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## A Critical Study of the Themes: Select Hindi Dalit Stories

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### Abstract:

This paper intends to critically evaluate themes of the select Hindi Dalit stories namely “Ghuspaithiye” [Infiltrators] and “Shodh Prabandh” [Research Thesis] written by Om Prakash Valmiki and Sheoraj Singh ‘Bechain’ respectively.

Stories by Valmiki and Sheoraj Singh touch upon the theme of reservation which is upheld as an effective tool to ameliorate the social conditions of Dalits. This is a new generation of stories that no longer deal with the issues of deprivation or oppression in the earlier senses of the word, they rather expose newer forms of ‘inclusive exclusion’ asserted through ‘modern’ institutions of power in a democratic republic. Thus, their stories are the documents to understand discriminatory behavior of Indian institutions in contemporary scenario.

The story “Ghuspaithiye” [Infiltrators] shows a sociological impact of reservation policy. It reveals how under the social and institutional pressure beneficiaries of reservation policy are forced to disassociate themselves from the movements intended to the welfare of Dalits. They rather aspire to project themselves people of different class who no longer belong to Dalit society.

“Shodh Prabandh” [Research Thesis] divulges the counter strategies adopted by the University to vitiate the reservation policy in the form of exploitation of the researcher. And the whole university administration covertly acts as an accomplice to perpetrator. University chooses to take this position as it deems it to be fit to blunt the effect of reservation policy. This way the themes of the stories reflect the counter strategies employed to control the effectiveness of policy on the one hand, on the other hand how the policy is reconfiguring Dalit society.

Therefore, an attempt is made to highlight the means and modes used to lay out different fallouts of reservation policy, especially in the institutions of higher education along with paying attention to societal changes felt within Dalit society due to the policy.

**Keywords:** Dalits, caste discrimination, reservation policy.

## Introduction

The term 'Dalit' carries social and political resonances in the contemporary world which are hard to ignore. Dalits are those people who were treated as 'untouchables' in the past. For Marathi writer, Arjun Dangle, Dalit is not a caste but "a realization and is related to the experiences, joys and sorrows, and struggles of those in the lowest stratum of society. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary" (265). Marathi Dalit writer, Sharam Kumar Limbale includes in the term 'Dalit' all, "untouchable communities living outside the boundary of the village, as well as Adivasis, landless farm- labourers, workers, the suffering masses, and nomadic and criminal tribes" (30). Even he includes those who are economically disadvantaged in this category.

The beginnings of Dalit literature are traced back in recent times to the publication of *Poisoned Bread* (1992) written by Arjun Dangle. Of course, there are many Dalit writers who wrote before the arrival of this anthology but this book carried the translations of Marathi Dalit writings. Hence its significance lies in providing Dalit writings to non-Marathi readers. Maharashtra is considered as origin of Dalit literature. But in north India, Dalit literature arrived much later. According to Sara Beth Hunt, it is in 1920's that Hindi Dalit literature began "... in the form of small, inexpensive pamphlets published by privately-owned Dalit presses and distributed to an exclusively Dalit audience at community festivals and political meetings" (3). Dalit literature is defined differently by Dalit writers. Sharatchandra Muktibodh in his article "What is Dalit Literature" defines Dalit literature thus:

Dalit literature is the literature produced by the Dalit consciousness. Human freedom is the inspiration behind it. That is its implied value. The nature of this literature consists in a rebellion against the suppression and humiliation suffered by the Dalits—in the past and even at present—in the framework of the *varna* system (267).

Noted writer and thinker, Sharan Kumar Limbale (2004) defines Dalit literature as, "... writing about Dalits by Dalit writers with a Dalit consciousness. The form of Dalit literature is inherent in its Dalitness, and its purpose is obvious: to inform Dalit society of its slavery, and narrate its pain and suffering to upper caste Hindus" (19). By Dalit consciousness, Limbale wants to make Dalits conscious of their slavery and exploitation at the hands of the upper caste Hindus. Hindi Dalit writer Mohandas Naimishray divides Hindi Dalit literature into two phases. The first phase was an oral phase, where poets and narrators talked about the suffering and the oppression of Dalits in communitarian gatherings. In the next phase they started writing. He says, "In the beginning he used to weep, sob and remained silent accepting it his destiny. But in the later phase he started questioning those castes/classes and people who had oppressed and exploited him" (14, Translation mine).

