

An Analysis of Caste Discrimination and Untouchability in R.B. Nischal's Poem Paitālā Pukār 2

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Abstract

This paper examines the socio-cultural issues of Dalits. The objective of the study was to analyze caste discrimination and untouchability of Dalits. For this objective, the researcher has employed Stuart Hall's theoretical insights of representation under cultural studies. The poem was selected purposively and it was the library based qualitative research. The data were collected from record-keeping and description. The researcher found that Dalit community that has suffered from the time immemorial in every aspect due to generational, multi-faceted and institutionalized discrimination due to the Hindu caste system in Nepal for religious and political reasons. This unfair practice has left a clear mark of social division, exclusion and inequality which has severely ruined Dalits' life and identity. Addressing this issue in the poem Paitālā Pukār Ram Bahadur Kami, displays episodes of verbal and physical violence and recurrent intra-caste discrimination. As well as he depicts the traumatic existence of the Dalit oppressed community. Other dominations and discriminations are less traumatic in comparison of cultural trauma which is like an incurable disease. Therefore, this paper displays how the Dalit people have been living in a society bearing harsh torture, trauma and inhuman treatment.

Moreover, it is significant for academia for representing diverse cultural experiences and people and it can be a valuable asset for the society.

Key Words: Dalit, Untouchability, Discrimination, Abusive word, Dalit Trauma, and Paitālā Pukār (Appeal of a Foot).

Introduction

In contemporary Nepal, there are millions of Dalit people adversely affected by the Varna system of the Hindu religion. These categories are at the bottom of Hindu social organization system and these have been designed as 'untouchable' or 'Dalit'. *Muluki Ain* (MA) 1910 B.S. made caste discrimination and the practice of untouchability officially strong. Civil Code 2020 B.S. declares that the

caste discrimination is a crime in the eyes of law. However, principles of social equality, justice and equity have not been practically achieved in Nepal. Leaders, policy makers, administrators and political parties have almost failed to implement rules and regulations. At this point, it is relevant to cite few lines from great poet Laxmi Prasad Devkota from the lyrical text *Muna Madan* (1992 B. S.): "Kshetrikho ChoroYo Pāu Chuncha Ghinale Chudaina / Mānis Thulo Dilale Huncha Jātle Hudaina / " 'This son of Chhetri touches your feet with not contempt, man is great by his heart not by his caste' (Devkota qtd. in Magarati, 2021, p. 40). Despite such a human expression of a great poet, people only read the text without applying it in their practice. In this regard Shyam Lal Magarati quotes from Kedharnath Pandey (Rahul Sankritayan) that the practice of untouchability as, "Why is there difference between your words and actions or speech and responsibilities (p.5)?" In this community too, people only talk but do not apply it in action. So, the researcher carried out a research to explore caste discrimination and untouchability in R.B's *Paitālā Pukār*. Ram Bahadur was born in Polungmainadi-1, Palpa in 2041B.S. His creations are; *Maun Himāl* (Collection of poems, 2062), *Sapanā Phul* (Half-epic-2062). *Āsu Khasdai Garcha* (collections of poems, 2063) and *Paitālā Pukār* (Collection of Poems, 2073) etc. In this collection there are 58 poems. Among them twelve poems are especially about Dalit life and their activities, domination and discrimination by the upper caste people.

The Dalit community has, therefore, endured centuries of subalternity, marginality and socio-economic inequality, and has been subsequently deprived of any kind of rights or voice, being thus thrust to the very bottom of Nepali society. R.B., by means of writing this intense poem which narrates the array of discrimination and violence suffered by Dalits, has provided this voiceless and downtrodden community with voice and has thus changed the usual high-caste focalization of the Nepali narrative from a high to a low-caste perspective. Nonetheless, this poem and its bestowal of voice to the social outcasts may certainly raise issues of authenticity, entitlement and representation since R.B. was an educated man born in a Dalit family. This research paper basically is confined to textual analysis based on library research. To explore caste discrimination, the researcher has selected the text purposively and collected the data by record keeping and description. For the analysis of data, the researcher has implemented cultural theories based on the insights of Stuart Hall, Chris Barker, Kedarnath Pandey, and other theorists.

Some important and critical viewpoints of Nepali writers are reviewed in the following section to get the ideas of caste discrimination and untouchability in the selected poem which provides ideas for finding the research gap. Then the researcher outlines the methodology adopted to carry out this study. This is followed by discussion of the findings and the paper ends with some concluding remarks.

