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Editor-In-Chief
Prof. K.N. Shelke

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A detailed still-life composition featuring a quill pen as the central focus. The quill is positioned diagonally, with its tip resting on a scroll of aged parchment. The scroll is secured with a red wax seal and a red ribbon. In the background, a lit candle in a brass holder casts a warm glow. In the foreground, a glass inkwell with a quill inside sits on a wooden surface, alongside a red wax seal and a small wooden object. The overall scene evokes a sense of traditional scholarship and research.

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The Reflections of Humiliation in the Autobiographies of Vasant Moon and Omprakash Valmiki

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Abstract

Humiliation has been one of the key components in analyzing Dalit literature. Gopal Guru in 'Humiliation Claims and Context' has delved on the experiences of humiliation. The researchers in this paper endeavor to investigate the site of humiliation in the Autobiographies of Vasant Moon and Omprakash Valmiki.

Key words - Dalit literature, autobiography, disgrace, Vasant Moon, Omprakash Valmiki.

Dalit literature is the portrayal of the exploited untouchables in India having variety of groups among them in the dominant Hindu society. With the question of survival and loss of self-respect, dignity and imposed torture, misguided, deluded, suffered and historically excluded from main stream. They were refrained from basic needs, exposed to untouchability and related discrimination actually numbered up to three hundred millions. Dalits are also called as Outcastes, Pariahs, Panchamas, Atishudras, Avarnas, Antyajas and Namashudras in different parts of the country. Dalits were excluded, rejected, compelled to live in dirt, dingy and unhygienic area, were considered as polluted and were denied human rights and right to property, ornaments, possession of animals. This all led to unfathomable gross humiliation.

Upper castes were engrossed in conquering and subjugating the Dalits. According to Gopal Guru:-

“In the East, it is the notion of untouchability that foregrounds the form and content of humiliation. This endemic character of the concept of humiliation can be explained in terms of the social paradox produced by the socially dominant elite from different societies.” (Guru, 2009: 1)

During 1960s, Dalit Literature came into existence, with the prolific writers such as Anna Bhau Sathe, Baburao Bagul, Namdeo Dhasal, Raja Dhale, Arun K. Kamble, Daya Pawar, Arjun Dangle. Urmila Pawar portrayed Dalit's life and experiences of humiliation. All of them inspired by the greatest leader of Dalits: – Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the messiah of downtrodden people who rescued them from the clutches of the upper castes hegemony. The present research paper endeavor to study the Dalit personal narratives and the reflection of humiliation, pain with reference to autobiographies of Vasant Moon's

'Growing up Untouchable in India' and Omprakash Valmiki's *'Joothan'*.

Moon was a Government Officer on the Special duty for editing Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's sixteen volumes of writings and speeches. Moon's autobiography begins with the neighborhood and its people who are Mahar, "Untouchables" and are always placed at the lowest strata of India's caste system. Moon portrays that his community comprises Mahar's majorly and their houses were made up of earthen. Very few people in the community had two storied house, and if they had, they were some kind of merchants. Upper caste people humiliated Mahars in day to day life.

Moon's mother Purnabai was married to a man (Waman) who had four daughters and a son from his first wife. She was married to this kind of man because she met with an accident when she was young. This accident affected her mind and another reason was that her husband, Waman's father, Vithoba Raoji Moon was a well-known social leader of Nagpur. Moon lived with his father for some years, as he was a drunkard; Sadashiv (Moon's grandfather) brought his daughter and his grandchildren back. Thus Moon and his sister were nourished by his grandfather. Several times his father was taken out from the gutter as he was not in his senses due to drinking habit, thus Moon felt humiliated whenever he heard that neighbors brought his father home in that condition.

Moon's father (Waman) sold his two-storey house and five-room chawl (small house) to his elder brother and received huge amount of money. Moon and his mother were present while they sold the house. They thought that they would get some amount of

money after the transaction but they were humiliated, because his father gave him some coins and discarded from the property and money. Due to this incident, Moon had lost all the regards towards his father and he felt excruciating pain.

