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From Ignorance to Empowerment: Education's Role in Sujatha Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants*

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ABSTRACT

This research paper mainly focuses on Sujatha Gidla's Ants Among Elephants, which thoroughly explores the systematic oppression and tenacity prevalent in the Indian social structure, specifically focusing on the caste system. The comprehensive study analyses how personal decisions and environmental constraints determine identity in the context of extensive societal hierarchy. Gidla, from an academic perspective, explores the significant impact of education in promoting empowerment and upward social mobility among marginalised communities. Inspired by Indian scholars who take an interdisciplinary approach to Dalit feminism and by the lens through which Hooks interprets Black feminism. Using intersectionality, this study investigates how caste, gender, and socioeconomic issues affect Dalits in the caste system scenario to highlight their marginalization.

Keywords: Caste, Dalit, Equality, Intersectionality, Minority, Suppression.

INTRODUCTION

India has been grappling with increasing challenges in its development since gaining independence. Indian individuals endure significant hardship due to the prejudiced sentiments exhibited by certain individuals. This is a pressing problem that hinders the prosperity of India. The reality of contemporary India is highly repugnant in the domains of politics, culture, and undiscovered realms such as caste-based injustice. Given that culture serves as the primary identity of our nation, it is predominantly neglected in the minds of a significant portion of the population. The Indian mindset is influenced by the actions of post-independence political parties and their leaders. Indian society is characterized by a distinctive system of social stratification based on purity, which classifies individuals into a four-tiered caste system, with Brahmins occupying the highest position and Shudras being considered the least pure. This structure is attributed to the Ati-shudra or Dalit[1] group, positioned below all other groups at the bottom of the caste system hierarchy. However, "Scheduled Caste" is the notified word as per Article 341 of the Indian Constitution to denote this specific group of people and hence they are referred to as such in official documents. They have been traditionally assigned the lowest rank in the social ladder of hierarchical Hindu society. Those assigned a high position in the caste system were called upper caste and were recently referred to as Caste Hindus or Savarnas. The caste system has been an integral and inseparable aspect of Indian society for centuries. The system's hierarchical structure, with its well-established roots, is the underlying cause of the visible hardships and distress experienced by individuals positioned lower on the social hierarchy. The term "Dalit" refers to those who are broken or scattered. Etymologically, it signifies their untouchable status and their marginalised position in society, as all other castes look down upon them. The untouchables were unable to access temples, streets, wells, or toilets, they were obliged to stay in restricted areas and were chastised, beaten, and killed if they did so.

> To tie an earthen pot around their necks so that their sputum should not fall to the earth and pollute it, and the compulsion of a broom behind them so that their footprints would be erased before others set their eyes on them. (Dangle, 2009)

[1] Dalit comes from the Marathi language and means the "downtrodden" or "oppressed." Earlier they were referred to as "untouchables" and in recent years have come to be known as the Dalits.

Dalit women experience a double burden of contamination, both due to their marginalised social status as outcastes and their gender as females. As women, their feminine bodies, which are also assigned at birth, bear the stigma of untouchability due to biological processes like menstruation and childbirth. "Dalitness" is an approach to developing an awareness of social identity. The essence is in recognising and appreciating each other's strengths. Dalit authors have exposed the cruelties and prejudices of society towards them. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar initiated the battle against the caste system. Ambedkar, a well-known Dalit politician and the main drafter of the Indian Constitution was adamantly against the caste system. In order to end prejudice based on caste, he thought that systematic changes were necessary. He argued that it is not fitting to attribute the creation of ranks or the caste system to a divine entity. Several researchers were inclined to attribute the origin of this hierarchical system to the sage Manu because Manu smriti, a stringent scripture, provided legitimacy to the caste system.

Dr Ambedkar said that the existence of castes predates Manu. He recognized the advantageous approach of refraining from merging the caste system with religion to enhance the state of the hierarchical structure.

