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Dalit Realities in Kancha Ilaih's Narrative: A Reading of *Untouchable God*

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Abstract-
Kancha Ilaih is a well-known as one of the Dalit activists. He teaches Political Science at Osmania University, Hyderabad. He is a challenging figure who advocates Dalit ideologies and challenges Brahminical supremacy. He shows in the narrative Untouchable God about upper caste's inhuman treatment towards Dalit (Pariah boy). And their mental agonies are revealed through the literary work. Brahmins keep them as self-made superior to Dalit people. They become self-made in charge of the social system.

Keywords- Dalit, Supremacy, Dalit Bahujan, Power

Introduction- Kancha Ilaih is a Dalit activist, a man behind the creation of various Dalit literary pieces. He was born in Oct 5, 1952 in Warangal district, now in Telangana. He took his teaching profession at department of Political Science at Osmania University. He is now assigned the task as the Director of the Center of Social Exclusion and Inclusion Policy at Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANNU) in Hyderabad. Kancha Ilaih is a prominent scholar, works for the betterment of Indian society. He attacks the Brahminical supremacy or Brahminical dominance. His other well-known works are *'Why I am not a Hindu: A Shudra Critique of Hinduvta Philosophy*. Kancha Ilaih has brought the idea of Dalit Bahujan as new exemplary, whom should take as an ideal. He is a political-social scientist who works on Dalitism which against the Indian caste discrimination, also known as 'hidden caste apartheid'.

Kancha endeavours to interpret Dalit society to be the ideal of Indian social structure. He urges Indian people should learn from Dalit. Dalit Bahujans prefer an egalitarian society, wherever men and women get extreme respect they deserve. Dalit people irrespective of men and women get busy in productive works like agricultural labours etc. On the contrary, Brahmins are only available for mental and intellectual labour, while physical labour is being kept for lower strata like dalits.

Analysis-Kancha Ilaih is one of the radical Dalit writers, while other writers portray Dalit lives and other conditions in a defensive manner. Kancha's approach is totally different, he attacks Brahminical supremacy, Brahminical fabricated social structure how they apply for own benefits. In his text *Untouchable God*, he has revealed Brahmin's approach and their views towards Dalits. He shows his displeasure of not accepting Dalits like Hindus of the Indian society. Upper caste Hindus are considered as the privileged caste in Indian society. He relates Indian Dalits to western Blacks who work hard and contribute to western literature. In India, the literatures of lower caste are not allowed to recognize like mainstream literature. Kancha Ilaiah is the figure behind the popularizing the term Dalit Bahujan, through which he has endeavoured to cover different depressed groups under one umbrella, where Kancha expects an egalitarian society, free from injustices imposed by dominant forces.

Kancha Ilaiah has contributed much to Dalit literature. Dalit literature is an emerging literature. Dalit narratives reveal pain and anguish of Dalit people which challenges Mainstream literary aesthetic. Dalit discourse beautifully provides space to the silent voice, and makes it assertive. Dalit literature is now the very strong part of Indian literature, which is mostly written in native dialect and with taste of some limitations. Earlier Dalit people were not penned from 'self', currently some of the new literary figures have articulated the marginalized voices. Dalit narratives' prime aim is to liberation, liberation from injustices, liberation from suppression, liberation from segregation, liberation from biased narratives. Dalit Panther, the literary and anti-caste social movement which was started in Maharashtra around 1970s, it was inspired by American Black Panther and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the group of pioneers of the movement were Raja Dhale, Namdeo Dhasal and J.V. Pawar.

Now Kancha's contribution to the field of Dalit literature is ground breaking. Ilaih through the Pariah, a Dalit boy tries to portray how India has the fabricated system where opportunities are living only for privileged class people, not for weaker section. Dalits cannot even think of God in the narrative. He is punished, because he has tried to think of God. Pariah granted. His mind was restless

today; it was running like a rat in a cage, nibbling at all these ideas. Which was food and which are the bars? He thought of his. They were born as gift of the same God, yet their future was bleak and fearful (Ilaih 6). The line shows mental agony of the Pariah boy, and his sufferings, deprivation due to education are portrayed which may lead his children to a very painful life in near future. He blames God for create such a social structure which is filled with discrimination.

The society is crafted in such a way where upper caste has been given supreme power. The narrator feels, due to his unholy body, he cannot touch God, i.e., he is not allowed to approach God, while caste Hindu takes advantage of it. Brahmins are considered as holy, and are given a position like God in the society. Dalits are not allowed to cross even shadows of Brahmin upper caste, if any Dalit person crosses, he or she get punished. This kind of treatment is depicted in renowned literary icon Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Untouchable* (1935). In Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* reveals the lower caste are not allowed to fetch water from public wells, they are treated as polluted caste. If they bring water from public well, the well will be polluted.

