ne Kua Chu Liya" (55). Teachers also discriminated against Dalit students. The students who did not bribe were not upgraded to the next class. Munsiji declared him fail. Such instances of exploitation of Dalit children in schools are impudently expressed.

Mirdahiya makes we visit the cultural traditions of Dalit community. Dalit has their culture and despite the suffering of famine and starvation, there are songs of beauty in an autobiography that ease the suffering of life. He describes different occasions such as marriage, death, childbirth, the first rain of season and drought when different folk songs are sung with recurrent themes. *Bankiya Dom*, *Nataniya*, *Bankiya Dom*, *Hinguriya* and *Jogi Babawere* expert to express their idea through folk songs. Tulsi Ram gives a lucid description of folk art 'swang' that visualises the scene:

- Harijan jatisa hedukhbhariho,
- Jekarkhetva din bhrjotli,
- Uhaidelagaariho, dukhbhari. (p. 106)

Therefore, it can be said that both autobiographies *Government Brahmana* and *Murdahiya* are concerned for highlighting the problems of Dalits, despite marked cultural and geographical differences and deals with the same issues. Both writers have depicted the real picture of Dalit people and hardship of their lives. In Indian hierarchical society, Dalit lives a life of insult and humiliation due to the institutions of caste and untouchability. Dalits are physically as well as mentally harassed by the upper caste in Indian societal structure. Both writers have highlighted such discrimination through their experiences. Both authors suffer from the caste system and disclose the situation of Dalits who face the physical exclusion from the locale where upper caste people reside in the vulnerable area. *Murdahiya* is related with the social aspect of Dalit life while *Government Brahmana* deals with the psychological aspect of Dalit life. Authors have described the social, economic, political, psychological and cultural aspects of Dalit Identity. Both have discussed many traditions which degrade the life of Dalits. Tulsi Ram has highlighted the tradition of Salaam among Dalits while Arvind Malagatti has described Okuli. Upper caste people popularised both traditions among Dalits. One tradition is a strike on the dignity of Dalit men while another is the strike of Dalit women. The hidden agenda behind these traditions were to make Dalits realize that they are inferior to upper caste people. Both writers not only have depicted the pathetic conditions of Dalits but also indicated the tentative solutions of these problems. Both did struggle and faced the hardship of caste hierarchy in their lives, but after getting the education they not only changed their life, but also strengthened the social movement of Dalits for change. Through these autobiographies, they have highlighted the importance of education for

change and development of Dalits. They have indicated that Education becomes a powerful weapon that can challenge the hierarchal social structure and raise social awareness among Dalit.

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