



**‘UNTOUCHABLE SPRING’ WITHOUT AMBEDKAR’S TOUCH: AN AMBEDKARIAN CRITICISM ON MARGINALIZED PROPAGANDA OF LEFT WING EXTREMISM ON DALIT LIBERATION**

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**ABSTRACT**



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The paper focuses on how marginalizing Ambedkarism in any form will result not only a serious threat to the Dalit movement but also institutionalize another hegemonic ideology to suppress the Dalits in highly strategic way. From the novel *Untouchable Spring*, out of 18 chapters, 14 chapters are seriously dedicated to explore the agony of Dalits but when it turns to 15 th chapter, suddenly the story takes a climax of introducing Naxalism! Since no man, no –ism and no system has risen to the height of Dr. Ambedkar in showing the real cause of caste system as well as solution to it, neglecting him in any social movement is gross violation of natural justice. The paper intention is not at all to underestimate the role of the Marxist movement in India. But it is to state that Marxism cannot become viable and relevant without closely scrutinizing the scientific base of problem and practical way of executing the solution for the liberation of Dalits.

**Key words:** Dalit liberation, marginalizing Ambedkarism, left-wing extremism, caste struggle, class struggle, propaganda literature, imperialism

Kalyan Rao is a distinguished writer in Telugu focusing on Dalit writing. He is the author **Aruna**

**Tara** magazine, which portrays current and prevalent issues, related to Dalits in Andhra Pradesh.

He also holds an esteemed position in the **Vi Ra Sam** (Revolutionary Writers Association). The novel **Antarani Vasantham (Untouchable Spring)** has been appeared in serialized version in **Aruna Tara** magazine. Kalyana Rao's **Untouchable Spring**, as memory text and novel, deals with a family of Dalits for seven generations. The novel brings rich and vibrant cultural traditions of Dalit community. Probably it is the first Telugu novel which clearly formed Dalit identity. There is surge of an ideological war at every phrase of the novel. No doubt, it raises pity for all that is pitiable and rage at what a man has done to for their rights. But interestingly as an irony, this novel is ended with Marxist note as an answer to Dalit struggles. Out of 18 chapters, 14 chapters are seriously dedicated to explore the agony of Dalits but when it turns to 15<sup>th</sup> chapter suddenly the story takes a climax of introducing Naxalism! So far depicted problems of casteism are tried to show solved by communism that evolved from left-wing extremism! Interestingly, an atheistic and naturalistic based communism simply overlooks and compromises with lives of Dalit Christians and becomes silent in identifying the services rendered by Christian Missionaries! Caste struggle is shown as class struggle! The damage that was done to Dalits in the name of caste over centuries is seemed to be manipulated by simple compensation of Marxism by implementing land reformations.

Kalyana Rao's strategy of subduing and nullifying the role of Ambedkarism is planned at two stages: one is introducing circumstances that emerged communism as the way which are not historical and fail to provide logical background to its propaganda. Secondly, introducing Ramanujam character as the mouth piece of the novelist. Fifteenth chapter is the anti-climax in the novel. Through him the writer tries to justify the ways of communism. Ramanujam is the embodiment and assimilation of communistic ideology. The novelist successfully creates Ramanujam character from Dalit and non Christian background so that his idea of emerging communist from Hindu background is understood as inevitable culmination to offer solution away from Hinduism. But nowhere his sufferings were mentioned like other characters in the novel. Ramanujam's mere educational background that forced him to embrace

Naxalism excluding his experiences has not been successfully justified. He is not like Ruth and Ruben from Christian background who will be turncoat if they leave and embrace Naxalism. He is an outsider. Moreover he is portrayed as a highly idealistic that he does not seem to be get married. His eyes are always 'starry with dreams', dreams of the liberation of Dalits.

It is also very interesting to see how drastic changes have been occurred in Ruth and Ruben characters. They are projected as sentimental fools for their experiences of past six generations and started thinking revolutionary of late, especially Ruth forgetting, all the services rendered by missionaries!

"Tell me don't stop saying things you want to because I'm a Christian. First and foremost, I'm an untouchable.' (**Untouchable Spring**, P: 201)<sup>1</sup> The term communism had never been far way from Ruth. It was a term close to her. She saw communists. Spoke with to them. Knew about Russia, heard about China." (P: 206)

By using Ramanujam as a powerful and a central character to express his criticism of Gandhi and his followers and his despair, the novelist tries to replace Ambedkar with Ramanujam and two different ideologies respectively. Though Ramanujam is completely against Gandhi's ideology of Dalit liberation and behaves like a disciple of Ambedkar, his conclusion for plan of action is anti-Ambedkarian hence remains as counterpart to Gandhi and substitute to Ambedkar.

