

RESEARCH ARTICLE



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

CASTE POLITICS AGAINST DALITS AND THE SOCIAL REFORMS IN RAJASTHANI
SOCIETY: SENSING THROUGH SHYAMLAL JAIDIA'S
UNTOLD STORY OF A BHANGI VICE-CHANCELLOR (2001)

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Article info

Article Received:06/11/2023
Article Accepted: 03/12/2023
Published online:10/12/2023
DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.11.4.150](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.11.4.150)

Abstract

The present paper explores how low caste identities for the Dalits in the Hindu caste hierarchy have not only created a narrative of their misrepresentation in every domain of stakeholder-ships in the country but also continue to widen the ideological erosion even among these in the post- independent political system in India. The deep-rootedness of divisive politics of caste system still affects proper implementation of government and nongovernment policies that are either framed while framing constitution or being framed thereafter for these people. The divisive frame work of caste system, practical issues in proper implementation of to various policies have been literary explored by the Dalit writers, especially in Shyamlal Jaidia's autobiography *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor* (2001).

Keywords: Identities, misrepresentation, divisive, practical, implementation.

Background

Society is the land from where literature emerges and stretches out the contours of description in routine practices of the local inhabitants of a region. Literature is the total outcome of all those social interactions between different groups of people in all issues of taking from earning a livelihood to political consciousness. The literature presents the undercurrents of society and repercussions at different levels that include the psychological and ecological levels of the region. The geographical conditions are one of the most important deterrents of nurturing and customizing the regional variations amongst the people that

becomes evident from the literature written during the different phases of life circles. The various forms of unwritten literature present the realistic perspective of a society in different stages. However, with time this form of literature either gets into the oblivion stage or distortion in the natural calamities like epidemics or pandemics as well as the manmade disasters like wars/chemical explosions. The regional writings have a close eye to describe the intensity of the folks' sensitivity and present realistic picture of the ethos of the local people in their social intricacies. This level of understanding is the essence of a literary activist who exhibits human sensitivity without missing, poetic justice without biases, and

presents the picture of society without prejudice fulfilling the purpose of art/literature. But in the description of the regional society of Rajasthan, the literary world has followed without fail the phenomenal trend of ignoring the issues of the untouchables. In any literary genre either in regional language or in Hindi/English with exceptions like (to some extent Premchand in Hindi) and (Mulk RajAnand in English) in the 1930s, Dalits' concern never get literary representations. Different in subject matter and on its treatment, Dalits' social-cultural milieu finds no innovations in Dalit characters in mainstream literature despite a long beginning in *Untouchable*, a novel by Mulk Raj Anand in 1935. For the first time, "an untouchable boy named Bhakha" who introspects his wretchedness and the measures to get freedom from such caste discrimination. After this novel, the socio-cultural sufferings of untouchables came out with no substantial description of untouchables' life in mainstream writings. The supposition either discrimination against the untouchables has ceased to be in the Hindu caste society or the mainstream writers have cornered their serious concerns of untouchables. The different nomenclatures of sub-castes for the Untouchables in the Hindu caste system not only long keeps them divided and mazes them encircling their oppressors but also keeps them distracted to understand the commonality of their protest against their oppressors. The castes specification in Hinduism is not a 'division of labour but the division of the labourers' hence, Ambedkar consolidates Untouchables as the scheduled castes in the constitutional provisions of reservations due to their historical perspective of social-cultural indignation. Hence, the SCs get equality of opportunities within the constitutional provisions of reservation without any discrimination including Bhangis. Hence, untouchables get a common nomenclature of the Scheduled Castes in implementation of the constitutional provisions and all gets equal opportunities in their welfare policies. Moreover, these people get a socio-cultural narrative of Dalits in Indian society in 1970s (finding no differentiation in caste discrimination against all Hindu untouchables) in India society. Certain scheduled castes (like Bhangi) do not get equal