> Preaching did not make the caste system, nor will it unmake it…While the four castes – Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishya's, and Shudras – came to be developed following particular conditions, the caste system and later the class system were given religious sanction in the Hindu texts which were written by the Brahmins. (Dangle, 2009)

B.R. Ambedkar supported Dalit electorates to achieve social and economic equality. He believed Dalits deserved independent political authority to protect their interests and be heard in legislation. To empower people, He highlighted the value of education. He established educational institutes and encouraged Dalits to pursue higher education to overcome caste oppression.

Mahatma Gandhi was an acknowledged advocate of social change and the advancement of India's lowest caste, the Dalits. To oppose untouchability, Gandhi popularized the term "Harijan" (children of God). He referred to untouchables as "Harijans" and saw them as important partners in the liberation movement. He always criticized Ambedkar's ideologies. Gandhi aimed to modify rather than destroy the caste system, referring to Dalits as "Harijans". His method was based on his spiritual convictions and his dedication to non-violence and ethical influence. He advocated for altering public perceptions of Dalits and incorporating them

into the Hindu community, prioritizing social cohesion rather than structural deconstruction. Gandhi's endeavours resulted in the creation of other projects, including the Harijan Sevak Sangh in 1932, to enhance the socio-economic circumstances of Dalits via self-reliance and ethical betterment. The ideological disparities between Ambedkar and Gandhi were widely emphasised during the Poona Pact in 1932. Ambedkar initially obtained separate electorates for Dalits through the Communal Award, a decision that Gandhi opposed. Gandhi held the belief that the implementation of separate electorates would result in the division of Hindu society and undermine the strength of the national movement. To address the deadlock, the Poona Pact was signed, which established the provision of reserved seats for Dalits within the general electorate. This agreement represented a pivotal milestone in the chronicles of Dalit politics. A substantial increase from the 71 seats originally suggested, the Poona Pact allotted 148 reserved seats for Dalits in provincial legislatures, demonstrating the rigour of the negotiations and the compromises reached by both sides.

Untouchability arises as a result of the deeply rooted hierarchical prejudice within this system. The major cause of subjection under the caste system was the establishment of an impractical division. This hierarchy, in which those at the top of the social ladder have the privilege of purity and those at the bottom are identified with indicators of pollution and impurity, is based on the idea of pure and impure. Beteille defines caste as a small group of people characterized by endogamy, hereditary and a specific way of life that includes the traditional continuation of a specific profession, usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system based on the concept of purity and pollution. (Beteille 2012; Paggi 2005) Gidla views this bias as a form of segregation, where the wealthy are seen as pure and those who are less fortunate are treated with disrespect. Gidla holds the perspective that those belonging to the outcaste community are referred to as untouchables due to the belief that they are ritually impure to such an extent that even the slightest interaction with them will contaminate even those belonging to the lower castes of Hindu society. In addition, she states that Untouchables are strictly prohibited from partaking in communal meals or engaging in intermarriage with others. Furthermore, they are compelled to reside in a distinct colony located on the periphery of the village, segregated from the rest of the community. Dalit women played a prominent role in the movements against caste discrimination and untouchability throughout the 1920s. During the 1930s, Dalit women actively participated in the non-Brahman movement. These initial organizations played a crucial role in

adopting resolutions against practices such as child marriage, dowries, and enforced widowhood. In India during the 1980s and 1990s, mainstream feminist ideology started acknowledging the concerns related to caste. This represented an important shift from the different feminist movements in the 1970s and 1980s that failed to tackle caste-related matters. During the 1970s, autobiographies documenting the lives and experiences of Dalit women started to be published. A significant number of these women were motivated by the influence of Babasaheb Ambedkar.

