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DALIT SENSIBILITY IN DEVANURA MAHADEVA'S FICTION



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ABSTRACT:

Devanura Mahadeva is one of the most famous Dalit writers in Kannada literary world. He is also regarded as a perfect artist. The specialty of his writing is not to directly attack on the oppressed category rather he makes his readers to understand the sensitivity behind the exploitation. Very smoothly he focuses on the loopholes of the system. Leaves message how the imbalanced society can be corrected.

KEYWORDS

Dalit Sensibility, community, exploitation, marginalization.

INTRODUCTION :

In response to the cognitive value of his writing, it naturally offers a wide variety of social and cultural interpretations of his community. In this paper, I wish to focus Mahadeva's sensibility on particular Dalit issues like poverty, hunger, exploitation, marginalization, suppression, helplessness, existentialism, cruelty, violence and compromise have been widely brought largely in his writing. So his novels are deeply analyzed from the standpoint of Dalit sensibility. In all his fiction, he seems to present the existential problems of his community so they deal with the facts of life and explores the sensibility of the characters.

Devanura Mahadeva's first work is *Dyavanuru*, a collection of short stories. This book includes seven short stories and each story is unique in dealing socio-economic and caste based problems. The characters of his stories are rich, poor and laborers. The most predominant characters are drawn from the Dalit community. Some of them are educated and some others are scamps or illiterate bonded laborers. They are projected with their inherent qualities. Most of the stories are set in villages and they focus on survival problems of the poor Dalits.

"Marikonadavaru (One Who Sold Themselves)" is one of such stories, deals the problem of existence and exploitation. In the story, Kittappa and Gowda symbolize the exploiting class and pretend to be as benevolent. The story exhibits the degree of poverty which forces the Dalit couple to compromise with the situations. "The gifted blanket by the landlord's son Kittappa has covered Lachumi's body and the gifted house has covered both the Dalit Beera and his wife Lachumi". The landlord's son Kittappa takes the Dalit couple helplessness for granted. He uses Bheera's wife Lachumi for his sexual pleasure whereas Bheera is silent because they have been provided food and shelter. He does not protest for both reasons. One, the helplessness of being poor and weak for drinks. Second, he is well aware of losing comforts if he protests.

This story shows, the most Dalit men are drunkards and women are oppressed. The present example of Bheera and Lachumi represents the most Dalit couples in the village either like Bheera or like Lachumi. The Dalit woman is triple oppressed as a woman, wife and laborer. She is not only oppressed by her husband but also by the landlords. Some critics have the opinion that, at least Bheera has an agency to scold Kittappa when he is drunk whereas his wife left with no alternatives to get relief from oppression. Thus the story concluded with the politics of power to rule the body and minds of the Dalits and the tolerance of the oppressed Dalits. The exploitation of the story reminds us the famous metaphor of Hegel, "Master and Slave" relationship. Two consciousnesses meeting each other in a life or death struggle in this metaphor starts when they are at the lowest and most primarily level as single elementary consciousness.

The words of narrator's uncle, "You ask why? Don't you know what fatal mistake you have done? Neither I could have reputation nor you because of your love with the upper caste girl? Hope you can understand the importance of caste since you are an educated boy. So don't act like a senseless boy, go go", in "Ondu Dahanada Kathe (Story of a Funeral)" prove caste is an important identity for everyone.

This story shows the solidarity of caste practice in villages by highlighting the caste practice is more important than food and shelter to everyone. The main character of the story is a young educated Dalit employee. It focuses on the predicament of the hero in selection of either his beloved lingayata girl Kamali or his family. The protagonist, being sensible and modern thinking, marries Kamali. Both cross the barriers of the caste system but the hero suffers for the permission to attend the cremation of

his beloved grandmother. The story ends with the decision of the panchayath for not allowing the protagonist to attend his dear grandmother's funeral just because he got married to an upper caste girl Kamali. The writer focuses on the mean mentality of his community people who are equally worse like upper caste people in maintaining caste system. The story ends with the ego of the panchayati people and the death of the humanity.

The story, "Datta" (Given Away) exhibits the impact of modernity on the Dalit family and how it destroys relationships. Ananda, is an adopted kid always ill-treated by his adopted parents. He is in shock finding his biological parents' prime concern for his property inherited from his adopted parents. Psychologically disturbed person's hopes are shattered by them. His desire to find peace with his real family members is destroyed completely when he finds his identity is measured with money. It happens because of modernity and its influence on his parents. They fail to understand his psychological status hence they do not become agencies for his mental problem to solve it. The boy leaves home without intimation with great disgust.

"Amasa" deals exclusively the Dalit experience. The critic, T.P. Ashok says, "The story, "Amasa" has opened up with another phase of the Dalits' life. It takes shifts from the representation of Dalits as the illiterate, suppressed and exploited to the deep-seated glorification of their cultural skills. He has given a new dimension to the cultural life of his community." The cultural dance of Amasa and Kuriyiah during the Marihabba (festival of Mari) thrills everyone and even an upper caste issueless Bangari wishes to have his type of son. But landlord's compliment about Amasa's dance foresees the future master and slave relationship to suppress the art of Dalits. So the praising itself is the deceit way of the landlords using the innocent people like Amasa and Kuriyayya as their bonded labors.

