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PORTRAYAL OF DALIT WOMEN IN THE NOVEL *UNTOUCHABLE SPRING*

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ABSTRACT

The Present Study analyses Dalit Women Characters beautifully Portrait by Kalyan Rao in his work "*Untouchable Spring*". In *untouchable spring* the author presented the Telugu Dalit movement, and role of Dalit Women in varies stages. '*Untouchable spring*' mirrored Dalit women belong to four generation and their approach in Dalit movement. The initial chapters of the *untouchable spring* presents the first and second generations. Dalit women presented through the characters of *Boodevi* and *Subhadra*. In The early phases of Telugu Dalit movement, Dalit women not only played the role of torchbearers of progressive ideology but also proved themselves as true fighters in given situations. *Boodevi* shackles age old upper caste oppression and caste discrimination imposed on Dalits by raising her voice. Pittodu inspired by *Boodevi's* reaction against male and upper caste domination in the society takes forward the dalit movement. *Subhadra* also encourages and enlightens the Dalit men through her ferocious nature. The author depicts the woman like *Boodevi* and *subhadra* dutiful but as violent and progressive. *Subhadra* is narrated as the likeness of the Goddess Kali.

Dalit women of third and fourth generations presented as seekers of mental liberty and social freedom, though they adopted different means to realise their dreams . *Sasirekha* sees Christianity as the only means through which the Dalits can get mental and social liberty, where as Ruth (The narrator) sees the Communism and Naxalism only the ways through which the Dalit emancipation will be attained. *Ruth* takes radical path and depends upon social philosophy in realising her dream of Dalit emancipation. The Dalit movement have been really playing a great role in the liberation of Dalits from the caste discrimination and exploitation for a long time. Author portrays the Socio - historical importance of Dalit women whose participation had been imperceptible in the upper caste writer's writings. G, Kalyan Rao traces the true role of Dalit Women as intellectual, independent, rationalist and revolutionary in the empire of Christianity, Communism, Naxalism and Dalit Movements.

Keywords: Emancipation; Mental liberty; Caste Oppression; Communist movement; Naxalite movement.

This paper titled portrayal of Dalit women in the novel "*Untouchable Spring*". Concerned with the portrayal of Dalit women, *untouchable Spring*

presents different demission in which in the novelist depicted the life's of Dalit women in the novel.

G. Kalyan Rao is a distinguished Dalit writer in Telugu. He is the editor of '*Arunatara*' magazine in

Telugu, which portrays current and prevalent issues related to Dalits in Andhra Pradesh. He also holds an esteemed position in the *Virasam* (A Revolutionary Writers Association). Initially, the novel *Antarani vasantham* appeared in serialized versions in Aruna Tara magazine. Apart from this novel, he has written many plays like Dawn, Satire, Caste and lockup. He had written critical analysis and explanation on the roots of Telugu Drama. In all his works we can see the question of Dalits and their struggle against caste oppression and women's powerful role in social activities.

His writings portray the Dalit lives, their history and their problems before and after the independence. His works have greatly influenced the people in Andhra Pradesh especially Dalits. His famous book '*Antarani Vasantham*' was translated by Telugu to English and was titled "*Untouchable Spring*".

In prehistoric India, the caste system was non-existent since even the most learned men were good householders and had varied occupations. The women of prehistoric India were just as superior as men in learning, education, and intellect. The choice for her mate was according to her own wishes and marriage was practiced after coming of age. She attended parties, competitions, and devout functions as she wished. The remarriage of young widows was also a common practice. The creation of a number of Hindu religious books including the Manusmriti, Atharva Vedas, Vishnu smriti, and many others like these and their strict compliance by the Brahmans (upper priestly Hindu caste), led to a society in which equality between men and women was far from existent.

Even the killing of a Dalit woman is explicitly justified as a minor offence for the Brahmans: equal to the killing of an animal (Manusmriti). If the killing of an untouchable was justified as a minor offence, one can only imagine the treatment they received throughout their lives. In a male dominated society, Dalit women suffered unbelievable oppression, not only through caste, but gender too, from which there was no escape.