benefits of reservations due to many reasons and the gap becomes distinguished to observe their socio-economic matrix. Therefore, the castes (who do not get benefits) demand for exclusive quota within the scheduled caste reservation. The unexpected juncture in the Scheduled Castes reservation (the policymakers lead by Ambedkar including Gandhi never visualized) becomes crucial either to weaken or to consolidate them to protest against the upper caste oppressors in recent times. As Bhangis find adequate opportunities in admissions, government jobs, political nominations, and democratic institutions (due to various underlying issues in the vertical and horizontal distribution of the provisions) so their issues in the SC reservation becomes important motif in the erstwhile feudal society of Rajasthan. Hence, Bhangis' underlying caste repercussions in the historical perspective as well as within the SCs get discussed by Shyamlal Jaidia (a Bhangi) in the autobiography *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor* (2001) where they get multiplied marginalization in one or the other reason in Indian society.

Bhangis' Issues in Rajasthani Society

Bhangis are the most exploited by the upper castes in Rajasthani society due to their traditionally engaged with the clearing the dust and the human excreta that largely blockade their socioeconomic change in the erstwhile feudal society. One of the famous modern Indian writers who quotes Gandhi's definition from his essay "The Ideal Bhangi" where he describes the identical characteristics of Bhangi as 'that looks after the sanitation of the body of society and deriving his livelihood from his occupations would approach it only as a sacred duty' also shows 'new identical crisis of these people (Roy, 70)'. In Hindu caste pyramid, Bhangi- 'a community of scavenging workers' and has long been engaged 'in degrading and inhuman jobs as carrying the night soil on their heads and cleaning of public latrines (Jaidia, 83)'. The Hindu untouchables have got different nomenclatures in various interpretations in purifications and reforming movements throughout the history of India but their sufferings remained unattended before the Ambedkar era seeking their representation in the republic India. Delineating

historical perspective of Bhangis' deprivation, Jaidia describes Bhangis' exploitations in the Rajasthani society as an overview of their sufferings countrywide phenomenon in Indian society. The population in Rajasthan is 68548437 out of which 88.49% are Hindus that is with the majority of the religious following. Out of which SCs are 18%, STs are 13.5%, Jats 12%, Meenas 11%, Gujjar 9%, and Rajputs and Brahmins are 7% each. Dalits constitute almost 16.6% of the country's population at the national level whereas Dalits in Rajasthan constitute 17.8% of the state demography. Despite having a larger percentage of Dalits in the state in comparison to the national demography, the state constitutes 6% of Dalits at the national level but the crime rate against SC atrocity touches 17% of the country determines their socio-cultural positions in the state. The state represents on 7th number in representing the Dalit population in the country but the state stands on the fifth number in crime rates against Dalits indicates the social fabrications of this state. Rajasthan traditionally has Hindu majority that gets reflected in the feudal culture with regional variations. Their customs and rituals are distinctively marked with caste identities in following the local deities and in their social interactions. The male dominance and untouchability become prominent features in the daily routine exercises as well as on the special occasions of festivals and celebrations as customary worship of weapons in the feudal background of this society. The scheduled castes are still languishing in socio-economic backwardness in the erstwhile feudalistic society of Rajasthan despite the Independence of the country for more than seven decades. Dalits comprising 18% percentage forms a major chunk of the state demography but their social exclusion and their dependency on the basic needs of the upper-castes make it potent that they lack self-reliance in absence of a source of their livelihood. The erstwhile royal families' ownership over the agricultural land and other resources of the state has put the process of democratization of socio-economic sectors off-road particularly for the untouchables having nothing in legacy but their exploitation. The political freedom of the country means to restore equality of opportunities in the state resources for these people, has ensured

neither economic equality nor political liberty despite implementation of the SC reservation. Moreover, a huge gap in stakeholder ships over the state resources and continuity of feudal establishments has rarely influenced the sensitivity of the mainstream writers. Dalits' seeking livelihood (different from the earlier caste rules and lacking sufficient resources) in new entrepreneurship (having no social sanction despite having constitutional rules) in the regional society of Rajasthan get feudal oppositions. Hence, untouchables being deprived of human rights for centuries in the Hindu society keep languishing in the worn-out traditions of permanent disability. The mainstream writers present a constructed reality of (whole) Rajasthani culture in not describing the ground reality that 'Dalits were outside of the Hindu fold, and therefore could not be allowed equal access to water, which in Rajasthan has always been a precious commodity (Bhatia, 31)'. Hence, the real existing issues of working-class Dalits fall in literary oblivion at their workplaces and religious places in the state.

