



Exploring Marginalized Voices: Caste and Class Intersections in G. Kalyana Rao's Untouchable Spring

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Abstract

The numerous difficulties that marginalized communities encounter are frequently caused by systemic discrimination, historical injustices, and socioeconomic inequalities. These are widespread and complex struggles that affect many facets of life, including housing, work, healthcare, education, and justice. It is imperative to comprehend and tackle the hardships faced by these communities in order to advance social justice and cultivate a more diverse community. The systematic exclusion of some groups from mainstream social, economic, and political life is referred to as marginalization. Usually, this exclusion is motivated by traits like socioeconomic class, gender, sexual orientation, race, or ethnicity. Marginalization has serious repercussions that cause notable differences in opportunities, resources, and results for those who experience it. This research paper tries to shed light on the hardships faced by underprivileged groups, paying particular attention to G.Kalyana Rao's novel *Untouchable Spring*. The novel is written originally in Telugu titled *Antarani Vasantam*. The novel tells the story of the generational battle of Dalits against the cruel customs of Hindu castes that drove them into exile from society and provided them with no defense against natural disasters. The past recollections of Ruth and Reuben are the focus of the novel. The narrative revolves around the lives of the Mala-Madigas of Andhra Pradesh's Yennella Dinni village and six generations of a Dalit family. In his novel, Rao effectively captures the ethnicity of the untouchables, giving the impression that he has personally experienced their way of life. Occasionally, he portrays the harsh attitude of the upper castes in the novel.

Keywords: Untouchables, Dalits, Upper Castes, Suppression and Generations.

1. Introduction of the Author

G.Kalyana Rao is a Dalit writer. His book *Untouchable Spring* can be read as a novel, a family saga, or a memoir. The book was first released as *Antarani Vasantam* in Telugu in 2000. Later, in 2010, Alladi Uma and M. Sridhar translated the book into English for the Orient Blackswan publishing house. The novel depicts the atrocities committed against Dalits by upper castes in India both before and after the Republic of India was established in 1947. In the book, Rao gives voice to the oppressed, voiceless, downtrodden, and, of course, untouchables. He primarily focuses on the identity of the Dalits, which is made clear by its rebellious characters, including Mataiah, Yellanna, Narigadu, Naganna, and several other courageous people. G.Kalyana Rao's use of the oral storytelling tradition has highlighted generations of Dalits' artistic expressions in addition to their social and cultural lives. Rao attempts to capture in

the book the hard life of the Dalits and their struggle to survive under the strict control of the upper castes. He repeatedly depicted the lives of the madiga and mala castes in *Untouchable Spring*, a novel whose central theme is how the upper castes exploit the lower castes by using caste as a weapon. The text itself contains several examples of lower castes being exploited.

2. Introduction of the Novel

The novel, *Untouchable Spring*, is set in the southern Indian district Andhra Pradesh. Rao has successfully depicted the ethnicity of the untouchables in his novel, when he is representing them in the novel it appears that he himself has lived that life. He every now and then in the novel is depicting the harsh attitude of upper castes. Most of the events of the novel took place in the Yennella Dinni, place where Reuben's ancestors lived. In this novel, *Untouchable*

Spring, Rao analyzes the importance of land, its relationship with land owned by various upper castes. He uncovers how Christianity, in its missionary zeal converted Dalits into Christianity, the compulsions behind the conversion, how the Dalits were educated in Christian schools and reached a position to question the traditional Indian Caste system [1].

