



## DALITS' EXISTENCE AND ENVIRONMENT IN THE LITERATURE OF MARGINS: "POISONED BREAD BY ARJUN DANGLE"

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### ABSTRACT

The nature is a bio-physical entity and culture is a social entity. The two functions correspondingly and maintain a continuous biotic relationship with each other to beautify or destroy or preserve the ecosphere. Human being manipulates their surroundings and environment for their survival and sustainable development. As organic beings they construct their culture as a social surrounding to influence the nature and the nature's creatures. Nature, as a non-human entity, is a source to support life, while culture as an anthro-centric agency evolves an invisible pattern to live life with the span of time in the human mind and body. There is another theory that considers woman is like a nature who nurtures and supports, whereas man is like culture who works to explore, exploit and enslave nature or woman. This paper will take up the selected works to study for example *Poisoned Bread* by Arjun Dangle. This work relates to poverty, casteism, deterioration of pristine quality and inherent simplicity, man-made human tragedy and disastrous outcome of the relationships between nature and human nature, subsequently illustrating declining sense of culture as regards Dalits' existence and the harmonious sustainability of the environment.

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### INTRODUCTION

*The Poisoned Bread: Translations from Marathi Dalit Literature* impetuously revives the prevalent slavery in pre-colonial and colonial times, the continuous pattern of dalits' exploitation and dependency of poor peasants, women, scheduled tribes and scheduled caste in post colonial India, who remained ethically, economically and politically deprived of their rights and privileges. The humiliation and horror of untouchability in casteism is the quintessence of conscious and subconscious will of the millions, therefore the literary expressions of dalits in the text theorizes dalits active participation for their concern for a new social order to gain self-respect, equality and justice, to seek humane conditions, to live with dignity and to struggle for "the reclamation of human personality" (*Ambedkar and Gandhi*, 1954: p. 45). The dalit writers in *The*

*Poisoned Bread: Translations from Marathi Dalit Literature* psychologically profess the same voice alike B.R. Ambedkar, who says that the society of Hindus has "the sense of structuration" and "the dualism of structure" (*Essential Writings of B.R.Ambedkar*, 2000: p. 369). On one hand we find social relations between gender, class and sex splited between dominance and the dominated one; whereas on the other hand cultural and social hegemony reflect human power and inhuman components both in the upper caste and the lower caste; and also in patriarchal structure in which women, children are like untouchables or dalits. They are marginalised in their own physical environment and their intricate relationship and social interaction is intertwined in the power of societies. The dalit literature in a way emotionally sensitises the isolation of downtrodden not only in

context of being dalits or untouchables but in general it includes those who are suppressed and oppressed because they are poor, bonded labourers, underpaid workers, outcaste or underclass. The objectives of the paper is to highlight –

- The ideology of the power of culture and its ability to manipulate nature
- The inefficiency of interconnected ecosystems in context of social ecology
- The loss of humility, harmony and happiness between nature and human being
- The sense of loneliness, greed, corruption, material outlook in existence has blinded the incredible essence
- The human emotions that mediate between the cultural and social realms

#### **The Poisoned Bread: Translations from Marathi Dalit Literature**

A short story by Bandhumadhav titled *Poisoned Bread* communicates evocatively about the sheer presence of categorization in the Hindu society, the reinforcing intersection of class and nation, the distribution of powers of person-over-person, social alienation in the following conversation:

“Bapu Patil’s insolence to Granpa Yetalya – at Kupad and grandpa saluted him with a *johar* – Patil acknowledge it like a swaggering maharaja and he disliked an encounter with a ‘*mahar*’ in the morning and uttered you are doomed for good”(Dangle, *PB* 112).

On the contrary grandpa appeared extremely weak and with the utmost respect said to Patil, “Why do you say that, Anna? I am your slave, I have come to you on purpose on hearing of the operations at your threshing floor. My Lord is our bread-giver and we find it a privilege to beg for our share of corn, master. I am your begging *mahar* and feel proud to be so” (*PB* 112).

Bapu Patil straightened himself and with a sense of pride said to Granpa, “Don’t give me that line, you’re no longer the *mahar* – *mangs* of the good old days to beg for your share of the corn. You are now Harijans! You’ve even started claiming equality, so I was told, eating and drinking with us at the city hotels. So there remains absolutely no difference

between us, does there? Now that you’re our peers, tell me, why do you beg for a share of the corn?”

Grandpa replied, “How could you say that, Anna? This Yetalya is certainly not one of those claiming equality. How can one in that case amount for God’s creating religion and caste?”

Patil replied, “come on, don’t you know that the rain-god got enraged because you – the *mahars* and *mangs* have profaned religion, and abandoning caste, have defiled Lord Vithoba of Pandharpur. How else can you account for the drying up of the Chandrabhaga River? Bapu Patil added insult to injury.

This conversation manifests a spirit of disintegration and disillusionment in Bapu Patil who suffers “the alienation from oneself, from one’s fellow men and from nature; the awareness that life runs out of one’s hand like sand...” (Erich, 1970: p.86) Painfully this suggests predicament of both Bapu Patil and Yetalya at the level of their own status quo which is linked with religion, culture and tradition. Bapu Patil’s “fractioned functions” (Johnson, 1973: p. 46) and fractioned consciousness and Yetalya’s self-estrangement with the right to live with equal opportunity development and dignity suggest ‘man’s dehumanization, loss of freedom and incompatible with their desires and ideals” (Tandon, 2006: p. 10).