Dalit Sufferings and Literary Representation

The society of Rajasthan is more or less caste-ridden with a slight exception in urban areas in social interactions but the traditional caste identities never ceased to be in regards of Dalits. The social suffering of Dalits in the regional society gets twice tortured in feudalistic culture and Rajwades' attitude of habitual arrogance towards the lower strata of society, particularly with the Dalits. Secondly, the majority of Hindu dominance in the low literacy rate in the area has never let them notional assertion for the constitutional rights of equality and liberty. Like the culture of the country, the state also exhibits the dominance of the upper castes like Rajputs, Gujjars, Jats, and Brahmins who determine the equations in the political system from the local Panchayati level to the political corridors at the national level. The issue of civil/human rights for Untouchables/Bhangis is much older than the 1930s that continues to haunt their lives. But Dalits have found no substantial place in any genre of the text except the holistic references in the social reforming movements in the pre-Independence period as well as in the post-Independence period. This knowingly

ignoring approach by the established writers gives way to the emergence of the regional Dalit writings to put forth the sufferings of untouchables and their exploitation in different practices in the caste system in India and Rajasthan too. The mainstream literary realists' endeavour has hardly touched the intensity of sensibility in describing the issues of human rights of the untouchables. The socio-cultural exploitation of the Bhangis never got attention under the feudal setup of Rajasthani society. If there is any referential glimpse in the mainstream realists, it has hardly got a justification in a literary representation like the social setup of this region even after the Independence of the country. Hence, many of the mainstream literary biggies have knowingly ignored the pangs and pathos to see the socio-cultural separation of Hindu society as becomes evident in literary discussion in the 'Jaipur Literary Festivals' scarcely touch the Dalit content in showing seriousness. The mainstream writers have unknowingly endorsed the set norms of social description in every literary canon that Dalit writers emerged to fulfil the vacuumed zone in Dalits' issues.

Mainstream Writers and their Reforming Approach

The mainstream writers' approach in exaggerating the feudal phenomenon in ignoring the untouchables' sufferings without any substantial development makes the Dalit writers express their cathartic experience in life writings. In the last couple of decades, the Rajasthani Dalits have become vocal to express their cathartic purgation in different genres of literature particularly in fiction and autobiographies. The Dalit writers portray the other side of rich cultural exoticism where the inhuman caste oppression is meted out to the Dalits in the name of culture. The royal arrogance of caste and authority of the unjustified means deprive Dalits of social equality and equal opportunity in Rajasthan, in a new political institution of democracy in India. Dalits' exploitation particularly of Bhangis has neither got the attention of the mainstream literary realism in showing sensitivity to social intricacies nor in the moralistic writings showing compassion in describing the human rights of these people. The different narratives of Dalit writers as counter publics include 'parallel discursive arenas

where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs (Fraser, 67)'. Hence, endorsing the orthodox interpretations of Bhangis in the mainstream writings succumbed to the one-sided glorification of their royal patronage in the country, particularly in Rajasthan. Bhangis socio-cultural sufferings have never got reality touch in literary representations as well as in other forms of cultural manifestations of art and cultural practices and exhibitions. The annual Jaipur Literary Festival scarcely touches the long persisting issues of the Bhangis in Rajasthan even after more than seventy years of Independence of the country. The sociological and political demonstration of these kings constructs a glorious aspect of the state level and national even after independence. The mainstream construction of these socio-political narratives of cultural glorifications largely ignores the other aspects making Rajasthani society a cultural heritage. Society encompasses 'folds and follies' of the local folks, socio-cultural mechanism of human relationships over there at the individual and community level are the features of a dynamic and vibrant society. But the static and pictorial depiction of the Rajasthani socio-cultural paradigms (undoubtedly rich in feudal and royal thundering) lacks the realistic aspect of the socio-political transformation of post-Independence India. The missing of the social relevance of the past practices brings any culture on the verge of turning it into a dead culture; hence the rich culture of Rajasthan is no exception to the natural phenomenon. Liveliness is an inseparable part of the vibrancy of a living culture that infuses the developmental changes in its ever-growing nature of culture. So, the lack of showing social transition with time determines a huge gap in depiction of social reality of Rajasthan that points to a prejudiced narrative of literature finding no social connection between the glorious past (of the royals) the past miserable present of the (Dalits, despite belonging to the same social composition. No incorporation in its basic formation particularly in democratic setups lessens the vitality of cultural heritage. Otherwise, it is