3. Opening of the Novel

First, Kalyana Rao presents Ruth, the protagonist of his book, who is by herself gazing up at the sky and narrating the history of his husband's ancestors. Rao uses the protagonist to immerse us in Reuben's lineage. We learn that Ruth's husband, Reuben, passed away not too long ago. In the first chapter, Ruth narrated the concocted story of the lower castes that was told by Rueben. "My grandfather told it so convincingly. His grandfather narrated it as if it were really true. The story of my birth and your birth" (4). Yellanna, a member of the Mala caste, was Reuben's grandfather. Yellanna was a well-known singer in his day, and the themes of his songs were exploitation, hunger, and untouchability. Yellanna shared everyone's birthmark. "Oh, you upper caste people! I, an untouchable, am walking on your pure, regal paths. Move aside. Move aside" (7). Like everyone else, he made his birth public. Just as every child's birth touches the heart of its father, so did his. He called out to the caste elder, "A male." He felt happy as he filled the caste elder's stomach with toddy. The child was given the grandfather's name as a name. Yarrenkadu was the father of Yellanna, but he does not love his son as much as his sister Boodevi did. Boodevi was a great caregiver for his nephew during his early years; she developed Yellanna into a talented artist. She would take her nephew to every town festival that was ever held and would spend many hours watching performances on the Mala mound in a hidden place. In addition to discussing the ethnicity of the Madigas and Malas with us, Rao also discusses the horrible methods used by the upper castes such as Karanam, Kapus, and Reddy families. One of the main characters in the novel, Naganna, is Yellanna's second teacher after Boodevi and was one of those who managed to survive the terrible rule of the upper castes. When Naganna was driven out of Yennella Dinni by upper castes, Yellanna met him.

Subsequently, Naganna instructs Yellanna in the art of urmulla dance and shares with him every detail of his life. Yellanna married Subhadra, daughter of Pittodu, both had great love for each other and had a son Sivaiah. Subhadra was not an ordinary woman; when she took spade to get revenge of Atchireddy, another made cruel character of the novel. After growing up, Sivaiah wed Sasirekha. In the novel, the Yennella Dinni was struck by one of the terrible droughts that claimed thousands of lives. With the exception of Sasirekha and himself, Sivaiah dug pits and buried his relatives. Together with a group of migrants, they left the village for the Bukingham Canal in search of employment, but they were unable to find employment there because the workers excavating the canal refused to hire an untouchable and chased him with stones. A bystander approached Sivaiah with a cross locket around his neck as he lay under a tree with his wife, starving and utterly exhausted from life's struggles. When Siviah was questioned about who he was, he revealed that the unidentified man was Martin, a Christian convert. Martin, a kind man, took Sivaiah and Sasirekha to his house in Valasapadu when they were homeless. Martin hears Sivaiah's account of earlier times. Martin was also a victim of oppression from Chinnodu, an upper caste individual. Then Martin tells everything about his life, including how the lone star operation led to his conversion to Christianity. Subsequently, he began evangelizing across the subcontinent. He renamed Sivaiah as Simon and taught him Christianity. Sasirekha conceived a son whose name was Reuben. Following Martin's victory in the land case against the ruling class, they resolved to exact revenge on him. On Christmas Eve, choudaries and reddys got together and brutally murdered Martin, leaving Simon severely injured as well. Simon carried Martin's body on his shoulders and made his way to the Valasapadu. He was startled to see his people being driven from the land they disputed by upper castes. He witnessed the deaths of Martin's wife and his own. Then, believing that his child needed to survive at least to have ancestry, he picked up the hurting child. Simon left Reuben in the hands of Jacob and Simon again went to Vasalapadu. Through Reuben's diary Ruth shares everything

related to the childhood of Reuben, how he gathered every inch of history of his family from travelling one village after another. He travelled to Yennella Dinni to research about his ancestors there he came to know about his grandfather Yellanna. Reuben needed nearly four or five years to fully understand his family's past. Ruth, the daughter of Francis, who had previously worked at the hospital where Reuben was the preacher, was eventually married to him. Ruth was penning the tales that her grandmother had spun. Following their marriage, they moved to Yennella Dinni, where they settled and built a home. It was also there that Ruth gave birth to her two children, Rosy and Immanuel. Vandanam, an employee of the Revenue department, and Rosy were married. Following his graduation, Immanuel married Mary Suvarta, the daughter of Ruth's uncle. Reuben was taken aback when Ramanujam arrived during the wedding. Even though Ramanujam and Reuben had never met, they had a good relationship as school teachers. After Reuben met this well-educated man, who had been hired to instruct the Madigas and Malas children in Yennella Dinni, they became close friends and shared a common concern for the issues facing their society. Reuben once asked Ramanujam about the Harijan Seva Sangam, which Mahatma Gandhi started in 1932 to end untouchability in India. Rao uses the character Ramanujam in his novel to further illustrate the arrival of communists. When Ramanujam met Ruth and Reuben at Immanuel and Marry Suvatra's wedding, he told them about the story of communism arriving in Avalapadu. In the novel, *Untouchable Spring*, Reuben's son also left the village and joined the Naxalite movement before being slain. Immanuel had a son named Jessie who married Ruby, Rosy's daughter. Jessie left the house and never returned, just like his ancestors had done before. Ruth writes a letter to his grandson Jessie at the book's conclusion. The lives of the Dalits in India have not significantly changed in the era of scientific, innovative, and cultural advancement. Dalits' social, economic, and cultural existence hasn't altered since the beginning of time. The early 20th-century Dalit literary movement and development was a reaction against the mistreatment of Dalits by the upper castes. They have been making an effort to preserve their