The story, "Mudala Seemeyali Kole Gile Ityadi (Murders in Mudalaseemeyali)" does not represent the actual murder but represents the mental death of a Dalit Rangappa. Rangappa's family suffers out of hunger. Empty stomach Rangappa is forced to cut firewood when he comes to the landlord's house in asking grains in order to protect his family from hunger. The landlord's wife Gouravva insults saying that it is his routine lament so she asked him to cut firewood only when she gives the grains. Sick Rangappa, he takes that work in order to get the flour from her to feed his family. He does not care his health and he fell down due to hunger. Gouravva's words, "What happened?", with slow voice he answered, "Don't have energy to cut the firewood madam." The story shows how privileged caste woman gets masculinity to rule the Dalit man.

The story shows the insensitiveness of upper caste men and women to force the Dalit people to work for them. The whole incident shows rich people don't understand the fundamental problem, hunger of the poor. Gouravva's words, "Ayyo God, what should we eat to-day without firewoods, so we should eat stalk or what?" This is more open than the other characters in the collection. The central character of the story is a Dalit but the social ambit of the story is much larger. Damabaru Bandaddu (the Arrival of tar) stands out from the other stories in the collection because of the larger interests of the writer who is now concerned with the changes taking place in his rural environment.

Odalala and Kusumabale are novels. Already critics have identified Odalala is Devanuru's best work. It deals the fundamental problem of a Dalits is hunger. The novel, Odalala centres around Sakavva' family. The hunger lives in her family. This forces Sakavva's eldest son Kalayya for lifting a bag of groundnut from Sahukara (landlord) Ettappa's mill. With regard to the complaint filed by the landlord, the police raids Sakavva's house in search of stolen bag but returns with no evidence since they have no instrument to measure the depths of hunger. The members of Sakavva's family have an

advantage over their oppression they know their ways but the police fail to solve the mystery of the missing bag.

Odalala presents two contrasting status of Sakavva's family. It is this contrast that gene-rates the ironic vision of the novel. The first five sections provide pictures of relationship within the family, which is broken up into three units but still maintains a sort of domestic solidarity under the stewardship of Sakavva. As she appears before us at the beginning of the novel, she is frustrated by the disappearance of a cock which belongs to her. But she is proud woman. When, Sannayya, her second son demands for his share in the family property she fires back, " What did you say? Say it again ...You press for your rights, right? do you know, this is my property understand? I have earned it with my own hands. I was born a woman, all right but no man could beat me in hard work. She ridicules Kalayya, the eldest son who has failed in his duty of keeping the family together and Sannaya takes to task for allowing him-self to be dictated by his wife. From this point of view Devanura's Kusumabale marks a step forward.

Sakavva has real affection for her daughter Gouramma because she is wedded to an irresponsible idler. Her affection is extended to sickly Duppaty commissioner along with her last son, Shivu and her young daughter Puttagouri . When she announces that she would leave all her property to Shivu, Sannaya and his wife Chaluvamma who have an eye on it, burst with anger . Kalayya who has no children of his own saddened by the whole drama. Shivu and Puttagowri oblivious to the domestic strife, busy themselves drawing pictures of peacocks on the walls. Sakavva finds immense solace in dreaming of grandson's future. The gloom temporarily lifts when Kalayya brings home a bag of groundnut stolen from Ettappa's mill. The whole family is united in the unexpected feast. Domestic solidarity prevails over pretty differences and quarrels. Even a neighbor who makes her casual call has her share. This scene of solidarity has a great symbolic significance in the novel.

The arrival of the police on the scene changes the situation radically. Sakavva's family loses its dignity under the reductive authority of the representative of the law if Sakkavva falls from her domestic eminence and becomes comic. The language too changes. The humil-iations of Shivu and Puttagowri at the hands of the police is presented in serious and pathetic tones but the predicament of the officers of law who are unable to solve the mystery of the missing bag invites irony and comedy . Sakavva who seeks the help of officers to get back her lost cock becomes an object of pity and ridicule.

Kusumabale spreads over past, present and future and it includes in its structure what Soyinka has called the fourth dimension. The events that take place in the holageri, the un-touchable colony are limited to the present but the relationship between Yada and Akkama-hadevi involves the events of the past as well. The children in the story –Kusuma's baby and the child in Kempji's womb –belong to the future. The dialogue between the Jivatma and the cot, the comments of the Jothammas as well as the rituals of birth and death belong to the fourth dimension. This inclusive vision is unique to Kusumabale. The adventures of Amasa and an upper caste Yada are the focus of the novel. The central event of the novel is the un-ion of Channa and Kusuma. This union is not just a stray incident but repetition of historical patterns of the Dalit and non-Dalit relationship.

His sensibility in the novel comes from the community and has the ability to articulate its complex life. It is open to all kinds of experience. The innocent joy of children like Prasad the touching sorrow of the lives of Kusuma and Iri. The adventures of Yada and Gurusidmava and others fight against the forces of oppression. The community is reflected in the narrative mode. The narrator employs several forms of folk narration in the management of his narrative. The language of the novel too has the same flexibility.

Devanur's novels known for the nature of revolt. Normally the characters protest directly same time contributing to the political assertion by presenting 'facts' of one's life to contest casteism. Odalala was a tremendous success when it appeared and it has now assumed the stature of a modern classic. But Kusumabale though experimental in nature is of greater significance in the context of dalit writing. No other Dalit writer has shown such a sure grasp of the entire culture of society as Devanur has shown in this novel. We will have to go to African writers like Wole Soyinka in search parallels.

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