



Encapsulation of Gods and Religion in Bandhu Madhav's *The Poisoned Bread*

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Abstract:

Dalit Literature especially in short stories presented God, Deity as one of the methods of exploitation by the upper caste people of untouchables in religious point of view. Dalit literature was greatly influenced by the thoughts of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar special concerned with holistic exploitation of Dalits. Arjun Dangle edited the popular anthology of Dalit short stories in English language entitled *The Poisoned Bread*. The Poisoned Bread by Bandhu Madhav focused on how the gods were explored by the upper caste people to exploit the untouchables. Bandhu Madhav wrote in Marathi language, it was translated into English language by Ramesh D Dalit short story The Poisoned Bread represented a revolt against the upper caste people who exploited and threatened them on the name of God. The upper caste religious people from centuries together made Dalits as a religious slave. Bandhu Madhav in The Poisoned Bread presented a character of untouchable caste a small educated boy who question the gods. He interrogates Bapu Patil upper caste fellow, which gods untouchables should follows. The poisoned Bread presented god as a source of injustice for the Dalits. It was observed that the illegal tradition of offering blood and flesh of animals to the gods was common in society. Even on the name gods Dalits girls and women were sexually exploited by the upper caste people, the tradition like Devdasi represented the same in Indian society. This research focused on the rejection of spiritual salvation for worldly oppression instead advocating for education and to strive for self-respect.

Keywords: *Dalit Literature, exploitation, sacrifice, offerings injustice, Devdasi, Untouchability.*

Introduction:

Bandhu Madhav a well-known Marathi writer who was greatly influenced by the thoughts of Dr.B.R. Ambedkar. Bandhu Madhav carry forward the movement of



Dr. Ambedkar to create awareness among the Dalits about the multiple ways of exploitation. Dalit literature is basically the literature of protest against discrimination and exploitation. Through his writing he attempts to create awareness and revolt against the injustice and exploitation of the untouchable. Upper caste people explored Gods, Goddesses, and religious elements as one of the factors of religious exploitation of the untouchables. Bandhu, Madhav's short story entitled *The Poisoned Bread* was originally written in Marathi language later on it was translated in English and edited by Arjun Dangle. He published the popular anthology of Dalit short stories in English language entitled *The Poisoned Bread*. The title of the anthology is named after a specific short story within the collection known as *The Poisoned Bread*. This anthology focused on the oppression and emerging Self-consciousness Dalit Literature encapsulated the thoughts of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on gods as one of the aspects of the religious exploitation of the Dalits. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar was a firm disbeliever of the power of gods and its impacts on human beings. Dalit people were exploited in different ways from centuries together by the upper caste people.

Illustration:

Indian literature often represented gods as a moral and spiritual salvation of all the people including upper caste and untouchables. Gods are considered as omnipresent, omniscient and offers all kinds of comfort, peaceful and satisfactory life to the people. The exploration of gods in *The Poisoned Bread* and other short stories is a direct rejection of the framework and held responsible for the dehumanization and suffering of untouchables. *The Poisoned Bread* emphasises on the physical hunger, economic exploitation and humiliation rather than spiritual aspects. The concept of gods is presented in Bandhu Madhav's short story "*The Poisoned Bread*". Dalit character in the short story, Mahadeva asks questions to the upper caste Bapu Patil about the gods and their role for the untouchable people. Mahadeva is of the opinion that the gods are responsible for their oppression and suffering. The story portrays the harsh realities of caste discrimination and exploitation of untouchables by the upper caste people.

Hindu gods are explored as the tools of justification of these discriminations and exploitation by the upper caste people. Bapu Patil blames the Yetyala (grandfather) and Mahadeva (grandson) for the recent famine and drying up of the river Chandrabhaga. Patil thinks that the rain god got angry because of Mahar, one of the castes in the untouchables.



profaned religion and defiled Lord Vithoba of Pandharpur. This indicates even for the natural calamities Dalit's and untouchable are held responsible for the same and denies them the basic dignity and respect. Young educated boy from the untouchable caste and the grandson of Vetalya aja Mahadeva asks question to the upper caste Babu Patil, "What is the use of such inhumane religion? And "If all men are born from their mother's womb... then why Mahar and Mang created at all?" This is the direct challenge to the gods and his discriminative treatment only for the untouchables. If the gods created humans then he has bias views on untouchables. The story also shows the submissive nature old generation of Yetalya and a young revolutionary generation of Mahadeva. Old generation of Yetalya is of the opinion that the caste discrimination and exploitation of untouchable is in his fate and has a submissive nature and has a mind set to accept it. Yetalya says to Babu Patil that "I am your slave."

The young Mahadeva educated Dalit boy challenges the notion that god created all human beings. Then why the untouchable are treated worse than the animals and challenges the theory of Varna system (hierarchy of caste). The story showcases the hypocrisy of upper caste people who worship gods and treated untouchables inhumanely. The story also challenges the concept of god who is merciful is no more merciful for the Dalit's and untouchables. Yetalya dies after eating infected, stale poisoned bread even the animals refuse to eat it. The bread was mixed up with the urine of animals and fungal infected worse condition of the bread on which flies hovering over it. This shows omnipresent and merciful god is also stay away from the lives of the untouchable. Yetalya, grandfather's final words to Mahadeva also showcases not to find solace in religion. He advised his grandson to get education and liberate the untouchables from poisoned bread of the caste system. This indicates the shifts from divine salvation to self-empowerment and education for them.