"Ruben asks Ramanujam how does he feel about the term Harijana used by Gandhi? He is quiet for a little while .He then asks, "In what way is the term Harijan better than Mala and Madiga?" He does not stop with that. He goes on to declare the word Harijan. This Brahminical society made Malas and Madigas into untouchables. With the word Harijan' Gandhi makes us orphans as well also (P: 169)

Ambedkar's revolutionary aspect is misinterpreted as an armed revolution instead of intellectual and

legal. Ambedkar calls Dalits to “**Educate, Agitate and Unite**”. Certainly Ramanujam’s misquoting Ambedkar’s sayings to fight as ‘tigers’ are a kind of call to advocate Naxalism. What Ramanujam says about Harijana movement by Gandhi that ‘this movement is not meant for either the upliftment of Dalits or absorbing them into the so called mainstream, but to protect the Hindu religion, applies to Naxalism too! The action is to stop a big section of the people among from converting into Christianity. At this juncture he remembers and endorses Ambedkar. He quotes from Ambedkar who speaks of the deceptive nature of Gandhi activists. As long as Malas and Madigas are like goats on the altar they will be killed. So they have to be like tigers.

“Dr Ambedkar has talked clearly about their deceit. So long as Malas and Madigas remain lambs, they’ll be slaughtered on the altar. It’s necessary for them to live like tigers”(P: 196)

But what Ambedkar believed is entirely different. Temple entry alone could not ameliorate the condition of the untouchables, as the economic aspects of their were far more rigorous than the religious ones. So Dr. B R Ambedkar questioned on this issue.

“Mr. Gandhi and his Sangh could have forgotten what the untouchables want. What the untouchables want is not education, but the right to be admitted to common schools. The untouchables don’t want medical aid; what they want is the right to be admitted to the general dispensary on equal terms. The untouchables don’t want water. What they want is the right to draw water from a common well. The untouchables don’t want their suffering to be relieved. They want their personality to be respected and their stigma removed. Once their stigma is removed, their suffering will go. This Harijan Sangh does not seem to have realised that”.<sup>2</sup>

Kalyana Rao proves the futility of entering into temple by any means and simply ignores

Ambedkar’s call for religious conversion from Hinduism which actually is his top priority in Dalit liberation. In fact, though Ambedkar started temple entry movement even before Gandhi, he faced so many problems by the fanatic Hindus. Later, Ambedkar changed his opinion from begging Hindus for allowing in to temples. Instead he gave a call to all Dalits to convert their religion and he accepted neo-Buddhism as a way out<sup>3</sup>. But it can be understood that Kalyan Rao’s intention is to show another solution. Gandhi believed that “Varnasrama is inherent in human nature and it does attach by birth. A man cannot change his *Varna* by choice”<sup>4</sup>. So, he asserted “Prohibition against inter-marriage and inter dining is essential for a rapid evolution of the soul.”<sup>5</sup> Therefore he held that Dalits were Hindus. This concept has been totally missed by Ramanujam who basically rejects spirituality in terms of Ambedkarism as he is communist. Nowhere Ramanujam suggests converting Dalits religion in the novel instead he shows the path of revolution, an undemocratic way of achieving rights. Moreover Ramanujam provokes Dalits to enter the Siva temple by force which might ultimately lead to bloodshed. Mr. V. T. Rajasekhar observes, “Conversion is the best, simplest, surest and the most non-violent way of not only liberating the Dalits but the country as a whole. It is as simple as that”<sup>6</sup>. How a communist is different from Gandhi if he doesn’t offer a solution against cast system?

From perspective of Dalit literature<sup>7</sup>, novelist seems to be no greater than other Dalit sympathetic writers in Indian writings. Doubtless that Ramanujam, having experienced personally and practically about the gimmicks played by the followers and activists of Harijan Seva Sangham under the guidance of Gandhi, disclosed the hideous and concealing canons of Gandhism. Though, Kalyana Rao unlike Mulkraj Anand tries his best to portray the protagonist as sharp, educated, knowledgeable and independent to react and confront with immense courage, misses the Ambedkar thought as the final solution to the problem. Mulk Raj Anand had Gandhi, mission and machinery in his mind and Kalyanarao has Maoism in his mind! Instead of introducing Ramanujam, Rao could have introduced Ambedkar as a hero, as Gandhi was depicted as a hero in many

Indian English novels, who led many agitations for the emancipation of untouchables. But Kalyan Rao does not even refer to him and consider his ideas seriously.

