



Vulnerable Life of Paki Caste With Reference To Sujatha Gidla's *Ants among Elephants*

Sunkam Rama Chary
Ph.D. Research Scholar
Osmania University, Hyderabad

Date of Submission: 18-10-2023

Date of Acceptance: 02-11-2023

Abstract:

The Pre-designed Hindu social structure divided the society into four groups, in this four-fold Varna system- the *Brahmins*, the *Kshatriyas*, the *Vysyas* and the *Shudras* have the place. These castes have been given significant roles as mentioned in the *Manusmrithi* which was written by Manu centuries ago. However, a section of group, excluded from the above social structure is called Untouchables, Panchama or Asprishyas in olden days, now, known as Dalits in the modern twenty-first century. Sujatha Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants* explains the Paki community or Manual Scavenger's hardships and discrimination, the author narrates their dreadful life journey in society by doing the job. It also unfolds humiliations by other community.

The present paper researches the portrayal of Paki community and caste discrimination in Sujatha Gidla's *Ants Among Elephants*.

Key Words: Social Exclusion, Deprived Manual Scavenger, Vulnerable, Oppression, Discrimination.

I. Introduction:

*"For centuries, our voice remain unheard,
Like a weeping fish at a sea,
We are treated zombies at the rush f bood,
Collecting by hand, the human society's poops
and pee"*

- Laxmi Narashimman, A Deadly cry of a manual scavenger

There are many deprived castes under the exclusion group in India. These groups have been ostracised by the upper castes in various ways. These groups excluded from having their own land, their houses have been away to the main stream village, they are not allowed to take water from the village tank, education prohibited for them, etc., in one word, the Dalits are treated as slaves by the society. Unfortunately, the excluded groups follow the untouchability within same

vulnerable groups. For instance, Manual scavengers, who have been treated as lower than by other untouchable castes. These people are facing social despair.

Manual Scavengers work is collecting human excrement. This is really inhuman and indecent work. These people called in Andhra Pradesh as *Paki*. Their work is emptying the dry latrines. The most horrible is they use their hands for collecting the human shit. Just with a small broom and tin plate, fill the pam-leaf basket. Very sad thing is, they have to carry on their head while walking the shit goes into their mouth, despite running, and they have to move to throw away. Sujatha Gidla explains about them in *Ants Among Elephants*, in this way,

"As their brooms wear down, they have to bend their backs lower and lower to sweep. When their baskets start to leak, the shit drops down their faces. In the rainy season, the filth runs all over these people, onto their hair, into their eyes, their noses, their mouths. (Sujatha Gidla112)

Even though that filth work done, the scavengers' wages are very low, their work is almost charity, it means their service is for granted for cleaning of toilets used by other people. In the society, they have been faced social discrimination and oppression, as their work is filthy. Even their children are also discriminated and forced to continue.

Government of India, this kind of manual scavenger was banned in 1993. According to Government data, by 2005, 6.76 lakhs, Manual scavengers are working in this heinous work. In Andhra Pradesh, Safai Karmachari Andolan is bringing their problems to the attention of the governments.

Even the communists' party which work for the establishment of equal society are not concerned about their profession. Moreover, they think that if they participate in party activities, they feel about the party's reputation. "What will it do to the party's reputation, the district leaders



demanded, to associate publicly with such dirty people?" (Sujatha Gidla113)

The pakis are living behind Gowri Sankar Cinema Hall, Gudivada. These people are in deplorable condition, so that they are easy to prey fall in infectious diseases such as Tuberculosis. Their wages are very low; anyone can say that their service is charitable. For fulfil their needs, borrow money at high rate interests, as a result they are drowning in to debts.

How terrible these people lives, how they eat food. This age-old system must be changed, what is the solution to this system? Can the society get rid of this system? Who can help to the Paki community? During 1940s time, Mulk Raj Anand in his work *Untouchable* gives solutions to get rid of the age-old system, modern flush toilet is one of the solutions, and the other is embracing to the Christianity. Bhasha Singh's work '*Unseen*' explains the hardships of the sanitation workers in India, by birth in the caste, the work is forced and enslaved them in it forever.

Despite of after 78 years of independence, the manual scavenger system is not vanished from the society. In his essay, *The Ideal Bhangi (1936)* Gandhi describes his desire for an ideal sanitation worker. " He should know how a right kind of latrine is constructed, and the correct way of cleaning it ...He would consider himself responsible for the proper removal and disposal of all the dirt and night -soil within the area which he serves and regard the maintenance of healthy and sanitary condition" (Gandhi 336)

Gandhi's solution to the manual scavenger is by providing respect to them as "the mother who washes her baby's dirt and preserve her health". Dr B.R.Ambedkar criticises the pre-designed social structure," in Indian caste- based social structure, unclean work has always been given to lower castes and the practice of manual scavenging is an extension of that slavery"(Singh 34) He further criticises, " In India, no one is a manual scavenger due to his profession; he is a manual scavenger because of his birth. The sermon that the work of manual scavenging is good for untouchables and attempts to link this practice with the ideal of service is a cruel joke played on the helpless people belonging to this caste"(Singh 35)

II. Conclusion

As the influence of the caste exerted a great influence on the lowest sections of the society, inequality increased. When one caste hates another caste, that caste looks at the other caste with the same hatred. These social conflicts and

inequalities are removed; create a sense that all human beings are equal, when every person of the society contributes, his /her efforts, then, the opportunities are available to all, brotherhood and solidarity will be formed among the people and the development of the modern society.

References:

- [1]. Khatoon, Rhizwana. Manual Scavenging and the issue of caste system in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*
- [2]. Anand, Mulkraj. *Untouchable*
- [3]. Sujatha, Gidla. *Ants Among Elephants*