



An eruption of agony on the violation of human rights in Siddalingaiah's '*Ooru Keri*' and Vasant moon's '*Basti*'

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Abstract

Human Rights are the hall mark of deprived society in the 20th century. The Dalit writers initiated to fight against many social issues including Casteism, Gender discrimination, racism and slavery which are always imposed by the dominant class in India.

Due to long struggle given by great Dalit human rights activist Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar by incorporating human rights in the Indian constitution, many suppressed voices started expressing the atrocities they experienced. This outburst, like the black literature, is also found in Dalit literature. The Dalit literature along with its autobiographical narratives stands up against the violation of all human rights. It focuses on the outcome of a long drawn repression and agony of the Dalits by the feudal system.

The present study undertakes two Dalit autobiographical narratives from different linguistic background written by Siddalingaiah and Vasant Moon as both of them have eye witnessed the injustice done to the Dalit community they lived in and expressed severe pain experienced by them and their communities. The narratives by showing the upheaval do not try to prove violence as solutions for the Dalit misery instead portrays how deprivation can lead to violence and confirm grounds for the Dalit identity in the macrocosmic world. Their solutions to the issues they presented seem to be very holistic and humanistic

Keywords: human rights, voice of dalit narratives, casteism, racism, slavery, social discrimination and violation of legal rights etc

Introduction

Human Rights are integral parts of human life. An individual development of human being depends on the human rights to be secured by the respective state. In some states of India, the people in rule have compressed the human rights of the people of a few communities on the basis of their race, colour and caste and in other states on the basis of religion, language and province etc. The violation of human rights in the name of God and religion had become the order of the day since thousands of years in different communities. It affected the major portion of world society. After getting freedom to Nation, the Indian constitution gave special liberty to downtrodden people through the legal rights conferred and accepted the human rights by the Indian Constitution on 26th November 1949. It has resolved to eradicate the social discrimination from Indian society and it has provided indivisible peace, social justice, equality, freedom, brotherhood, rights to speech and other human rights through legal safeguards. As far as the social strata are concerned, under the legal rights some questions emerge, those are: Are all these human rights accepted and followed in our Indian society by the citizens of India? Is the programme developed by Indian Government to make the propaganda of human rights in progress? Do the precautions taken by the Indian government to observe the implementation of human rights work properly? And, does the system developed to protect

the human rights work properly for it? The answers to all these questions may be affirmative to some extent but the ground level reality of the downtrodden is quite different. The people are still living the life of beasts. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar has incorporated the human rights in our constitution. The Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles of the State Policy lead towards the Universal Declaration of Human Rights lay down by United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC). This is the biggest achievement of our constitution which sabotages the earlier rules of Manu which was considered to be the earlier maker of traditional constitution of India based on caste discrimination. By giving the freedom of expression through constitution, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar taught us to make use of human rights and express our emotions, thoughts, feelings, opinions and record our atrocious experiences without wavering so that we can get justice and the rest of the people of main stream society will understand the life of downtrodden and the masses. In reflection to the call by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, most of the writers got inspired and started writing literature in the form of poetry, novel, drama, songs, etc. When we read autobiographical narratives written by Dalit writers such as Manoranjan Byapari, Babitai Kamble, Kancha Illaiah, Daya Pawar, Siddalingaiah, Bama, Omprakash Valmiki, Urmila Pawar, Aravind Malagatti, Lakshman Mane, Laxman Gaikwad, Dr. Kishore Shantabai Kale, Sharankumar Limbale and many other Dalit

writers, we come to know that the violation of human rights in case of Dalits is commonly observed in our country. It raises a question mark on both, the acceptance of human rights by the citizens and implementation by the government of India.

Materials and Methods

The material undertaken to study and prepare this research paper are two Dalit narrative autobiographical narratives viz. Siddalingaiah's '*Ooru Keri*' translated by S. R. Ramkrishna and Vasant Moon's '*Basti*' translated by Gail Omvedt as '*Growing up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography*'. Analytical method has been used. Through this method, the data from selected narratives have been analyzed taking into consideration the violation of human rights as the source of eruption of an agony in dalits.