During the 1970s, autobiography became the primary medium of expression for Dalit writers to convey their Dalit consciousness. It served as a backdrop for the writers to document and preserve their personal experiences and stories. It provided readers with a direct and immediate understanding of the author's personal experiences and challenges, expressed in their own words and viewpoints. These writings emerged as a result of the introduction of the very first group of educated Dalits into the Indian literary scene. The writers of this generation aimed to depict their own experiences, showcasing a reality that was abundant with various forms of exploitation and marginalization. Most Dalit writers predominantly choose the genre of 'Memoir' to articulate their emotions and lived encounters. They depicted the challenges faced by Dalit women in their lives through Memoirs, using authentic and realistic experiences. Ants among Elephants, Sujatha Gidla's autobiography, tells the family history of a rural South Indian Dalit woman from the lower middle class. Sujatha Gidla, an Indian American author and activist born in 1963, gained popularity for her biography titled Ants among Elephants: An Untouchable Family and the Making of Modern India published in 2017. She was born and raised in a Dalit community in Andhra Pradesh and relocated to the United States at the age of 26. Gidla is regarded as one of the emerging figures in Dalit literature. The text explores the themes of poverty and the struggle against caste discrimination within a Dalit family spanning three generations, residing in the town of Kazipet, located in Andhra Pradesh. As members of an untouchable caste, they endure profound tragedies and suffering throughout the novel. The lives of Sathyam, Manjula, and Gidla serve as a narrative of the pervasive caste and gender inequality that exists throughout familial households, academic institutions, political organizations, and other societal structures. Throughout different periods of her life, she had numerous problems with colleagues, bosses, house owners, and even hospital guests. The autonomous professional young woman's life is significantly affected by marriage, children, and the constant presence of caste identity. This work received strong criticism from critics due to its uncompromising condemnation of the caste system. Although her autobiography contains

significant political implications, it should not be disregarded, as she originates from a tribal society. In her biography, she frequently emphasises the persistent presence of her untouchability, which burdened her like a concealed truth that she could never confide in anybody. Gidla's memoir aligns with the multitude of indigenous writers in India who are sharing their narratives to gain recognition.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research paper employs a qualitative methodology by thoroughly examining research papers, scholarly publications, and theses as sources to understand the subject matter comprehensively and to investigate the complexities of Dalit feminism with the concept of intersectionality and identity. The selected work thoroughly examines the systematic oppression inside the Indian caste system and the tenacity of Dalits, which is the main subject of this research study. Gidla's narrative framework rigorously scrutinises the intricate strata of subjugation experienced by Dalits, providing a full comprehension of how identity is moulded within societal hierarchies. This theoretical framework utilises multidisciplinary methodologies from Dalit feminism and the concept of intersectionality, influenced by Bell Hook's interpretation of Black feminism, to examine the interconnectedness of caste, gender, and socio-economic aspects.

Dalit Feminism: Challenging Mainstream Feminism

Dalit feminism is a feminist viewpoint that challenges gender norms and caste both within the Dalit community and within feminism as a whole. South Asian countries like Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan are home to the majority of Dalit women. They encounter distinct problems compared to women in these nations' dominant castes. They have a higher probability of experiencing poverty, lacking education, and facing social marginalization.

Sharmila Rege criticizes Indian feminism for its tendency to ignore the hardships and experiences of Dalit women. Traditionally, mainstream feminism in India has mostly focused on addressing the concerns of privileged women from higher castes, higher social classes, and university education. As a result, Dalit women have been excluded and overlooked within the feminist conversation. Rege asserts that feminist analyses are insufficient and restrictive if they fail to take into account the impact of caste. Inspired by Bell Hooks's interpretation of Black feminism, Dalit feminism use the notion of intersectionality to examine the relationships between caste, gender, and socio-economic parameters.