Review of Literature

Some important and critical viewpoints of Nepali writers are reviewed in this section. The selected text is an anthology of fifty-eight poems. About this anthology, Gobinda Raj Bhattarai asserts, it is different from his family and surrounding and socio-cultural, in which people view, distinctly for the humiliation. Because the lack of education and ignorance, people around there have been traditionally and culturally affected. They do not know what is R.B's status, education and personal life. People dominate him due to his caste. This is a huge mistake committed by the people or creator who created

such an evil tradition and culture so that hundreds and thousands of R.Bs have been innocently getting punishment. This is the representative echo of live experiences of Dalits.

Paitālā Pukār, a collection of poems is the master pieces of R.B. which appeals people not to make a class as the foot. See with your eyes of knowledge. All the bodily parts from head to foot are equally important. Some individuals are facing social discrimination because they are regarded as foot. This tradition and culture should be ended (Bhattarai, 2073, pp. 7-23). Similarly, Bhattarai adds that R.B's poems are full of human consciousness which have been strengthened by the philosophic perception (p.10). His poems related to caste discrimination are centered on the destruction of the wall between the human beings (p.11). His *Paitālā Pukār* is the master piece. He appeals that do not make foot to a class (group), see with your conscience, the parts from top to bottom (head to toe) are equally important. By reading such poems, the heart of Brahman and Chhetries may stop for a moment, eyes may be filled with tears, they may remorse for this evil sin and they may redeem their brothers and sisters from such hellish life. Why do people consider Dalits as foot and the upper caste as head? (Bhattarai, 2073, pp. 11-12).

In the same line, Netra Prasad Neupane (2073) claims that R.B has created *Paitālā Pukār* based on the contemporary time and its human life. Almost all poems have been moved towards the intense height and perfection. They are guided by both ideology and mystery. Subject wise, it has covered atom to the whole universe, writing style is very simple, full of philosophy, mystery, theme of rebellion, spiritualism, equality, freedom and fraternity, cultural theme and modernism (pp. 24-39). Further, in the cultural aspect, the poet has mentioned that "people who believe in existence of nature and god but practice caste discrimination and untouchability cannot be theists and humanists. Human beings created by god are equal (Neupane, 2073, p. 38).

Shyam Lal Magarati (2078), states generally, Dalit writings center on poverty, illiteracy, politically backward, landlessness and joblessness of the Dalit community (p 66). Similarly, their emphasis is on caste discrimination and the practice of untouchability in different places: the upper caste houses, temples, schools, hotels and taps. Some of them have talked about the intra-caste untouchability among Dalits which causes a division among them. Some argued that their miserable situation is due to the Varna system and socio-cultural structure of the society. They are conscious of their misery and resisting against discrimination, exploitation and humiliation. But they have not mentioned the effect of caste discrimination and practice of untouchability. Likewise, they are silent about the way of representing regarding whether Dalit or non-Dalit writers represent Dalit issues more accurately. Mostly, Dalit writers have focused on the class struggle for the emancipation and liberation of Dalits. They have not focused on the cultural trauma and psychological problem caused by untouchability. They have talked about Dalit consciousness but not about the consciousness of leaders, upper caste people and policy makers about the solution of Dalit problems (Magarati, 2078, pp. 66-67).

Aforementioned reviews of literature mainly focus on inter-caste untouchability, caste discrimination, poverty, lack of political access, and cultural domination in general. The upper caste people dominate and discriminate due to the society's convention. It is the traditional concept of the society. There is bad cultural effect of the ignorance so that Dalits have been affected generally. However, Dalit community in Nepal has been tortured and traumatized more by cultural domination caused by

caste discrimination and practice of untouchability than other aspects. Therefore, problems faced by Dalits due to caste discrimination and practice of untouchability are main problem. So, the present research tries to explore caste discrimination and practice of untouchability in Dalits specifically in this text.

Methodology

This paper has used a qualitative approach to study the poem of R, B Nischal from a critical perspective of representation. The paper has utilized the descriptive analysis to examine the poem. The insight of Stuart Hall on representation has also been used to interpret the poem. Similarly, other theorist's concept of culture has also been analyzed. Besides, the conceptual reviews on his poem, "Paitālā Pukār 2" (Appeal of a Foot) from a collection of poems *Paitālā Pukār* (2073) has been primarily emphasized.

