

DELINEATING THE DALIT PSYCHE IN MEENA KANDASAMY'S SELECT POETRY

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Introduction

The Dalit Psyche

Dalit is a historical, political, social and cultural construct. Dalit is a trap of politics played by the so called elite, upper, rich and the hypocrites. Dalit represents and symbolizes the victimized, suppressed and the rebellious who strike back like phoenix. Dalit showcases the pains, poverty, helplessness, powerlessness, despair, hopelessness etc. The periphery is a platform where the Dalits, women and the downtrodden emerge. Every dalit experiences insecurities and traumas according to the different situations of life and to tackle them he/she needs self defense mechanism.

The dalit psyche is proved to be different, as a dalit has to struggle through many harassments and inequalities. But when a dalit comes of age, things change. The frustrated dalit explodes and transforms as a rebel which is the first step of self defense mechanism. If a dalit has to survive, it can be only through protest and rebel. If not every dalit is and will be victimized in grip of caste politics. A dalit needs the defense mechanisms to survive and exist in the unequal society. A dalit exists if he/she defends.

Defense mechanism when applied to the dalits, ostracized and outcaste, becomes the only solace and weapon for the wounded and the shattered to survive. To understand the dalit defense mechanism we need to first analyze the dalit psyche as it is different to other self defense mechanisms. This mechanism is constructed and is the result of well laid caste and tradition which have been suppressing the dalits. The words dalit and defense could appear to be antonyms, since the history. The history of dalits exposes the lack of defense in a dalit's psyche which could be evaluated as collective consciousness or unconsciousness. Dalits suffered from inferiority, suppression, humiliation, shame, etc which hindered the growth of their mind and mentality.

Defense Mechanism

Defense mechanism is a psychological strategy used by people unconsciously to cope with harmful or stressful situations. Defense mechanism is an automatic reaction, in defense with one's own self. In psychology it is a mental process initiated unconsciously to avoid experiencing conflict or anxiety. Every organism and living creature has been inculcated with inbuilt self defense mechanism. It's a natural trait found in the human psychology, structure and behavior. Defense mechanism is a necessity which is many times needed for existence.

In psychology, it is discussed as follows.

“Defense Mechanism is a psychological strategy used unconsciously by people to cope with harmful or stressful situations. Mental defense mechanisms were proposed by Freud and were thought to help an individual cope with reality and maintain self-image. Defense mechanisms are the method by which the ego can solve the conflicts between the

super-ego and the id. The use of defense mechanisms is helpful if moderately used. The use of defense mechanisms may attenuate the conflict between the id and super-ego, but their overuse or reuse rather than confrontation can lead to either anxiety or guilt, which may result in psychological disorders such as depression. Healthy individuals normally use different defenses throughout life. An ego defense mechanism becomes pathological only when its persistent use leads to maladaptive behavior such that the physical and/or mental health of the individual is adversely affected. The various defense mechanisms include repression (originally known as suppression), regression, reaction formation, projection, rationalization, displacement, and denial. Defense mechanism, in psychoanalytic theory, is a group of mental processes that enable the mind to reach compromise solutions to conflicts that it is unable to resolve. The process is usually unconscious, and the compromise generally involves concealing from oneself internal drives or feelings that threaten to lower self-esteem or provoke anxiety. The concept derives from the psychoanalytic hypothesis that there are forces in the mind that oppose and battle against each other.

Depiction of Dalit psyche in Dalit literature

The struggles for survival and the journey to the center from margin have been consistently observed in Dalit literature. But, the accomplishment of the center has still remained aloof. Nevertheless, the striving struggle continues with hopes to attain the deserving center. Dalit writers like Arun Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Laxman Gaikwad, Sharanakumar Limbale etc, have

come to the forefront and have paved the way for younger writers to establish themselves and occupy the center. Dalit literature is known through autobiographies and movements. Every dalit autobiography is the epitome of defense mechanisms. They portray how the dalits survived through their defense mechanisms. It was the great philanthropist Dr. B.R. Ambedkar who taught the dalits, defense mechanisms like protest, fight against the atrocities, being educated, demand the equality rights and not to be victimized in the web of caste politics. The similar traits can be witnessed in every dalit work especially the autobiographies.

Off late, the Dalit literature has been witnessing a progressive change not only through autobiographies but also through poetry and novels. Dalit literature is enriching itself with women writers as well. One of those women writers is Meena Kandasamy, a dalit poet, feminist and a social activist. Meena has written a few collections of poetry which stand unusual and bold. Her poems are the voices of dalit and women against the non-dalit patriarchal society. Meena, through her poems deconstructs caste and gender and reveals the hypocrisy of center. Her poetry is feministic and frank where one can notice the pains and struggles of a dalit woman. Her poems exemplify the dalit defense mechanisms in a very strong way. The poems “We will Rebuild Worlds” and “This Poem will Provoke You” by Meena Kandasamy are the epitome representing the history of dalits, how they will rebuild it and the politics of caste and gender.