In this novel *Untouchable spring*, the author portrays women as intellectual, independent-decision-takers, and initiators in the protest against

the inequality of untouchability. He portrays Dalit women as potent spirits and icons of the struggle for social justice. There were many woman central characters like Boodevi, Subhadra, Seshirekha, Ruth and Ruby, in his novel in which anyone can find out their living style, culture, tradition and their potential to confront the Upper Castes. The most interesting aspect is that the narrator of the novel is a woman, Ruth, who reminds us of the unforgettable by gone days where casteism dictated and imposed ruthlessness on their lives. Ruth very forcefully says, "My memory in not past but an untouchable spring". She repeatedly wants to remember her memories.

Boodevi:

Boodevi is one of the challenging characters in the memory of Ruth. Since she has no child, she brings up her brothers' son, Yellanna. She leads an ordinary life at Yennela Dinni. She brings up the child by reciting songs and narrating plays. He plays rhythmically just hearing the songs. He eats listening to the song.... (P:15). When Yellanna unexpectedly imitates the stories and songs of Boodevi, she feels blissful. It is obvious that relationship, intimacy and affection between them are unbreakable. She likes him more than anyone or anything.

Boodevi is fond of watching the plays of Yerra Gollalu (Red Shepherds). Since the Dalits are not allowed to watch the plays of Red Shepherds, Boodevi, who is very keen on watching them performing, watches the play secretly along with her nephew, Yellanna and other members of the untouchable community. The writer very vividly displays the entirely bestial, inhuman attitude of caste Hindus in practicing untouchability even on the children of the downtrodden. Yellanna, having a strong desire to look at the players from very near, goes there without letting it known to anyone of his family members. When he enters among the visitors, a man quickly asks him where he came from and which caste he belongs to. Very soon when they knew that Yellana is a Mala boy, son of Yerrankadu, an upper caste started kicking the little kid without any compassion.

The courage of Boodevi is evident in that when she comes to know what had happened to her beloved nephew, she becomes furious and abuses

the upper castes calling each person by his name. What happened when the Red shepherd's marquee reached the Mala colony, who pursued them and how they pursued Yellanna, is also known. When Boodevi comes to know the incident she could not control herself. It is interesting to observe that while even untouchable men are scared to blame the upper castes, Boodevi is absolutely fearless in challenging them, and warning them with immense courage and promises to end their life at any cost.

"She abused the ones who beat up Yellanna by name. When she abused the pedda mala, his pride was hurt. If she abused the people in the village, he would tremble with fear." (P: 46).

It is evident that the untouchable men are afraid to question the upper castes on the account of Yellanna's disappearance. Her husband, Venkatanarasu beats her for the aggressive abuse of the upper castes. The untouchable men fail to protest at the right time. All they do is beat their women without questioning the atrocities of upper castes.

It is due to Boodevis' strong voice of protest against the upper castes! by attack on Yellanna, the Dalit men are awakened to protest against the upper castes. Boodevi is the power behind the operation. Pittodu is aroused by rational words of Boodevi.

When the community meeting is held, he supports the anguish of Budevi and digs out the previous history in which Naganna mobilized the Dalits amidst of the village and Mataiah, who secretly killed Karanam, the man responsible for the murder of Naganna.

What concerns us here is what is constraining the Dalit men from attacking? Why did they remain less conscious and responsive to the terrible situation? It is fear and frustration imposed on them for many generations. When Vellanna is expelled to Pakkela Dinni he attracts a person with songs of Naganna who is known as the best thunder dancer. When Naganna comes to know about the boy, Yellanna and that he is from Yennela Dinni and belongs to Mala caste, he gets interested and wants to know about what happened to the boy.

The arrival of Yellanna baffles Naganna whose past he brings to the surface. The flood at the Yennela Dinni, his fathers' daring step to cross the ghetto, and eventually his fathers' murder and as a child giving up his village along with his mother, his mothers' re-settlement with Chandranna from whom he learns the skills of the art, all these rewind in his mind seriously. What is interesting is that Naganna brings back Yellanna to the Yennela Dinni and as he has a kindred heart, he is forced to settle in his homeland and brings up Subhadra, the daughter of Pittodu and Chinnammi. The more interesting thing is that Yellanna later gets marries Subhadra. Like these, there are many women characters like Seshirekha, Ruth, Mary Suvatha etc.