The Concept of Caste Discrimination, Untouchability, Representation and Theories

The Varna system in Nepal was changed into caste system by the Hindu rulers along with their feudal norms and traditions with the practice of untouchability. Such a process continued till the seventeenth century. In Nepal, the caste system was spread from three directions. First, Lichhavis entered from India and started the Varna system: four Varna and eighteen Jāt. By 600 A.D., untouchability was added to the Varna system. Later on Jayasthiti Malla (1360-1395) divided the Nepali society into four Varna and sixty-four castes and also rigidly imposed untouchability (Budhāthoki cited. in Dulāl, 2071, p. 79). Second, King Ram Shah from Gorkhā (1605-1636) established the system of four Varna and thirty-six castes to reinforce the Varna system. It shows the early picture of the Varna system in the Khas states in the West of Nepal (INSEC cited in Dulal, 2071, p. 79). Dulāl states, the third point, Varna system spread among the Maithili and Avadhi speaking Madhesi community of Nepali Terai from its origin in India. It was around 1000 BC in the time of king Janak (p. 81).

After the unification process of the different principalities into one Gorkhā kingdom by the king Prithivi Narayan Shah, the Hindu Varna system became the official religion of the Shah rulers. The Shah feudal state was based on Varna system with untouchability and on Hindu Aryan Khas high-caste hierarchy. It not only continued the age-old oppression on Dalit but also encouraged and educated all the Mongolian ethnic groups to adopt the Varna system with untouchability as their culture. Under the Shah feudal rule, prime-minister Bhimsen Thāpā (1806-1839 B.S.) made untouchability more rigid. After taking power, Jung Bahādur Rāṇā put the royal seal that made the already 'untouchable' Dalit castes as 'water untouchable' and made rule for punishment accordingly (Dulal, 2071, p. 83). Thus, he legalized the Varna system with untouchability (HMG cited. in Dulal, 2071, pp. 82-83).

To represent caste discrimination of Dalits in Nepal, the researcher embeds the theoretical insights of Stuart Hall's Discursive Approach. Discursive Approach is more concerned with the effects and consequences of representation- its politics. It examines not only how language and representation produce meaning but how the knowledge which a particular discourse produces, connects with power, regulates, conducts, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about, practiced and studied (Hall, 1997, pp. 2-3). In this theoretical parameters, the poem is analyzed. Caste discrimination and untouchability is the culture constructed by the society and practiced by the upper caste dominant people. In this regard Kedārnāth Pāndey (Rāhul

Sāṅkṛitayān, 1983) questions the practice of untouchability as, "Why is there difference between your words and actions or speech and responsibilities (p. 5)?" Dalits construct taps, wells and preserve water sources but they are avoided in these places. So Dalits are not even free to use water sources. The literary genres, a cultural discourse from the margin, explore "lived cultures" (William cited in Nayar, 2008, p. 27). In the same way, the genres symbolically and metaphorically refer to the story of Dalits at the margin. So During (1993) quotes, it is "an academic site for the marginal or minority discourse" (p. 15). For emphasizing Dalit problems, Chaitanya Mishra (2066), in "Dalit Problems Politics and Economy", states that "Dalit problem is not confined to the cultural arena. It encompasses, broadly and strongly, the political and economic areas. It is a political relationship between those who give orders and those who toil (p. 19)." So the cultural practices depicted in the literary genres are the representation that generate meanings and "constitute identity" (Nayar, 2008, p. 25). "Culture as a whole and distinctive way of life" (Barker, 2002, p. 68). As Barker's emphasis, Dalits have been living distinct life in the same society so they are exiled in their motherland. Eventually, representation of such cultural discourse constructs cultural identity as Hall asserts, "Cultural identity is always constituted within, not outside, representation" (cited in Fregoso, 1993, p. 663). Such events occur every day in Nepali society. Dalits have been represented in a certain way-within a certain "regime of representation" (Hall, 1997, p. 259). So that they can be understood in which condition they are going through. At the same time such kind of as Hall (1997) argues, "Discursive representation constructs the discourse in order to produce knowledge" (p. 62) about Dalits. It is the result of the Verna system based on the Hindu religion. In this regard, Baba Saheb Ambedkar (2018), in *Annihilation of Caste*, reinforces that "It is not possible to break caste without annihilating the religious notion on which the caste system, is founded" (pp. 5-6). It shows that Dalits are not only dominated because of poverty but there are other consequences which affect in their daily life as well. Dalits have been affected more by, caste discrimination, practice of untouchability, avoidance in school premises and work places. Not only this, they abused, scolded and humiliated by the derogatory word and badly beaten and punished physically. In the context of Nepal for Dalit, it is relevant to quote Ambedkar (2018), that "caste is the monster that crosses your path. You cannot have political and economic reform, unless you kill this monster" (p. 42). Ambedkar also emphasizes the bad impact of caste hierarchy constructed by the society. For Dalit community in Nepal, caste discrimination and practice of untouchability is crucial because it has created trauma on them.

