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The Plight of Dalits through Telugu Dalit Poems

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Abstract

There is a misconception among the common people that untouchability is a portion of our dharma and giving it up is a great sin. This belief is the root cause of untouchability. Several saints and front-runners in different periods such as Sri Ramanujar, Gurunanak, Basaveswara, Swami DayanandhaSaraswathi, Sri Narayanaguru, Dr.Ambedkar, Periyar, Madurai VaithyanathaIyer, M.C.Raja, dedicated their precious lives to eradicate untouchability and they struggled in all the ways to connect people beyond the chain of caste. The list is continuing without having a definite end. Despite the fact that all these great people worked to cleanse the strain on the fundamental philosophies of Hinduism, this taint still continues its role in society. Even today, those people who call themselves as upper caste people decline to treat the untouchables, the people who are called as lower caste by birth, as equals to their level. This paper aims at vividly portraying the plight of Dalits through the translated poems of Telugu Dalit literature.

Key words: Untouchability, Discriminated people, caste, Dalits.

Showing love and affection towards fellow humans is called as humanity. Caste, religion and race stand as hurdles to share this love for one another. If these three things are eradicated, there will bloom affection and equality. Several leaders in history taught the people to give up these sorts of ups and downs in society. Some great people went one step ahead and lived as great example for not practising the caste- based discriminations in day-to-day life. Though certain non-Dalit people raised their voice against the good-old caste system, which has been continuously discriminating a

group of people for many centuries, some people from Dalits are not ready to accept the works of non- Dalits figuring in Dalit literature. Certain notable reasons serve as supporting pillars to their proclamation.

In the basics of Hinduism, everyone knows that it has not preached any kind of discrimination to its followers. Due to selfishness, certain people during certain periods violated the ethics. Because of their selfishness, they started discriminating certain people in the name of their profession. In course of time, charity and dharma, which

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our ancestors followed, were destroyed in the nation and the seed of selfishness started growing gradually in the minds of the people. As a result, a group of people are still being oppressed in the name of caste. The upper caste people have killed the dreams, freedom and basic rights of the Dalits and sometimes so-called people have killed Dalits brutally for various reasons.

Charity and dharma are destroyed in the country,

Selfishness has established itself in the world.

They are killing us on the basis of caste,

In which shastras were the Panchamas set up?(Present Condition of Mala and Madiga)

In order to live luxuriously, the upper caste people forced the Dalits to do their (Upper caste people) works and they treated them as their bonding slaves. Those upper caste people decided what kind of works the lower caste people should do and what kind of works they should not do. Thus they decided the professions of Dalits and made them do those works continuously for centuries. Rangaswami describes the situation thus,

They decided the professions and placed us in these,

They called us servants and exploited us to the maximum,

They manufactured the difference of caste and subdued us,

They pushed us into slavish work and tortured us,

They separated us on the basis of profession, (Present Condition of Mala and Madiga)

Though the upper caste people treated the Dalits worse than animals, they used to love the upper caste. The poet used the past tense to represent the mind-set of the Dalits towards the upper caste people. Once upon a time, they could tolerate those injustices, but after a certain limit they could not tolerate this hatred and they started to reciprocate the same. He puts pen to paper as "Even though they abused and beat us, we loved them."

As a result of this caste discrimination in a particular religion, the discriminated people started to switch their religion with the expectation of equality in the newly-converted religion. A poet, Nakka Chinavenkaiah, who does not tolerate this caste system, at the same time does not want to give up his religion. Through his poem 'The *Plight of Harijan Women*', he explains the impact of the caste system in particular religion.

Give up untouchability.

We are converting because of caste. (The Plight of Harijan Women)

Like Nakka, another anonymous poet, he wants to make the things clear to the so-called people through his song. He expresses his thoughts on caste system in Hinduism in his song '*The Song of the Outcasts*', and makes the upper caste people to understand who the Dalits are. He appeals to them to treat the Dalits as their brother and sister like their own siblings. The poet stresses that the Hinduism is the mother and everyone who follows it is her children. In this case, he substantiates that upper caste people are the siblings of the lower caste people. If the upper caste people treat the Dalits so, the mother will be glad to see them and she will bless the so-called people and make herself rich in everything. The anonymous poet describes it thus,

We're Hindus like you; don't say we're dumb

We're Hindus and we go forward.

Treat us as your brothers, one of your own.

The mother will bless you and make you rich. (The Song of the Outcasts)

This caste discrimination should be eradicated completely from the society. So many people are working on it and are trying to change the perspectives of the people and bringing the changes gradually. Meanwhile, some people in the same society use this caste discrimination for their goodness. They show up to the world that they are, the messiah – born to uplift Dalits' life and to bring equality in society. In the recent protest in Chennai Marina beach against Jallikattu ban, it was observed that some people were singing songs on stage regarding caste system. The youngsters who gathered there proved themselves as ones going beyond the bounds of caste and religion and this was the case with some other state youngsters too. They raised many slogans by criticising the government as well as the company which filed the case against the new uprising sought to belittle our ancient culture. Those youngsters did not ask for one's caste, but a few persons in the crowd brought the caste name in their slogans and a crew were singing a song on stage upholding their caste name. Bijay Kant Dubey directly asks the pseudo-social reformers through his poem thus,

Those who want to promote Dalit literature,

May I ask,

Are they themselves

Or the problems and concerns of them?

What the agenda, what the motto behind,
Are they for the Dalits
Or for themselves...
...To burn on the streets
By pushing the country into the civil war,
Partitioning India as per caste, creed and sect lines
Between Backward India and Forward India,
Murdering genius? (What Is Dalit Literature? What
the Agenda Behind, What the Motto?)

An anonymous poet gives solution to this issue
through his poem 'The Song of the Outcasts', in which
the poet says,

We're all children of the Hindu mother
Let's live together in peace.
In good times and bad times
Let's stay together in love. (The Song of the
Outcasts)

We are all the Children of the mother Hindu and
we can live happily together in peace. In fact, people
should live together in good times as well as bad times;
the relationship between the Dalits and Non-dalits should
be tied with the rope of love. Both Dalits and Non-dalits
can stay together and preserve the humanity in the

world. In order to hold back the humanity, people need
not create any new epics. Already our ancestors gave us
enough wisdom through the Vedas and in the form of
many poems written in various periods. When the people
start following them, certainly the future generation
people will search the meaning for untouchability in
dictionaries, as it will be rooted out completely by then.

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