



Research Paper

A comparative study of Dalit short stories: Mother and The Poisoned Bread

ABSTRACT:

Class oppression and hegemony have been inflicted upon economically backward classes in the Indian society from the later Vedic period up until recent times. BaburaoBagul's 'Mother' and BandhuMadhav's 'The Poisoned Bread' are two Dalit short stories that have effectively portrayed the misery and misfortune of the Dalit society. The works shed light on how the Dalits are oppressed and live their lives at the mercy of the upper-class people. A comparison between the two works helps in understanding the sufferings and the inhumane treatment of the marginalized at the hands of the upper class. This paper focuses on how hegemony and deprivation succeeded in the marginalization of the Dalit community and what role education plays in the eradication of such oppression and emancipation of the Dalits as depicted in 'Mother' and 'The Poisoned Bread'.

KEYWORDS: Dalit oppression, Marginalization, Deprivation, Hegemony, Emancipation of Dalits

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I. INTRODUCTION:

'Mother' is one of the short stories from the collection, *Jevha Mi JaatChorliHoti*, written by BaburaoBagul, published in 1963. Baburao was a Marathi writer who has contributed many works to Dalit literature. The work deals with Dalit oppression, power play in the society, marginalization of the lower sections of the society, and discrimination against Dalit women. The author meticulously takes the readers through the life of the Dalit community and how Dalit women are oppressed twice – by upper-class people for being a Dalit and also by men of her community for being a woman. The patriarchal mindset of treating women as low lives is so deep-rooted that even the child, Pandu, treats his mother badly and doubts her character. Baburao's characters were not just tools for portraying the evils in the society and struggles of the Dalit, but they also presented a sense of revolt and retaliation against the oppression inflicted upon them which Baburao considered as a means to annihilate the caste and class oppression prevailing in the Indian society.

'The Poisoned Bread' by BandhuMadhav was published in 1992 which created a stir among the people when the Dalit writers had gathered up the courage to write about the misery of the oppressed classes. The work presents a day in the life of a Dalit as we can see in 'Untouchable' by Mulk Raj Anand. The author puts forth the menace of discrimination, oppression of Dalits, economic deprivation, and exploitation of the Dalit community by the upper class. However, the story also shows the effect that education has and how it brings about a change in the mindset of the educated ones. In the story, the grandson tries to retaliate against the zamindar, BapuPatil, who treats his grandfather, Yetalya, in an insulting manner, while the grandfather without a protest accepts how he is treated by the zamindar. The grandson argues that they don't deserve to be treated like scum and that they should revolt against the mistreatment of the Dalits. It signals how education can bring insight and courage to question the evils in society.

II. DALIT OPPRESSION

Dalit oppression is the micro and macro-level implications and impact of the caste system in society. BaburaoBagul's 'Mother', suggests the 'strident assertiveness of the writer's work'. It often conflicts with the simultaneous affirmation of marginalized weak ego boundaries. With this we see, how oppression and impurity remain as markers of Dalit identity, thereby remaining as a burden on upper caste mentality. Moreover, since Pandu's mother happens to be a Dalit woman, the degree of misery is twofold. Why is it so hard to be a widow, and still be 'pure' in society? Besides the death of Pandu's father, his mother has no other way but to move forward out in the public to earn a living. So does this suggest that Pandu's mother is 'wrong'? No the woman, being a widow already undergoes multiple oppressions in the society, hence she has her right to lead her life. The reader is exposed to the stark reality of a woman's condition in society which turns even worse if she is a

widow and a Dalit. Society taints her as a 'bad woman' and also forces her son to see her with disgrace and hatred. The hate that society weighs upon her is too much when she is forced to go out seeking work to feed her son and then in return gets the wrath of her son himself. The misery inflicted upon the woman by society is heinous. Here, the oppression inflicted upon the woman is not just by the upper class but by her class of the low caste Dalits, where the reader has to realize that as much the oppression was eating them from the outside, for Dalit women, it was eating them from the inside too. It shows the ruthless side of society that would continue to feed upon the weaker ones, here, which happens to be a Dalit widow.

