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ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal
www.galaxyimrj.com

Title of the Book: *Water in A Broken Pot: A Memoir*

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Publisher: India: Penguin Viking,

Publication Year: 2023

Price: 499/-

Pages: 320 pp

ISBN: 9780670095186

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*Everyone has the right
To defend himself
And if necessary, attack
Hence, I write
But not in my mother tongue. (133)*

Water in a Broken Pot: A Memoir (2023), by Yogesh Maitreya, is not just about the struggles and disappointments one faces in a hegemonic system but also about overcoming them to unlive the prescribed life of a Dalit. Maitreya was deprived of having a history, and his Dalit identity was recognised only through caste certificates and government papers. This incomplete identity of the Dalit community resembles water in a broken pot—meaningless and wasted. The book encapsulates the experiences of a Dalit man who understands the power of storytelling to break free from casteist society. It documents the struggles and difficulties etched in his memory because of the impervious, fanatic, and unreasonable nature of caste.

The book begins with a dedication to Maitreya's father and mother, for whom life was about having the hand to mouth existence. During his childhood, the significance of books for survival was underestimated. Therefore, choosing a career in literature was definitely a conscious decision motivated by the parents' longstanding struggle. The memoir, in its thirteen chapters, narrates incidents of cultural, social, political, and emotional significance that taught him to observe, comprehend and write about his Dalit existence. The predominant theme of the book is the experiences of untouchability followed by the urge to resist and choose a volatile career in writing.

The book begins with the childhood memories of the author, growing up in a Dalit Basti, Takli Sim, in Nagpur with his father, mother, and three sisters. At his home and neighbourhood, Ambedkar was present as a historical figure, but absent as a political force (30). The significance of education was limited in their lives due to the lack of economic and social resources. Choiceless and underprivileged, Maitreya's parents were forced to take up different jobs for survival. Bollywood movies like *Zanjeer*, which glorified the powerlessness of the common man, with the promise of justice at the end, became the solace to their struggles. Maitreya, who also once enjoyed them, later, realised that "Bollywood is a cataract in (our) world of perceptions" (22). The book also documents the divergent lives of a Dalit man and a Dalit woman. While the father sought relief from alcohol, the responsibility always stayed with Maitreya's mother, who was burdened more with the economic and social situations of the family.

Looking at the role of knowledge in liberation, the educational institutions in a country have a concrete role in moulding the personality of an individual. The prejudice over Reservation, contested in educational spaces, is a manifestation of society's reluctance towards acknowledging the marginalised as equals. The caste entitlement is exemplified in Chapter 2, 'Lost and Lonely', where discrimination is instilled in subtle forms, like imposing certain standards and cultures of life. Most schools exposed the students to only standardised curriculums, stifling the exploration of the individual's interests. Gender stereotyping is another concerning factor. Chapter 3, 'Men don't cry?' questions the idealisation of male superiority, characterised by emotional detachment and insensitivity. The ramifications of such actions are later elucidated in chapter 12, "Hurt and Hollowness", where the author underscores how his girlfriend, "a Maratha woman, was much more powerful than Dalit men in many ways in caste society." (259). The dichotomies in his romantic relationships are further elucidated

through his relationship with a Shia Muslim girl from Delhi, better acquainted with Kashmiri lives and their victimisation, compared to the caste oppression mainlanders suffer each day. This stark contrast is mirrored in the dissection of privilege carried out by the author in Chapter 8, 'I Am a Part Apart'. The "institutionalised murder" of Rohith Vemula, who was unable to survive the Brahminical spaces of educational structures, is also evidence of the excruciating nature of what he calls the "Savarna gaze". These collective actions by the mainstream society inflict profound distress upon Dalits, a reality poignantly characterised by Maitreya's term "psychologically terrorised" (62).

In chapter four, 'Khairlanji: Know My Place', Maitreya gives a personal account of the 2006 Khairlanji Massacre in Maharashtra's Bhandara district. This appalling incident involved the public humiliation, brutal rape, and murder of Surekha, her daughter, and her sons, leading to an uproar within the Dalit community of Khairlanji village. The disturbing events at Khairlanji serve as a stark reminder of the physical dimensions of discrimination. Transitioning from this harrowing narrative, the institutional patterns within premier educational institutions, as explained in Chapter Nine, 'Mumbai, Me and Ambedkar', are equally revealing. This chapter exposes a troubling disconnection between these institutions and the grim realities of atrocity-prone regions like Marathawada. Furthermore, the desecration of Dr Ambedkar's bust in Ramabai Nagar serves as a poignant reminder of the pervasive hypocrisy within a caste-majority society. This irony is further echoed in religion, a path to liberation for the oppressed, ridiculed in Chapter Five, 'I Am Not Your Buddhist'. The chapter also unveils the subtle elitism masked behind the treatment of white participants, illustrating how Ambedkar's identity is reduced to a 'project of representation, not persuasion' (79). In spite of these, the conscience of non-Dalits remains largely undisturbed, ultimately making it a struggle for only the Dalits (67). There is a growing resentment within the author, accompanied by instances of disorder. Thus, an invisible wall was created that kept Maitreya from being seen or heard by the dominant caste.

