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A SUBALTERN READING OF B.JEYAMOHAN'S *NOORU SIMHAASANANGAL*

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ABSTRACT

The Hindu religion encompasses a lot of castes and sub castes where the people from different castes enjoy different privileges and dignity. Dalits as low castes encounter a lot of atrocities and sufferings in relation with their descent and ancestry. As the people of the former colonized experienced a form of subjugation from the invaders the Dalits in India experience the internal colonialism which is inside and within the Hindu religion. All the colonized, whether it is the writers from the third world or the people from the low caste, write their humiliations and frustrations that faced and have been facing by them. It is their need to uplift themselves. These kind of writing features resistance to homogenization, battling of injustice and exploitation, discovering modes of survival in a globalizing culture and so on. The novel *Nooru Simhaasanangal* (2013) by the Tamil writer Jeyamohan delineates the history and the degradation that experience by the low caste named "Nayadis". The present paper attempts to read the novel from the perspective of a low caste.

Key words: Dalit, Nayadi, caste. ©KY PUBLICATIONS

Whatever he has done, he is not a culprit.

The literature in the form of poems, plays, fictions, short stories, essays have a history of their own. Considering the literature as an umbrella term it has a multitude of literatures under it such as the African American literature, native American literature, Dalit literature and so on apart from the elitist literatures like American literature and British literature. The literary world has been witnessing the emergence of a latest kind of literature named fourth world literature. Fourth World literature refers to the written work of native people living in a land that has been taken over by non-Natives. Fourth World people are the indigenous people who occupied before the colonizers invaded and conquered their homelands. Native people of America, Aborigines of Australia, Maoris of New Zealand, First Nations of Canada, Dalits and Tribes of India are considered peoples of Fourth World. Similar to the postcolonial third world writers who began to write back to the Empire, the aborigines such as the Native Americans, African Americans, first Nation Canadians and the Dalits of India felt the need to unveil their furies and pangs that suffer and suffered by them in terms of religion, domicile, race, ethnicity, colour, class, caste and origin and so on.

The caste society was moulded with the varna system. It is the system of four varnas. The approximately four thousand endogamous castes and sub-castes in Hindu society, each with its specified hereditary occupation are divided into four varnas- Brahmins, Kshathriyas, Vaisyas and Shudras. Outside these are the *avarna* castes arranged in hierarchies of their own- the Untouchables, the Unseeables, the Unapproachables- whose presence, whose touch, whose very shadow is considered to be polluting by privileged- caste Hindus (Roy 24). There is the tradition of accepting the values set by the upper class and castes as standard. The Brahmins who has the highest rank in the caste hierarchy of Hindu religion monopolised the positions of priests and teachers and bestowed less privileged occupations and roles to their lower castes. They are not only placed at the top but are considered to be superior social beings worthy of all rights and privileges. And the very low caste get the menial jobs such as scavenging and made regulation that they cannot meet and touch the upper caste as it may be the defilement of them and thus they have been pushed out from the mainstream society, culture, history and so on and are born to confront subjugations and humiliations. B. R. Ambedkar, the first and foremost personality who tried to annihilate the caste system, in his *Annihilation of Caste* contends that "There cannot be a more degrading system of social organization than the caste system." According to him it is the system that deadens paralyses and cripples the people from helpful activity (qtd in Roy 25). The society does not allow a low caste born to enjoy the same privilege as much as a caste Hindu enjoys.

The Dalits are considered the low caste people who face a lot of suppression in terms of their origin. The history has referred to Dalits as the people written out of history and are known variously as exterior castes, out castes, depressed class, scheduled castes, untouchable and ex-untouchable and so on (Paswan 11). The literatures of the Dalits unfolds the hopes and aspirations of the exploited masses, it acquaints people with their fight for survival, their sufferings and humiliations, the insults and injustice they have to confront and so on. It intends to bring about a social transformation and change. The work *Nooru Simhaasanangal* of Jeyamohan unfolds the story of Dharmapalan, the protagonist of the novel, of Nayadi caste. The name "Nayadi" is equivalent to Nayattukar, i.e., hunter. The Nayadis are professional hunters. The approach of a "Nayadi" within a distance of three hundred feet is said to contaminate a Brahman, who has to bathe and put on a new sacred thread, to cleanse himself of the pollution (Thurston 275). Though the protagonist, Dharmapalan is a civil servant by profession the novel tries to depict the adversary effects of his caste on his personal and professional life. He vividly portrays the menace casteism that prevails in India as Nayadi is a low caste who have no permanent dwellings, those are the people who takes the remaining and remnants of food and clothes for their subsistence and survival. The people of this caste are not allowed to see an upper caste. They hide themselves inside bushes during day time and come out during night for hunting using dogs. They eat anything they get. Those are the people who suffered a lot for their survival.