The narrative *Untouchable God* by Kancha Ilaiah talks about six Brahmin sects Veda Shastry (Tamil Nadu), Banerjee Babu (Bengal), D.C Tilak (Maharashtra), Krishnamurthy (Karnataka), Namboodri (Kerala), Appa Rao (Andhra Pradesh). Kancha Ilaih's aim is to bring pan Indian caste based subjugations in one umbrella. Through his book, he wants to show the injustices done by Brahmin upper caste section of the society towards Dalit people.

The discrimination shows though the text. Kancha brings new dimension of the scenario, while the priest speaks,

I am a Pundit and priest of this temple. Above all I am a Brahmin. Do you think we teach Shudras, chandals, dogs and donkeys? Why let you march into the temple like this and ask me whether I would teach your low born daughters- a girl, a demand bitch puppy! Get out! Out of this temple! Take your defiling feet off my floor! (Ilaiah 69)

The lines show the mentality of Brahmin/pundits towards dalits on providing education. Brahmins consider dalits lower than animals. They are not treated as human being. Through the above lines, the narrator tries to show the true colour and hypocrite mentality of upper caste Brahmin people. Brahmins feel that their duty is to teach only to Kshatriyas and Vaishyas, not to other lower castes. Kancha depicts that the one of the prime causes behind the discrimination is fourfold division of Hinduism.

The novel shows work divisions of men and women, he expresses men are positioned in a good way, whatever their caste, no matter they will never cook, and they only do works. The narrator says-

Men were men whatever caste they were born in; they tilled the land and fed the cattle but they would never cook or weed crops. The division between labour of men and women was so deep that it was almost a thing of nature; it was so old that no one could have said whether it was made by Gods or Humans. (1)

One of the most prominent characters is the Pariah boy, who does all works irrespective of gender. Nobody have such potentialities to be worked like male and female. His voice is like female also. The multitasking abilities of the Pariah boy reveal in the text. In general, our society is fighting due to division of labour on the basis of gender.

Kancha Ilaih is an academician, writer and social reformer, who believes the idea of 'progressivism'. Progressive writers eager to bring new ideas and they provide some kind of solution for the problems. Untouchability is an issue created by dominant social system. Untouchables are considered as the impure people. Untouchables (dalit) are outcaste; they are not allowed to enter premises of upper caste house premises.

In the text, *Untouchable God*, Kancha Ilaih mocks the hypocrisies of upper caste Brahmins. Pariah, a Dalit boy is succumbed to death due to physical torture by upper caste people. Because, he is thinking of God. Upper caste establishes that Dalit or untouchables have no right to devote God and even cannot think of God. There are different characters that portray different sections of the society; Veda Shastry, one of the top most Brahmins is introduced; Namboodri is from Kerala, his caste created the perfect system of discrimination. Krishnamurthy and Appa Rao are the characters belong to Andhra Pradesh. Another character Tilak from Maharashtra.

The text reflects tragic torture by upper caste, and how they have killed a Dalit boy Pariah. Author has articulated clearly-

"You bastard, how dare you think about soul, God and caste?' shouted an unknown voice. 'That means …Equality? You son of bitch, you too have begun to think. You too! 'You bastards, stop thinking about God, you think about God. The moment thinks about God, you think about soul. Then you think about equality. All that nonsense.' (Ilaih 8-9)

It is like thinking of God by lower caste untouchable member is a threat to upper caste Brahmin. They think if lower caste begins to think about God, then power or authority of upper caste will automatically reduce. Power cannot be shared by upper caste, upper caste Brahmins believe if power share with everyone, the charisma of power will be decreased. Power attracts everyone, if power available with everyone then value of power will be demolished. On the one hand, Dalit boy Pariah feels that

everyone is created by God. And he is wondered why dalits are not allowed to think of God, why dalits cannot touch the feet of God's idol even in temples. He stands as a symbol of protest and resistance, and a challenging character to Brahmin.

Ambedkar focused education as the best medium to uplift one's caste identity. But the text delineates that country like in India; it is difficult for untouchables (Dalit) to get proper facilities to access education, which is showed through the character Saraswati. Her father has approached to the priest to teach her daughter that he has wished to educate her daughter. He has requested the Priest to teach her and in respect of that he will pay. However, the priest has asked her about the caste, and he has revealed that his dirty mind is filled with insulting thoughts, and that they do not teach people like Shudras, and from his words he signifies that he keeps Dalit people in the line of dogs and donkey like animals. Priests do not teach lower caste girls, that shows a clear injustice in education system also.

