

RESEARCH ARTICLE**REPRESENTATION OF CASTE ISSUE IN MAINSTREAM LITERATURE AND REGIONAL LITERATURE****P. REVATHI**

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ABSTRACT

The major focus of this piece of writing is to compare the way of representation of caste as theme for two prominent schools of writing in India; that is Indian Literature in English and Indian Literature in other languages. David Davidar and Omprakash Valmiki's work are chosen for the article. Among their works *The House of Blue Mangoes* (2002) and *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* (2003) respectively, are chosen, as they deal with caste issues. Both the works are sensitive portrayals of the lives of lower-caste people and their attempts at coming in terms with the reality of their shackled existence. It is not to grade the two schools of writings, but to analyze their differences in the way of illustration of the theme of caste as presented in the mainstream writing and regional writing. In order to understand the trends of Mainstream writing and Regional writing, it is indispensable to have an overview on Indian Literature in English and Indian Literature in English Translation.

Keywords: Mainstream Writing, Regional Writing, Indian Literature in English, Indian Literature in English Translation.

Introduction

In a multi – lingual country like India, Indian Literature in English cannot be studied in isolation, as many Indian English writers happen to be bilingual and are nourished on native as well foreign literary traditions. Hence, there is an urgent need for correlating the Indian Regional Literatures with Indian English Literature to set a broader pattern of thoughts and emotions of Indian people as a whole. The scholars of Indian writing in English are also in a deliberate need to know the cultures and life style of specific region in connection with India as a whole.

In the process of perusing a complete view of any literature in connection with its cultural specificities, language will not be an obstacle. The Indian critic, therefore, should wake up from his complacency and try to interpret Indian English

Literature along with Indian Regional Literature in order to perceive a broader unified vision of national literature.

G.N. Devy is the first person to classify Indian literature into two traditions. In his book *After Amnesia: Tradition and Change in Indian Literary History* suggests how Indian Literature can be categorized under two different schools. They are Mainstream Literature and Marginal Literature or Regional Literature.

In earlier days Britishers found English as the bridge to 'enlighten the natives' so, English in education acted as means of social climbing. Over the years Indian writers used the English language for the purpose of creative expression. Right from Raja Ram Mohan Ray, Mulkraj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Toru Dutt, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Sarojini Naidu, Nissim Ezekiel, A.K. Ramanujam,

Anita Desai, Kushwant Singh, Shobha de, Kamala Das, Shashi Deshpande etc., are the writers with distinct quality of Indianess about them.

If one closely observes the tradition of Indian literature in English one can notice that they are divided into three different types of writings. They are Indian writing in English, Diaspora and Writings in other Indian Languages. The first writer tried to represent India and its diverse cultures to the West. They used English language as powerful weapon to claim universal significance. Writers like Salman Rushdie, Amitav Gosh, Vikram Seth ect are diasporian writiers. These writers were caught up in two different cultures – the west and their own native culture. It became difficult for them to identify themselves with their nation. This resulted in the emergence of the category of "Diaspora", a term given to these writers. The works produced by these writers has won them world recognition and even fetched literary awards. The third writers came along with the old problems of gender, equality, patriacrchy and caste. They began to take daring steps by dealing with the sensitive issues like caste of their region, which was once considered not to be talked in the limelight.

Translation has, to a great extent, retired their silenced voices. For instance, the works of David Davidar could be easily read with knowledge of English. On the other hand, reading a vibrant piece of work like *Joothan A Dalit's Life*, written in Hindi would not have been possible for any non-Hindi speaking readers if it had not been translated into English. Though translation can never hope to bridge the gap between two diverse cultures like those of Hindi and English, it has still succeeded in giving a voice of the sub altered literary realm of regional writing.