The experience of humiliation in the sacred house of education is reflected in Moon's autobiography, as there were few people in the community who got educated. However Moon got educated with the help of those community members, who were benefited by his grandfather Sadashiv. Atmaram Patil was one of them and he gave economical support for Moon's education and enrolled him in Patwardhan School, which came under the reputed schools in Central Provinces. Moon was a reserved kind of child in the school. He was unable to answer in the class, as he was afraid of his teachers. Thus one of his English teacher, Dev Master humiliated and cursed him in sixth standard that, "Moon, you cannot pass matric for ten years." (Moon, 2001:38)

This is due to the psyche of upper caste people who thought that, now they are in power and will rule and crush the downtrodden people. This was the first horrendous pain, which Moon had gone through and was humiliated in front of the class. However fortunately Moon passed Matric exam in 1949 and that English language which troubled him a lot was the language Babasaheb used in his Writings and Speeches. Moon got the opportunity to edit Babasaheb's Writings and Speeches and he successfully completed it. Thus we can see how Dalit's were tortured, subjugated by upper caste teachers. They were dominating,

and felt proud, honor, dignity while degrading Dalits.

Overall Moon's autobiography reflects the Mahar life of Nagpur and those humiliating incidents from which Dalits had suffered from hundreds of years. They were not paid for their labor and degraded in every situation.

The paper also discusses the experiences of public humiliation, denying dignity, human rights, right to property and basic needs that leads to loss of confidence and zeal to life. It has happened to Valmiki which is a sure case of humiliation and is vehemently brought forward by an eminent North Indian Dalit autobiographer; Omprakash Valmiki. Valmiki was born on 30th June 1950 in Barla village, Muzzaffarnagar district in Uttar Pradesh. He did M.A. in Hindi Literature. His autobiography '*Joothan*' (1997) is considered as milestone in Dalit literature, and it has been translated in English by Arun Prabha Mukherjee,

Omprakash Valmiki's autobiography majorly portrays Chuhra¹ basti². This is the place where all upper caste women came to do their morning ablutions without hesitating. Due to this, there was unbearable odor. This was the vicinity in which Valmiki was born and brought up. Valmiki's house was next to Chandrabhan Taga's cowshed. This is because they had to work/toil throughout the day at Taga's home and in their fields. On the contrary they did not get paid for their labor. Nobody called this Valmiki community with respect, but they were called as 'Oe Chuhre' or 'Abey Chuhre'. Humiliating, crushing downtrodden people brings joy to upper castes.

...untouchability is essentially an experience of wounding, of willful hurt, through which the outcaste body becomes a stranger to itself, and is ever ready to fall off the edge, give into anomie and fragmentation. Untouchability however is not an act of dramatic horror-it exists most powerfully in the everyday, is at home in the quotidian, and sustained and legitimized by a torturous semantics of tactility. (Guru, 2009: 97)

Untouchability existed in the northern part of India. If a person touches a dog or a cat, a cow or buffalo, it was alright, but if he/she touches a chuhra, gets polluted immediately. Valmiki learned alphabets in the open school run by Master Sewak Ram Masihi. His father quarreled with that Master, thus Valmiki was enrolled in the Basic primary school. It was 1955, when Valmiki started his education in dire consequences. Valmiki was humiliated, whipped by the Tyagi³ teachers and students several times. In the school, chuhra's were not allowed to drink water from the tap, thus they had to cup their hands to drink water. Valmiki was told by headmaster to sweep the whole school and playground but it was out of his reach, as he was weak and slim, he was sweeping the school since three days. On the fourth day, his father saw Valmiki and asked what are you doing? He replied with hiccups that all the teachers torture and humiliate me and sweep the school. His father said with confidence to the headmaster, my son will get educated here and others will come too. Thus they (Chuhra's) were crushed by the upper castes in everyday life.