This social discourse in literal sense project subordination, social isolation, social discrimination, class relations, cultural tensions that have become generic characteristics of such class-societies and if the sociological analysis of this discourse critically evaluated, it also possesses the power to reconstruct the text in its post-independence, post-modern societal phase where in historical background of such sections of Hindu society provide the readers to restructure indivisible duality of social conflicts, societal structuring, barriers and borders in a new dialogic process. Mukul Sharma in his essay “*Dalits and Indian Environmental Politics*” states about the implied historical understandings of Dalit intellectuals regarding environment in this way: ‘Dalit discourses that may not fit into conventional understandings of environmental politics, but which nonetheless have a dynamic relationship with it’(50). He further writes that ecological concerns can be traced in various dalit writings. About

Mangoo Ram, the leader of the Ad Dharm Movement in colonial Punjab, a critic quotes what Mangoo Ram believed in, he says that "the role of God is played by Nature ... Nature (Quadrat ka Mela) created human beings from the original source (adi) at the time it created all beings on the earth ... Everyone believed in one dharma which Nature had given them through intellect and knowledge (Juergensmeyer 2009: 51).

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar allegedly opposed self-annihilated, enslaved, decimated and marginalised convictions of the poor depressed class instead he reproached the traditional myths of eugenic origin, construction of lineages mentioned in *Manusmriti* and *Sahayadarikhand*. This prejudice has been the cause of preventing Hindus from expanding and absorbing other religious communities. So long as caste remains, Hindu religion cannot be made a missionary religion and *Shudhi* will be both a folly and futility (*Annihilation of Caste*: p.273).

The authors such as Bandhumadhav probes into the historical discourse and pseudo affirmation of personal identity in the public sphere, he interrogates the sick psychic condition of the custodians of religious faith when he found Bapu Patil's anarchic sense of pride and his Granpa's victimization and discrimination. The author writes the dialogues occurred between Bapu Patil and grandson, after the grandson listened to the conversation happened between Grandpa and Bapu Patil in the short story *Poisoned Bread* :

"I could not take it no more, I felt my cheeks burning. But I quelled my temper and cutting Bapu Patil short in the middle of his fiery tirade, but burst out, "Patil will you kindly tell me what you meant when you accused us of forgetting religion, abandoning our caste and of polluting the God? And if a religion can't tolerate one human being, treating another simply as a human being, what's the use of such an inhuman religion? And if our touch pollutes the Gods, why were the *Mahars* and *Mangs* created at all? And who? May i know, who indeed, created them? And would you please tell me the name of the God whom the *Mahars* and *Mangs* can claim as their own?" My retort made Bapu Patil wild. I'd addressed him simply as Patil whereas the rest of

our clan called him Anna or "elder brother". And to top it all a *Mahar* was answering him back". (PB 115) Indeed this text encourages sociological discourse on subalterns' mindset or dalit mimic the centre at the expense of its own identity (Castle, *Postcolonial Discourse – An Anthology*: p. 392). Moreover effectively challenges or subverts the hegemonic centre (393) and it reclaims the histories of the indigenous peoples and to educate non-indigenous readers about aboriginal cultures (394). The same thought in other way represents silenced periphery of aborigines in B.R.Ambedkar's essay "*Annihilation of Caste*", that the Hindus have not realized that these aborigines are a source of potential danger. If these savages remain savages they may not do any harm to the Hindus; but if they are reclaimed by non-Hindus and converted to their faiths they will swell the ranks of the enemies of the Hindus (217).

#### Conclusion

The contemporary analyses in recent literature and in literature of aborigines have raised issues related to identity, meaning and cultural status of these under-privileged underdogs of the Hindu society that form majority in India for Hindu population, but ironically treated in minority as regards their representation and political consciousness. Metaphorically their status quo in the sense of "collective effervescence" (Crossley, 2009: 26) endorses the social movement in context of imbalance in social ecology and in terms of contaminated environment due to the complexities in human behaviour, human action and human life. At the same time the textual discourse analyses symbolise dialogical relationship between the self-consciousness and with the social world. The dialectical social interaction of dalits through writings construct individuation of selfhood, self-control and self-reflection on one hand, while their thinking viz-a-viz their status quo points to their collective definition of situations, collective plans of action and collective behaviour. Ania Loomba attests Arjun Dangle's "intention of reassessing the historical antecedents of casteism". Another critic referring to this opines that "decolonization can only be possible through interaction, cognition and structural conduciveness and with the assertion of cultural assimilation" (Douglas, 2009: 11). Unless

race, class, ethnicity, gender and their mutations are assimilated with 'love force or soul force' (Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 1909: p. 79), there would be no canonical imagination of secession and sovereignty in the world, in the nations, in the society and in the 'self' of an individual, because the novel and the translations from Marathi Dalit Literature do not in any way provide the readers with final solutions or resolutions how to have peaceful transitions of social movement into nation and nationalism. The Dalit writings indeed sensitise economic and cultural deformations, ecological degradation and environmental politics as regards caste blindness. Henceforth the ramifications of inescapable conditions of social cultural milieu obstruct national integration and growth of national identities. The Dalits's status in India, is similar to women who are still subalterns and silenced contesting sustainable patterns of development in gender ecology and environment.

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