Findings and Discussion

Caste Discrimination, Untouchability and Representation

The speaker in "Paitālā Pukār 2" emphasizes the importance of foot and head. They are inseparable in life. He requests Brahma not to be biased and fled away alone without foot. He complains Brahma for making foot as Shudra, Dalit untouchable. Similarly, he emphasizes that treat head and foot equally because he is the creator. Lastly, he threatens that put off your bad goggle and hear the voice of foot. Let's throw the thorn of hatred and make a garland with the very blossoming flower. So the speaker in this poem blames the god Brahma for creating biasness in the same society. The researcher in this context collects some examples to prove the cultural discrimination and domination based on caste constructed by the Hindu Verna system as Ram Bahadur Kami states (2073): "Samayeakā bāhāk

paitalālāi, Shudra, achut, Dalit thānera, tāukolāi mātra, sampurṇa jiwān na thānnuhos" 'Foot as the medium of time, is considered Shudra, untouchable and Dalit. Do not think head as a complete life' (p. 69). According to the Hindu scriptures, Brahma has created four Verna: Head, bosom, thigh and foot. Head at the top and foot at the bottom. In the Nepali society head including other two are respected whereas foot is hated. All the bodily parts are equally important, however, foot (Dalit) is disregarded, avoided, neglected, dominated and humiliated even after playing important role in the society. Head separately cannot reach to the destination unless there are feet.

People started disregarding, hating and humiliating Dalits basing the division made by Brahma. So the speaker requests the creator to clean the hatred created by him. Dalits in this society are hated and avoided due to their caste. Similarly, the researcher quotes from the text as "Ghriṇālāi pakhālnuhoṣ sadhaikā lāgi kinaki tyo pani pachinai thopāriyeko ho. Ghriṇākā kādālāi phyākidiyera, prem puspakā suwāsīlā jiwān mālāunnuhos" 'Clean the hatred forever because it has been imposed latter. Let's throw the thorn of hatred and make a scented garland of the love' (Kami, 2073, p. 70). The speaker appeals Brahma that it is better to avoid the hatred and spread the love. Dalits have been hated and dominated because of caste division and living the hellish life. In this sense it is relevant to quote Pāndey (1983) who questions the practice of untouchability as, "Why is there difference between your words and actions or speech and responsibilities (p. 5)?" Dalits perform low level tasks rather they are humiliated and hated in spite of getting regards and love. The literary genres, a cultural discourse from the margin, explore "lived cultures" (William cited in Nayar, 2008, p. 27). In the same way, the genres symbolically and metaphorically refer to the story of Dalits at the margin. So, During (1993), states it is "an academic site for the marginal or minority discourse" (p. 15). Dalits, as water untouchable have been facing unbearable torture, physical punishment and trauma for the ages. Such cultural practices have created distinct identity of Dalit which is not true representation. Despite this, Dalits have been leading responsible, innocent, dutiful and laborious life which can be the true representation.

In the same way, Brahma's division was applied as the caste division and people started treating foot as lower level. Dalits have been mistreated and misbehaved on the basis of caste and marginalized forever. In this context, Kami (2073), observing cultural practices, surprisingly questions, "Brahma Devatā! Hajurako jiwān Tāukole mātra dhāneko cha ki paitalāle pani? Gantabyemā Tāukoko mātra sahārāle pugnuhayeko cha ki paitalāko pani sahārāle?" 'Brahma! Does your life depend only on head? Does it depend on foot too? Do you reach on the destination with head? Do you need the help of foot (p. 69)? In the society, all the people are equally important due to their role what they know and what they can do. Despite their important participation to develop the nation, they have been exiled by using cultural shackles. So, in this sense, for emphasizing Dalit problems, Chaitanya Mishra (2073), in "Dalit Problems Politics and Economy", states that "Dalit problem is not confined to the cultural arena. It encompasses, broadly and strongly, the political and economic areas. It is a political relationship between those who give orders and those who toil (p. 19)." It can be claimed that Dalits even in the present time are under the domination of economic and political power on the one hand and on the other cultural domination. Comparatively, cultural domination is crucial than other types. So the cultural practices depicted in the literary genres are the representation that generate meanings and "constitute identity" (Nayar, 2008, p. 25). "Culture as a whole and distinctive way of life" (Barker, 2002, p. 68). Dalits

instead of getting respect, love and support, they are discouraged, traumatized, and behaved inhumanly due to the culture constructed by the society. Their real identity is not displayed but misrepresented.

