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Dominant Brahmanical Discourse: A Reading of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's *Waiting for a Visa*

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Abstract:

Popular culture is a totality of ideas, practices, perceptions, approaches, and other observable facts that are within the mainstream of a particular society. It has disintegrated into so many diverse forms, genres, tones, styles, and goals that it can no longer be effectively discussed as a single entity. Popular culture serves as the breeding ground for democracy, speaking and acting as its voice. Democracy is made truly democratic by popular culture, which equilibrates society. Its main concern will be with regard to the suppression and oppressed conditions in the society which result in upraising of many voices to represent their conditions through the memoirs and autobiographical writings. The emergence of autobiography as a genre in literary theories was possible and getting prominence in representing the marginalized conditions of the majority of the population in the society. This paper discusses the barbarous actions and the Brahmanical attitudes imposed by certain communities in the memoir of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar "Waiting for a Visa".

Keywords: Popular Culture, Autobiography, Marginalisation, Democracy.

Introduction:

The term "culture" describes the cumulative set of principles and customs that a group of people has accumulated over generations. It mainly includes knowledge, understanding of beliefs, values, attitudes, spatial relationships with the society and concepts of the universe. The culture also refers to material objects and possessions that a group of people has stockpiled in the course of time.

Raymond Williams (1983) suggests three broad definitions. The First definition is , culture can be used to refer "a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development". The second use of the word "culture might be to suggest a particular way of life, whether of people, a period or a group". Finally, Williams suggests that "culture can be used to refer to 'the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity'".

The word Popular refers to something that is widely distributed and accepted or something in which many people are engaged, involved and followed whether actively or passively. It is well known that people have adopted the concept of popular culture to refer something in which many people are involved as a distinct entity which can be separated from what is then existed.

"Popular culture is the culture that originates from the society and everyday life of people. It takes issue with any approach that suggests something imposed on the people. As per the given definition, the term should only be used to indicate an authentic culture of the people". (John storey, 2009)

Popular culture is pervasive, significant, and essential. It has greater potentiality of how it brings people together and connect with innovative ideologies. It is a site where the construction of everyday life may be examined. The point of doing this is not only academic but is an attempt to understand a process or practice. It is also political, to examine the power of relations that constitute the form of everyday life and thus reveal the configuration of interests its construction serves (Turner, 1996: 6).

That popular culture deserves detailed discussion and gives scope for multiple perspectives in various fields. In the arena of literature, The main stream literature in India has never addressed the issues of the Dalits, oppressed and downtrodden people. Writing of autobiographies and the memoirs of Dalits are getting prominence and popular in the 21st Century and formed as a Genre in literary writings. The genre of autobiography had

rejuvenated new hope and elicited hidden ideologies and different styles among ill - treated people to represent their pains and pathetic stories through memoirs, biographies and autobiographies.

In the process of documenting the excruciating narrations, Dalit writers do not follow the notion of Art for Art's sake but advocate for art that is deeply connected to life, particularly the lived experiences of Dalits and other ill-treated groups in the society. They consider literature as a tool for social change and strive to use their writing to address systemic injustices and promote voices for equality and justice. M.N.Wankhade says:

“Actually beauty is a relative concept. I don’t believe it is a constant or eternal truth. The concept of beauty is related to the thought of each particular age. At one time kings were the subject of literature, common people were not acceptable subject but today the life of untouchable quarters and slums has become the subject matter of literature”.

Perspectives of Dalit Literature: Goals and Aspirations

The moment of writing the self in Dalits and other subjugated people in India commenced in 1960s. Inventiveness and innovative styles of literary works formed the self-admiring and approving practices in Indian writing in English. Authors have projected an unexplored aspect of social reality in Indian setting by refusing the existing customs and cultural principles in general. Poetry and fiction made up the majority contribution in Dalit writings in sequence memoirs have also grown to be a significant genre in Dalit literature. Darshana Trivedi quoted “Dalit literature is neither an ideal representation of life nor an individual commitment, but social commitment”. (4) Writing Autobiographies has remained a significant channel of Dalit literature since 1960s. Dalit writers termed the autobiographical narratives as self-stories or self-reportings (Atma vritta) (Kumar 2011, 150). Dalit autobiographies not only recount tales of hardship; they also assert identity, voice, and agency. In Dalit writings, there is a powerful expression of protest and defiance that emphasizes the rejection of oppressive systems. Sharan Kumar Limbale writes:

“This rejection is aimed at the unequal order which has exploited Dalits. Its form is double edged-rejecting the unequal order and demanding equality, liberty, fraternity and justice”.(31)

The writings and intellectual battles of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had created much impact on Dalit intellectuals to reveal their agonies by putting their pen to paper. They have endured centuries of repression and humiliation due to the caste system. However, this does not imply that Dalits have never resisted this injustice throughout history. Various revolts against this inhumane practice have occurred since ancient times. Even the movement led by Ambedkar in modern India holds significant and far-reaching influence. Ambedkar was instrumental in awakening Dalits from the slumber of centuries of oppression to the enlightenment. The present article discusses some of the most inhuman and uncivilized incidents which Dr. B. R. Ambedkar experienced in the dominant Brahminical Hindu society.