another kind of hegemony to stop the democratic values in the masses, a representative of all communities comprising of low and high, Hindu or others, males and females in the society. Therefore, the obsession of mainstream literary pursuit in depiction of royals' exoticism undermines the social realism of lower strata of society in cultural and literary representation. Dalit writings in Rajasthan are in the initial stages of depicting the Dalits' struggle to establish (with painstaking earnestness) in regional Dalit writings as a counter-canon of Dalit narrative of social sufferings in the erstwhile feudal society. Furthermore, the inhuman social practices and getting that endorsed in literature (as Bhangis' are taken granted for cleaning human waste only) has not only slowed down the process of sociocultural transition but have also created a sense of static and feudal nature to the rich Rajasthani culture.

Conclusion

Jaidia describes Dalits'/Bhangis' backwardness in understanding the contrariness between the mainstream policymakers (including Gandhi) and the Ambedkarite missionaries in seeking practical solutions for Dalits. Describing social reality of Dalits', he distinctively delineates as stated 'reality of Dalit Literature is distinct, and so is the language of this reality. It is the uncouthimpolite language of Dalits...Standard language has a class. Dalit writers have rejected the class of this standard language (Limbale, 33)'. The issue of implementation of the SC provisions (including reservations) for their stakeholder ships in national resources must have legality instead of moralistic narratives of their backwardness. The theoretical differences between Dalits' then assimilation and present dissimilation in the provisions of SC reservations that ascertain the positioning of their protest against caste oppression have also been discussed in his autobiography. Dalit writings present the issues of untouchables as human rights and their socio-cultural exploitation in the feudal setup constitutes the counter canon of Dalits' socioliterary world. He penetrates (into the castled culture of the Raja-Rajwades' extravaganza) while describing the under carpet reality of Dalits in the Rajasthani society. The mainstream writers'

narrative of Bhangis' exploitation either falls in the overt reference of sufferings or touching not their new challenges in the changed circumstances in post-Independence India. The reciprocal interdependence of society and literature has been ignored in the critical analysis of the writers on one hand, and the social responsibility of the writers seems to succumb to the royal(ly) impressions. One reason or the others, the issues of untouchables remained out of the literariness that determines the essence of routine social interaction between different social groups in the region. The 'reducing of the gap between history and literary writings' that presents a prejudiced picture of the Rajasthani society is the ignoring of suffering and pains of almost twenty percent of the state population. The selective description of the wholeness of the socio-cultural aspects of a society either suit be a one-sided narrative in the propagation of mainstream culture. Jaidia penetratingly overturns those sociocultural practices which have kept continued procedural tortures of Dalits in the Indian society. The pitfalls to stop untouchables' oppression in the hands of upper castes in the royal background gets multiply their sufferings in the Rajasthani society. He describes the socio-cultural as well as the religio-political mechanism in the caste system that blindfolded Dalits making them clash with themselves instead of consolidating against their oppressors. Dalits' fallout in the theoretical collective efforts in the erstwhile feudal state gets a pivotal point in social suffering. The fallouts of 'stratification within stratification' among Dalits and the counterforce that wish to keep the social 'status quo' display the social perspective of research. The local nuances, social status to an individual, and many other deciding factors are the crux in 'caste culture' and 'castled construction of attitudinal indifference' in the Rajasthani society. All the characters in these writings put forth the struggle that has been described "the characters in my stories that fight for their dream of justice and to the tradition that teaches us to struggle for dignity, equality, and freedom (Navaria, 252)". The realistic presentation of Dalits and their changing roles for new goals in their socio-economic and educational

stakeholder ship gets stuck in feudal society of Rajasthan.

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