

Voice of silence in Chaos: Socio-political Representation of Dalits in Rajasthan through *Thunderstorm: Dalit Stories*

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Abstract

Voice of Dalits and oppressed people have emerged in 60s with numerous genres of literature like poetry, drama, fiction etc. The revolutionary school of thought developed most importantly in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh, but voice of marginalized was still unheard in the deserts of Rajasthan. The conditions in Rajasthan is more deplorable many a castes like Bairava, Meghwal, Bhangi, Chamar and Jatav etc. are being suffered social exclusion since ages and most significantly due to their traditional occupation. Some castes as Guar, Kantar, Bavaria are deleteriously labeled as criminals and pushed to corner. When there is/was always struggle against oppression in Deccan states of India, the desert of Rajasthan was still waiting for some miracle to happen. Even Christians' and Arya-smajis failed to demolish this cultural edifice in Rajasthan's society. So through the years Dalits have to discover themselves, their own strengths to come out from the limbo of socio-cultural emasculation. Therefore, this paper proposes to represent the Dalit literature from state's soil and reaction to the violence against untouchable and inhuman behavior of the caste ridden Indian society where Dalits are treated worse than animal. The study analyses the contribution of Ratan Kumar Sambhariya in Dalit Literature of Rajasthan focusing on the grounds of historical politics, cultural phenomenon, and social psychology of twentieth first century in the arena of Rajasthan wherein ugliness of society and brutality has not been brought into mainstream discussion. Sambhariya is an established author with a progressive outlook, mainly published his works in Hindi as *Dalit Samaj Ki Kahaniya*, *Ratnakumar Sambhariya* and *Munsi Premchand Aur Dalit Samaj*, but recently his translation of Dalit stories hit publishing house entitled *Thunderstorm: Dalit Stories*. His philosophy of representation stiches beyond orthodox projection of past high glory of kshatriyas which is shifting towards Other of the society for example "Phulwa", a short stories, at several places Sambhariya makes very subtle remarks at this social transformation. So, paper examines the authors depiction of depicts helplessness and desperation of the Dalits who are endowed with higher artistic qualities but are insulted only because of their birth.

I

Rajasthan is state with all the rich and high values led by those highness kings of different times as the particular geographical space located in north-western part of India and since times it ruled by mostly Rajputs also called 'Kshatriyas', an upper class of course, until we got independence and democracy in our country. As it is noted the land of the Kings called Rajputana was, before its formation of a complete state of the country, divided into some nineteen separate princely states most significant of them are Mewar (Which is Udaipur today), Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bikaner,

Kota, Bundi, Jhalawar, Bharatpur, Alwar etc. The greatest dynasty of all is known as Mewar, finds its his back in the past around a fifteen centuries with all those well told stories of glorifications, Kings turning against Mugal empires and ended their life for the self respects as Maharana Pratap and his well known battle of Haldighati which is also compared to battle of Thermopolis in Europe, but also there were kings from the same land as Mirza Raja Maansingh, Bhagawandas, Jaisingh etc who surrendered to and walked alone with Mugal King Akbar, the same king with whom Maharana Pratap fought throughout the life; and accepted all the terms and conditions to work under Akbar dynasty. The state has glorious histories of fighting among themselves and army chief deceiving their own side of empire and supporting the opposition in the battle. The history of this does not end with Mugals only it extends latter struggling for their own seat of authority with Maratha and lastly with British rule in India. In the colonial period as this particular state had various provinces, similarly, rulers ignoring the people of their respective states met with Britishers and never supported the struggle for independence of India in fact they became heavy obstacle to reduce the effects produced by bloods of many Indians to evade the colonial rule. Therefore, I want to arrive at the point that 'Land of kings had kings of many facets those who fought for the freedom and those who never wanted India to be a free a country, to make very clear all these varieties of kings belong to the so called Kshtriya Varna or Upper class in modern context. When we put effort at looking at social stratification and the dynamics of the caste, we quite come to understand the wide gap between classes and atrocities against the weaker sections, particularly on the Dalits. Since times we have been told that after independence India as being the free country will improve the status of downtrodden and backward classes and at some extant it is observed in the form of reservation for admission in government educational institutes and in government jobs. But as Mahatma Gandhi has dreamt of global village where everyone would get equal opportunity to present the skills and lead a living of respect from last person from outskirts of village to a president of India. Many a things has altered through the course of time but to note it in modern times what has not changed is the mind set of people of upper class towards the weaker sections of the society. As the stories of 21st century after that long silence of marginalized sections goes on harping again and again for the existence in the society and cases of atrocities at one point or other every day. It is many a time notified that our democratic institutions have grown mature but the feudal conditions of Dalits continue to exist even after seventy years after the independence. At the national level Dalits constitute around 16.6% of India's population according to 2011 census and recorded nearly 20.14 crore people belonging to various scheduled castes in the country. Now, to consider the papers arena that is in context of Rajasthan. The numbers game tells a different story, here, Dalits forms about eighteen percent of the complete population the state. Around 11 million of total population that is 73 million. According to a report in The Hindu Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar lead the country in the number of cases registered of crimes against the Scheduled Castes in the years of 2013, 2014 and 2015. Still it is Rajasthan that leads in number of crimes against Dalits. Report says that 52 to 65 per cent of all crimes in Rajasthan have a Dalit as the victim. This is despite the fact that the State's SC (Dalit) population is just 17.8 per cent of its total population. With six per cent of India's Dalit population, the State accounts for up to 17 per cent of the crimes against them across India. The National Commission for Scheduled Castes counts the State among those deserving special attention. Despite NCSC's recommendation the