By replacing 'property' for 'self respect', Rao drives Dalit movement into Naxalite one. He exposes the hypocrisy, pretence, falsehood and insincerity in the activities of Gandhians as seen from a Dalit perspective, but unfortunately he simply keeps aside what Ambedkar is intended for the real emancipation of Dalits. Many times he raises the question of distribution of lands to Dalits. He simply rejects the false respect that Hindu community gives. In the disguise of rejecting false sympathy, the writer indirectly invokes Dalits to go for land reoccupation at the cost of regaining their self respect. He tries to replace property for self respect. But what a communist demands is only land. Ramanujam asserts,

"No need. No need for their sympathy. It's better to die than live with sympathy. Don't drink. Don't drink water like that. Don't renovate the ruined temples for our sake. If they have a little bit of sincerity in their reform, ask them to do something small. There is a lot of land adjacent the Malas a mound. The Malas and Madigas will occupy it. Ask them to watch and keep quiet. That's enough. Gandhi won't talk about this. These Harijan Seva Sangham workers too won't say a word about this. (P: 196)

Ambedkar was severely criticized as a 'liberal bourgeois intellectual'<sup>8</sup> for failing to understand as to why lower caste people are subjected to abject poverty and unemployment according to communism. He was attacked by communists for advocating the cause of the constitution. His idea of nationalizing property is misinterpreted as a new path and called is as 'rent business. That's why so called Christianized Ruben also writes in his diary,

"I am searching for that which my ancestors have lost. Grand mother told me that grandfather too searched like that. Mother said father passed away searching. Then grandmother too searched. Mother too searched. Now I am searching. I am searching for that

which my ancestors have lost. Along with me all my people started searching. As we searched and searched, searched the whole world and came that corner to this, the account of the lost land became clear.

The account of life became clear." (P: 196)

It is very interesting that what the novelist has depicted for last fourteen chapters in the novel has been forgotten. According to him what six generations have lost is not 'self respect' but only 'land'! A critical scrutiny of the novel doesn't prove that. Does really any affluent person or community or country enjoy contentment? As an answer to these comments Ambedkar questions,

"They (communists) propound that man is an economic creature, that his activities and aspirations are bound by economic facts, that property is the only source of power. They, therefore, preach that political and social reforms are but gigantic illusions and that economic reform by equalization of property must have precedence over every other kind of reform. One may contend that economic motive is not the only motive by which man is actuated. That economic power is the only kind of power no student of human society can accept."<sup>9</sup>

The novelist angry against Western imperialism has also reached its peak in the novel. The fundamental clash between Western capitalism against Russian Communism has been categorically discussed by the novelist. It is projected that Christianity is an offshoot of the capitalism that strategically manipulated to grab the property of Indians.

"It appears as if the British rule is breathing new life into the institution of the caste. You have heard about the self respect movement in Tamil Nadu. It justifies socialism. Perhaps it is the result of Periyar's Russian trip. It appears as if the influence of Soviet Russia is rubbing off very well on the intellectuals of this country. (P: 196)

As a Himalayan blunder, Kalyana Rao has ignored the fundamental difference between imperialistic British and Christian missionaries.<sup>10</sup> Christian

missionaries' contribution in alleviation of poverty, thought, culture, languages, development of political consciousness, women liberation, education, health care, music, humanitarian development, science and technology, nation building and above all Dalit liberation have been simply kept aside and projected as capitalistic activities. The novelist discusses the existing mistrust between Dalit Christians and Christians and fails to find out why the church is not interested in liberating the Dalits as a whole. Above all, he misrepresents that Church has virtually failed on its own but not with the interference of upper castes. That's why Ruben 'hated upper caste converts all the more' (P: 202). But he simply ignores what missionaries have done for his ancestors.