We Will Rebuild Worlds

In the poem “We will Rebuild Worlds”, the poet expresses the deep desire of rebuilding the shattered world of dalits. In the beginning of poem she discusses the history and past of the dalits, and how they were outcasted and rejected. The poem clearly portrays the pains of being a

dalit. But in the second half, the poet grows hopeful and rebellious to come out of the grip of caste. She is avengeful and furious in her expression which showcases her wrath, frustration and hopelessness. As the poem opens, the poet begins using the phrase “we will rebuild worlds” which is an act of defense mechanism and portrayal of dalit psyche. Then she explains what the dalits have to rebuild and from what. The worlds belong to the past which are shattered glasses from the remains of a disaster. The memories shout of a disgraced, degraded and outcasted untouchables living on the margin who are denied life. The poet feels that to reveal the past one would need an encyclopedia or a Steven-Spielberg special effect to reproduce the past.

In the first half of the poem, the poet ponders upon how the dalits were charred to death for asking a handful of rice, how the children were electrocuted for playing in the well, poured pesticide in ear and nose, hanged the lovers to death in public for not maintaining caste lines and the dalits were brutally murdered and massacred. In the second half, the poem takes a twist. In these lines the poet is avengeful, defensive and rebellious. She defends by elucidating that the dalits promise to wipe away all the brutal memories, deceiving smiles, botoxed faces and soulless worlds. She declares that the dalits will singe the skins which are castes, races hypocritically known for style and sophistication. But the poet is hopeful and defensive when she states that the dalits will learn, learn to fight and revolute. She compares the tragic past of dalits to a volcano which can blast anytime with revenge. The lava i.e. the humiliation and the frustration will never settle or solidify. This revolution will begin with a song, a dance where dalits unite not succumbing to threats, where dalits transform themselves into fury and wrath like a forestfire scaring the cowards and politicians. It will begin with the thundering slogans which chronicle our voiceless past. The scream will never subdue until the breathless words breathe

life, until India answers the two questions. What is the caste of a sperm and what is the cost of life. The poem ends with questions where the readers have to realize the answers. When the second half of the poem is analyzed, the dalit psyche and defense can be witnessed in their protests, fights, voices and screams. The other defenses also include revenge, unity and love.

This Poem Will Provoke You

“This Poem Will Provoke You” is an unusual poem in which the poet deconstructs the religion Hinduism and misogyny. The poem is expressed in bold and frank form where the poet openly and fearlessly condemns the politics behind the construction of religion and patriarchy. It outrightly discusses the banned and controversial aspects. This poem also evidences how the Hinduism and RSS denigrate and deconstruct the dalits in the name of religion and power. She discusses several aspects like, sex, gender, mythology and the vices of society and exposes the politics through this poem. In this poem the dalit defense and psyche can be witnessed through the reactions of the poet. Every line of the poem is a sentence in which truth is nailed. The narration and style are straight and overwhelming. The very first line of the poem explains that ‘This poem is not a Hindu’. The poet outrightly that the poem is a haphazard presentation of heresy on Hinduism which practices evil.

Then the poem moves on to explore the sexual aspects which are feministic like, praising Lord Krishna who perches on the naked women, women hungry of sex, that poem supports sexual connotations, puts phallus back and compares shivalingam to the male sexual organ which doesn't erect. In the next lines the poem reveals that Hinduism should be condemned for practicing untouchability and misogyny. The poet writes that her poem upgrades worshipping

monkey, a dalit god and horse for sex. She denies that this poem will not culture the jungle, i.e. sophisticate the dalits but rather, it would do the opposite, jungles the culture. The poem declares a political fact that RSS is BJP's mother. There are also references of sections like 153A and 295A which the poem will not practice as the sections uphold the religion and punish those speaking against a religion. The poet clarifies that she breaches these sections as a dalit because the Hinduism is against the dalits. Dr. B.R.Ambedkar substantiates about Hinduism as,

“In the Hindu religion, one cannot have freedom of speech. A Hindu must surrender his freedom of speech. He must act according to the Vedas. If the Vedas do not support the actions, instructions must be sought from the Smritis, and if the Smritis fail to provide any such instructions, he must follow in the footsteps of the great men. He is not supposed to reason. Hence, so long as you are in the Hindu religion, you cannot expect to have freedom of thought”.

Then the poem moves on to discuss Ramayana as a hetero normative novel, sex between Sita and Laxman, condemns rape of Shurpanakha and Rama's suspicious mind. The poem supports eating beef which is the food of dalits. Dr. B.R.Ambedkar's statement on eating beef strengthens the point here. He writes, “The Touchables, whether they are vegetarians or flesh-eaters, are united in their objection to eat cow's flesh. As against them stand the Untouchables, who eat cow's flesh without compunction and as a matter of course and habit”.

The poem is sarcastic enough to laugh at the innumerable castes of thirty three million hindu gods. The poet ends the poem with a reality that this poem is difficult to publish and that it will never tender an unconditional apology.

The dalit psyche represented in this poem is very clear. The poet defends by condemning Hinduism which degraded dalits for several eras, by revealing the bitter truths of this religion. The poet asserts the reality of the hindu gods, especially Krishna and Rama who are the lords of the upper castes known to be against the dalits in mythology and refers to the monkey as a dalit god. Her defense is very true when she condemns Hinduism for untouchability. The defense continues when she writes that this poem should be the hindu canon, culture, Vedas and scriptures instead. Eating beef, testing the paternity of Hinduism, suttee practice, Godse of RSS, killing Gandhi are the other aspects where the dalit defense is strong and feministic against Hinduism.

To conclude, the two poems “We Will Rebuild Worlds” and “This Poem Will Provoke You” are the epitome of dalit defense mechanisms and dalit psyche.

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