states' literature of Dalits is lacking far behind in comparison with Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Maharashtra, Tamilnadu and other such states. Due to the feudal dominance the Dalit movement did not emerge as a strong voice in Rajasthan. All those Dalit leaders who got elected to the Parliament, Legislative Assemblies and other bodies of local self government remained confined to their political association but did not care much to organize the Dalits as a movement. As a consequence unlike Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu and Kerala Dalit literature did not gain much ground in the state of Rajasthan. Sub-castes of the Dalits in Rajasthan like Bairava, Meghwal, Bhangi, Dhanuk, Jatav etc. suffered social exclusion because of their traditional occupation whereas some castes as Guar, Kantar, Bavaria etc. were labeled as criminals and had to suffer the stigma for centuries.

II

Dalit Literature is, in fact, the writings that are about Dalits. Dalit (Oppressed or broken) is not a new word. Apparently, it was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of 'depressed classes', a term the British used for what are now called the Scheduled Castes. In 1970s the 'Dalit Panthers' revived the term and expanded its reference to include scheduled tribes, poor peasants, women and all those being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion. So Dalit is not a caste. It is a symbol of change and revolution. The Primary motive of Dalit literature is the liberation of Dalits. Dalit struggle against casts' tradition has a long history. In recent times, weaker sections has experienced a blow of support from Mahtma Phule and Babarao Ambedkar who have transported their disparity into the large section of the society through public representation and writing experience of marginalized in pre and post independence era. Though, these highly acknowledged personalities influenced almost every corner in India, some remote places like Rajasthan was still waiting for the miracle to happen. Of course there were social activist and regional writers who pictured the plight of Dalit societies through literary writing in Rajasthani and Hindi language and later many got translated into foreign languages mostly in English. During the post independence time we have Baburao Bagul, Bandhu Madhav and Shankarao Kharat were doing literature at length to create awareness among those of the societies; It was also the time when in India progressive movement was in its full form and Dalit Panthers were rising form the great inspiration of Black Panther and Black Literature of North America. The of Dallit literature at the large extant emerged from the Maharashtra where Babarao Ambedkar and Mahatma Phule works hard to lighten the lamp for oppressed community to stand on their own. During the period the a new kind of literature has been gaining its stature in the form of Dalit Literature wherein Poems, Short stories, novels and most significantly autobiographies of dalit writers provide useful insight into the quest of marginalized identity. The label of 'Dalit' is celebrate among subaltern communities and bind together to discuss not only deep rooted social problems but established the faith for positive change to bring the oppression down imposed by social order. Dalit literature in the state of Rajasthan is been underrated through the centuries in the Kshtriya and Bramin dominated society and the voice of the marginalized human class is being considered to be unheard because it was labeled as untouchable human class in the state during the reign of the "glorious" kings and manipulative Brahimin dominated society. But in the contemporary scenario things have take rolled in better way and weaker class also have got some voice to speak in the form of literature, art and music. Many a Hindi writers in the state has adapted the responsibility to represent the

ideology, thought and progressive minds from those downtrodden outskirts of villages. In the process, several writers of the have successfully struggled to achieve their voice in the wilderness and one among the many is Ratan Kumar Sambharia, who is a leading Hindi author in the desert who flung his ideology from not being repeating all the defeatism around instead, come with stories which were rationally more powerful and dwelt with logic.