Subhadra:

Another powerful woman character is Subhadra. She is a genuine, gentle, obedient and respectable. She never comes out of her house but keenly observes the social barriers, discrimination and exploitation. The writer selects art as an instrument to extirpate the control of the upper castes and hierarchy of society. Subhadras' husband, Yellanna actively participates in the plays directed by Naganna in which they turn down the conventional and culture – bound methods.

The art and literature of the Dalits is delineated right at the beginning of the novel. The skills are born out of their real experience. Naganna teaches the stories in which he brings out the irony of the epics, and the culture and tradition of the Dalits. Naganna and Yellanna try their best to change the living style of Dalits though their dedicated participation in forming a social organization and eventually they acquire the Mala-dibba (occupied and waste land) from the Karanam and Achi Reddy. They struggle for the land, for their food and for their self respect. They unanimously and relentlessly struggle for their rights, and for their primary needs. Sadly, Naganna dies without achieving his dreams and requirements.

It must be the test of Subhadra to nourish the family when her husband renounces the family and wanders from place to place singing spontaneously songs on the nature of caste-exploitation and discrimination. Subhadra strives to feed and look after the old parents and her son,

Sivaiah. She anxiously waits for her husbands' return. With lot of hopes she brings up her child, Sivaiah. Boodevi sees Yellanna in her son. Many years pass by Sivaiah is growing up and Subhadra is working hard than even before in order to feed the old members of her family.

It may perhaps seem to us now amusing, but the struggle was indeed necessary at every stage for their employment. The Dalits were made to struggle till the end of their lives irrespective of young or old and men or woman. Even though they acquire a piece of land, they were not allowed to cultivate their land or to use the water. They had to even steal water at midnight. The Hindu society forcibly made the Dalits to do everything stealthily. When Achi Reddy comes to know that Pittodu and some others bring to bear water to cultivate their pieces of lands at midnight, he rages and beats Pittodu cruelly.

Nobody can tolerate humiliation. In fact, Subhadra who is a conservative, obedient and calm woman, who never crossed the threshold of the house, cannot digest the brutal attack on her father and on other members of her community. Subhadra deliberately takes a spade and walks boldly on to the fields where the upper castes men had beaten the Dalits. She challenges the upper castes to end their lives on the spot and symbolically stands like the Goddess Kali on the edge of the field.

The writer brings out the suffering covered to remonstrate against the upper castes' barbaric and diabolic acts. It is an unimaginable that Subhadra has such audacity and even her own father could not imagine that his daughter has such fearlessness.

Subhadra is there amidst the blood. She is there amidst the tears. She takes the spade, which is aside. Everybody is looking. She tightens her sari and twists it into her waist. Everybody is staringShe looks like green gold coil in the sunshine. Her eyes look like burning oven. She moves into front by holding the spade (P: 115).

The author depicts the woman not as dutiful but as violent and progressive. The psyche of upper castes is that when they are challenged literally they find it difficult to confront the Dalits directly. Instead they

look for indirect ways to defeat them. Moreover, they find out some allegorical elements. Subhadra is narrated as the likeness of the Goddess Kali. Subhadra cuts the edge of kennel and stands there by raising the spade. Subhadra is a common woman of Mala community who challenges the upper castes with gigantic courage. Chukki Reddy strongly feels that untouchable Mala woman like Subhadra can only challenge upper caste people. He further believes she is filled with the divine spirit of Goddess Kali and he, moreover, advertises her in the village as the appearance of the Goddesses.

Yellanna, her husband, wanders through different villages wherein he projects his thought provoking, radical and rational songs on the evils of social barriers. The interesting thing is that even the song of his, Subhadra hears from Seshirekha who had learnt the songs from Yellanna. She hopes that she would definitely meet him again. Unfortunately, she did not meet him in the time, but fortunately she gets Sashirekha as her daughter-in-law. The way Subhadra and Sashirekha meet is quite attractive.

Subhadra hears the songs being sung by the cookies in the field; the song begins with her name. Her name sounds in the rhythm. She hears the tune of the singing girl (Seshirekha). The girl sings as if Yellanna was singing it. (P: 122).

Soon, another set of problems plagued Seshirekha. Boodevi, Subhadra and Seshirekha were leading their usual lives in Yennela Dinni. Sivaiah works hard to cultivate his kindred. The desolation is in the form of a gloomy drought that strikes in Mala and Madiga communities.

