

Unheard Voices: Exploring Subalternity In Gopinath Mohanty's Harijana

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Abstract

This paper will examine Gopinath Mohanty's *Harijan* in an effort to comprehend the subaltern's terrible predicament as they speak out against the oppression and exploitation they endure at the hands of society's upper class. This article will follow the plight of the excluded by imagining their mental journey from the depths of obscurity and secrets to the bright light of society. Gopinath Mohanty draws attention to the plight of the marginalised and socially excluded, their perilous trek for a better life, their fight for existence, and other related issues. He is a dedicated author and a novelist with a mission; his goal is to draw attention to the plight of the impoverished and disadvantaged people. He has spoken out against the corrupt social system. The untouchables of Harijana speak out against what they perceive as societal tyranny.

Keywords: Marginalisation, Dalit, Oppressed, Voice, Subalterns.

Introduction

"Dalit" is a term that originates from the Sanskrit word "Dalita," which translates to "oppressed." In Indian society, they were classified as untouchables and the inferior castes of Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya. In the past, the untouchables were referred to as "Chandala" or "Avarna." Narasimha Mehta and Mahatma Gandhi employed the terms "Untouchable" and "Harijan" in the twentieth century. The word Dalit means "ground," the "Dalit" refers to a diverse array of marginalised communities.

This term is a self-generated term that is derived from the Sanskrit and Marathi words for marginalised, shattered, and ground down. It is employed to demonstrate that untouchability is imposed by others rather than the result of pollution. It is also employed to denote the entire population of India who are impoverished and subjugated.

Baburao Bagul, a Dalit writer, significantly broadens the scope of Dalit literature and establishes a connection between it and human liberty (rights). He defines the term as follows:

“The Literature that advocates human liberty that treats human beings as superior to any other things in the world and that strongly opposes/condemns the idea of superiority based on false distinctions like race, varnas and castes is called Dalit literature.”

The term "subaltern" refers to an individual of lower status or rank. In broad terms, the term "subaltern" refers to a specific type of deprived individual who is portrayed as the Oppressor/Oppressed group. A subaltern is a specific type of individual who occupies a subordinate position in a cultural, economic, political, or other hierarchy. It also refers to individuals who have been marginalized or oppressed. The subaltern concept is examined from the most theoretical perspective in Gayatri Spivak's exceptional article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988). According to Spivak, the subaltern is incapable of speaking. She believes that the subaltern lacks a voice.

Post-Colonial Theory has emerged as one of its most important areas of study in the field of literature in recent years. Literary critics, feminists, critics of art, social reformers, political analysts, and economists were among the individuals who consistently produced an extensive body of postcolonial literature.

Subaltern-literature amalgamation of Subaltern theory and literature

Subaltern theory and Dalit literature intersect significantly in their focus on marginalized communities and the voices that are often excluded from mainstream discourse. Here's an overview of how they amalgamate:

Subaltern Theory is rooted in Marxist thought and popularized by the works of the Subaltern studies group, this theory seeks to highlight the perspectives of groups who are socially, politically and geographically outside the hegemonic power structures.

Dalit Literature emerged as a literary movement in India, highlighting the experiences and struggles of the Dalit community, which has faced centuries of caste-based oppression and discrimination.

Amalgamation:

Focus on Marginalized Voices: Both subaltern theory and Dalit Literature aim to bring forth the voices and experiences of those marginalized by dominant power structures, whether these are colonial or caste-based. **Critique of Hegemony:** They challenge the mainstream narratives that often silence or distort the experiences of the oppressed. **Narrative Strategies:** Both employ narrative strategies that subvert traditional forms of storytelling, often using first-person accounts, oral histories, and other forms of vernacular expression.

The integration of subaltern theory and Dalit literature provides a powerful framework for understanding and challenging the structures of oppression that continue to affect marginalized communities worldwide.