In the groundbreaking book Feminist Theory: From Margin to Centre, Bell Hooks aims to provide a thorough analysis of feminism. She specifically highlights the shortcomings of mainstream feminism in the United States throughout the late 20th century. To create a comprehensive and revolutionary feminist movement that can effectively bring about significant social change, hooks direct her critique not only towards gender but also towards the interconnected systems of oppression and structures of power. She emphasises the significance of liberalism, which supports and is made easier by the discussion of White bourgeois feminism, several years before Kimberle Crenshaw coined the word "Intersectionality" to describe the interconnected systems of oppression. Intersectionality is a concept used to analyse how groups and people's social and political identities lead to specific combinations of inequality and privilege. Some examples of these criteria encompass gender, caste, sex, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, religion, and how one looks physically. The convergence and interplay of these social identities can have liberating and oppressive effects. Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality in 1989. She explains the impact of interconnected power structures on the most marginalised individuals in society.

Intersectionality: The Core of Rege's Theory

Rege's theoretical framework is heavily anchored in the concept of intersectionality, which she utilises to investigate how caste, gender, class, and race intersect to impact the lives of Dalit women. She contends that focusing exclusively on one part of identity, such as gender, fails to capture the whole magnitude of the oppression experienced by Dalit women. Instead, a full analysis must address how these many identities interact and intensify the effects of prejudice and marginalization. The growth of intersectionality theory in India has been impacted by her work. Rege, an Indian feminist sociologist, is renowned for her extensive research on the experiences of Dalit women in India. Her articles will provide valuable insights into the challenges experienced by Dalit women in India and the intricate dynamics between caste and gender that shape these difficulties. She argued that when analysing social inequality, it is inadequate to focus solely on a single aspect of identity, such as gender, because this can obscure the influence of other identities, as well as class or caste, on an individual's experiences of oppression and marginalization. Her work is essential for understanding and eradicating social inequality. It has significantly impacted feminist activism and research in India and other locations. She emphasizes the significance of prioritizing underrepresented communities' viewpoints and experiences. This method of

analysis is beneficial for examining how the work simultaneously questions and enhances the perspectives of Dalit women, while also questioning prevailing cultural beliefs about women in India. According to her study, understanding the realities of marginalised communities requires the consideration of intersectionality. It aims to investigate how these factors collectively exacerbate the challenges faced by Dalit women, particularly concerning their psychological and physical well-being.

Within this paradigm, the phenomenon of discrimination against black women cannot be adequately accounted for by a mere convergence of sexism and racism but rather requires a more intricate analysis. Intersectionality explores overlapping forms of oppression, such as triple oppression, which specifically refers to the oppression experienced by women of colour who are impoverished or immigrants. According to Hooks, Black women must endure oppression from both White people and Black men. While White middle-class and upper-class women have the right to despise Black people, Black men also subjugate Black women, perpetuating the cycle of oppression. The way that Hooks interprets the double marginalization of Black working-class women is similar to how Gopal Guru's essay, "Dalit Women Talk Differently,"(1995) aims to highlight the predicament of historically marginalised Dalit women in India. These women are doubly silenced because they are not given a voice in mainstream Indian feminism, which focuses on the problems of upper-class, university-educated women, and male-dominated Dalit politics. Guru emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the unique perspective of Dalit women, who are marginalised in multiple ways. He argues that their way of expressing themselves should be considered truly representative and appropriate.

Identity

The concept of identity is complex and includes elements of the individual, the group, and society. Personal identity pertains to an individual's self-perception and distinctive characteristics. Social identity refers to the feeling of being a part of specific social groupings, which is influenced by elements like caste, gender, and class. Collective identity encompasses the common attributes and shared encounters within a group. Within the Dalit community, personal experiences of resistance and resilience intersect with prejudice based on caste to shape identity. This framework will examine how Gidla's narrative demonstrates the flexible and ever-changing nature of identity, influenced by both oppressive systems and individual autonomy.

