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Yendluri Sudhakar's Darky: A Voice of Resistance and Identity

Dr.J.Satyanarayana
Asst. Professor
Dept.of English
(UASC- Subedari)
Kakatiya University
Warangal, Telangana, India.

Abstract

Any liberation movement that finds its voice in literature is a protest literature that speaks of a language of resistance. Anti-hegemonic struggle, in any context, is marked by protests and rebellions, until it reaches a point of empowerment of the dispossessed. A poetics of resistance is created in the process of the literary field which records the angry voices of the oppressed. African literature in English, and African-American literature during the periods of segregation bear close resemblances to the Dalit voices of protest in India. History is sought to be reclaimed and culture re-figured in all the above three categories as a means of subversion. Dalit literature is predominantly a post-Independence phenomenon. It is a natural corollary of the Dalit liberation movements which first appeared in Maharashtra under the championship of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Soon Dalit writers have created a distinct, powerful corpus in different genres, in different Indian languages offering a re-interpretation of Indian myths and legends. The present study attempts an analysis of Telugu Dalit poems of Yendluri Sudhakar's Darky since it deals with the aesthetics of subversion tracing the note of suffering and protest.

Keywords: Apartheid, Black, Caste, Community, Society, Race, Equality, Liberty, Justice, God, Religion, Struggles, etc.

Introduction:

The Dalit literature always represents the collective consciousness of Dalit community aiming at the eradication of social, cultural, economic, political, religious and racial discrimination, and demands the reorganization of the society for the social and national integrity. The Dalit literature can be traced deep rooted, longing for self-respect, liberty, equality and identity. This challenges the segregation of the society on the basis of unethical and asocial practices. The caste system which is the base of disintegration of the nation is challenged at every level of Dalit writings. The caste which made the Indian society lame, created many hurdles itself for its progress against global aspirations. Like the apartheid literature, it voices the marginal people's voice that demands the equal life and opportunities in all the ways.

The caste system in the Hindu and other Indian religions deprived the Dalits of all kinds' freedoms, and very importantly of speech for centuries. Thus they remained mute and voiceless for hundreds of years seeking the opportunity of proving themselves as scholars like main stream writers if the education is given. Like the writings of the freedom fighters that who vocalize against the British autocratic rule, the writings of the Dalits contain the seeds of protests and revolt against the age old caste system and the exploitation carried in the name of caste. Thus the way the British rule was challenged by the mainstream writers, the Dalits in India challenged the hegemonic and established literary tradition of the caste Hindus by constituting their own literary segment as well as their communal legacy over the Dalits.

The present article focuses on the emergence of Telugu Dalit literature and its existence in the contemporary literary period in the country. It also deals with the detailed descriptions of political, social

and literary movements with regard to the life of Dalits both in pre-independent and post-independent India.

Evolution of Telugu Dalit Poetry:

Gurram Jashuva's Gabbilam (The Bat) was perhaps the first attempt in Telugu to express the pain and hurt of the Dalits in a moving manner, voicing protest against the centuries–old exploitation and oppression. Stretching from the late 1980s through the 90s Telugu literature witnessed the emergence of bright and committed Dalit writers creating excellent works of art. The publication of a poetry anthology, Chikkanavulunna Pata, (The Thickening Song) in 1995 is considered a milestone in Dalit literature. It is followed by another anthology, Padunekkina Pata (Sharpened Song). Poetry collections in English translation such as Yendluri Sudhakar's Darky, Yakoob's Arc of Unrest, Banna Ilaiah's long poem, Fire-spark and many other Dalit poems that appeared in a number of anthologies and literary journals have forced the mainstream Telugu literature to give the Dalit aesthetics due place of pride. Poetry became the voice of exploitation and oppression. Poetry became a powerful means of their fury and resistance. They subverted and reversed the established symbols and myths; and constructed their own myth in the process. They created an alternative aesthetic by exploring new horizons of experience that have so far been kept in darkness and silence. The spurt of translations of Dalit poetry, fiction and autobiography in English, in the form of individual collections and anthologies could be seen as a process of mainstream literature.

Darky: A Dalit Florilegia:

The present article aims at exploring the importance of popular Telugu Dalit anthology, Darky of Dr. Y. Sudhkar who is a well-known teacher and poet. Originally this work was published titled Neelika in Telugu, later in bilingual collection, titled Nalla Draksha Pandiri. Surprisingly he had his early grounding

in classical Telugu literature at an oriental college, and teaches the Telugu literature at Potti Sreeramulu Telugu University. "The present work delineates the poem Draky…as a celebration of dark black skin to redefine the beauty standards with poetic sensibility" (Malathi 31). In his childhood, he ran errand painting houses and did odd jobs to make a living. Ironically, this unrelated experience lent a tensile quality to his life, sensitivity to his poetry and scholarship to his vocation quite early. His understanding and appreciation of classical poetry broadened his creativity. Unlike many modern poets, Sudhakar refused to snub classical poetry. He also translated a number of Urdu poems into Telugu. His chosen form of expression in poetry is free verse. He is also one of many who believe that the traditional Telugu stanza structured in rigid meter is an inadequate medium for the modern poet.