Literature always depicts the fragility and struggle of enslaved people. Gopinath Mohanty has given specific issues significant attention in his works. Gopinath's first Odia prose epic, *Harijan*, is set in independent India. This is a story about class struggle, exploitation, broken desires, and refusing equal opportunity for Dalits. And also writes about characters from the "untouchable" society. In the fight of life, he wants to show how these "untouchables" try to stay alive. Mohanty tries to show us that these Dalits are struggling to live by giving them power and being very patient with them, even when they are angry and frustrated. They don't give up hope, even though they feel lost. To find a new life where they can't be exploited, they have to work hard. *Harijan* by Gopinath Mohanty is a novel on the plight of the marginalized, describing the dismal life of scavengers, who are the most severely affected individuals of society. Gopinath Mohanty has shown social realism in current Hindu society through a well-executed technique of dramatic irony and the juxtaposition of the novel's predicament of untouchables. The portrayal of social injustice against untouchables in Hindu society has made the work the most popular. This story vividly depicts Dalits' suppressed cries and personal encounters with injustice and brutality. Dalits in society often experience identity loss, alienation, and hopelessness. They are constantly subjected to dishonor, assault, inequity, and starvation. *Harijan* explores the subject of the exploitation of the most neglected members of society, the impoverished Dalits. The eradication of casteism stands as the primary aspect of Gopinath Mohanty's humanist thought process in *Harijan*. His interpretation of casteism as a social crime against humanity is that it corrupts the human psyche in destructive ways. Mohanty has always been wounded by the condescending attitude of the wealthy towards the marginalized members of society. Mohanty's characters in '*Harijan*' serve as a protest against the social dogmas that contribute to the plight of the untouchables. Many occurrences within the novel highlight this fact.

Portrayal of subalternism in Mohanty's *Harijan*

The untouchable characters in Mohanty's play are societal victims whose destinies are predetermined by their ancestry. Their existence is marked by a painful journey. They find themselves in opposition to the enormous and dangerous quantities of lies, cruelty, negativity, and arrogance that the social traditions impose upon them. Mohanty, the saviour of the poor, undesirable, and ignored, holds that leading a dignified life is the ultimate benefit of an individual. However, the revolting attitude of the wealthy has prevented the lower strata and outcasts – the lowest dregs of humanity – from adopting this way of life.

Harijan, a tragic play by Gopinath Mohanty, depicts the marginalized stuck in the caste system. The narrative focuses on Puni, an untouchable girl, through vivid and heartbreaking passages. Puni represents the exploitation and abuse of untouchables in society. Puni is an immoral victim of society. She encounters the wrath of untouchables while purchasing tea for her mother. She encounters the wrath of untouchables while purchasing tea for her mother. The shopkeeper scolds her and refuses to offer her a one-paisa tea because she lacks funds. At the tea shop, a man mocks her for purchasing tea. The man curses at her, fearing she will harm him. He criticizes her for not standing to one side and not announcing her approach. She resumes the brutal attack. She is surprised by the rapid and vicious outpouring of abuse.

Puni, who is considered sacred, endures traumatic struggles. A subsequent humiliation injures her to the point where she acknowledges her condition.

An individual cannot fall further into poverty even if they are born into a low caste. Our society distinguishes between individuals of both economic and social status. The lower castes are perpetually exploited by the upper castes, who are victims of their circumstances. Furthermore, the financial difficulties experienced by the disadvantaged part of society forces them to submit to the dominant group.

Within this literary work, Mohanty reveals the arrogance of the cleaning superintendent, who in the presence of society strongly follows to caste norms while simultaneously displaying generosity towards a Dalit girl.

Puni is acquired as the object of the desire of the supervisor. She becomes the first victim of the man's generosity due to the fact that, as a Dalit, she appears to satisfy his desires of affection. His motivation arises from wicked desire. Therefore, he advises Puni to seek employment and earn money. Poverty and caste identity are two primary causes of the plight of Dalits. Puni regrets her unfortunate situation and desires to experience the luxurious lifestyle enjoyed by the privileged, such as Manamayee and Aghore. Abinash Babu's luxurious home inspires her desire for the same luxury as the upper castes. She is often saddened by her own low status. Her mother, Jema, is also an innocent victim of society. In the narrative, Jema faces criticism for being absent from work due to illness. The cleaning company supervisor threatened to reduce her income. She understands her role as a latrine cleaner who must face the anger of her managers. After being subjected to inhumane, degrading, and insulting treatment, she develops the strength to take revenge. Dalits experience a traumatic existence in a society affected by caste. As a result of the low living conditions of women, men of the upper castes attempt to harm them. As such, in Harijana. The cleaning manager confronts Jema with continued labour despite the fact that her physical condition does not allow her to do so. Jema, gradually accepting to such social norms, makes the decision to go back to work. She also anticipates exchanging her work for that of another employee who will assume her responsibilities for a few days. Everyone still accepts. She holds concerns that her absence from work could result in their end due to hunger. It is prohibited by the superior caste for them to do so. They are dependent entirely on the kindness of their superiors for even the most limited of goods.