The novel shows the pathetic condition of Dalit, they are not allowed to get education, as India is caste based society. The society is dominated by upper caste Brahmins. Saraswati's father requests the priest to teach her daughter. But the priest has replied rudely that they teach only privileged upper caste. It shows like education is not for everyone. The priest uses derogatory terms, compares Dalit to animals like dogs and donkeys. The text articulates narrow mentality of priestly class towards Dalit. She is mentally depressed due to orthodox Hinduism. She is converted to Islam, and turns out to be an intelligent girl. She has got an opportunity to have education. She has started to learn Urdu and married to a Muslim boy. But he is murdered.

It was Friday. Friday at mosque is a day of special prayer. The whole village had gathered around the mosque gates. Hussein's naked body lay there in a pool of sticky blood. A litter of broken teeth lay around his head. One eye had been popped from its socket and dangled nearby to the ground. His chest was grotesquely bruised, the center caved in a though an enormous weight had slammed down upon it. His private parts had been cut off and placed on his stomach. The Muslims silently came and saw the body and went away. Hussein's mother and father were lying unconscious in their house. Wailing rose above it, and the crying of the youngest child. (Ilaih 78)

The lines show the Hindu upper caste mindset towards Dalits and Muslims. Due to the terrific injustices faced by Dalit, their minds move and searching for an alternate religion. Therefore, some of the Dalit people have embraced Islam. Hindu fundamentalist groups object the brain drain or the conversion to Islam. The upper caste groups ask newly converted Dalit Islam to reconvert to own Hindu religion. Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha (RSS) are the active organizations who are working on the religion with very aggressive approaches.

Through the text, Kancha Ilaiah establishes social justice, the narrative questions the validity of upper-caste superiority; and its hegemony, it challenges the religious narratives of upper caste. It denies the existence Brahminical God; he discourages to follow Hindu gods which segregate people on the basis of Varna system. Kancha's narrative proposes Dalit bahujan's own God, who will understand Dalit cause, who will not discriminate, who will be the savior of the downtrodden people; the God will be 'Untouchable God'. The narrative acts as the strong critic of codes of Manu which is a Hindu scripture which gives advantage to Hindu people. *Manusmriti* is a sacred of Hindus that everyone knows, but a curse for Dalit people; it was burnt by Dr. B.R Ambedkar in response as a protest to selfish code of conducts. Manu keeps away Dalit people from positive participation in religious issues. The religious practices create oppression in the society, while Dalit people are become scapegoat of the oppressive religious system. The writer has applied the term Untouchable God, who gives Dalit divine justice, who will assist Dalits to uproot their dignity. Being a Dalit Christian Kancha Ilaiah, he has used his experiences of entire life of memories of hidden apartheid, he has critically examined the supreme God, that God should be not only accessible to upper caste, God should for all, God should for one and all, especially for the marginalized people, God has to shower some mercy. The narrative attempts to show its important force of religious resistance, it revitalizes people who are in turmoil of identity, there should not be identity conflict. The narrative uses a kind of unique form of style which is known as Socratic-dialogue style, it is a form of dialogue, which encourages a group to question and reach consensus in answering a universal question (Wikipedia). In the narrative, Kancha raises his queries to God to gain answers, which challenges dominant narratives. Kancha through the text demonstrates the counter-narrative by its philosophical devices. The text shows conversation between the narrator and God, it is like how Socrates had conversation with his disciples; the text artistically captures 'The Question-Answer format' also known as Dialogic Structure. Like Socrates, Kancha has endeavored to critical enquiry over blind faiths. He does not accept the traditional belief system blindly, he is curious; he is analytical in the text on the beliefs of social system. He questions the authenticity of religion; he argues that religion as a human construct which is for some section's political benefits in the society. He expects