The novel begins with the portrayal of a hospital, which is the sub centre of a main hospital. The hospital is the three or four buildings that are shattered having a lot of stray dogs, having the wilderness of weeds and grasses, having the music of flies "hum", having the admitted patients naked with nobody to look after them. The Mother of Dharmapalan has been missing and Dharmapalan also sees his Mother with a lot of health problems treated like animals in the sub centre of the hospital. According to the doctors of the sub centre his Mother is brought there by scavengers while they were doing their job. Jeyamohan, through the portrayal of this condition of hospital, attempts to bring out the scavengers, the Nayadi and other castes who are ignored by the authorities by not providing proper sanitation, medicines and so on. It shows the complete denial of the existence of low castes.

Though the doctors there witness a multitude of weird things, they are helpless, the admitted people lay down on the bare floor excreting and urinating. According to the doctors "the scavengers would come in the morning . . . And nobody else would come. They clean it and we cannot call them in the evening also" (12). The doctors appointed there are the doctors from a low caste. The doctor's view is that he has got his job as a doctor because he is a Scheduled Caste but he laments that he has been treated like a meager insect and as a senior till that day he has not get even an opportunity to sit on a chair and examine the patients. At last the

penultimate section of the story reveals that the doctor loses his job and the temporary loss closed the door for a promotion for him. It happens as a result of Dharmapalan's report against the sub centre of the hospital. It is for the first time he exercises his power in his profession but it creates a loss for another low caste. The doctor expresses his condition that ". . . Sir, I am a senior and now as the result of your report I am suspended. Henceforth nothing will happen till my retirement . . . ." (73). As far as Dharmapalan is concerned, while writing the report on the pitiable condition of the sub centre of the hospital, he has to act as hands and voices for the people like him. . . . Why cannot a government which offers lakh of amount for public health afford some thousands for them . . . ." (81).

The novel has been read considering its autobiographical elements. The protagonist incorporates his life as a young boy with his Mother asking alms from others, having food from the scrap heaps of hotels, the travelling through the paths where scavengers go through and the taking of food nearby the heap or from the heap itself and so on. He includes the period of education where he is an owl in the class since he speaks less. Nobody is ready to share his room. He use to admit all the avoidances from everywhere. As Jeyamohan tries to delineate a veridical background of his people and his own and the way they live in the society, the narrator describes a lot of times when he has nothing to eat and eats asking alms with his Mother, the loitering around the city and getting aplenty of blows, the skin problems that were faced by him because of unhygienic environment.

For the interview for his job as a civil servant he describes his caste that he has by hearted from the Malabar Manual thus: ". . . Nobody can say the exact number of Nayad is in Travancore. And the Government is not gaining any kind of income from them. Dalits as a category struggle to find a way into public services, to become doctors, scholars, writers, judges, policemen and officers of the civil services. Their numbers are small, but Dalit representations in the echelons of power alter the old social equation. " . . . a Brahmin clerk may have to serve under a low caste Dalit civil servant (qtd in Roy 33). Dharmapalan of the novel as a low caste on a higher position in the hierarchy of job cannot exercise and enjoy the rights and power he supposed to enjoy. According to the narrator there would be somebody who keep the tracks of all under him and manage to do things as their own wish and will and for their own conveniences. According to him wherever he has appointed there would be a person of his lower rank who belongs to the caste of majority in that region. Every time he leads the scene by disguising as an obeying officer concealing his own real quality.