During the wedding, chuhra's used to sit outside and wait for the leftover or '*Joothan*'. After all the guests and baratis⁴ had food till their hearts content, then the chuhras get their leftover plates in a basket. They were threatened and humiliated, if they ask for some more leftover food. The small pieces of pooris⁵ were dried in the sun, as to eat in the rainy season, when there is scarcity of food in the community. This was the time when Valmiki and his brother had the responsibility of grazing pigs and buffalo, because there was no food at home they had to work. Valmiki had passed fifth standard in dire situation. But his intention was to get educated. One day he came home and was very sad, his mother and aunt (bhabhi) asked what happened, he replied: "Ma, I want to go to school." (Valmiki, 2010: 14)

As soon as these words were heard by his bhabhi, she gave her silver anklet to Valmiki's mother and told to sell it and admit Valmiki in school. Valmiki embraced his bhabhi and wept. However his education was going on and his passion for reading started in eight standard, he had read Saratchandra, Premchandra and Rabindranath Tagore. This was beginning of Valmiki's literary sensibility. Upper caste people were disturbed to see Valmiki getting educated. Valmiki desired to iron his clothes. He went to a dhobi and that man refused because of his caste. If he irons a chuhra's clothes, then, tyagis won't iron their clothes from him. Those words pierced Valmiki's heart and he felt humiliated.

"One can somehow get past poverty and deprivation, but it is impossible to get past caste." (Valmiki, 2010: 18)

Valmiki was humiliated and disheartened, when his teachers used to ask him about how many pieces of pork you had but he thought of those days when Tyagi came in the darkness to eat pork. Surbhajan Taga's son Brajesh abused, threatened Omprakash, when he was on the way to school, he called out names and snatched his school bag and threw it in the mud. Omprakash washed his hands and feet, then dried the books and bag in the sun. This was another horrendous incident when Valmiki was in fury and pain but controlled himself. A person who had lost his self-respect has to face humiliation and tortured more deeply.

Administration and government as agents of humiliation:

Taga's and police used to trouble Chuhras a lot because they had power. They did not give their wages as well as captured their land. They kept one of their children as debt and then gave some grain. This all happened because one of the chuhra refused to work without wages. Police were controlled by upper castes. Some men of the village were tortured and whipped by upper caste people. Even a single man in the basti did not had the courage to ask the police, why these chuhra men are beaten brutally, which crime had they committed? Due to this Valmiki was disheartened and felt humiliated. This incident caused a storm in Valmiki's heart and it gave rise to his first poetry, '*Thakur ka Kuan*'. These are some bitter memories which Valmiki says he cannot forget. There is an incident when Valmiki was forced to kill a piglet, but he was unable to kill that piglet, then that owner increased the pressure on piglet's heart and kept it on the

fire. He ran towards his home and wept on his mother's lap. Valmiki says,

"If Ma had not looked after me that day, I think the blood vessels in my brain would have burst. The vortex of pain and disgust that I was caught up in at that moment had soiled my innermost self." (Valmiki, 2010: 46)

Surjan Singh was Valmiki's Mama's (Maternal Brother) son, who came from Dehradun and was his (Valmiki's) classmate in ninth standard. Surjan used to dress like upper caste and came to college; this was unbearable for the upper caste teacher. One day he was humiliated in front of the class and was brutally beaten by Phool Singh Tyagi; Physical education teacher. Tyagi thought about Surjan that how can a Chuhra dress like an upper caste man. Valmiki had faced this type of teacher in his school and college life. He says,

"I had to live in this terror-filled environment. How will those who have never suffered the needle pricks of hatred and jealousy feel my pain? Who have never endured humiliation?...At times I feel I have grown up in a cruel and barbaric civilization" (Valmiki, 2010: 48)

Now these are the upper caste, elite people who were degraded, humiliated from the hands of imperialists and used to do all sorts of work as told by them, because then, they were not in power. Thus it is clear, that they are humiliating, discriminating, segregating the downtrodden people and taking the revenge of their own. So said by Gopal Guru:

"...the Dalits and the blacks, for example, chose to remain on the probation of the upper castes and the whites respectively. This is because they lacked the moral courage to take the risks and challenge their hegemonic rejection by the socially dominant...developing courage provides the necessary moral conditions to produce the counter rejection."(Guru, 2009: 221)

"THE LAST PART OF MY NAME, which is also called the surname, has landed me in a lot of dire situations because of its functions as a marker of caste." (Valmiki, 2010: 124)

Thus, both autobiographies ends with the theme that due to education, their life changed and humiliation is the persistent theme in Dalit autobiographies.

Notes/References:-

1. Chuhra- People having traditional occupation of Sweeping.
2. Basti- Community.
3. Tyagi/Taga- Brahmins/Upper Caste.
4. Baratis- Guests arrived for Marriage
5. Pooris- Small round bread cooked in oil.

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