Research Methodology

To comprehend Dalit autobiographies, a thorough sociological understanding of the community, its protests, self-articulation, and activities is necessary. This exploratory study has focused on the qualitative framework of analysis. As a result, this research endeavour adheres to the descriptive and observational research patterns. It also focuses on certain methods of narrating facts and modes of portraying life stories of people, groups, or locales. It is a library research, the researcher refers the primary sources, journal articles, online resources, and reviews etc. to accomplish the goals and objectives of the research article.

Autobiography became a genre

The power of Indian English prose often lies in its profound exploration of societal and political themes. Historical narratives like Ranade's "The Great Maratha" to seminal works such as Ambedkar's "Annihilation of Caste," Indian English prose consistently offers deep insights into the complexities of Indian society and politics. B. R. Ambedkar's writings provide a multifaceted perspective on the crucial issues. His works offer a comprehensive understanding of caste dynamics, social justice, and democratic principles, making it an invaluable resource for scholars and readers alike. Inspired by the words of Ambedkar and his memoir, *waiting for a visa*, many Dalit writers started narrating their own stories in the form of biographies and autobiographies which are formed into a new genre in Indian English literature.

Dr. Ambedkar, through his memoir 'Waiting for a Visa', gives a clear picture of mortifying incidents that happened in his life. The present work investigates contemporary

realities and also focuses on dominant Brahmanical attitudes and injustice in connection with the autobiographical sketches of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's 'Waiting for a Visa'.

Unfair Practices in Educational Settings

At the age of nine, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar attended to school where he was much humiliated by the treatment of the school staff and his peers. He was not like the other students who belonged to upper caste, he was offered place at the back corner of the classroom and the servant was also not willing to clean the place where he was seated. Ambedkar used to carry a piece of gunny cloth to school, arrange it to sit at respective place which was catered to him. He had to bring it back at the end of the school. Many other incidents which were really humiliating that if he was thirsty, he was to ask permission from the teacher and should go to the peon to get water. The peon had to serve him water without touching his glass. Precisely if there was no peon, no water would be supplied at school. Or else he had to rush to Maharwada where his community people lived to quench his thirsty. Most of the debasing occurrences in his childhood days created indelible impression in his mind. Washermen did not wash clothes because not they could meet the expenses but they belonged to untouchable community. Barber was also not willing to cut the hair or shave these downtrodden communities even they are ready to pay the double. Even the one who drives a hiring bullock cart refused to come into contact with Ambedkar when he and his cousins wanted to spend their vacation with his father during his childhood.

“There were many bullock- carts plying for hire. But my reply to the station-master that we were Mahars had gone round among the cart men and not one of them was prepared to suffer being polluted and to demean himself carrying passengers of the untouchable classes. We were prepared to pay double the fare but we found that money did not work”. (p.3)

The aforesaid incidents highlight the deep-rooted caste-based discrimination prevalent in Indian society. Those instances serve as reminders of the ongoing struggle against caste-based discrimination and the importance of promoting equality and social justice for all citizens. All incidents which Ambedkar experienced in his early childhood days created an ineradicable impression on social injustice and inequality.

Unveiling Inequalities: Exploring Social Bias and Exclusion

Ambedkar stayed nearly five years in overseas. The stay in the foreign land and culture transformed him into a worldly person and the very thought of he being an untouchable in India was washed out from his mind. Due to a long gap, he forgot all the discriminatory attitudes and the strong rooted hindu principles in India. He went to Baroda straight away where he supposed to extend his services by the order of his highness Maharaja of Baroda who offered scholarship to his studies. When he got down from the train, he started thinking about his accommodation over there. Where should he stay? That was the question. To stay in any Hindu hotel called Vishis, he had to masquerade himself as Hindu; otherwise, he would not be allowed to stay in the hotel for short period of time at least he was not that much dare enough to impersonate himself to accommodate in the Hindu hotel because he could sense the consequences well, if his identity was revealed.

Finally, he recollected some of his friends in Baroda who accompanied with him in America. In spite having friends in Baroda, he had different kinds of questions in his mind that whether they were willing to accept his admittance into their homes. He tried his luck with one of his Christian friends at last who had been converted into Christianity. He replied gently that Mahars admittance into their homes was not accepted. Ambedkar approached another friend and asked his consent to stay in his house for a short period of time until he was sanctioned a staff quarter. He replied with very diplomatic answer that he should get his wife's consent who would come in a couple of days from her parents home. After getting the dissentient responses, he decided to search for any possible accommodation in Baroda. At last, he enquired about hotels available around and heard from one hackney driver that there was an inn which was maintained by a Parsi. He was relaxed and happy a bit. Basically, the Parsi community believe in Zoroastrian religion principles. With lots of joy and happiness he kept his bag and baggage in the hackney carriage and asked the driver to take him to the inn. The incharge of the inn found him that he was not a Parsi. At the end, The Incharge and Ambedkar had secret contract that Babasaheb had to impersonate himself as a Parsi. The secret of masquerading as Parsi to stay in hotel was revealed later and faced very ignominious situation and was forced to vacate the inn.