Whereas, Bandhumadav has depicted the psychological enslavement of the Mahar community in his short story, 'The Poisoned Bread'. The Dalit narrative has developed from the 'poisoned bread' since it is closely connected with the so-called untouchables who have been marginalized from the social, economic, and political mainstream. The pathetic manner in which Yetalya, the grandfather, is treated by BapuPatil is a reflection of how the Dalits, in general, were being treated throughout India. The grandfather begs for work in hope of receiving something to eat in return which shows their pitiable condition where they yearned for nothing but food. The duo of the grandfather and the grandson are made to work in the field all day in the promise of some corn if they finish the work on time. However, BapuPatil picks up a quarrel with the grandson, who is an educated young man and he does not see it fit that they should be treated so lowly by the upper class. Due to this quarrel, BapuPatil does not provide them with food. This shows the extent of the oppression inflicted upon the Dalits where they are denied food in return for their day's toil. Food is basic for sustenance and denying the very basic need of a human is inhumane and cruel. The upper caste zamindars made the Mahars and other Dalit communities work in their fields, provided them with little or no grains for their sustenance which forced the Dalits to forever remain in debt to the zamindars. They could not revolt against this oppression because that would deprive them of their very basic need, food. And, the upper class took advantage of this very weakness of the Dalits and enslaved them and treated them worse than animals, which we see in the latter part of the work. The grandfather, after being denied food, walks to the cowshed and picks up two pieces of bread that were rejected by the cow, which had molds and urine on them. He cleans them with his hands and out of hunger, eats them. The grandfather dies eating the poisoned bread and while it might seem a little exaggerated, that was the actual condition and sufferings of the Dalits. The grandfather in Bandhumadhav's 'The Poisoned Bread' is only a representation of the true oppression that the Dalits undergo in the hands of the upper class.

The circumstances of the Dalits without land and livelihood are a long-drawn-out condition. This problem needs to be spoken out to help the Dalits emerge from the oppression.

III. HEGEMONY

The Indian society is a system composed of women who are subjected to face marginalization irrespective of their caste; be it hailing from a higher caste or a lower, they are degraded to the status of an object in the patriarchal society. BaburaoBagul's "Mother" is one such piece of writing that portrays the struggles of a woman who is a Dalit widow. The text not only opens up dimensions of caste hegemony but explores the aspects of gender hegemony as well. As important as it is to assimilate the voice of the Dalits through Dalit Literature, it is equally important to assimilate the voices of Dalit women in particular, who have to suffer not only because of their caste but also because of their womanhood. BaburaoBagul's short story "Mother" is centralized around a Dalit woman, living with her son named Pandu. Pandu's father was ill and his mother had to work to make both ends meet. Despite working so hard for the family, she is not appreciated. Instead of being appreciated, she is physically abused by her husband who constantly tries to uglify her as he suspects her of committing adultery. This constant abuse indicates how the male dominant society wants to control a female. Pandu's mother is amid fighting two battles; one being the turbulence she faces with her household, and the second being the marginalization she faces from society. Being a classic example of Hegemony, the story portrays the hardship faced by a woman who is crushed in the patriarchal society.

Poisoned bread assumed a critical part in making a philosophical bond and perceiving the writers who had for such a long time communicating in an irregular style. The book got a staggering reaction, got converted into Indian language just as unknown dialects, making a dynamic abstract development. It analyses the brain of somebody tortured intellectually and yet unequipped for hitting back. The vast majority of the compositions in poisoned bread have a place with a similar type where shock, irritation, and hopelessness lead to revolts pointed toward achieving a more equivalent social request. The voice of the marginalized in Dalit writing makes it on a standard with incredible scholarly work in any language, public or global.

Poisoned bread for achievement for Dalit writing just as for Dalit developments regardless of whether the next generation decides to utilize various strategies to convey forwards the battle for an impartial Indian culture.

According to the Crossley-

The contemporary analyses in recent literature and literature of aborigines have raised issues related to identity, meaning, and cultural states of these underprivileged underdogs of the Hindu society that form a majority in India for the Hindu population, but ironically treated in the majority as regards their representation and political consciousness. Metaphorically their status quo in the sense of "collective effervescence".

Subsequently, it embraces social development because of the intricacies in human conduct, human activity, and human existence. Simultaneously the literary talk represents a dialogical connection between the hesitance and with the social world. The social association of Dalits through works develops individuation of selfhood poise and self-reflection on one hand while their reasoning viz -a- viz the norm focuses on their aggregate meaning of the circumstances, aggregate strategies, and aggregate conduct.

AniaLoombia attests to Arjun Dangle's intention of reassessing the historical antecedents of casteism. He opines the decolonization can only be possible through interaction cognition and structural conduciveness and with the assertion of cultural assimilation" (Douglas, 2009, 11). Unless race, class, ethnicity, gender, and their mutations are assimilated with "love force or coil force" (Gandhi, Hind Swaraj, 1909, 79).

Therefore, there would be no standard creative mind of withdrawal and sway on the planet, in the countries, in the general public, and in 'oneself' of an individual, because the novel and the interpretations from Marathi Dalit writing don't, in any case, furnish the perusers with definite arrangements or goals how to have quiet changes of social development into country and patriotism. The Dalit composition for sure sharpens financial and social misshapeness and consequences of certain states of the social milieu that block public mix because Dalit like women is yet an inferior who can't talk.