Human Rights and Lower Caste

The present paper has undertaken the study of two autobiographical narratives '*Ooru Keri*' written by Siddalingaiah and '*Basti*' written by Vasant Moon which observe the violation of human rights at their native places. Both the writers have come up with their genuine experiences that they seem to be representing the rest of the Dalit communities spread all over the country. Human Rights allow the people to live life freely irrespective of their race, colour, gender, language, religion or any other status with full enthusiasm that is required for the birth of new ideas for new society. Indirectly human rights provide a space for the creation of innovations in human mind for better society. Violation of human rights is a standing denial to human development as the external situation in the form of human rights required for the internal development of human being diminishes so the awareness of human being regarding self diminishes. It results into the decreasing of self-esteem. Once self-esteem is lowered man becomes dull in communication and also loses the ability to acquire the skills required for a particular job. Human Rights reject the violence and ill-treatment to them and permit human being a free and fair atmosphere for an individual development.

The question is: was such type of situation available to all citizens of India? The answer is 'No'. There was discrimination in the name of caste and religion. As a result a big portion of Indian community didn't get an equal opportunity to show the skill and have a job. Thus they had to live brutal life for thousands of years as they had neither chance to enhance their skills nor any kind of work to their hands. It affected their lives to live independent life. As a result, these people had been living their lives without self esteem for thousands of years. They had faced innumerable atrocities. The same scenario has been reflected in the autobiographical narratives written by Dalit writers. The human rights such as freedom, fraternity, equality, social justice and peace are seen violated when we read the autobiographical narratives of Dalits. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar had experienced humiliation to meet the basic needs such as water, food and shelter not only in his own town but also in other cities wherever he went. He, therefore, struggled throughout his life for the human rights of Depressed Classes. Fight for the rights was the mission of his life. He spoke about human rights in his speeches delivered in front of the masses. Addressing to the writers, he said that the writers should express for the sake of the vulnerable communities to shade light on their issues. Their

pen should work for the rights of the people, which were denied by the conservatives in the name of religion.

Eruption of Agony on the violation of Human Rights: A Dalit Assertion

Both, '*Ooru Keri*' by Siddalingaiah and '*Basti*' by Vasant Moon are the real voices of Dalit writers having the impact of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's ideology which advocates the security and protection of human rights of every human being. '*Ooru Keri*' by Siddalingaiah and '*Basti*' by Vasant Moon are autobiographical narratives, which portray the real picture of two different places viz. *Ooru* (Karnataka) and Nagpur (Maharashtra). Both the writers have worked in forefront of the movements protesting against caste injustice and for the welfare of the downtrodden communities. The word '*Keri*' is a Kannada word meaning ward and it is used particularly for the living place of Dalits, in the same way, '*Basti*' is a Marathi word also meaning a place particularly used to live for a particular people. Both the words '*Keri*' and '*Basti*' are common nouns used to show the living place for downtrodden people. These writers expressed their regret and agony through their autobiographies. They exposed their violation of legal rights. In '*Ooru Keri*', the writer in the very first part showed the job his father used to do in the farm of the land owner. Once the writer saw that his father and the other fellow from the same community had been yoked to plough instead of bulls. The very strange picture struck the writer in his childhood. Here we come to know that a person should look at another as a fellow man in humanitarian point of view but the land owner didn't show his humanity. The following paragraph from '*Ooru Keri*' shows how the eruption of agony is found when human rights have been violated. "One day, as we stood on the squat walls calling out to our parents, we noticed something strange. A man had fastened a yoke onto the shoulders of two others, and was ploughing Ainoru's fields. It was amusing to watch the two men trundle on like bullocks, while third followed them swinging a whip and making them plough. A strange agony gripped me the moment I realized that one of the men carrying the yoke was my father. Some women who came to where we were standing and sighed, "What a plight has befallen poor Dyavanna!" This doubled my agony. " [1] People from down trodden community were enjoying the slavery as they had forgotten their rights to live life with dignity. Dr. Siddalingaiah describes the event in the following paragraph which shows the culmination of helplessness where human rights are seen to be violated. How helpless the Dalits were for the morsel of stale food has been clearly shown by the writer. He narrated, "Someone gave out a yelp, and in a flash, women, men and children started running, at the speed of arrows, towards the Brahmin house with the pumpset. I was scared, and couldn't run as quickly as the others. I reached the house a later than the others. Dalits sat in a row a little distance from the front yard. People from Ainoru's house were giving away left over *poori* and *chitranna*. I was disappointed to be the last to get there, but was overjoyed to see my parents receiving the eats and coming away before all the others." [2] The caste system was so discriminative that the Dalits were not allowed to participate in the public ceremonial programme. They were invited for the feast only if some food was left. The treatment given to them in every walk of life was like a training to mitigate their feelings towards self-esteem. The writer narrated, "Some threw