III

Acclaimed Rajasthani Hindi writer Ratan Kumar Sambharia, born in 1956, has published numerous works mostly portrays the injustice rooted in the caste-driven society. Ratan Kumar Sambharia's biographical detail traces him from neighboring state of Rajasthan. Though, his birthplace is Rewari district of Haryana, but spent large chunk of his life in Rajasthan worked for almost 36 years. He has been a author of high esteem in the sense of producing Dalit literature in the state, authored five collections of short stories counted as *Banga Aur Anya Laghukathaye* (1996), *Hukama Ki Duggi: Kahani Sangraha* (2003), *Khet Tatha Anya Kahaniya* (2010), *Dalit Samaj Ki Kahaniyan* (2011), *Thunderstorm: Dalit Stories* (2015); a book on celebrated Hindi writer Premchand entitled as *Munshi Premchand Aur Dalit Samaj: Rashtriya Bahas Ke Ainemein Vivechna*, (2011); also a edited a book on Great Dalit savior Dr. Ambedkar titled as *Dr. Ambedkar: Ek Prerak Jivan*; apart from these he has authored couple of collections of plays such as *Pratinishi Laghukatha Shatak* (2010), and *Ratankumar Sambharia* (2011). He has won several awards for his work, including the Sahara Samay Katha Award from the vice president of India, for his story, 'Chapadasan' (The Attendant). More than 25 PhD and MPhil scholars are working on his literary contributions, and his stories and plays are a part of the curriculum in Rajasthan University. His work has been translated into Marathi, Gujarati, Sindhi, Punjabi, Kannada, Malayalam and Oriya languages. His dalit short stories have been translated in English by a Fulbright scholar Dr. Mridul Bhasin, who is also an acclaimed writer, translator and social worker. She has translated Padma Shri Vijaydan Detha's collection of stories... into English as *The New Life; The Living Traditions of Rajasthan*, a coffee-table book commissioned by the department of Tourism, Rajasthan; and She has also emotionally contributed to Rajasthan's Folk Art. Her widely recognized online columns, newspaper articles and art and design magazine are always dragging the attention on current social issues. The Jaipuriet translator and social activist mostly engaged in social welfare devotes herself with Muskaan Foundation which is a not-for-profit trust for Road Safety, beyond that her interest in art, music and gardening is inevitable. Ratan Kumar Sambharia.

As it is discussed that Sambharia produced several collections of short stories and most important of them have been translated into English by Mridul Bhasin in English, she selected fifteen stories that are at once grim, wryly ironic, humorous and affecting. He portrays with rare acuity the injustices rampant in a caste-driven society and the triggers that spark rebellion. Poverty and greed degrade blood ties; money plays a dramatic role in changing equations between oppressors and oppressed; livestock and land become precious beyond measure. Yet, love – between men and women, mother and child, a man and his land, and human beings and the animals they nurture – underlies such dark overtones, and integrity and honor shine through in the bleakest moments. Remarkable for their craft and rendered here in an authentic translation, these deceptively simple stories are narratives of love and anger, hope and fortitude, and subtly negotiate equality in a society inherently marked by inequity. The translated work of

Sambharia's short stories, *Thunderstorm: Dalit Stories*, is an effort in the direction of increasing awareness for the level of oppression and its impact among readers of the existing literatures of protest. These intimate, touching and starkly honest tales of pain and deprivation are driven by centuries-old memories expressed in a pan-India and pan-world idiom. The expressions of human experience that emerges through the narratives is underscored by justifiable anger and carries tragic overtones, they resonate, ultimately, with hope. Sambaria's narratives maintains the gritty realism which develop a protagonists centered in different regions who speak the universal language of real people living in abject poverty, defined by a shared rural ethos and socio-historical experience. I would like to enlist the short stories accommodated by Mridul Bhsin in her translated works, (1) 'Phulwa' from *Hukum ki Duggi*, (2) *The Goat's Two Kids* from *Hukum ki Duggi*, (3) *The Chance Meeting*, (4) *Terms and Conditions* from *Hukum ki Duggi*, (5) *The Buffalo* from *Hukum ki Duggi*, (6) *The Old Woman* from *Hukum ki Duggi*, (7) *The Famine*, (8) *Thunderstorm* from *Hukum ki Duggi*, (9) *The Farmland*. (10) *Word of Honour* from 'Kaal Tatha Anya Kahaniya', (11) *Salvation*, (12) *Lathi* from 'Kaal Tatha Anya Kahaniya', (13) *The New Masseur*, (14) *The Hammer*, (15) and *Bes*.

