

Exploitation in the guise of Upliftment : A study of Radhavji Madhad's Short Story 'Stamp'(Sikko)

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is an attempt to study a Gujarati short story entitled "Sikko"(Stamp) by well-known Gujarati writer Radhavji Madhad. The writer has presented the saga of suffering of the dalits. The irony of the story is the fact that the attempt to uplift the dalit community itself has provided the means for exploiting them further. The paper throws light on this aspect of the story. Caste system is a defining characteristic of the Indian society. In this society the status of the individual is determined by her/his birth and not by deeds. This is a system which has been powerfully strengthened and legitimised by the brahminical ideology. The term 'dalit' refers to all the exploited people belonging to various lower castes in India. The Indian society is broadly classified into three main communities, namely, the upper-caste, the non-upper-caste and the depressed classes. The paper attempts to analysis the cause of the suffering and exploitation of the depressed class. The weapon of reservation to uplift the depressed itself becomes the means of the exploitation of the protagonist 'Leela'.

Keywords : Dalit, Brahminical Ideology, Depressed Class, Upliftment, Reservation.

I. INTRODUCTION

“Dalithood is like a kind of life condition which characterizes the exploitation, suppression and marginalization of the lower castes by the social, economic, cultural and political domination of the upper caste Brahminical order.” wrote Ambedkar, the most outstanding leaders of the anti-caste movement in India. The term, thus, originally does not mean to refer to a particular caste. According to Raosaheb Kasbe, the term 'dalit' refers to all those sections of the society, which are oppressed for various reasons. He argues that the term has universal connotations. The term dalit can not substitute the term 'caste'. In every society, there are certain sections of people who are deprived of socio-economic opportunities and are victims of social, cultural, and political exclusion. They are the marginalized or socially excluded and such people belongs to the group of either rural poor, or the downtrodden, or those of the scheduled castes. Caste system is a defining characteristic of the Indian society. In this society the status of the individual is

determined by her/his birth and not by deeds. This is a system which has been powerfully strengthened and legitimised by the brahminical ideology. The term 'dalit' refers to all the exploited people belonging to various lower castes in India. The Indian society is broadly classified into three main communities, namely, the upper-caste, the non-upper-caste and the depressed classes. Among them, there existed many castes and sub-castes, which follows numerous practices and usages; surprisingly each of them is unique.

In such caste based system the upper caste people exploit the lower caste people. Caste plays a very significant role in every aspect of Indian life. It has powerfully implanted in Indian society.

In this caste hierarchy, untouchable castes are at the lowest level. Earlier Hindu society has condemned untouchables as the dirt of society. Hindu society did not consider untouchables as human beings at all. This inhuman discrimination is the shameful drawback of

Indian society. In spite of India's industrialization and globalization, Indian society is heavily dependent on the maintenance of caste duties. It is this caste that impedes the growth of the protagonist in the story and as a result, she suffers.

Like other marginalized literature, especially women literature and black literature, dalit literature too started off as a protest and has been looked upon as a literature of opposition by the writers of the mainstream literature. It challenged the norms, standards and principles of the mainstream literature, aesthetics and literary theory. Dalit literature is not the literature of protest or negation. It aims at dismantling the existing structures of exploitation and restructuring the global society. Started in Marathi during the seventies, dalit literature is now being written in several Indian languages.

Like all dalit literatures, Gujarati dalit literature is also about assertion of human rights, self-pride, revolt against social injustice, chronicles of personal and collective suffering, and hopes and aspirations for a new society devoid of discrimination. It is a weapon for the struggle; it addresses primarily dalits but the other readers are also considered. As Neerav Patel puts, "I wish you to be not only my reader but also an empathizer, then and only then perhaps my pain would end."

Gujarati dalit short stories also focus on some important aspects of dalit life and thus it brings out the sorrow, anguish and anger of dalithood. Radhavji Madhad is familiar with the situations of dalits in villages and in his story 'Sikko'(Stamp), he tactfully depicts the exploitation of a dalit woman, Leela. Government implements some acts and policies like Anti-untouchability Act, Reservation Policy for the upliftment of the dalits. Madhad very ironically suggests how such upliftment policy turns out to be a powerful means of exploitation for the dalits in the hands of the mainstream. Nothing else but their

rights becomes the curse for them. The story also throws light on some other aspects like- their helplessness, unemployment, exploitation, humiliation, anguish and anxiety of dalithood.

In a village Panchayati Raj, the seat for the position of the President has been kept reserved for the SC woman candidate. The former president and other upper class leaders like Kathadbapu chooses the daughter-in-law of Manga Metar as the proposed candidate for the president. How Manga Metar, his wife Kaludoshi, his son Nagaji and the protagonist herself respond to the proposal of Kathadbapu is very skillfully and artistically woven in the story. As a woman also Leela is victimized. Her husband knows it but he does not show any concern for it. Manga Metar's unexpressed thought or question itself answers a dalit woman's exploitation by the upper class people. "If my daughter-in-law suits the candidanship, why can't my wife be?"

In the saga of suffering and exploitation, all of them, even her husband Nagaji knows about the seduction of his wife Leela, but the dreams of prosperous future makes him dumb. It is only her mother-in-law who has smelled the evil due to her age dares to ask her. Their helplessness has been skillfully portrayed by the writer. A woman, especially a dalit woman has to sacrifice her character for achieving such positions. The mainstream people have always ill-treated the people of this class. The changes in government policy have not lessened the sorrow and sufferings of the dalits. On the contrary it has added to their exploitation, in some cases like that of Leela in the story. The hidden fear in the minds of the dalits has also been given voice in the story. When the upper class leaders come to the house of Manga Metar to offer a ticket to his daughter-in-law, the anxiety of Manga Metar and his wife on their late night arrival speaks for the hidden fear and their helplessness.

Leela's sexual exploitation is two-folded; she suffers because of her caste and gender. The discrimination on caste basis may be considered as the root cause of her exploitation. The caste system and hierarchy based on Hindu religion challenges the framework of human rights. This class based social order creates conflict. The upper class hindus who always dominated the social and political spheres of the country continues the practice of exploiting the downtrodden and poor, even when they are given rights and powers.

II. REFERENCES

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