ceremonial feasts to appease the rain gods. During such feasts, the *Holeyas* were made to sit in a corner. We were noticed only after people of the upper castes had been served. I felt contented with whatever little food came my way, and wouldn't think too much about the discrimination."^[3] (Note- *Holeyas* is the plural of *holeya*, a word derived from *Hola*, Scheduled Caste people mainly belonging to Karnataka state at present. *Hola* means an agricultural field. Once they were landlord but meanwhile defeated and were made outcaste.) In the above two paragraphs, it is vividly seen that the people from downtrodden community were made so helpless that they didn't think of their self-esteem for a single moment, but still they are happy and indifferent to discrimination. No thread of human rights can be observed out of this event—neither equality, nor brotherhood or justice only humiliation. Even the religious person, a priest (*guru*) didn't step into the *Holeya* community as he belonged to high caste. Still the people from the community became happy to know that they had a guru to bless them. Karan Singh, in his address 'Youth and the Tasks Ahead' has made the definition of spiritualism. He says, "Spiritualism is the main faculty that distinguishes human beings from the myriad other forms of life that exist on this planet"^[4]. It connotes that all human beings are equal with equal human rights and cannot be equated with animals as human rights are indivisible. But the situation described in the above paragraph shows caste discrimination in which the *holeyas* are treated very inhumanly like a beast crushing human rights. Human rights are broken up by the upper caste people therefore the eruption of agony is shown in *Ooru Keri*. Even at the public places like hotel, the Dalits were kept away at distant places or there were separate Dalit hotels only for Dalits opened by Dalits. Dr. Siddalingaiah says, "Another of my father's elder brothers ran a hotel in Megalhatti. Only Dalits came here"^[5]. It doesn't mean that the Dalits were professionally hotel owners instead it was the need of the Dalits to have their own hotel as the discrimination was at peak. Here in *Ooru Keri*, Siddalingaiah experienced embarrassment in his childhood. This embarrassment continues throughout his life. It is vividly found in the instances such as yoking his father to plough, chasing the stale food by the Dalit men and women at Brahmins' house and sitting in the corner waiting for their turn to eat. It is told that Human rights advocate the dignity and honour of human being. But here the father of the writer was given a beast like treatment by the landlord imposing on him the beast work which was rejected nowadays by the campaigner like Maneka Gandhi. Secondly, people are running for stale food like dogs and at the time of feast the men and women are just waiting for the signal from upper caste people. All these events violate the Dalit human rights. The writer knows that it is against humanity and law but he is helpless. He knows very well it is against humanity but in some instances confesses his enjoyment with the stale food out of hunger. In the ending of the autobiography, the writer has shown his struggle against atrocious things. He joined social movements, worked day and night and sometimes was beaten up by the upper caste students. The autobiography shows that the Dalit have to persist on their movement in this caste provoked society. In '*Basti*' (Growing up Untouchable in India, a Dalit Autobiography), Vasant Moon has portrayed many events which show the violation of human rights. For so many times the Dalit