The novelist creates a kind of emotional attraction to jump into Naxalism by projecting it as the greatest service that can be done by a Dalit educationalist to their community. His conclusion of the story misses historicity of the Andhra Pradesh. As a Marxist he has to present 'historical materialism' as analysis of the incidents<sup>11</sup>. In the last chapter he suddenly gives a conclusion by giving a kind of alter call to Dalits to join Naxalism. He neither justifies the ways of Naxalism nor gives Dalits freedom to think over and take a decision. It is true that the mutual ground had been prepared for the evolution of the Dalit movement through its various phases, and its interaction with the Naxalite movement in Andhra Pradesh<sup>12</sup>. The contours and changes in the Dalit movement can be made through the impact created by the three major massacres against Dalits, in Karamchedu in 1985, Chundur in 1991 and Vempentta in 1998. Around these gruesome events, the Dalit movement shaped and reshaped its agenda, political discourse and strategy of transformation. In the course of its struggles against caste atrocities, it perceived the Naxalite movement as both an ally and at times a representative of the same caste hierarchy that society at large replicated. Initially, though both movements had some consensus between them and the issue of solidarity between these movements, therefore, becomes extremely crucial in shaping these movements, in course of time what happened is different. Dalit leaders protested and rejected the

ML group's<sup>13</sup> depiction of the incident as "landlords attack against labourers". Instead, they represented it as an attack by "kamma landlords" on "Madiga coolies". Along with demanding autonomy from the ML groups, Dalit leaders even rejected political representatives as well as bureaucrats from within the community. As a symbolic representation of an autonomous struggle, Dalit leaders decided that "only Dalits" would occupy the dais and address others on the issue of Karamchedu. It was decided that no upper caste should involve however, radical and sympathetic to the Dalit.<sup>14</sup>

Novelist doesn't discuss as to why after independence there was gradual fall in communist movement and how it gradually turned into various internal rivalry groups and now is on the edge of collapse. He tried to depict that the same fever seems to be continued. He could have justified the need of armed struggle instead<sup>15</sup>. He misses that how casteism has caused so many inevitable changes in the movement. Both communities, the delta Kammass with their valuable paddy lands and Rayalaseema Rich Reddies stayed above the movement, hence, B. T. Ranadive, concluded that Andhra's "wrong social base" with the working class base of the Tamil Nadu party and the "poor peasant" base in Kerala. By January, 1950, the **Cominform** journal had endorsed the "path taken by the Chinese people of 1950 and the Indian Communists apologized profusely to Mao. They also praised "New Democracy" as a model for India to follow, and replaced B. T. Ranadive with the Kamma Andhra Communist leader Chandra Rajeshwar Rao, whose family rice plantation sprawls over 290 acres of fertile delta land..<sup>16</sup> It is very interesting that Dr .B R Ambedkar in his brilliant article "**Linguistic States-Need for Checks and Balances**,"<sup>17</sup> had predicted that Kammass and Reddies would rule Andhra Pradesh and face each other as titans in Andhra politics. It is a historical fact that even communism could not escape from the prey of castism.

The novel missed all these incidents though he penned the novel after these historical incidents had occurred in Andhra Pradesh. Actually Ruth and Ruben witnessed incidents between 1950-80<sup>18</sup>. But the last chapter in the novel simply shifts to 2000 and he leaves everything between the periods. What happened between 1985 and 2000 is crucial in

AP history. Dalit movement was strengthened and Communism had gradually lost. The main reason for not presenting some other incidents happened in AP in the novel is evident that the Naxalism proved to be viable. The movement has neglected one of the intellects of the millennium and Samson of the wisdom who asserted Dalit position as human beings and advocated the cause of humanity in the form of democracy. No man, no -ism and no system has risen to the height of Dr. Ambedkar in showing the real cause of caste system as well solution to it. As it is understood by communist theoreticians and leaders that successful struggles that can be launched in a society of serious structural inequalities should not only be based on historical and practical grounds but also show the future path for the sustainability of the movement in order to offer complete solution. Somewhere in the world, Communism may be successful, but in India it became irrelevant to adapt new ideology to the changing political situation. The communists in India have not been able to form a 'coalition of the oppressed classes' because they failed to understand that Indian society has consolidated into castes and sub-castes. It is a class struggle in caste land. Can communists support the march of casteism and be seen in the company of caste and communal elements and still hope to be the party of the poor and deprived? This is the crux of the issue. Ambedkar questions,