DISCUSSION

Decoding Domination

The lived experience of the Dalit provides a subtext for criticising the mechanisms of domination, and it also explains the source of the narrator's wrath that breaks up the usually calm and collected narrative. Gidla focuses on her mother, Mary Manjulabai (also known as Manjula), and describes how Manjula faced institutional casteism and linguistic and regional discrimination during her time at Banaras University. At Banaras Hindu University, Professor Tripathi, the Head of the Department, was deeply disgusted by the sight of Manjula. A single glance at her confirmed her destitute status and her untouchable caste identification. In a display of his Brahmanical superiority, he proceeded to manipulate Manjula's final results. Manjula, who ranked second in her class after the first year was praised by Professor Pathak that she is most intelligent student in his class but she was shocked and disappointed and hardly attained a second-class result. She examined closely what might have gone wrong and discovered that "she had made top marks in all the papers except for those that were graded by Tripathi" (Gidla,2017,194). Despite Manjula's exceptional academic performance, her untouchable caste identity prevents her from receiving the marks she deserves. Nevertheless, she still manages to achieve outstanding results. She defied all obstacles and surpassed the limitations of her town by obtaining a master's degree from a prestigious Central University in Uttar Pradesh. The fact that South Indians are viewed as having a lower status in the regional and language hierarchy further complicates her situation:

> North Indians bullied South Indians and never mingled with them. There were separate messes for north and south. North Indians wouldn't go to the south-Indian mess while south Indians wouldn't dare set foot in the north-Indian one (Gidla,2017,187).

Regarding language, "there was also the problem of English. … her lack of fluency was a shame on this cosmopolitan campus where English was the lingua franca" (Gidla,2017,188). Her Dalit identity is not the sole factor contributing to the discriminating attitude towards her. Her class, regional origin, and language also play a significant role in amplifying her marginalization.

An intersectional reading of the story of the Dalit family, which includes Manjula and her two brothers Satyam and Carey, is necessary due to the interconnected nature of caste and gender oppression. The work powerfully depicts inter-caste conflict, with a focus on the protection of their women. The exploitation of nonkamma females (those who do not belong to

the kamma caste) by kamma[2] males on campus promptly triggers a dispute between two castes, specifically kammas and kapus[3]. The caste aspect takes over the gender dimension of the harassment as readers encounter Kusuma: "Kusuma, a dazzlingly beautiful kapu girl, was a special target. The boys would challenge each other to cycle past her and snatch the jasmine blossoms from her hair" (Gidla,2017,158). Satyam, the older brother of Manjula, recognized a potential for political advantages for his student organisation, SFI[4], and assumed the responsibility of "to defend the girls against these attacks" (Gidla,2017,158). He was aware that the kammas held a dominant position in the Congress panel. Therefore, by advocating for the dignity of the kapus girls, he aimed to safeguard the masculinity of the kapus and attract them to join his SFI panel. The work addresses the notion of protectionism, underscoring the adverse consequences of the absence of protection for women, which ultimately results in the disempowerment of Dalit men. The Surya Samajists[5], Members of the Surya Samajam[6], a youth organisation for high-caste high-school dropouts, had a clear intention to wish for the demise of Carey, one of the three siblings. In addition to surpassing all of them as an athlete, Carey also "led a group of his friends—all fearless mala sons of bitches like himself—in protecting the honour of untouchable girls in town from caste boys who see them as cheap and easy" (Gidla,2017,138) It is striking that Carey, who himself mistreated a girl from a higher social class, chose the role of guardian for girls from the untouchable caste, which strengthens the notion that a man considers a woman's honour to be his possession. Women should be safeguarded, used, and defended solely based on caste, class, or personal envy, rather than to uphold a woman's intrinsic dignity. This is seen in two situations. Initially, to save the kapu women, the kapus did not hesitate to seek support from the Dalits, such as Satyam. secondly, the upper-caste individuals, such as the Surya Samajists, showed no

[2] Kamma is a Hindu caste predominantly settled in the southern parts of India.

[3] Kapu is another caste in the Hindu community based in the Andhra-Telangana region of India.