The Telugu Dalit poetry has an orality, structurally which is not necessary in the anthropological sense since explosive anger cannot be delicately dealt with appropriate language and rhythms which need to be invented. Many Dalit poems have been engaged in creating this Dalit aesthetic in addition to vocalizing resistance against systematic oppression of marginal communities, ideating revolutionary literary movements and articulating the lived experiences.

The Dalit poetry, by and large opposed the Hindu cultural hegemony and its venerated icons. It is the basis of its aesthetic. Sudhakar's poetic strategy is simple and uncomplicated. He has carved a niche for himself as a unique Dalit poet. In his famous work Darky. He questions the disorder of the caste system and injustice of inequalities. This is an anthology of poems in which a sense of anguish and suffering is given much importance. Many Dalit ideological poems provide a framework to the Dalit life. In this paper, a few select poems are taken for closer scrutiny.

Dr. Sudhakar's "Low caste script" (Nimna Lipi) is a poem of crushed people in which he narrates oppressed people's art, culture, history, sense of pain and hurt caused by high caste people. He also

analyses the hypocritical attitude of high caste men who feign to defend and support the Dalits to win their hearts as a matter of convenience. He says human beings show their interest very much in fair things and no one cares to show any interest in people and things of outcastes. He shows in this poem how the lower caste people were destroyed physically, mentally, and morally under the pseudo practices of high caste society.

In the first stanza of the poem, the poet poses some questions to the society asking whether anybody touches a leper with love as gently as a flower is touched. He also asks whether anybody comes forward to hug a hungry orphan like Mother Teresa or whether anybody gives a life to the babe in the dust bin. His mean, he wanted to praise the alien land lady over native people for her commendable work in uplifting the people by extending her sincere service beyond caste boundary. She was indeed a true human being for treating all the people equally without showing any distinction either in name of caste or in the name of race and nation.

Can you ever hug a hungry orphan like Mother Teresa?

Can you give life to the babe in the dust bin? (Sudhakar 97)

The poet also criticizes the upper caste people for showing the pseudo humanity by wearing it. He further says that they feign as if they are showing the kindness towards Dalits which is in-fact a rare to see being shown it towards them always. But in reality no love is shown by them towards any untouchable in any form and they could exploit them beyond norms in the name of caste. The poet further says out of his anger that humans are underserve for serving either the mankind or the god with this kind of inhuman nature.

You can neither serve mankind, Nor worship god

You are an Indian ocean of violence (Sudhakar 97)

In the second stanza the poem describes the kindness of Jesus and Lord Buddha who showed affection towards the untouchables, and gave an important place for the outcast people in all terms against the prevailing social stigma of that time. He says though Jesus came from long distance, he gave an entry into the Dalit ghettos to lift them from their miserable plight. The poet says Jesus honored them by giving a cross to their necks instead of a spittoon. The universal humanism and love shoed by Christ made the Dalits recognize themselves their caliber and dignity as human beings. His means only few religions and gods are there to give equal treatment to the untouchables in the world and it is very rare to see that kind of treatment in the Hindu religion which is an expectation by all the Dalits in the religion. Dalits always wish for the equal treatment as humans by all the religions. But it remains a distant dream in most cases of the different religions. Despite their conversion into other religions, the in-equal treatment has been stopped even in other religions too. Though the god, in any religion does not have the segregative feeling but the humans who are in the forefront of the religions carry it against the god's will.

Yet, Jesus came into our ghetto
In the place of my spittoon
He gave the honour of cross to my neck. (Sudhakar 97)

In this poem he further reminisces the Lord Buddha's attempts of annihilation of untouchability towards the outcaste people. Though he had originally been from a royal family, Buddha later worked for the upliftment of the underprivileged masses. Thus the poet says that how Buddha made them recite the holy Tripitakans through their torn tongues by giving them the access to the education which was remained an inaccessible thing for centuries together in the country. The following lines denote the real love and affection that was showed by the great soul.