Sivaiah starts digging ponds for his people. He buried Pittodu in the morning and Chinnammi in the evening and Boodevi on the second day. Venkatanarasu and sivaiah were digging the ponds even at the midnight. He dug for his kindred and for his neighbors. At every Subhadra is sitting like a terrible devil. She hopes not to die even if all are dying. She thinks, she must live until he (Yellanna) Comes back (P: 131).

In the aforesaid paragraph, we can witness the terrible state of starvation deaths on one side and

the love and deep affection for their near and dear ones. Subhadra enthusiastically awaits her husbands' arrival at the lost moments. They struggle to live by overcome the hunger, the untouchability, separation and discrimination.

When Seshirekha and Sivaiah abandon Yennela Dinni and join the migrant workers who plan to get the work at Buckingham canal, they face and taste once again the impact of the poisonous, peculiar and evil practice of untouchability. Even caste-Hindu workers do not agree to Dalits to work along with them.

Christianity begins in the lives of Sashirekha and Sivaiah. Martin saves the lives of Sivaiah and Seshirekha when they were utterly at the edge of death. After having observed the way of Martin and his wife, Saramma, they enjoy the life more than ever before. Sashirekha and Sivaiah strongly believe, they have been liberated meticulously because of Christianity, all the more so as they mingle with and become part and parcel of Martins' family. Since Saramma has no children, she looks after Seshirekha as her own kindred. Sivaiah moves along with Martin to preach the Bible, is baptized and given name as Simon, characteristically to manifest him as Christian identity.

The writer elicits the resumption of caste-discriminations in Christianity. In fact, the Dalits who convert into Christianity perhaps may get the mental emancipation but not the liberation from the shackles of Untouchability. Seshirekha gives birth to a son, Ruben, of whom Saramma brings up with more affection rather than his own parents. They have to confront another kind of segregation from the upper caste Christians. Martin and Simon could not bear out the adaptation of upper castes into Christianity. They strongly oppose the attitude of upper caste Christians'. The upper caste Christians support and originate the upper caste against the Dalit Christians. Nevertheless, the Dalit Christians have absolutely drastic and rational minds. They struggle for the wasteland in Valasapadu against the higher caste Christians. As a result Martin is brutally killed, Simon was terribly injured and the whole untouchable colony was burnt in which Sashirekha and Saramma also died.

Ruth

Ruth is the storyteller of the novel and has the key role. She has the capacity in the way of understanding and absorbing the complexity of society with a broad and analytical mind. In fact, the author projects, incorporates and presents his authentic, rational and radical ideas principally through Ruths character. She is depicted as progressive, intelligent and keen-witted. She was born and brought up in a complicated Dalit Christian family. She therefore develops critical skills to observe society. Her father, Francis is a preacher of the Bible at Hanumakonda. She studied in Madras, speaks English fluently, and writes it effectively. She used to write poetry and short stories from her childhood days.

Ruth is undoubtedly a brilliant woman. After she married Ruben, she trains to be a nurse and joins the Mission Hospital where her husband was working as a preacher. She is polite and greetings everybody. She wants to live along with her husband at Yennela Dinni, the ancestral home of her husband. Ruth and Ruben are not just adherents to Christianity. They actively participate in Communist movements. They in-fact, encourage Ramanujam who is a teacher as well as over and strict follower of Communist ideology. Ruth prepares food for Communist party members when they hold meetings, usually at her house.

Ever after the self-government, the plight of Dalits remains and goes on even without any marked change. They are not even mentally emancipated and moreover denied their due. Communist party enters and influences the lives of Dalits. A few of the upper castes are also attracted and joined the party in order to make a casteless and classless Society. Ramanujam now works in Aavalapadu village where the party conference is conducted in the center of the Mala's colony. Ramireddy makes a good speech. All the men and women of Mala's colony as well as few from Chakali (Washers colony comes to attend the meeting, There are several Congress workers in the village. There is a ban on the communists. So, the meeting was conducted very furtively with huge audience. They decided to fetch the water from the pond, which was barred for Dalits for many generations.