heritage, identity, and personality via literature. One can read *Untouchable Spring* by G. Kalyan Rao as an authentic record that depicts the plight of the Dalits. The author of the novel, *Untouchable Spring*, Kalyana Rao takes us on a journey into the hearts of each generation, starting with those who were exploited and ending with those who show their humanity by defying authority. Ruth's memories transport us to her husband Reuben's family in Yennella Dinni, to the boy Yellanna, to his expulsion from his caste by his superiors, to his music, to his son Sivaiah's escape from the drought with his wife, to the latter's conversion to Christianity, to the violence directed at him and other Dalit Christians, to the birth of Reuben whenever it seems to fall apart, leaving him in an orphanage before Reuben begins his quest to find his ancestry. There was untouchability throughout all eras [2-3].

4. Thematic Exploration of Caste and Class in *Untouchable Spring*

The condition of the Dalits in first two generations was submissive and traditional. The Dalit of first two generations are primarily agricultural labourers. Once the rains fall, all of them, men, women and children go to work in the Karanam's fields. They are paid starvation wages, which is not enough to appease their hunger. The story of the third generation is riddled with tumultuous events. The 19th century is affected by severe drought and famine that devastated the village life, the Dalits of the village have no other recourse except to migrate to different places looking for work. Eventually, Martin comes to their rescue thus representing Christian charity and compassion. The fourth generation begins with Sivaiah's son Reuben the sole survivor of the massacre who is now into youthful age. A Christian who lives there brings him up. Reuben is curious in learning, about his ancestors. There is a search into the past to know their roots and to appreciate that great culture. Reuben refers to himself as the son of Sivaiah in this instance, even though he is aware that his father was born Simon and went by that name until his passing. He talks about how amazing his past was: "Then I came to know that Yellanna, my grandfather used to crate songs and sing them. He was well versed in Urumula dance and knew Veedhi. Bhogotam (Street Play). My



paternal grandmother Subhadra was hidden in his songs. Then I felt that so far, all these days, I was away from a great heritage” (159). The generational life of the Dalits and somehow intertwined with Yennela Dinni. This generation also sees the source of the pre-Independence ideological discourses such as Communism, Gandhism and subaltern systems of thought including. As the conversation between Reuben and Ramanujam was going on, they also talked about “Communism”. Communism becomes the major landscape, which brought about changes in Dalit consciousness. Immanuel’s is the story of the fifth generation and is suggestive of liberation theology of South and Latin America, which principally stems from Christian humanism. Immanuel’s religious upbringing is modelled on countless biblical stories of oppression and liberation. Immanuel is attracted to extremist movements. When he is arrested, the police humiliate Reuben but Reuben says that he is proud of his son. “Christ is my faith, struggle is my necessity. My son is a symbol of the conflict of centuries. My son’s struggle is not a Maala or a Madiga. That is an ideal struggle it is a necessity. I was born as an untouchable. I do not have a piece of land. I was excommunicated.” (211)

Conclusion

Thus, this paper aims to provide an insight into the concept of a casteless society. The battle of numerous oppressed communities opposing other communities' Brahmanical view points. Rao’s novel *Untouchable Spring* reminds us of the anxiety of socialist realism. The Dalits lived with their own rich tradition of art form their plight is represented in this novel. Till the end the Dalit personalities never gave up their self respect and dignity.

Works Cited

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