Buddha, son of soil

Sounded on my torn tongue the

Tripitakas unflinchingly. (Sudhakar 97)

In the next stanza, the author narrates how the atrocities on the innocent Dalits usually take place by the upper caste people due to their communal hegemony and fanaticism. He writes in this context saying about Dalits that they usually like to have a peaceful life for themselves at all the times. They even do not get the thought of how to dominate others, and remain the subject of being dominate by the high caste people. This kind of servile attitude made the Dalits submissive, defenseless and vulnerable to the exploitation of other high caste people. He also metaphorically writes that how the offered food to the god was turned red with the blood of Dalits that oozed due to the fanatic attacks of upper castes on the innocent Dalits in the name of caste conceit. The poet cites the time as; though the Dalits were wounded and humiliated by the other high caste people in many ways, and at many times, but they never forget to follow the word "Love thy neighbor as thyself."

A crowd of caste enemies fell on the birds.

The dinner of lord turned red with blood

Sisters became Crosses of rape. (Sudhakar 99)

In the fourth stanza of poem, he describes the culture and civilization of his community people. He says that their great art and culture were destroyed by the arrogance of high caste people. They had insulted in every possible way, describing them as untouchable and uncultured people. Though the author was not excluded from being stigmatized so, but he never compromised in having life with self-respect due to the claim of "Self-respect is the foundation of his race". He further says that all the five elements knew his artistic skill and it doesn't matter even if the 'others' do not recognize his kill. He finally

declares that this millennium is as 'his', and his is the "blue sign on the blue millennium" as a matter of self-respect and identity.

All the five elements know my skill

Mine is the blue signature on the blue millennium.(Sudhakar 101)

Thus the poet says that all the time of this millennium is as their time of vocalization. In support of the above statement, he further envisages that all the bards who have come from the other high caste wards so far may come from their ghettos now onwards for the reason of the goddess Saraswati had become the daughter-in-law of their ghetto, and further wishes the alphabet may be liberated from the high caste people so as to outreach the lowest rung of the society. Thus he says that this is their millennium to enrich the poetry as the goddess Saraswati had her abode among their huts. He says with confidence that they will flourish with the blessings of the goddesses in the future. When the education is believed as the source of everything, the Dalits started to receive it for their total change. The same is seen being promoted by Dr. B.R.Ambedakar that 'education is everything'.

Enriching poetry is an age old art of we the outcastes

Saraswati has now and for all time to come

become the daughter-in-law of our ghetto. (Sudhakar 101)

In the final stanza, the poet attempts to recreate some myths. He says that the history was as written with his blood. And says, 'Rama is not his savior but slayer for losing everything with the entry of Aryans into his country'. These Aryans exploited the Dalits in every possible way, and left nothing with them. He became an untouchable and even not allowed to enter the temples. Finally the poet gives a call for the deconstruction of society by saying that he couldn't sing the Suprabatha sloka with his burning throat until it is happened,.

Notify all out caste hamlets as liberated

Before I become an untouchable nation and

From them come out universal men. (Sudhakar 101)

His other two significant poems are both 'Dakkali girl' and 'Darky' (Neelika). They deal with the black beautifulness of a girl called Chandalika. She was symbolized as an earth and corn in this context. And he also described her as she was standing after being drenched under a palmyra umbrella. The style of her grinding the millet, and getting being applied of the flour of the millet over her waist while grinding shines like a girdle on her. Some of these descriptions were really seemed like sculpture after she was presented in the poem.

Grinding millet in the handmill,

Flour powder on the fold of your black waist

Shines like a silver girdle (Sudhakar 108)

He further describes her as his goddesses Matangini, and the eternal virgin Arundhati. The legends ascribe some myths to these folk goddesses of the Dalits, and vocalize many songs about both of them in their folk traditions. "he calls her 'Matangini', a woman who is wedded to God in Dalit community. He compares her to a kite and desires to fly her in the beauteous sky" (Malathi 32) They were further described in the form of textual narratives by many conscious Dalits. With that joyous feeling, writer wanted to make her fly in the beauteous sky. All such kind of expressions of the writer about their things show the tendency of advocating for the right and equal place in the world. He say as he was quite ready to create the space for themselves as it was denied by the upper caste people due to the caste feeling. His expression in this context exemplifies very clearly as they were second to none.

O my matangini

Making you a kite

I fly you in the beauteous sky (Sudhakar 107)

Further he describes the darky's tipsy dance and her other things like expressions as quite finery examples in his poem. He says "one look at you, even the old cotton cobs sprout warm seeds again", warm seeds, indeed. The Black-mother, the black earth mother is always the mother and not a male God. Legends of all cults emanate from the primordial mother. He calls her lady Christ bearing pain and collective callousness.