One of the members of the interview board Mr. Sen Gupta, after the interview for the Civil Service tells Dharmapalan that: ". . . You could become a good teacher, a good doctor, even a good politician. But I do not know whether this is a good ground for you" (25) knowing him that he is a "Nayadi." According to Dharmapalan, from the day he has appointed, he has been understanding what Sen Gupta had said to him by facing a lot of humiliations and oppressions. He has been growing up to stay subjugated to all others and has no ability to order and command his inferior officers.

He includes Sudha, his wife, from a high caste and his son Prem. Sudha and his son are fair unlike him. The fair skin of Sudha and Prem are strikingly refers to in the novel. Sudha always advises Dharmapalan to erase the inferiority complex that is inherent in him and to be more authoritarian in his job and life. Dharmapalan's Mother has cared his son at his younger ages by asking alms and giving food from scrap heaps and so on. But when he is qualified with a job he marries Sudha. She is a modern woman according to the him. The Mother of Dharmapalan has not changed yet. She remains the same and acts as she was earlier she asks alms, she takes gangrenous food, she travels around the place at nights and so on. But Sudha cannot accept and tolerate the Mother. As an effect of this, Sudha does not allow their son Prem to know about his grandmother. She says " Look, he is my son, I will not allow you to make him know that that beggar is his grandmother. As a part of her advice to him she continues saying: " Look, you do not know how to sit on a chair properly, the qualification, the knowledge level, the dignity all that you attained have not of any use in your life. You cannot command anyone. Your tongue will not move even to rebuke anybody" (32). These instances portray his own identity as a "Nayadi" and as an employed husband of Sudha; a high caste. The caste compels him to stay oppressed and exploited and his caste offers him his perennial subjugation. When

he gets a well reputed job he should have been able to withstand and survive all the situations but the caste makes him remain below all but doing his everyday jobs in his profession. Though he wants to act but he cannot. According to him he became a caged animal in the city zoo. He was not able to respond, if he responds he is said to be an autocrat and if he does not respond it is considered the incapability of his particular caste to respond (60).

When Dharmapalan was young as a Nayadi he was not adapted to sit and take food. When he gets the food as a habituated action he takes the food and tends to get up from the position. A Nayadi of caste cannot imagine that he or she sits and eat even on the floor and stay upright in front of the high castes. In the progression of the story his Mother comes his home and having served food for her she also tends to get up from the floor. In an event of having caught by the police, his Mother comes the home of him. The instance when she goes to the bush in order to hide herself as a law accustomed to a "Nayaydi" evokes a thought in Dharmapalan. Even though the society has developed a lot there are no differences in the behaviour of people like his Mother.

As Dharmapalan wears shirt, his Mother says it as a crime to wear shirt by his caste and tells him to put off the dress. When he sits on a chair her Mother makes deafening cries. As far as she is concerned the shirt and chair are not for them but for the high castes. They should not violate the rules, if it is violated the high castes would kill his son. Sudha's fair skin panics his Mother and tells his son to be wary of Sudha, if it is otherwise she would kill him.

As a revelation Dharmapalan think about Sudha's advice :". . . The things that coming out that you say are the only imaginations emerging out of your inferiority complex. You know what is to be done. But you do it hardly ever." This revelation has made him to write the report against the sub centre of the hospital. But the story of his Mother ends towards the end of the novel as she dies in the hospital. Dharmapalan wants to put off all his clothing and go to his Mother; it shows the heartfelt despair and exhaustion he faces in the life, society and profession. As a Civil servant he reveals that the untouchability that exists in oneself cannot be erased or annihilated with wealth and job. From the interview of his job itself he has been encountering questions about his origin and caste. Jeyamohan has succeeded in bringing out a lot of aspects and incidents that marginalize the so called outcastes. Though the protagonist has his job appointment in Civil Service and has adequate economic background, he experiences the same as a low caste who is not financially reputable.

According to Ambedkar, the outcaste is a bye product of the caste system. There will be out castes as long as there are caste system. Nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste system(qtd in Roy 26). Thus the novel is the harrowing proclamation and revelation of the condition of the low castes in Indian societies. As a sobering picture, the novel with a plethora of incidents and events delineates the centuries' silence of the low castes by caste prejudice and social oppression.

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