Puni, upon hearing her mother utter such remarks, is similarly tortured. She is unable to tolerate her mother's suffering. Puni then promises to perform this tedious work in consideration for her mother. In defiance of her mother's disagreement, she opts to follow in the footsteps of her other close friends, including Ranga, Tabha, Kalamanika, and others, by returning to her job. One of the days she will never forget is the very first day of her job. She feels powerless in terms of her terrible situation. She moves while carrying a basket of dirty, which is thickly covered. Behind the toilets, while on her knees, she performs this dexterous task. As bodily waste products are impure, individuals who transport them are filthy and unpleasant. The untouchability of the inhabitants of Nakdharapur village stems from the fact that they perform tedious tasks such as cleaning. Puni is afflicted as a result of her unclean occupation. The girl is unable to support herself in any other way. She shows determination in her expression of Aghore.

The protagonists in Gopinath Mohanty's novel show audacity. Dhani Budha takes a significant act within the novel due to his rebellious status. By means of Dhani Budha, Mohanty tries to stand against the upper castes.

The elderly gentleman has attempted to free the poor and untouchables from their long-standing struggle. He desires that they engage in free resistance against slavery. He attempts to organize the people into a collective resistance in his ability as a revolutionary. Dhani Budha maintains his gait in the area of the lavatory, the drain, the crowd, and in front of the small stores. He promotes in the impoverished an untouchable rage against all forms of injustice, cruel treatment, suffering, and crimes imposed upon them.

Dhani Budha inspires Sania and the younger masses to speak out against the upper caste males. They are endowed with a spirit inspired by the elderly man who fought for their right to live with respect. One can only attain a high social standing by gathering assets. Additionally, he incites them to take money from the residences of those from the upper caste. Frustrated, Sania commits a robbery at Abinash Babu's residence. He satisfies the wish of his beloved childhood companion Puni. A unique style of happiness enters his whole being. However, he gets captured and severely beaten later in the story.

Comparative study of different characters undergoing through subaltern experiences

Gopinath Mohanty consistently seizes every opportunity to denounce the widespread discrimination that affects society. Sania desires to be accorded humane treatment. Despite putting considerable effort, he is subjected to insults and denied the opportunity to receive recognition for his efforts. Additionally, these impose painful suffering upon him. Poor Sania tries to maintain the reputation. However, the heartless community regards him as if he were a cat or dog. He experiences discrimination due to many different kinds of factors. After being silenced and subjected to prolonged oppression, Sania ultimately arises from the depths of enslavement. He organises opposition in opposition to his superior. Sania exhibits indications of rebellion or defiant consciousness when he clearly declines the cleaning supervisor's request to avoid from attending work. An argument occurs between him and the stranger when that individual insults Sania. As a result of the disgrace he endures, he has spoken out against the man. Being defenceless, he seeks different ways of survival. He follows a purpose of stealing. After stealing jewellery and cash from Abinash Babu's residence, he experiences immense joy because his situation has been altered. Having the ability to offer gifts to his Puni. But then he is caught by religious Hindus, who treat him to horrible abuse, disgrace, and assault.

The untouchables have to depend totally on the higher caste for their existence because they have no other choice than to perform miserable work. And in Sania's situation, that is how it took place. In reality, Sania is looking for fresh initiatives that will earn him wealth and respect. He is humiliated and sent out after asking for some work. After that, he starts to rebel, and in the end, his search for identification makes him a well-thought-out person. In his situation, how he sees himself is based on how outside of society he lives in. There is still a fight going on between the minority individual and the majority in society.

The protagonists of Gopinath Mohanty's novel Harijana confront the suffering, anguish, and challenges that Dalit men and women encounter on a daily basis, as well as the strategies they employ to win over such circumstances. Mohanty examines into the pitiful condition of Dalits, who at times struggle to improve themselves socially. Immediately after doing so, they are annihilated with violence by the higher castes. The Dalits find themselves powerless by many kinds of destructive societal forces. They experience a lack of identity in addition to facing discrimination due to their lower social position.

Occasionally, they must endure stresses that result from an ongoing struggle between "identity loss and self-assertion." Due to their caste status, Puni and Sania endure a sense of powerlessness for the duration of the novel. The identity of Sania's caste defines his destiny. His status as a lower caste member is his greatest impediment. During his youth, he was removed from school solely on the basis of his origin from a reportedly infected village known as Scavenger. Due to the establishment of untouchability in the school by the upper caste teacher, he was unable to grant his grandmother's wish. As a result, he was not granted permission to enter the classroom but was permitted to remain on the outside. His fellow students treated him with disdain. Additionally, he cleaned the upper-caste students' waste. Sania, along with other males of the lower castes, is forced to discontinue his education, as Gopinath Mohanty has stated. Furthermore, he illustrates the hostile atmosphere of the school, which actively discourages Dalit children from attending classes.