“My five years of stay in Europe and America had completely wiped out of my mind any consciousness that I was an untouchable and that an untouchable whenever he went in India was a problem to himself and to others. But when I came out of the station my

mind was considerably disturbed by a question, Where to go ? Who will take me ? I felt deeply agitated. The Hindu hotels, called Vishis, I knew, there were. They would not take me. The only way of seeking accommodation therein was by impersonation".
(P.6)

Another occurrence in the life of Babasaheb Ambedkar that he and his friends planned to have a long trip to Aurangabad. They started their journey from Nasik to Aurangabad. Tour schedule was not revealed to any one because they were worried of their identity of being untouchables. If their identity was revealed, they might face problems in the society. The halting points were clearly mentioned in the tour plan, and everyone was informed about the short stay in the journey.

In Doulatabad, the situations were quite different regarding the social discrimination. The team of Ambedkar informed their community people about their time of arrival, and were eagerly waiting to receive the tourists at the outskirts of the town. Tourists were welcomed warmly and were offered to have some refreshments, but the tourists were very excited to visit the fort of Dualatabad . They resumed their journey to the fort, and were much excited to spend their time over there.

That was the month of Ramzan. It is a sacred month to muslims. Before entering into the fort, The team of Ambedkar washed their faces and cleaned their dusty feet at the water tank located at entrance of the fort. They started asking the guide about the history of the fort. A long white beard person started shouting at them followed by a throng of musulmans. The tourists were surprised at, why crowd were crying?. After a couple of minutes, they came to understand the reason for their shouting that They polluted the water in the tank. All Mohammedans addressed them as Dheds (untouchables) abused with unparliamentary language and the crowd became uncontrollable. Ambedkar was impatient finally and questioned them with angry tone about main motto of muslim religion and their religious principles. He also asked with angry tone, if an untouchable converted into a muslim, would they stop him from touching the water there in the tank. The entire crowd was silent. At last, the tourists were given permission to visit the fort with lots of conditions.

“One young muslim in the crowd kept on saying that every one must conform to his religion, meaning thereby that the untouchables must not take water from a public tank. I had grown quite impatient and asked him in a some what angry tone, " Is that what your religion teaches ? Would you prevent an untouchable from taking water from this

tank if he became a Mohammedan? " These straight questions seemed to have some effect on the Mohammedans. They gave no answer and stood silent. Turning to the guard I said, again in an angry tone, "Can we get into the fort or not? Tell us, if we can't we don't want to stop". The guard asked for my name. I wrote it out on a piece of paper. He took it to the Superintendent inside and came out. We were told that we could go into the fort but we could not touch water anywhere in the fort and an armed soldier was ordered to go with us to see that we did not transgress the order". (P.13)

This is a clear example of discrimination that exists not only in Hinduism but in other religions as well. This indicates similar social hierarchies and discriminatory practices exist across different religious and cultural contexts. It emphasizes the need for collective efforts to challenge and dismantle oppressive systems pervaded in every nook and corner and foster inclusivity, equality, and respect for all individuals, regardless of their background. Highlighting the efforts and contributions of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in Dalit movement Jenifer Aomi writes,

"Over the years, the Hindu caste system had perfected itself into a self-sustaining mechanism of exploitation and in process had completely robbed the labouring masses like untouchables of their human identity. He had reclaimed for them this identity, breathed political consciousness and galvanized them into a vibrant movement that changed the course of Indian politics"(1)

An illuminating instance was that an Untouchable school teacher in Kathiawar encountered barbarious impediments in obtaining medical assistance for his wife during the childbirth. Reluctance of the Hindu doctor to attend to the teacher's wife medical emergency represents the deeply ingrained prejudices and discriminatory practices prevalent in society, particularly towards individuals considered Untouchables within the Hindu caste system. Despite the urgent need for medical attention, the teacher's plea for assistance was disregarded due to his social status, leading to the tremendous tragic loss of his wife and child. These incidents emphasize the importance of advocacy and activism in challenging prejudiced and discriminatory practices existed in Hindu dominated society and promoting for social justice and equality to all citizens of the country irrespective of caste, creed, religion and state. The focus also must be on building inclusive healthcare system that prioritises the needs of marginalized communities and ensure that no individual is denied critical medical care due to their social status. This issue serves as a stark reminder of the contemporary struggles against

caste-based discrimination and the urgent need for collective action to dismantle oppressive systems and create a more just and equitable society.

Conclusion:

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's legacy indeed epitomizes a relentless pursuit of justice and empowerment for the marginalized communities in Indian society. As a visionary leader and scholar, Ambedkar fearlessly critiqued prevalent social injustices and proposed solutions to address them. His advocacy for the freedom and rights of Dalits, women, and all exploited groups is a mark of his commitment to a more equitable and inclusive society.

Ambedkar's approach was iconoclastic in challenging entrenched societal norms and advocating for radical change. He strongly believed that true freedom and progress could only be achieved when every individual, regardless of their background, enjoyed equal rights and opportunities.

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