“However, what I like to ask the Socialists is this: Can you have economic reform without first bringing about a reform of the social order? Will the proletariat of India combine to bring about this revolution? Men will not join in a revolution for the equalization of property unless they know that after the revolution is achieved they will be treated equally and that there will be no discrimination of caste and creed. Can it be said that the proletariats of India, poor as it is, recognize no distinctions except that of the rich and the poor? This is only another way of saying that, turn in any direction you like, caste is the monster that crosses your path. You cannot have political reform; you cannot have economic reform, unless you kill this monster”.<sup>19</sup>

The novel fails to justify as to why there are ‘exploiting castes’, ‘labouring castes’ and ‘ruling castes’ and the features that apply to ‘castes’ do not apply to ‘classes’. In our society one can call a caste ‘exploiting caste’. Not that every person of that caste consume/enjoy more or less the income that they receive by means of exploitation but everyone is casteist in ideology and belief. Most of the Dalits are poor but not upper castes. In upper castes like Brahmins, Kammas or Reddys, have political power, business, industry, education, media, entertainment and even any movements like Naxalism are absolutely in the hands of upper castes.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, we can call that ‘exploiting caste’ and ‘laboring caste’.

By creating two dramatic incidents in sixteenth chapter, Kalyana Rao accidentally gives gun to Dalits. But what Maoists argue is that the pursuits of parliamentary democracy is an exercise in futility and explain the necessity for armed struggle against the present ‘reactionary autocratic state’ given the strength of its armed machinery<sup>21</sup>. Democracy advocating Dalitism argues that Maoism is a kind of terrorism because it shoulders its ideology on “natural selection’ and “survival of the fittest’ and the jungle principle called ‘might is right’. In the struggle for existence, government only will win because it holds the highest power and weaponry. There is no question of preserving rights of weaker section hence the ideology of the movement is self contradictory. Contrary to this what Ambedkar argued is viable. That’s why he is praised as the humanist. What Naxalism does is dehumanizing individuals by voluntarily killing oneself in the forests with slogan, ‘Socialism or death’<sup>22</sup>.

Therefore neglecting Ambedkar in any social movement is gross violation of natural justice. Marginalizing Ambedkarism in any form will result not only a serious threat to the Dalit movement but also institutionalize another hegemonic ideology to suppress the Dalits in highly strategic way. It’s a turn coat attempt to manipulate experiences of Dalits! It’s a Dalit cult. Readers are to be given chance to apply the remedy of Ambedkarism. The conclusion of the novel would be highly appreciable if alternatives of Ambedkarian thought for Dalit

liberation along with Marxism are equally discussed. But there is no single trace of attempt to do it by the novelist. In the words of Karl Marx it is a 'marginalized propaganda'. That is why that **Untouchable Spring** misses the breeze of Ambedkar who gives life to the spring of life for every Dalit flower and every leaf of Dalit literature.

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9. **Selected Works of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar**, <http://drambedkarbooks.wordpress.com>,p:89
10. British became enemies to missionaries for their message of love and sent them back and prohibited missionary movement from England, (**India: The Grand Experiment** ,Vishal Mangalwadi, Pippa Rann Books, Mussoorie,1997) and social critic, dalit writer Bojja Bharathi argues that both are different. **Bharathi.B,Baba Saheb Ambedkar Biography**,(Hyderabad Book Trust,Hyderabad,1982 ),p:7
11. Historical materialism is a methodological approach to the study of society, economics, and history, first articulated by Karl Marx(1818–1883) as "the materialist conception of history". The concept looks for the causes of developments and changes in human society in the means by which humans collectively produce the necessities of life. Social classes and the relationship between them, plus the political structures and ways of thinking in society, are founded on and reflect economic activity.
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13. In India today there are many Maoist parties and organizations that either predate the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) or emerged from factions when the CPI-ML split after the death of Charu Majumdar. Three of them, the CPI-ML (People's War), CPI-ML (Party Unity), and the Maoist Communist Center (MCC), are currently engaged in armed struggle.
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15. Because the CPI (ML)-led agrarian movement in Telangana in the post-Emergency period and laid in first phase, (i.e. 1977 to the early 1980s) the emphasis was on mass mobilization and popular forms of protest around the issues of landlord oppression and coercion, the practice of *vetti*, land to the landless, usury, etc. The second phase, the beginnings of which can be traced to the 1970s and relied upon almost exclusively since the mid-1980s, was the armed struggle phase due to their ideological differences.
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