justified answers from God in respect of validity of religion. The text opens wider space for Dalit/Dalit-Bahujan to gain knowledge, and to enlighten them to question God. The narrative gives strength to Dalit to question the too powerful figure of the system. They are assigned and authorized to take on the God's supremacy. There is a common belief that people cannot question God, that he is invisible, that he is divine. However, Kancha questions in the narrative to God. In form of Socrates method, Ilaiah is 'deliberately provocative'. Ilaiah understands that questioning God will hurt the sentiments of upper-caste people, it will disturb readers. Therefore, he has intentionally demonstrated God whom people can ask his role of authority. The narrative appeals readers to critical engagement to the forceful imposed burdens by the Brahminical beliefs. He attempts to establish an alternative form of theology which will serve dignity and justice to Dalits. The narrative shows the demand of the narrator 'religious democratisation' where irrespective of communities will be able to blessed with God's divinity wherever ethical and moral values will be prevailed. Kancha relates the narrative to subaltern studies, which creates counter narrative and provide an idiom to voiceless sections, they are given authority to act against Brahminical supremacy, and to control over the religious and scriptural authority. The narrative stands as a resistance to the imposed faiths and monopoly of upper caste. It is a cultural resistance wherever the writer has designated dialogue as liberation, for instance, asks question to God, and challenges religious scriptures and structures of religion. The narrative is a true document of Dalit liberation text; it has propounded Ambedkar's ideology that has revealed Ambedkar's tool education that can liberate oppressed people.

The novel shows the double standard of Brahmins and Upper castes. Upper castes segregate lower caste people on the basis of caste lines. Upper caste people treat lower caste in an inhuman way. Celebrations of Brahminhood are seen in the text. The novelist is a critic, Philosopher and thinker and a true humanist, who represents 'Dalit Bahujans'. He focuses on the term to signify the entire depressed and suppressed people. The novel depicts pan-Indian concept on casteism. Casteism plays a cruicial role in contemporary socio-political life of India. Casteism enforces some limitations to certain sections of people. The depressed section deprives of their basic rights; they lack freedom, equality, equity. The suffering section always has to fight for their basic needs.

Like Manusmriti's code of conduct, where lower castes have no right to become a priest, no right to read Hindu scriptures. If untouchables try to learn and read, they have to face punishment imposed by upper castes. Kaki Madhava Rao, IAS, Former Chief Secretary to Andhra Pradesh Govt. has written about Kancha Ilaiah's approach towards Hinduism. The research has shown the characters of the narrative such as Saraswati, Paraiah (boy). The narrative shows Saraswati's deprivation of learning and how pariah boy gets ill-treatment from upper caste like punishment etc. Mr. Rao's article on inhuman control of upper castes towards Dalitbahujans is visible; while Dalit Bahujan is a term covers different groups such as Dalit, Adivasis, Sudras etc. Brahmins are designated as exploiters of the Indian social system. For their own benefits, it is believed that they have segregated people on the basis of caste. In Kancha Ilaiah's fourth book 'Post Hindu India', he has challenged the supremacy of Brahminism. He has showed India's inhuman inequalities. Kaki Madhava Rao has endeavoured to establish Kancha's position in the field of Dalit issues after Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Dr. BR Ambedkar; he has opined that Kancha is the true successor. Moreover, Rao has demonstrated Kancha's voice that Hinsuism has lack of democracy and highlights Hinduism as spiritual fascism. (Rao, Dalit Voice)

Kancha Ilaih's books are so assertive that lead to removal from University of Delhi's syllabus. He writes in his texts based on his own experiences, he shows Dalit lives. He has used different terms like 'spiritual fascism', 'social smugglers', 'buffalo nationalism' etc. Kancha Ilaih is a character who has tried to revolt against the strong forces of Indian social system. Caste plays a very crucial role in Indian society. Mainstream Indian writers do not much concentrate on untouchability and other things. In his text 'Buffalo Nationalism', he comparatively symbolizes two animals such as Cow and Buffalo. He says that both Cow and Buffalo give milk, but cow only get respectable position in India. Buffalo's colour is black. Therefore, Buffalo do not get deserved status. In respect of production, both are equal. Like buffalo, Adivasi-tribals or dalits have production in large, but they have not valued like other so called upper caste.

Conclusion- Kancha Ilaiah's *Untouchale God* is a ground breaking literary work which is considered as counter-theological narrative. It is written with spiritual and political consciousness. The narrative demonstrates 'dialogic liberation' (a term connected to philosophies of Mikhail Bakhtin and Paulo Freire) with Socratic dialogue with supreme God. He does not accept the supremacy of God; he expects the supreme figure should have the ability to establish an egalitarian society. He has searched for a new authority for the betterment of Dalit-bahujan people, therefore he has applied in the narrative a divine figure an 'Untouchable God', the new

authority will live in the hearts of Dalit people, and it will not be confined like Hindu God in Brahminical Sanskritic traditions. To conclude, the narrative works as literary resistance by demonstrating Ambedkarite ideology and counter narrative of theology.

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