Objectives-

- To analyze their differences in the way of representation of the theme of caste as presented in the mainstream writing and regional writing.
- To prove that though mainstream writing shares the ideology of marginalized issues it is only in the regional writing it shares the specific issues, which are silenced for a long time

Need for the Study

History informs that many great leaders in India fought against the caste inequality. Their sole object is to remove untouchability and elevate the oppressed class, but they failed in their endeavor. Caste is seen as omnipresent in Indian history and it is also seen as a threat to Indian modernity. From the writings of the intellectuals it is encountered that the caste is of the pre-colonial existence. The education and other facilities provided by the Britishers claimed a niche for themselves. Nevertheless it is doubtful to say that even today in India that caste is not been wholly eliminated. The need of the study is prove how the same caste issue is portrayed in the two different schools.

The two writings share many social issues in common. One among them is the caste issue. Writers like David adopted the western form of writing under the name of modernist and experimenter. These writers moves from the indigenous traditions and problems and get trapped in the stream of illusion. Since English is the international language, writers of mainstream group felt that they could fetch wider recognition. David's novel has also got fame all over the world and read by the wider audience. In the other hand regional writing arose mostly with the special purpose in their vernacular languages. The regional writers are not vehement in their expressions. They provide the real facts and expect a solution on the issues of what they are dealing. Valmiki's autobiography *Joothan: A Dalits Life* helps us to know the tradition, custom, food, clothes and different castes of his state.

The caste dealt in mainstream novel is the dominant caste which usually the ruling caste of the village. Only such kind of dominant caste is portrayed by the mainstream writers in their novels. The theme of caste is not stressed or given importance in David's novel. Whereas, the caste in the valmiki's writing describes the real struggle and obstacles. The need of the study is to substantiate and justify the contemporary issues of regional writer's problem and raise issues on caste disparities and caste exploitation.

Expected Outcomes: This article expects into how the system of any caste operates under a socio-cultural milieu of the Indian caste system with

special reference to the condition of the lower caste prevailing in Indian society in general. An attempt to probe into the works of David Davidar and Omprakash Valmiki's autobiography in order to study their way of representation of caste as one of the themes.

As a mainstream writer, David Davidar's novel proves to be the stuff of potboiler. Davidar's writing gives pleasure to the readers, highly coloured story in the best sense and without twists and turns in narrative pattern and his use of dialogues is skilful. He has known the best way of telling a good story. He has done with words and the impact of this is that the characters in the story remains etched in the minds of the readers well after one has turned the last page. Whereas, Omprakash Valmiki's autobiographical account proves to be the stuff of regional writing. Valmiki's writing gives voice for his community, fighting against the gross and injustice that has been their heritage for centuries. Valmiki struggles to assert his identity. Joothan is seen as the representation of whole Dalit community. It is the depiction of a collective trauma of his community.

Analysis

Valmiki struggles hard to study in school and in intermediate college because of his caste. But it is not in the case of Daniel and Kannan in *The House of Blue Mangoes*. Caste is not an obstacle for their studies. As mentioned earlier, in the mainstream novel, the main characters are the oppressors. Valmiki struggles to assert his identity in the society. Solomon and Muthu Vedhar fight for no reason to show whose caste is powerful in the House of Blue Mangoes.

David portrays the village of Chevathar, is set on the banks of India's southernmost river side as a pastoral village and the settings of the village is portrayed with rich characters and colourful descriptions of the Indian landscape. But Valmiki portrays the village surroundings as the most painful one, where the members of his caste, Chuhras lived in the outskirts of the village were forced to do the menial works. Such portrayal of village life is unlike mode in the regional literature.

Valmiki juxtaposes his harsh portrayals of village life and exploitative economy to a famous

poem by a canonical Hindi poet. In his introduction Valmiki states how the poetry by Sumitranandan Pant had been taught in school in which the life in the village is portrayed as wonderful. He views each word of the poem as artificial and a lie. They reveal Valmiki's antagonistic relationship to the canon of Hindi literature.

A vast difference is found in the narrative style of the two novels. The voice of the narrator is throughout heard in *The House of Blue Mangoes*. It is an imaginative experience of the narrator in the case of *The House of Blue Mangoes*. It is linear and one can easily follow the story without any confusion. In *Joothan: A Dalits Life*, the narrator is a live participant. He relives his traumatic experiences by understanding them in an ethical framework and passing judgement on them, what as a child he could not do. It is non-linear. The text is itself a testimony to a crime suffered, and it contains the character of a victim and it becomes an impact statement.