[4] SFI is the abbreviation of the Students' Federation of India. It is the left-wing student body, aligned with the political views and ideology of the Communist Party of India.

[5] Samajists refer to the members of a particular association named Surya Samajam as described in the text.

[6] Samajam, which translates to society, refers to a particular organisation featured in the novel.

hesitation in supporting Aseervadam, a lad from a lower social caste, as they sought to target Carey, who is responsible for safeguarding untouchable girls.

Pan's exploration of the interplay between caste and gender dynamics is applicable in this context as well. According to Rege, Pan highlights in their work *Mapping Dalit Feminism* that an intersectional study may effectively show how gender ideology not only supports traditional patriarchal structures but also the caste system. Pan elucidates how Brahmanical patriarchy has exploited sexual assaults on Dalit women as a means to undermine the masculinity of Dalit men or to emasculate them, hence providing a rationale for the alleged impurity of Dalit women. Taking references from the instances happened recently, she proves that:

> their public sexual assault also marks the inability of Dalit men to protect their women. In Brahmanical patriarchy protectionism (executed by confining women within the four walls of the house) is deemed as one of the major ways to preserve caste purity and prove masculinist and caste supremacy. (Pan,2020,217)

Now, focusing on the notion of purity and impurity,

> The concept of pure and impure forms the basis of this hierarchy wherein people placed at the top enjoy the privilege of purity, and those at the bottom of the social ladder are marked with signs of impurity and pollution. To such an extent that Gidla perceives this bias as a segregation of the village where the privileged shines with purity, while the underprivileged are treated like dirty dogs. (Gidla,2018,10)

Since the idea of caste purity is closely linked to the representation of purity and impurity, which is frequently internalised by the Dalits themselves, it is crucial to talk about it. The depiction of Dalit women, specifically, is intricately linked to the caste system; this is seen in the portrayal of Rajeswari at Andhra University in the selected work. As depicted in Telugu films and books, Rajeswari was the embodiment of a popular stereotype of untouchable Christian girls. She wore high heels, short-sleeved shirts, see-through saris, and a brassiere, all of which were deemed shocking and vulgar when Manjula was a college student. Rajeswari also used eyeliner and lipstick. In addition to highlighting the portrayal of the marginalised Christians and Brahmins, they experience unfair treatment as represented here:

> Rajeswari was friends with the only other modern girl in the hostel, who to everyone's shock was not an untouchable but a Brahmin. Manjula often wondered what was wrong with this girl. While many untouchable Christians liked to be stylish in this way, brahmins

> typically revelled in looking old-fashioned. But the boys would never harass a Brahmin girl, however provocatively she dressed or behaved. (Gidla,2017,183)

The portrayal of the untouchable Christian as a filthy, immoral woman who is "usually a nurse or a secretary …(and) is vulgar in her dress and behavior and constantly throws herself at men" (Gidla,2017,183) is contrasted with the Brahmin girls' satisfaction in maintaining their traditional appearance as a symbol of their purity. Therefore, Rajeswari's aspiration to be fashionable in this manner is not as surprising as that of the Brahmin girl. These stereotypes provide the upper-caste boys with an explanation for their perception of lower-caste women as immoral and easily accessible. However, the varying treatment of women from different castes by men indicates that the root cause of conflict lies in caste identity rather than gender identity. Rege examines the contradictory interactions between caste and gender that contribute to the subjugation of women:

> In the Brahmanical social order, caste-based division of labour and sexual divisions of labour are intermeshed such that elevation in caste status is preceded by the withdrawal of women of that caste from productive processes outside the private sphere. Such a linkage derives from presumptions about the accessibility of sexuality of lower caste women because they participate in social labour. Brahminism in turn locates this as the failure of lower caste men to control the sexuality of their women and underlines this as a justification of their impurity. (Rege,1998,44)