The women who descended into the Cheruvu (pond) are going still further. They felt that they should go like that. Those who are on the edge of the outside pond are shouting not to go further. But the insider of the pond, are not stopping. They felt like through the whole pond... (P: 217)

The writer visibly portrays the suffering of Dalits from the upper castes as well as from the police. The police mingled with upper-castes and neglect the basic right of Dalits. The Dalit women under the guidance of Ramanujam's in fetching the water from the pond, the upper castes cannot digest this amazing and sudden harass from the Dalits and file a case under the leadership of Venkat Chowdary against Dalits. As a result, the police create chaos in the Dalits colony, they beat everyone irrespective of whether they are old, women or children. The cries of children and the burning of the huts are the pure symbol of independence. After all for a drop of water the Dalits have to lose their huts. The clumsy act of the police and Venkat Chowdary is that they even didn't eliminate a pregnant who is just getting labor pains:

Sendri's pains increased. She was screaming. She had slumped to the ground. The midwife was looking only at Sendri silently. She did not remember the blows of the police. She did not take note of what they were asking. From the previous night an untouchable was struggling to fall on to this earth and to set his first sight at this violence. She was eagerly waiting for him. Definitely a male child. All the movements seemed to indicate it. Sendri was blaring sporadically The midwife asked everyone to stand around Sendri. That was it. All the women surrounded Sendri like a screen. Chettodu came there holding the Petromax lamp. He was about to peep inside saying, "Is she delivering"? The women saying, "Chi!", swarmed around Sendri like a hut. Chettodu's lathi blows were falling on them. The police were hitting them on their hands and legs. But that human hut formed around her did not crumble. Did not disperse. All their attention was on Sendri.

The lathi blows that were falling on them did not trouble them. They did not hear the swear words by the police. In all that ghastliness, an earsplitting cry...a baby boy's shriek. The first scream of an untouchable. (P: 226).

Ruth is not only a preacher of social ideology but also an implementer of her words. Her son, Emmanuel who is a teacher is attracted towards the communist party. He keenly observes the discriminations being done to the Dalits on the basis of caste. He renounces his family and joins the Naxalite movement at Srikakulam. In fact, he is a humble son and usually sits in their family prayer and pays listen to the songs, verses and prayer. How could he become a Naxalite and who would be onus for his decision? As per the writer, it concerns to us that caste bias is the prime cause. We can realize the authors' intensively emotional and experienced harsh voice on the existence of caste in the following Song:

In this country, the air that one breathes
has caste
The water one drinks has caste
The field canal that flows and the land that
yields harvest
have caste.
The school, the temple and the village
square have caste.
The food one eats, the house one lives in
and the clothes
one wears have caste.
The word one speaks has caste.
Literature and culture have caste.
Justice and the courts have caste.
The corpse and the cemetery have caste
God has caste. Devil has caste. (P: 227)

Ruth does not scare her son and moreover, she is ready to offer her son for the sake of Dalits' liberation and amelioration. When Emmanuel is killed in an encounter, Ruth and Ruben reveal great courage. They further admire the sacrifice of their son for tine poor. They feel proud of him to be killed for the Dalit cause. Ruth and Ruben now have their aspirations on Emmanuel's son, Jesse. When he grows up he also walks in the ways of his father and forefather. He dreams of fulfilling the aspirations of

his grandparents through the Naxalite movement and so he joins in the movement at Srikakulam from where he runs the activities very effectively. When he gives up his mother and old grandparents, the old hearts eagerly wait for him. The following paragraph is one of the best narrations in the recollections of Ruth.

Christmas came and was going away. The Christmas tree was being left alone Only Three shared the candlelight in that house. Ruth, Reuben and Mary Suvarta. That was it. Ruby would come to keep company. Reuben's voice was no longer heard in the church. Every Christmas day they would think. It would be so nice if Jessie came. Good if he came. Felt worried thinking like that. The night would pass by in worry and despair. But why this worry? Why these nights of despair? What did he do after all? Did he leave saying no to grandfather's love, mother's love or the love of one who loved him, no (P: 251).

The Dalit women have been really playing a great role in the liberation of Dalits from the caste discrimination and exploitation for a long time. Author portrays the socio-historical importance of Dalit women whose participation had been imperceptible in the upper caste writers' writings. G Kalyan Rao traces the true role of Dalit women as intellectual, independent, rationalist and revolutionary in the empire of Christianity, Communism, Naxalism and Dalit Movements.

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