A memorable experience is given to the reader of David Davidar's *The House of Blue Mangoes*. The characters are drawn with vividness, and Davidar has a sense of the larger canvas – his epic covers the spectrum of heroes and rogues, clans and dynasties, the ugly and the beautiful. The narrative, alternately measured and hectic, richly weaves together assassinations and passionate affairs. David's story is from India's great history, but the fascination of everyday life is never overlooked.

Joothan: A Dalits Life is constructed in the form of wave upon wave of memories that erupt in Valmiki's mind which has triggered through a stimulus in the present. He uses metaphors of erupting lava, explosions, conflagrations and flooding to denote their uncontrollable character. The text follows the logic of the recall of his memories. Instead of following a linear pattern, Valmiki moves from memory to memory, showing how his present is deeply scarred by his past despite the great distance he has travelled to get away from it.

Davidar's writing gives pleasure to the readers, highly coloured story in the best sense and without twists and turns in narrative pattern and his use of dialogues is skilful. He has known the best

way of telling a good story. He has done with words and the impact of this is that the characters in the story remains etched in the minds of the readers well after one has turned the last page. The reader has to keep reminding himself that Chevathar is a figment of author's vivid imagination. *The House of Blue Mangoes* is set to take Indian writing in English greater literary. But it has nothing to do with the facts of real life experience as far as the portrayal of caste is concerned. So the issue he tries to convey through fight between the two groups remains submissive compared to other factors of the novel. Even though, the novel is appreciated for various reasons, it cannot be taken as a good example of the novels that deal with caste issues, as it reflects the attitude of the mainstream writer.

As a regional writer, Omprakash Valmiki's autobiographical account proves to be the stuff of regional writing. Valmiki's writing gives voice for his community, fighting against the gross and injustice that has been their heritage for centuries.

The analysis of the two writings comes to the conclusion that the regional writing is direct and true in telling the fact of real life. It represents the issue of caste more elaborately than the mainstream writing. Valmiki wants to find a solution through his writing which is based on his real life. His writing proves to be a better medium to create awareness in the society.

Findings

It is time to realize that the Indian English writer cannot claim to be superior to the regional writer as they happen to write in a world language. They are no more rivals or enemies or aliens, fighting desperately for space. Actually, they are blood brothers, born of the same mother. They have more in common with each other. They both express the Indian sensibility and psyche, and narrative sensibility. Indian literature is a vast ocean into which several mighty rivers merge. Among these are rivers like Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, etc.

By the end of 19th century there was a major shift in the Indian writings. Earlier the writing dealt with the themes of freedom struggle, identity, partition, exploitation, social issues and nationality. Now they took step forward to look into post –

colonial, feminism, gender and most intricate and complex of all problems is the caste system in India. The findings highlight the difference in approach in presenting a national issue "caste" in David's and valmiki's novel. My interest in caste study drove me to work on the issues of caste as a theme in mainstream and marginal writing

Suggestions

This article suggests that language is not a barrier to have a comprehensible and complete view of any literature. Therefore one should always be aware of Indian English literature (mainstream literature) and Indian regional literature (regional literature) to interpret. The sensitive issues like caste, gender and other social issues should be dealt more authentically by the mainstream writers. The mainstream writers though they use flowery language to portray the susceptive issues it should reveal the approximate concern.

Further Research

This article deals only with the caste issue covenant in two authors writing by two diverse school writers. The further research can be expanded in dealing with the gender, race, feminism and other social issues or how the Diaspora writers, Regional writers and marginal writers examine these problems in their writing.

Conclusions

Whatever the conflict between the two schools of writers, one interesting thing is to note is that, they are able to produce good works of literature that stand the test of time. It is hypothesized that the theme of caste is represented more authentically in marginal writing than in the mainstream. It is established that though mainstream writing shares the ideology of marginalized issues it is only in the regional writing it shares the specific issues, which are silenced for a long time.

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