people were attacked by upper caste people. This shows the contravention of human rights. There is no room for brotherhood to dwell. The reason behind this is that ideologically the Dalits were always considered and shown as their enemies. They are treated as if they are foreigners and not to be touched. One of the events shows how Dalits were attacked out of the blue. "Maniram came to Gymnasium, and the ranks of wrestlers started to form. A preplanned quarrel started between two parties. With insulting language, the Mahars and cowherds began to taunt each other. "You bastard Scavenger, don't you have any respect?" (in this period all Hindi- speakers, and Muslims too, called Mahars "Scavengers".) All the cowherds wielded sticks and clubs. The Mahars were caught by surprise. Even so, some Mahars grabbed the sticks of the Cowherds and began to whirl them around"^[6]. This shows how the Mahars were attacked by the high caste people unexpectedly. It is due to their consideration regarding Mahar community as their foes. The writer has rightly observed the situation of Mahar women in the colony. The writer pointed out, 'Mahar women were not kept as servants in the neighbouring Brahman Colony'^[7]. Here is no space for humanity, brotherhood, equality, justice and peace. The stereotype may be spread regarding Mahars that they are offensive and should not be helped by offering the work even as a servant. As a result the people from Mahar community had to go on hungers for several days. The writer experienced diminishing of hunger. He said, "Now our days of hunger began. We started going hungry for two days at a time. At first we were troubled by pangs of starvation. However, once the body gets in the habit of fasting, hunger is not felt. Hunger slowly begins to die."^[8] As human rights have been incorporated in our constitution, it is the duty of the government to avail the job opportunities to the citizens so that they will live their lives with dignity and come into main stream of development. But unfortunately, at that time, the government was of Congress supporting the attackers. The writer, Vasant Moon, writes-"After these events, a curfew was imposed. Everyone was forbidden to leave his house. The police began a search, entering house after house. But no curfew was imposed on the attacking community, only for the Ambedkarites. The Mahar youth went underground. The aged and senior people who stayed in their houses were taken under arrest. Finally the young girls, the married women, and the very old women and men who remained in their homes made some effort to come out, and the police began to fire on them. Ramdas Dongare, a young Federation activist, was fired upon the moment he left for the toilet; he lost his life."^[9] Therefore the agony of Dalits is being expressed in Dalit literature in the forms of different genres of literature as is expressed in the above select autobiographies with various events eye witnessed by the writers. In, '*Basti*', Vasant Moon has illustrated that the Dalits were continuously attacked out of casteism. The instances such as unexpected attack on Dalit youths, keeping the Dalit women away from employment deliberately (though it may be the lowest job), arresting Dalits to keep them under control, and underestimating and threatening Dalits at the time of election violates the basic principles of human rights. Vasant Moon is an eyewitness to all these atrocious events. Therefore, till death he fought against the vicious circle of caste by joining Ambedkarite movement. His autobiography gives us a message to be aware of ochlocracy.

Conclusion

Violation of Human Rights is observed in both the texts '*Ooru Keri*' and '*Basti*'. The events portrayed in these autobiographies show that the people from Depressed Classes had to live very inhuman life due to denial of their human rights by the high caste people. While writing the atrocious events, it is worth observing that the writers didn't use abusive language against the high caste people in their texts. No doubt they expressed their agonies but they tried to show a path of humanity without the misuse of human rights bestowed by the constitution. The present condition of the Depresses Class people which is considered to be reformed one and better than the previous one is because of the implementation of human rights embedded in Indian Constitution. The writers got a chance to come up with their true experiences due to human rights. No doubt, the cases of atrocities occur in our society but in comparison to the previous condition the number is lessened. Due to right to education, right to freedom, right against exploitation, right to freedom of religion and right to equality, the things have undergone a drastic change. Change in the mind is an evolutionary process therefore it takes time to change the mentality of the people. Even though this is true, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's efforts converted the evolutionary process into revolutionary one within a very small period of time and a drastic change occurred not only in the minds of untouchables but in the rest of the minds too.

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