IV. IMPACT OF EDUCATION

Education can bring a major impact on the mindset and outlook of the people. Rajaram Mohan Roy, the well-known social reformer of pre-independent India, encouraged education with a view that it can enable the common people to realize the effect of the social evils on their lives and to retaliate against the upper class who promote and practice these discriminatory methods on the lower caste community.

In the story 'Mother', Pandu, the young boy is constantly teased by his classmates who call his mother a characterless woman. At the beginning of the story, we can see that Pandu is deeply affected by this but he refuses to believe what his classmates and neighbors talk about his mother. He yearns for her love, care, and touch and as a young boy, misses the motherly love. But as the story goes further, the reader can notice a change in the thoughts of Pandu who considers the possibility of his mother having an affair with the overseer. He is overcome with doubt when he realizes that his mother has been giving him very little time and affection after his father's death and also the fact that she comes home late every day. At the thought of losing his mother forever and having to live his life alone, Pandu cries aloud. His neighbors gather and they abuse his mother further instead of consoling and soothing the boy. This is when his mother comes back home and as she looks at Pandu she sees the doubt and hatred for her in his eyes too. Overcome by rage she curses her son but when she realizes that her son was just a small, weak boy, she embraces him and gives him the new clothes she had got for him. The new clothes trigger some bad memories from the past in Pandu's mind and he shouts at his mother and says, "Whore! I spit on your clothes." At this, the mother is torn into pieces from within. She yearns for her son to return to her the whole day. In this story, we can see how Pandu also strides along with society in abusing his mother. At the beginning of the story, he does not believe what people talk about his mother but after being exposed to constant abuse showered at his mother, he too starts doubting her. Even though Pandu goes to school and is getting educated, he is too young to fathom the misery and ill-treatment that his mother has to go through being a Dalit woman and a widow. The boy is too young to understand the evils of society and how his mother is being a target of dual oppression, for being a Dalit, and also for being a woman.

In the story 'The Poisoned Bread', the reader is exposed to the two sides of the Dalit community, one, which is the grandfather, Yetalya, and the other is the grandson. The grandfather appears to be meek and accepting his fate of being a Mahar (a Dalit caste). He addresses BapuPatil as Anna (elder brother) and says that he is a slave of BapuPatil. When BapuPatil haughtily mocks Yetalya saying that the Mahars and Mangs have started claiming equal status as the high born and blame the protest of the lower class as the reason for rains failing that year because they had abandoned their caste and gone against the religion, Yetalya responds that he isn't one of them who claims equal status for the upper class and lower class. However, the grandson who observes the conversation is enraged by the way Patil mocks and insults his grandfather multiple times. He retaliates and questions Patil as to what religion cannot tolerate one man treating another man as a human being and what was the need of such an intolerant religion. Enraged by this counter questioning, Patil warns the boy that education would not make a Mahar equal to an upper caste and he asks, "A chappal is never worshipped in the place of God, is it?", which indirectly implies that the Dalits were only fit to be treated as low as the chappal (footwear). Towards the end of the story, the grandson educates his grandfather on the importance of retaliating against such evils and mistreatment. The grandson says, "But why should it go on? Even a lion locked in a cage all his life forgets how to hunt." The grandfather who seems to understand the essence of what his grandson is

talking about asks him how do they go about this protest which would affect their livelihood because they are dependent on the zamindar for their daily share of corn. To this, the grandson responds that the protest needs to be gradual and they could start by not pretending that the meager share of corn that they receive at the end of the day after toiling at the field the whole day, as an act of mercy from the zamindar's side. It is something that they rightfully deserve for the day's work. This is the impact that education can bring, which has the potential of igniting a major change for the good of society.

Education can help build our character and mind. It can also enable us to differentiate between the good and the bad and to take a side that sits well with one's morals. In 'Mother', Pandu was too young to understand the ways of the society, and hence, education could not help him much in taking a decision. However, in 'The Poisoned Bread', the grandson is well-informed of the existing social evils and takes a stand against those evils and acts to revolt against the mistreatment of the Dalits.

V. CONCLUSION

The elements of Dalit oppression, hegemony, and importance of education are intricately interwoven in the short stories, 'Mother' and 'The Poisoned Bread'. The two works showcase the social evils that the Dalits had to deal with and how education was an eye-opener and a way out for the Dalits. 'Mother' and 'The Poisoned Bread' very well portray the oppression of the Dalits and how hegemony has its claws dug deep into the lives of the marginalized sections. It is a scenario where power play forces the weaker section to remain weak and the powerful upper class to yield more power and control over the Dalits. However, Bandhumadhav through 'The Poisoned Bread', hints that education could be a major game-changer for the marginalized. Right education with good intention holds the power to bring about a major shift in the way that society works. He emphasizes the importance of education because it can enlighten minds and make the powerless powerful.

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