The Poisoned bread mention the gods and goddess are not the figures of worship and salvation for the protagonists. It is the symbol of oppressive upper caste ideology which was rejected by the protagonist and find education as an alternatives for the same. Yetalya is of the opinion that the gods created religion and caste. Babu Patil critically blame the mahar and Mang untouchable caste are responsible for the drought in the area. The people of these caste pollute the religion abandoning caste and defile Lord Vithoba of Pandharpur. River Chandrabhaga is drying up only because of the untouchable who



demand equality and sitting together on the same table eating together and polluting the upper castes. Mahadeva comment on the use of the religion which differ one man with other and giving unhuman treatment to some. Even the touch of such people pollute the gods then why gods created such people.

Mahadeva asked to the Bapu Patil tell me name of gods whom we can claim as our gods. When grandpa said to the Bapu Patil that he is my grandson, who is educated. Bapu Patil is the representative of the upper caste is of the opinion that even if mahar or mang get LLB and become barrister no one you called you Brahmin. This statement of Bapu Patil also dismissed the ideology that the castes are made on the basis of work of the person which is generally said about Verna system of India. The writer trigger the concept that a person of Dalit caste is highly educated he is not given due respect by the upper caste people. Even the educated fellow from the untouchable caste is exploited and discriminated on the basis of his caste.

Bapu Patil portrays a story of Saint Chokhamela, who was not allowed to enter in the temple of Lord Vithoba. Chokhamela was kept at the foot of the temple of Lord Vithoba because he belong to the lower caste. Chokhamela was denied to enter the temple only because he belongs to the untouchable Mahar caste. He wrote many Abhangas and considered as one of the first poet of low caste in India. Even today if anyone visit to the temple of Lord Vithoba at Pandharpur witness that a small blue temple of Saint Chokhamela is in front of the gate of the main temple. Bandhu Madhav showcases the ideology of the upper caste people that the great Saint Chokhamela was denied then what about the common untouchable people.

God intended to have a definite hierarchy when he created Brahmin, Maratha, fisherman, weaver mahar mang Dhor and cobbler in that order. Bapu Patil is a firm believer of the caste system and think that it is made by god. A chappal is never worshipped in the place of god. Mahadeva replies to the Patil so you consider us a footwear. Mahadeva argues and said that we are made of the same flesh and blood as other human being. We are born after nine month in our mother's womb. There is hardly any difference between upper caste and untouchables. Untouchables are not something very strange human being directly thrown by someone from some specific place. He showcases the similarities between upper caste and untouchable people. Untouchable don't have different type of blood and flesh colour. He directly or indirectly want to say that the



untouchable have all the parts of human body as the upper caste people have. Hence there is no any kind of difference between upper caste and untouchables.

The dialogue between upper caste Bapu Patil and young Mahadeva focused on the concept of gods and their role in the creation of society based on the hierarchy of order. Varna system put forward the theory of creation of castes, as the Brahmins were born from the mouth as he is highly intellectual, priests, teachers, then come the second position Kshatriyas the warriors, rulers brave people and then come third position Vaishyas merchants businessmen and farmers, and Shudras labourers slaves servants to serve all other peoples.

Yetalya even after working for entire day was not given either the wages of work or some grain as a compensation of the work. He does not have the right to demand the wages from the Patil or grain for the entire day work. The writer focused the extreme situation of hunger, grandpa collect some breads which were put in front of the animals like cow, oxen, buffaloes. These animals are not ready to eat that bread hence animal's urine and dung amalgamate with it and even flies flying over the bread. Fungal infected bread was collected by grandpa and bring it to his home. He thanks to Bapu Patil for the giving him these bread. His wife prepared it and he ate the same. God is generally known as omnipresent and omniscient who is unable to see the wretched condition of Yetalya. He is suffering from food poison and dies. God is not merciful for the grandpa for his suffering and death.

Conclusion:

This research paper attempts to focus on the articulation of gods and religion in the Dalit short story *The Poisoned Bread* of Bandhu Madhav. These concepts of gods and religion is explored by the writer to indicate the exploitation of untouchable. Lower caste people from centuries together were not allowed to enter in the temple. If some disaster take place like drought, untouchable were held responsible for the same as they pollute the religion. Therefore gods and religion is play a vital role in the lives of Dalit as one of the way of exploitation. Yetalya grandpa suggest a remedy over such exploitation and discrimination untouchable is obtaining education. The characters in the story are the representative of upper caste and untouchable caste. Yetalya grandpa is the name of god Vithoba but the upper caste people used colloquial insulting language and called him Yetalya. People of untouchable caste are in search of gods whom they should call as their



gods for worship. There is no such god whom untouchable called as their god who helps and remove their suffering. The writer advises to all the untouchables through the character of Yetalya that education is the only remedy over suffering and exploitation.

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