IV

Phulwa, a short story from *Hukum Ki Duggi: Kahani Sangarsh* published in 2003, is a sensibly strong characterization of the outdated Feudalism which I still exists in the minds of hierarchy of the landlord class. As the feudal social system is erased from the contemporary world but how it exists in the subconscious of those landlords. Instead, landlords are reluctant to accept the democratic political system which has given a step to walk in the form of reservation to those who were downtrodden since ages and feudalists wait for the chance to come to take the revenge from those Dalits who, now, has achieved a better standard and life style in the society. In the story zamindar Rameshwar visit a Phulwa's, once a inferior caste widow, house/Bungalow in the town to get recommendation for his son who is now jobless. When former Zamindar Rameshwar sees Phulwa's stature of life has turned shocked because, below given a quotation from text which describes how Phulwa's life is at more ease and successful and thus he became jealous of her.

Rameshwar turned to Phulwa. "So she is your daughter-in-law, is she?"

'No, she is not. She is our maid. Her name is Kunwar. We have never ever enquired about the poor woman's caste. She says she is a Rajput. Our village has thirty-six variations of caste. In the city, however, there are only two castes – the rich and the poor.'

Rameshwar felt himself sinking deeper into a mire of shame and outrage; a woman from such a high caste working as a servant for a low-caste nonentity like Phulwa! Imagine serving in Phulwa's house – Phulwa, who had once led such a wretched life herself!

During the story narrator reads Rameshwar's wherein he still thinks of her as lower class woman who has achieved the standard by chance. Thus, it clears in the story although today land lordship is no more practiced but their sense of prejudices realizes them their past misdoings. Therefore, Sambharia takes a new look at those upper class citizens of past and throws the light that how a Dalit is being superior of them. A power of the society is shifted from center to margin but the ideology of the said society still needs to be changed.

The power of education is traced in the story, *The Goat's two Kids*, wherein Dalpat's two sons are well settled one in army and other working in factory away from village, but the fate of being downtrodden in any remote place of Rajasthan is rarely achieved the status equaling to people like Dan Singh, a landlord of once time. Dan Singh's son Dharmpal murdered the two kids of Dalpat's goat. Now, atrocities have not halt at this only when an educated Sharmchad takes Dalpat to police station to fill FIR against him, the level humiliation touch the sky and victims were threw out because of their class status. But the author has adapted a new approach to represent the community which has power to fight back, first, it is Ramdulare – president of Safai Karmchhari Union – who salvaged he tattered honor; and secondly, Superintendent of Police who “had himself grown up playing with bat and bat of penury and poverty.” Thus, the story elucidate that strength of education vested in power handcuffed the once who do not count *dedh* and *bhedh* – cobblers and goats – living beings. Sambharia rightly convey that Dalits don't possess land do they have grand palaces, “all we have is our honour and our hard work. If we lose these, we will be left utterly bereft” sates Sharmchand he continued, “these bloodsucking leeches have grown fast on our labour that they are ready to brust. Dalpat they are big because we consider them big. The day see them to be puny, they will become puny. As puny as we want them.”

Next is the story, ‘A Chance Meeting’, accounting self-esteem of woman, named Saanwali, who has been abandoned by her husband, Ramdayal, just two after their wedding. The same woman has earned her standard of life as well as the reputation of wealthy and educated family in the village wherein even Sarpanch never dared to take a decision on any matter without her concern. The woman brings her husband home after 40 years she was abandoned. The most significant is the character of woman sketched by the author, a woman of low cast is considered as upper class not because of color of skin or behavior towards the others but due to the investment in the education. Her son have a senior clerk in government office, her daughter-in-law is a M.A. B.ed educated lady who taught at girls college and finally her granddaughter who is BA and marrying an assistant collector. Saanwali is treated, unknowingly by her husband as “she belonged to a caste higher then his own” and Ramdayal hesitant while accepting water from her because that would tantamount showing hr disrespect. Therefore, the author illustrate the power of hardship and education that definitely gain the not only the reputation but courage to stand in the society of different castes. Sambharia does not lean only on the struggle and weakness of the Dalits but steps beyond describing a Dalit widow a strong character that fights alone without a male her side.

Another point is shared by Ratan kumar Sambharia in sentimental story of ‘The Old Woman’ who's daughter, Sarita, is married off with government officer and she outdo the Brahmin and landlord slandered of living. A Dalit girl represented the vibrant personality who arrives at the village along with a maidservant and visits her friend in the same village where upper class people get jealous of her. Author also bring a picture of self-styled school teacher Khayal Chand, a moneylender and keen to count his interest by day and night, but when compared to Sarita – who arrives in a car to pay attention to the old woman's illness – stand nowhere before her status quo.