As Dalit literature is a literature of pain and sufferings and lacks in aesthetics so it has attracted criticism from the mainstream writers. According to Marathi Dalit writer Sharan Kumar Limbale, Dalit literature has attracted criticism from non-Dalit writers on many grounds such as “...Dalit literature is shallow because of lack of artistic sophistication” and “Dalits are pilferers, thieves and criminals, how can they be regarded as exploited?”(111). His response to the criticism on aesthetics of Dalit literature is thus, “If giving extraordinary pleasure is considered an artistic value, why cannot giving extraordinary pain too be recognized as an artistic value” (108). As Dalit literature has been written with a social purpose so Dalit writers think that “their literature should be analyzed from a sociological perspective focused on social values rather than on beauty. An exclusive aesthetic consideration of Dalit literature will disregard the Dalit writers fundamental role, and hence is not acceptable to Dalit writers” (Limbale, 19).

Suggesting the social agenda behind Dalit literature B. Krishnappa writes:

As dalit literature is addressed to the labourers, the farm hand toiling in the fields, the unfortunate living in hell, suppressed by the caste system, it has to be unadorned and fresh.

When the purpose is to provoke people against injustice, there is no scope for old aesthetic pleasures or artistic creativity or, indeed, abstruse similes and metaphors. Dalit literature is not the literature of those whose stomachs are full (63).

Dalit literature is basically a documentation of the pains and suppression that the whole dalit society underwent therefore its themes and content are unlike typical mainstream literature. Its point of emergence is social oppression and therefore it is reflective of the same sentiments and emotions. Works of first generation of dalit writers echoed the same sentiments in plenty but later on dalit writers started picking up different socio-political issues of the society. Now the writers raise the issues which give an account of changing socio-political and economic status on the one hand while on the other hand they also touch upon micro social issues which impact social emancipation of their society.

In the stories of Om Prakash Valmiki and Sheoraj Singh ‘Bechain’ we see such issues being discussed. Their stories, in different scenario, discuss issue of reservation policy and its implication felt inside and outside their society and the middle class it has created and its issues. Reservation policy was introduced to give representation to socially deprived people of the society accepting the fact that this section of the society has been kept on a margin for a long time. Denied all the human rights to them they have been treated as untouchables. As Hindu society identifies one’s caste by one’s occupation ascribed in the caste hierarchy hence Dalits are also identified by their traditional occupations. Their occupations are related to dirt, smell and soil and on this ground upper caste people have stigmatized them as untouchables and polluted. Although due to provision of reservation ensured by government they are on social upward

mobility scale and have left their ancestral job, however, stigma of being polluted, or dirt is still metaphorically extended to them.

### **Analysis of “Ghuspaithiye”**

“Ghuspaithiye” by Om Prakash Valmiki was first published in May, 2000 in Hindi Journal *Hans*. In the story “Ghuspaithiye” the word ‘Ghuspaithiye’ evokes the feeling of being secretive and unwanted in a territory. Here the territory refers to the Indian educational institutes which have actually been marked for so called meritorious students and entry of dalit students is being projected as matter of concern to prevailing order of merit as they are not on par with general category students. It is a mooted point and there is a range of opinions on the reservation policy. One of the arguments held against the policy is its inability to ensure merit. Its detractors consider this policy insidious as the provision of reservation did not give enough thought on its potential harms that the policy is likely to do. Kancha Ilaiah in order to counter this argument in his article “Merit of Reservations” exposes an inherent fault with system which has been exploited by upper castes in their favour. Paid Seats in the Institutes of Management, Institutes of Technology and medical colleges are availed by upper castes because they have been financially in position to afford those seats (2447). These seats are filled with the same supposedly incapable students of upper castes. They are also harm to the system. But this fact is mostly unheeded. Susie Tharu and others in the article “Reservation Policy and Returns to Politics” find fault with the underlying aim of policy. They explain “The history of reservations in India shows it to have been an instrument of governance, a mechanism for social and political representation, rather than a way of achieving social justice” (39).

They further explain that the role of state in its effort “to tackling the social problem of caste discrimination and structural inequalities, the state has no doubt produced a number of legal provisions, but has refrained from undertaking the work of restructuring, of reforming its citizen-subjects in keeping with the commitment to end caste discrimination and oppression. On the contrary it would appear covertly to have firmed up and strengthened the normative, upper caste and Hindu formation of this subjectivity”(39). S. C. Behar in his article “Reservation: An Insufficient Condition for Social Transformation” lays down certain weaknesses in implementation of reservation policy such as lack of serious efforts in filling up reserved posts, no systematic efforts to provide education to Dalit children to make them eligible and qualified for jobs, lack of monitoring on the resources provided to Dalits for education, and accessibility to them only for low paid jobs (317).

A critical look at the title of the story “Ghuspaithiye” and how it is used in the story by dean of institute provides with insight into methods that evokes feeling of stigma of pollution and dirt reinforced by administration. Dean of institute is seen expressing his grudge against the policy by declaring students from quota category as infiltrators. The term is used to assign them an identity which is negative and uncalled-for. Such an identity is founded on ideological bias. It creates a binary distinction of deserved versus underserved, able versus unable and

discriminatory behavior by upper caste students are socially justified on this ground in the story which results in suicide of dalit students.