Mohanty severely criticizes the hypocrisy of upper-caste men who, while practicing untouchability during the day, sleep boldly and guiltily with untouchable women at night. Abinash Babu and his son Aghore are portrayed as individuals who exploit the emotions of low-caste women. Abinash Babu lies to Jashoda and Jema with fake commitments. When Puni is born, Jema's character is put into doubt. However, Abinash Babu never provides the upbringing of the impoverished girl to himself by using his name. Jema is responsible for the child's care. Despite her financial hardships, she works to distance Puni from performing the tedious work. Her desire is for her daughter to wed. Despite not having funds, she visits the market in search of dried fish to bring for Puni. As a result of her pleasure at presenting Puni with the cabbage meal, she has been injured and has shed blood.

As Jema attempts to take cabbage from the garden of Bishi Babu, she is apprehended and severely beaten. Thereafter, she becomes unwell due to a severe fever. When Abinash Babu experiences the loss of Jashoda's husband and in-laws in the past, she uses her. Abinash Babu assures her of a secure existence filled with every pleasure. Jashoda aspires to attain a position of honour in both his home and his private life. But such things did not occur. She ends up with her need empty. There, she is compelled to remain and performs the duties of a housekeeper. Jashoda, overcome with sadness and hopelessness, reveals her anger. She increases the tension and screams at Abinash Babu. The inner conflicts of Jashoda's agitated psyche are portrayed by Gopinath. In order to rebel against the upper class, she disfigures the crimson bud of a rose plant, which demonstrates her resistance in the novel. Poor Jashoda has no hope of any other choice of avoiding her terrible destiny. Prior to the high class, she is required to present herself. Despite the ongoing suffering at Abinash Babu's residence, however, she becomes aggressive during one scene of the novel. She is speaking more loudly.

Gopinath criticises the dishonesty of upper caste men in India who adhere to caste regulations for their own benefit but have no concerns about exploiting the dignity of lower-caste women for the sake of pleasure. In the same way, Aghore has no concerns about engaging in relationship with Puni, his step-sister.

A peculiar book, *Harijan* is a wonderful concept achievement. It can be classified as socially conscious and class fiction based on thematic analysis. The life of the marginalized people, the poorest class in Indian society who experience severe psychological and financial hardship, have been masterfully shown by Mohanty. Additionally, he presents an extraordinary image of the living circumstances of these individuals.

While the novel *Harijana* explores issues related to caste, the author continues to emphasise the social stratification based on social class. The poor Dalits will have to live on the edge of poverty and be scared away from better places to live. As the novel draws to a close, characters such as Abinash Babu, his wife, and daughter hold desires to free the deprived menial class of Nakdharapur. The needy household staff of Abinash Babu are never shown pity by his merciless family. Thus, they burned down their home late at night, leaving them without a place to live.

Mohanty's intention in penning *Harijan* was to express the sentiments, situations, and feelings of the oppressed the underprivileged. The purpose of this novel is to raise understanding regarding the painful suffering and anguish experienced by underprivileged. These individuals are not only subjected to psychological and financial exploitation, but also denied the rights that are essential to a decent and honourable existence. In this literary work, the author portrays marginalised groups as both victims and participants of a past event that he attempts to reverse by means of their resistance against the higher castes. Despite being depressed, Puni, Jema, and Sania each present problems to the orthodox methods. Although they face obstacles, they maintain optimism. A fire breaks out in the houses of the sweeper in Nakdharapur in the novel. Furthermore, this is an intentional action taken by Mr. Abinash. Rich people's high-rise structures have been created on the property of the needy. Through the disgrace and harassment of the deprived, he attains immense joy. Following the removal of the homeless people of Nakdharapur, he organises a divine request within the recently built temple. Nevertheless, this does not signify the conclusion. Despite being forced to leave the land by men from the upper caste, they maintain an aspiration to begin a fresh existence. None of them are escapists. These people really believe that they will live forever, even though they have been through the ups and downs of life.

Conclusion

Life is a constant battle. For the minority groups, surviving among the upper castes constitutes a formidable obstacle. These oppressed individuals must continue to fight one more battle: one to prove and express their position in the dominant society. Mohanty highlights the inherent worth of the underprivileged individuals who suffer immense difficulties in their search of humane existence. His compassionate knowledge of the human mind inspires each character in their endeavour to find their self-worth. They maintain positivity despite being confronted with numerous difficulties. They keep hope despite being caught in an act of tragedy. Thus, the above-mentioned novel by Mohanty, *Harijan*, depicts the Dalit or poor spirit, which is fundamentally a people's belief of bravery and perseverance.

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