The dominance of men over women's sexuality and overall lives is apparent in the story of Manjula, who is subjected to the influence of two patriarchal systems - one within her family and another within the higher education sphere. It is relevant that the men in Manjula's family held the authority to determine both her academic curriculum and her choices about clothing, spouse, and reproductive well-being:

> Since she had to sit in classrooms with boys, her family made sure she looked as unattractive as possible. One weekend when Prasanna Rao came to visit, he and his sons and mother-in-law…decided that Manjula ought no longer to wear half saris…her father bought a bolt of coarse white cloth without a spot of colour.... even Brahmin widows dressed better than sixteen-year-old Manjula.… The decision about Manjula's dress had been made right in front of her, but no one asked her what she thought of it. (Gidla,2017,123-124)

The rigorous authority exercised by the male members of Manjula's family, especially her brothers, over her life both before and after her marriage is perceived as a praiseworthy form of upbringing. Consequently, Gidla illustrates how Manjula's upbringing was characterised by constant concern over unintentionally doing something that may upset her brothers.

Furthermore, the fact that Manjula's family members initially and later her husband Prabhakar Rao influenced her finances exemplifies how having a source of income does not guarantee a woman's financial independence. Prabhakar Rao, the husband, is a victim of patriarchy and feels obligated to demonstrate his masculinity in front of his mother, Rathnamma, and other relatives. He resorts to domestic violence to avoid being seen as weak and submissive to his wife. After giving birth to her third child, her brother Satyam made decisions regarding her reproductive well-being, just as he did for her education and marriage. The subjectivity of Dalit women is influenced by gender hierarchy, which in turn leads to the internalisation of negative perceptions. The portrayal of Dalits reinforces a sense of inferiority across the whole group, regardless of gender and the way Dalit complexion and features are shown and interpreted throws emphasis on the way individuals perceive themselves. They are forced to feel less than the Hindu caste of their appearance. Once again, the narrator highlights the prevailing perception of the untouchables: "Everyone thinks all untouchables are dark, but many of them, especially madigas, are as light-skinned as brahmins" (Gidla,2017,63).

Resolving Dalit Rage

Bell Hooks discusses rage and shows how, in their book Black Rage, Black psychiatrists William Grier and Prince Cobbs characterise it as pathological and only an indication of helplessness. She discreetly criticises them for failing to recognise it as a potentially beneficial reaction to oppression. Gidla's documentation of her family's narratives might be interpreted as a remedial reaction that would have been inaccessible to her had she not relocated to a different nation, as she consistently emphasised throughout her interviews. In one of her interviews at the Times Litfest Bangalore in 2018, she makes it very clear that "I don't think I could ever publish this book in India … as for threats if I were in India, I don't think I would have ever written this book as especially from the point of view of a Dalit" ("Sujatha Gidla Times of India"). Due to the extreme normalisation of Dalit persecution, she was unable to consider its resentment until she moved to the United States at the age of 26. It wasn't until she left the country that she understood,

> My stories, my family's stories, were not stories in India. They were just life. When I left and made new friends in a new country, only then did the things that happened to my family, the things we had done, become stories. Stories worth telling, stories worth writing down (Gidla,2017,1).

The narrative is abundant in both anger and irony, satire, and mockery in the narrator's voice regarding the situations she describes. The irony is evident in several sections that describe the Paki[7] colony: "One good thing for pakis in Gudivada was that enough shit was produced in the town every day to give every able-bodied man, woman, and child among them paying work" (Gidla,2017,114). Gilda provides a comprehensive analysis of India's shift towards modernity by highlighting the shortcomings that plague the contemporary Indian government:

> The caste whose occupation is the most degrading, the most indecent, and the most inhuman of all, is known in coastal Andhra as pakis. In print, they are called manual scavengers or, more euphemistically still, porters of night soil. In plain language, they carry away human shit. They empty the "dry" latrines still widely used throughout India, and they do it by hand. Their tools are nothing but a small broom and a tin plate. With these, they fill their palm-leaf baskets with excrement and carry it off on their heads five, to six miles to some place on the outskirts of town where they're allowed to dispose of it. Some modernized areas have replaced these baskets with pushcarts (this being thought of as progress in India) but even today the traditional "head-loading" method prevails across the country. Nearly all of these workers are women. (Gidla,2017,112)

The concept of progress is strongly condemned due to the dismissive tone she employs. The article contains a significant amount of criticism over independent India's unwillingness to address these issues or its carelessness in perpetuating the long-standing practice of caste-based oppression. The text reveals a strong anger at the oppression of Dalits, which is shown in Manjula's deep-seated hatred towards Hindus, who have historically exploited Dalits.

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[7] Pakis are the lowest caste among the Dalits whose assigned caste duty is to clean human excrement.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the fundamental objective of applying an intersectional framework to this Dalit family narrative is to highlight the various characteristics of caste, class, language, and geography that collectively contribute to gender discrimination. Economic and financial disparities, cultural discrimination, and violence based on gender all exacerbate their experiences of persistent prejudice.

Dalit memoirs articulate the complex realities of living at the junction of gender and caste and are essential for expressing resiliency and resistance. These stories promote a better comprehension of the emotional landscapes of excluded people and challenge prevailing cultural views. Ultimately, elevating the voices of Dalit women highlights the need for an intersectional strategy in the fight for equality and social justice in India.

The text demonstrates the presence of a hierarchical structure within the untouchable community, where the Mala, this group sees themselves as superior to other untouchable communities, such as the Madigas. However, to the caste Hindus, all individuals belonging to the untouchable caste are considered disgusting. Satyam observed that untouchable buffaloes were prohibited from grazing in the same meadows as the buffaloes belonging to the higher castes. The social stratification between the malas and the madigas, although both are considered untouchables, arises from internal hierarchies within their respective communities. On the other hand, the caste Hindus, who view all untouchables with disgust, enforce segregation between themselves and the untouchables as a consequence of external hierarchies between different communities. Consequently, because of the oppressive societal system, one's status is the perception of an individual is constantly changing, depending upon the person they are being compared to. The author's opinions align with the interpretation of Dalit feminism as seen through the intersectional lens and Black feminism. Interpreting oppression by caste within the framework of racial prejudice has been a prevalent approach, as the author elucidates to her fellow citizens in the United States that caste discrimination resembles racism against African Americans here. Here in India, where ideas of purity and impurity are frequently determined by skin colour, colourism the preference for lighter skin tones is intricately linked to the caste system. A lighter complexion is often related to a higher rank and perceived purity within the caste system, whereas darker skin is linked to lower status and perceived impurity. This perpetuates prejudices that demean oppressed populations, especially Dalits. Because people with lighter complexion tend to be given preference, this relationship affects social mobility, marriage prospects, and access to resources in addition to

reinforcing caste distinctions. The psychological impact of a society that values pale complexion can be severe, causing people with darker skin tones to internalize injustice.

These circumstances give rise to feelings of wrath and powerlessness that are similar to what Bell Hooks called "Black rage" the psychological response to centuries of Black people's discrimination, humiliation, and injustice in society. People from underprivileged groups are left to contend with societal systems that are intended to keep them in subordination in both situations. Caste inequalities impede Dalits' ability to advance in life and achieve self-awareness which, like Black fury, makes them feel imprisoned by social dynamics outside of their control. According to Hooks, Black rage is a sort of protest, a call for equality and acknowledgement.

In short, it is crucial to address the various dimensions of oppression, such as those related to language or area and those that occur across or within categories, to fully achieve the purposes of Dalit feminism. Sujatha Gidla's personal experiences and her family's story demonstrate that every aspect of oppression is interconnected. Therefore, attempting to eliminate one kind of oppression while disregarding others may result in an incomplete and limited emancipation.

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