Another strong character presented by Sambharia is Surti in *Word of Honour*. The character is trapped in the meanness of men from whom she borrowed three hundred rupees on the condition

that if she will not be able to return the money she would surrender herself before him. Seeing her son exploited in the school because teacher was demanding the fees, she gives the word saying “my Radhu will now make sure he comes to school tomorrow with the money.” The woman rich in beauty and down on luck finally forced to beg money from Dheeng, a notorious womanizer. Now she retain her word of honour she work day and night and earns the amount she needed but Dheeng steals the money and attempt to molest her. The author demystifies the scene where Surti places her reputation, honor, dignity and self-esteem before Dheeng remembering the statement uttered by her Husband, “Education is the poor man’s treasure. Our son is a good student. He will become certainly an officer some day. no matter how much suffering you need to go through for it, make sure Radhu is never parted from his books.”

Salvation is a story of Dalit untouchable Nanak Ram and his son Chand Singh who almost sacrificed their life in order to preserve the dignity of religion while battling with a crazy bull and got himself heavily injured, but his father was declared untouchable while descending the idol from chariot by same Mahant whom he has served as father since years. As it goes “Nanak stretches his hand out towards the idol. Infused by fury, the Mahant’s eye turned redder than live charcoal.” He screamed, “Nanakiya, You scum. Sweepers and scavengers are untouchables! Their hands are not allowed to contaminate the deity.” *The New Masseur*, a story of bonded laborer, captures the sense of resentment in a thirteen year boy, Puchharam, who is been withdrawal from his studies and appointed as masseur at landlord Halka Singh. The boy was hostler and studying in the seventh class, his room has two portraits hanging on the wall one is Dr. Ambedkar’s that carries his slogan, “Education is the milk of the tigress” whereas other is of Mahatma Gandhi saying “do or die.” Puchharam pleaded innumerable time to get a permission to attend his sister’s marriage for which he was thrown in bonded laborer. In return, Halka Singh snarls at him, “Just shut your trap, will you or I’ll will teach a lesson you won’t forget, you vile piece of low-caste scum”.

Last story of the collection is titled ‘Bes’, a story of tribal girl Agani who hails from the hamlet near Udaipur of Rajasthan. Since, she is returning back home from her place of education with the excitement of getting engaged within few days. But destiny drops her alone halfway of her journey and receiving side of emotion is her mother who wait endlessly for her to welcome her. The begins while sun is set and bus broke down so Agani has to step down to catch the another public or private transport to get to her place. Although Agani is a educated and well-civilized girl but at night there were innumerable human beast who wait for the chance to approach any female to satisfy their sexual desire as Harji and Marji – who attack the alone girl with full of their capacity; Truck driver and cleaner – advanced their lust to kidnap and rape the poor girl; Jackals – tugging at her blanket; hunter – marched with intention of getting a woman prey; and robbers. All these dangerous were not resolved and intact her self-esteem not with her educated background or her civilian behavior but it was the dress (BES) which saved her from being raped and killed. Everyone from dead drunk Harji and Marji who says, “She is not a tribal at all, she is some Rajput’s wife. Look at her clothes – the Lehenga, the kurti kanchali and the chunadri. You are heading for death yourself” similarly robbers’ cleaner stated trembling, “Sir, she is not tribal woman, she is a Rajput. I beg of you, don’t force me touch her. If I do, a curse will befall me.” Then the hunter who held back and adhere the responsibility of protecting a upper-caste Rajputi

dressed woman, the Bes – a dress worn by a of upper caste Rajput in village – appearance assumed her to be a high class woman.

V

The translation of version of Ratan Kumar Smbhatia's dalit stories in english has accomodated the stories with strong light on characterization projecting the practical sense of life in the low-caste communities and their way upwards in the society, be it reservation system or their hard work along to achieve at the certain stature of self-respect, dignity, and honor. Characters as Phulwa from *Phulwa* who take a standard like high class woman well settled with the family in town. Panaram in *Terms and Condition* who better choose death instead of being lived without the self-respect and honor. His daughter is raped by landlord Jasveer Singh's son and for that Jasveer promised to fulfill his demand and accepted terms and condition. Saanwali in *A chance meeting*, another character similar to Phulwa. Daryav Singh in *Thunderstorm*, who has killed police inspector for the reputation of family against corruption. Kher Singh in *Farmland* – who struggle to not sell her land/plot which was more dearer then his own life. He took the piece if land as the symbol of dignity. Stood against the SP and went to shut down lawyer life that cheated him. Forged his thump and become middleman manage to deal Kher Singh's plot to SP. Surti – fought for her word of honor given by her husband to her for remain her son in the school for better studies and her own word for the money she borrowed from Dheeng, lusty and womanizer. Agani, an educated girl from hamlet wisely saved from the terrible situation. Finally education has become a scope to intact their identity in the society.

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