In another poem of his collection, entitled "Dakkali girl", he describes the importance of this specific girl of extreme untouchable caste of Telugu states seen how she proves her life with her communal skill of weaving dates mat. People of this Dakkali caste usually depend on this profession at the mercy of other untouchable caste Madiga for whom they have to perform the dram of Jambava. Most of times they depend on this Madiga caste for their survival by expecting and taking their communal portion in the form of alms by extending their talents like singing songs and performing dramas. Here writer describes her just after seeing her extraordinary weaving skill only due to the sympathy arose out of communal concern. The poet describes the young Dakkali girl as a queen while she was weaving the date mat. She was followed by her father singing Jambu Purana while she was carrying her skilled work. The poet says in this context as:

That untouchable girl

Used to move in my tender heart like a puppet. (Sudhakar 47)

The author says that the girl was seemed like Jesus while she riding a donkey into the town where her mother follows her like Renuka Devi. According to the Jambava Purana, the goddess Renuka's is the very important deity to this community. They have to recite story for the other castes on whom they

survive for their livelihood. Here the writer defines the girl in the poem 'Dakkali girl' as a symbol of poet's community and cultural heritage. The oral recitation was a rich replete with the story, imagery, symbols and sounds.

Dr. Sudhakar's other important poem of anthology is "Foot prints of History" in which he reminiscences his whole life that how he was tortured, and how he became a victim of untouchability of high caste people. He says that he was denied the access to the free and happier life that can usually be given with liberty, and his confinement to the outskirts of the village that where he was born. Thus he presents very successfully his angst that was undergone by him in this long poem as a counter voice to the upper case people.

He further writes that how his legs were tied up with the ropes of sanctions so as not to walk himself freely as he wish. He says that his art and culture were destroyed due to the hegemony of high caste people. He claims that thus is the reason why he and his communities remained as slave. Therefore he asks the society a question that how it would possible for them to be meritorious after being crushed years together. And, he further suggests the society not to talk about the merit of the downtrodden castes as they were plundered and destroyed in all the angles for centuries together. He says, society is the main responsible institution for his inglorious life and is the reason why only he remained as a meek, dependent, and in social chains. As a result he lost his hope of being liberated, and having dignity and equal life.

Therefore he insists on the need of coming out of the past distressed life like an exploding volcano where even nobody should dare to stop and distinguish him explosiveness. He says as he was in the state of bondage all these days leading a gloomy life. Now he is ready to break the silence and all the surrounded obstacles of restrictions for exploring new life with new talents. So he writes the context in

the poem as he was a 'walking sword' and 'awakened Tiger' to reach his aims against the social ordeals and impositions being quite ready to face them in anyway.

Thus the poet goes on saying that how his skills have been remained the subject of exploitations in the upper caste people through ages together and how he faces the problems of surviving against multiple odds that happened in his life with the help of educational awareness. He says that searching the food for one's survival against all the hurdles alone was a major challenge in any Dalit's life. He could not forget the past life that he led his life and shares his experiences with us through this long poems. The major and minor themes covered in the poem are not only the real life themes of the girl but also the same can be seen even in himself and all the Dalits across the region. Thus he recollects his past life filled with the multiple sorrows like how he was inhumanly treated, whipped and subdued by high caste people. However he doesn't want to worry about his coming out of the upper caste impositions with his mental as well as physical strength.

He said that knowledge made him strong giving the confidence to overcome anything. Now he was ready to withstand anybody with the burning rage on his face. As long as he was confined to the gloomy world, he could not understand anything and felt the life any Dalit was just like this. He simply followed others surrendering himself too like others. Now he wishes to see himself a dignified human being. He strongly desires to reclaim all the things that he lost in the past due to the exploitation and treachery of high caste people. Therefore he decides to search himself for his lost and past glory to re-establish himself and not to surrender in the modern world with the knowledge and awareness that he received from the formal education.

My peoples impoverished dark histories,

I tie them and tear them up in the middle of the street.

I put my foot on the throat of the past,

And I sign fearlessly on the heart of the future…(Sudhakar 199)

Conclusion:

The poet adduces many such kind of endless stories of Dalits which have remained in the darkness with a painful past, and hidden history. Now he wants to tear off all the dark and saddest history of untouchables by putting his leg on the throat of that history. Therefore he gives a wake call for his people to create a new history with their hands and obliterate the past history which was full of atrocities on the Dalits. Thus he sins a song for the future of Dalts as: "one day my foot prints will becomes the wheels of history". Thus the collection Darky emerges as a poetic testimony of Dr. Sudhakar's conviction and ability to retrieve his community's past, so as to give them the confidence to live with dignity in the future. Thus the article focuses on the struggle of the Dalit activists to extend the spirit of the self-respect and identity of the Dalits. They fought against the fourfold system of the Hindu religion considering it as the main cause for their ill-treatment, discrimination and under development. Therefore, they proposed strategies against the discrimination and demanded seriously to eradicate it for creating a new society with equality.

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