The term ‘ghuspaiithiye’ is a stigma which is being made to work in the same way as stigma of untouchable or pollute worked for upper castes to perpetuate their domination and exercise their social power on the dalits. It has just changed its name. Stigma is a social tool that society uses as its internal mechanism. Measures adopted by administration to counter reservation policy are to reinforce socially attached feeling of untouchable in newer and subtler form. System treats them the way they are perceived and treated in society. Therefore, counter strategies used by administration is to reinforce feeling of stigma in more disguised form. Administration lends unsaid support to students of upper castes by adopting indifferent attitude towards Dalit students. It is reflective of social attitude people have towards reservation. It is generally not seen as a means to end of ensuring social justice rather a transgression to their territory. When Rakesh and Ramesh Chaudhari, a social activist, meet the Dean of college regarding the problems of Dalit students the Dean shows his loathe for reservation policy. Valmiki writes:

Without listening to them Dean was talking about the harm done by reservation policy. His belief was that if ineligible people infiltrates in medical institutions through state intervention then conditions will be worse day by day. What is the fault of those who pass with good marks (18, Translation mine).

Therefore it is an intentional attempt of administration to stigmatize dalit students in order to sustain their intellectual and social influence.

The story “Ghuspaiithiye” furthermore keenly demonstrates the socio-economic impact of reservation on dalit society. In this story Rakesh and his wife, Indu represent the middle class Dalits who have adopted the life style of upper castes. Though Rakesh wants to be the part of the Dalit movements but at the same time he is made to realize his social image of an educated middle class Dalit by his wife. His continued association with people of his caste puts his social position in jeopardy. His wife’s constant pleading to change their surname is reflective of her concern that she does not want her children to face the same social humiliation that she faced. Her concern grows when her daughter’s friend questions on their caste identity and the daughter comes home crying. Her daughter is asked by her friend if they belong to the caste of shoe makers. The same theory of stigma seems to be working here.

### **Analysis of “Shodh Prabandh”**

“Shodh Prabandh” (2001) by Sheoraj Singh ‘Bechain’ also deals with the repulsive attitude of Indian educational system towards reservation policy. This story shows how the university has adopted the counter strategies to impair the impact of reservation policy. An innocent Dalit girl, Reena becomes the victim of the casteist ideology adopted by the administration of the university. She decides to pursue her PhD on the topic of “Study of Gandhi and Ambedkar in the

context of Dalit Freedom”. But she is convinced by the Chairperson of the university to change her topic and is sent under the supervision of a Brahman Professor who exploits her. The casteist ideology of the university is disclosed when the girl gets pregnant by the Professor and university is forced to tackle the problem. One of the Professors of the Institute reminds the Chairperson about his anti- reservation sentiments that he feels some strategies should be adopted so that reservation policy does not succeed in its aims. She reminds him of the strategy to be followed in selecting a dalit student. Head of institute has asked to select unintelligent student and preferably a girl student so that she can be more easily led astray. And Dalits start becoming afraid of using reservation policy for their benefit. It is summed up in the following lines:

Sir once you asked us to select an unintelligent student if we have to select an SC student for research. Female student should be given preference. Try to mislead her in a way that she does not return to her community respectfully (suggestive of sexual exploitation), if she doesn't, get her married to a boy belonging to our caste and declare it a progressive marriage— a step to break the caste hierarchy. If by mistake any talented boy comes across as a student, get him married to a retarded girl of our community so that he is obliged to favour us. The bottom line is to keep SC/ST at bottom of social hierarchy. But yes rhetorically favor them. (86-87, Translation mine).

Inspiration to commit crime in the form of sexual exploitation of female researcher by Professor actually emerges from the support and anti-reservation sentiments displayed by Head of institute and he also in a very subtle way tries to sweep the whole incident under the carpet. However, such oppression of Reena turns out to be a point of developing a consciousness against such oppression and she decides to meet Professor with strategy which exposes schemes of institute hatched against her by girl submitting the child in Professor's arms instead of thesis.

Through Reena's decision of delivering her supervisor's baby Sheoraj Singh seems to suggest that silence of Dalits make them more victimized and their liberation lies in breaking this silence. In the beginning her silence on her supervisor's objectionable behavior becomes the reason of her oppression. The stigma of being called backward makes her silent.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, the story “Ghuspaithiye” shows that reservation policy can provide economic mobility to Dalits but as long as civil society does not get rid of its casteist mentality, social respect is an unaccomplished dream for Dalits. “Shodh Prabandh” on the one side shows the conspiracies of educational institutes against Dalits on the other side it suggests that Dalits' freedom lies in breaking their silence against injustice. Thus both the stories track the point where problem lies in educational system in implementing reservation policy.

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