Moreover, Dalits are regarded less than animals in the sense that they are discriminated in schools, avoided in water sources, limited in low level professions, restricted in the temples and provided less wages for their daily works due to the caste discrimination and untouchability. "Āfailā imatra bhagawān na Thānnu hos, arulāi kulchera, arulāimāreṛa, lāsai-lāsko khāta māthi ubhiyera, chittalāi suddha pārnu bhayo bhane paitālāle nai hajuralāi paramprabhu pramesworko dwār tarfa lagnechan." "Do not think god only yourself. Stepping on other and killing others, standing on the piles of corpses, if you make your heart clean, you will be taken to almighty god by foot (Kami, 2073, p. 70). The speaker is serious enough to share the inner feeling that it was the cruel act of Brahma to divide people. It is very philosophic that spirituality is gained if people make their heart pure. They will be taken to the heavenly world if they become pure in their heart. The feet make the spiritual journey possible. According to Hindu culture, so called the lower castes have been tortured, dominated and discriminated. Dalits in general have been living bearing such inhuman treatment for centuries. The upper caste people have been playing with innocent, voiceless and powerless life of Dalits in the name of caste. Dalits are thought as if they are corpses. In this regard, Ambedkar (2018), reinforces that "It is not possible to break caste without annihilating the religious notion on which the caste system, is founded" (pp. 5-6). Similarly, Ambedkar (2018), opines that "caste is the monster that crosses your path. You cannot have political and economic reform, unless you kill this monster" (p. 42). Dalits have been badly affected due to such cultural practices so they are backward in education, politics and economic background. Eventually, representation of such cultural discourse constructs cultural identity as Hall asserts, "Cultural identity is always constituted within, not outside, representation" (cited in Fregoso 1993, p. 663). Such events occur every day in Nepali society. Dalits have been represented in a certain way-within a certain "regime of representation" (Hall, 1997, p. 259). So that they can be understood in which condition they are going through. At the same time such kind of "discursive representation constructs the discourse in order to produce knowledge" (Hall, 1997, p. 62) about Dalits. It is the result of the Verna system based on the Hindu religion.

Conclusion

The researcher from the aforementioned result and discussion concludes that R.B. Nischal philosophically raises the issue of caste division, caste discrimination and practice of untouchability. He directly connects the cultural practices: caste discrimination and practice of untouchability with Verna system relating to Brahma. When people related Verna with the caste, so called the lower caste people have been tortured, disregarded, marginalized and humiliated. Despite getting nation's support, Dalits have been struggling for their existence rather they are powerless, voiceless and living in the margin. The speaker blames Brahma directly due to his tilting towards the head. The cultural practices determined by the power holders is undoubtedly biased so that some are privileged whereas some are underprivileged in the same society. The upper caste people are considered head; very respectful, powerful and decision makers whereas Dalits are regarded foot; low level, disrespectful and powerless, valueless and voiceless. But the philosophy is: how it is possible to reach to the destination without the support of foot. All the parts of the body are equally important to lead the whole body. Dalits have been marginalized because of

the cruel cultural practices imposed on them, however, they have been playing positive role to build the nation as they can and they know innocently, responsibly and dutifully. The situation they have been facing is not created by them rather the structurally constructed. The nation, power holders and dominant people should be responsible to solve the cultural problems in the society because Dalits have been facing traumatic problems for ages. The unfair social practices have left very bad marks: exclusion, exile, injustice, unfair treatment and lack of equity for Dalits.

Consequently, untouchability is still a fact, and Dalits continue to face mistreatment and violence because of their status. Dalits do not get education, they lack political access, lack support from the state, are compelled to continue traditional profession, lack of proper job and disregarded in the work places due to the caste hierarchy and practice of untouchability. They are human beings but living inhuman life worse than wild animals in the same society at the same time. In this miserable situation, they have been searching equity than equality, love than sympathy and emancipation rather than policy in general. Generally, in "Paitālā Pukār-2", R.B has imagined to see the Dalit community free from such shackles of caste discrimination and practice of untouchability and society emancipated from all kinds of evil social aspects.

This paper has examined the caste discrimination and untouchability limiting in a poem "Paitālā Pukār 2" among fifty-eight in the anthology. Therefore, further research can be carried out comparing other poems to get general ideas presented in the poems.

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