Later, it was the decision to relinquish his *mazdoor* legacy in pursuit of a literary career that marked the beginning of a transformative journey for Maitreya. In Chapter Seven, 'Learning to Read', He joins for a BA in English literature and got familiar with authors like Charles Dickens and D.H Lawrence. The English narratives, although culturally different, unlike the geographically similar Indian literary texts, inspired Maitreya to rethink his bounded existence. As a result, Chapter eleven, 'Against the Madness of Morality', highlights the wrath

and helplessness boiling inside a 32-year-old who was expected to have a normal invisible life with a menial job. The sense of the past caused him to refuse to be confused about his identity. Moreover, confronting the ideological groups in educational spaces that demanded uniformity of thought, he channelled his resistance through anger and the consumption of marijuana. While the internalised conflicts were liberated as rage against the caste society, Marijuana liberated him from all societal restrictions. In Chapter 8, 'I Am a Part Apart', Maitreya consciously positions himself as a threat to those who distort or erase history. While various romantic relationships coaxed him into being more oppressed, his vision to be acknowledged became the only motivating factor to write.

However, Dr Ambedkar's advocacy for illuminating and intellectually convincing literature resonates as Maitreya slowly realised the 'communicative void' rooted across generations within the Dalit community. It fostered internal ideological strife, as detailed in Chapter Ten, 'Learning to Write'. This void is further confirmed in Indian English writing, where the Dalit voice has been systematically obliterated, resulting in an unsettling absence. 'Hurt and Hollowness', Chapter Twelve, further elucidates this absence, spotlighting the lack of Dalit historical representation in mainstream literature. Paradoxically, amidst the pain and hurdles, Dalits' resilience surfaces through their desire to create music and grow plants. This parallels the author's interest in creating more inclusive writing in English. The dominance of Brahmanical aesthetics in Indian English was disrupted by Dalit poets—Lal Singh Dil, Kamal Dev Pall, Gurnider Azad, and Attali—whose vernacular verses reshaped Maitreya's vision of Dalit poetry in English.

The book also underscores translation's significance in bridging linguistic diversity, fostering a unified language for communities' solidarity. It will also enable heterogeneous discussions that traverse regional boundaries and unite marginalised voices. The trajectory of Maitreya's journey is profoundly shaped by influences such as J.W. Pawar, a Dalit Panther, who inspired him to share more stories of failures and desertion. Demonstrating his commitment to broadening the perspectives, Maitreya undertook the translation of Pawar's work "Ambedkarite Movement after Ambedkar" from Marathi to English. This translation endeavour not only enriched his understanding of the value of intellectual labour but also underscored the significance of such contributions. Furthermore, to assert the multi-dimensional history of the Dalit community, he founded his publishing house 'Panther's Paw Publication', a milestone in his dream of becoming a writer and publisher. Over time, this

pursuit led to an unwavering dedication to creating vitality and justice within his immediate environment. Within his reflections, Maitreya also highlights the transformative power of intellectual labour that transcends individual realms and permeates others' lives. He defines how this transformative process engenders a paradigm shift, dismantling the notions of inferiority or superiority. This transformative labour, as he articulates, brings a realisation that neither inferiority nor the pursuit of superiority is reasonable, as love and justice emerge as integral facets of human existence. (204).

The concluding chapter, 'Beginning from the Roots', invokes Baldwin's assertion that individuals clasp to hate originates from a subconscious awareness that relinquishing hate necessitates confronting pain (293). However, Maitreya wishes to transcend beyond his hurt to love and establish a profound connection with his community. A dignified life, unlike the invisible, untouchable life prescribed by society, was taken as his responsibility. As his memoir unfolds, Maitreya's readership becomes a conduit through which he reclaims and fortifies his sense of self. The battle for emancipation emerges as the crucible through which Maitreya redeems and reaffirms his individuality.

Water in a Broken Pot is a systematic compilation of the complex life and observations of Maitreya and his venture into a vision as a Dalit writer and publisher. Through his words and experiences, Maitreya makes a significant contribution to documenting a broken history. Maitreya also created an engaging read with stories that amalgamate his life as a Dalit, along with experiences that enabled him to receive the freedom he deserved. Ambedkar says, "Ours is a battle, not for wealth or for power. It is a battle for freedom. It is a battle for the reclamation of human personality" (303). Each chapter, with its personal narratives, makes the reader understand the hard truths that necessitate such a topic in the modern age. It also consists of thoughts that delve into the human psyche and understand the deep-rooted history of injustice happening in the name of caste in India.

The book is well-suited for anyone looking for a particular understanding of Dalit life and history to the region of Maharashtra. It is also acknowledging the need for a utopian world, a casteless society. Moreover, the book can be an important point of discussion in Indian classrooms, which have limited exposure to the depth of topics discussed in his book. It is also an addition to the corpus of Dalit writing in English in the form of a memoir. Therefore, *water in a broken pot* is a significant contribution to Indian writing, which causes one to realise that there is still a legacy of conquest that many people ignore.