

INSIGHTS

Trends in English Language & Literatures in English



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English Language and literature is one of the most significant areas in the research. Language and literature interacts with every aspects of human life in society and both can be understood only when they are considered and applied in relation to the society. Language is a mode of communication through which we can transmit ideas, information, emotions and messages one to another whereas the literature is representation of contemporary human life in to the society which imitates quotidian way of life, ethics and moral values of humans. Now a days, the impact of new technology and digital social media in language and literature each corresponds between an author and reader, simplify the lucid way of accession and understanding of language and literature by students, researchers and readers. The new technological innovations arise in language and literature so we can easily teach and learn language and literature in online mode. The present edited book offers an insightful emerging issues of scholarly research chapters of researchers in English language and literatures in English.

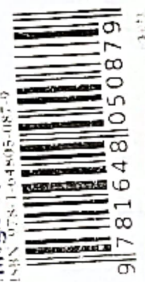
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14. The Shroud (*Kafan*): An Anti-Dalit Story

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Munshi Premchand was born on July 31, 1880 in the village of Lamhi, four miles from the Varanasi in eastern Uttar Pradesh. By caste he was a Kayastha. His father Munshi Ajib Lal was a postal clerk who started his career on a salary of ten rupees a month and retired when it was forty. Premchand's mother Anandi was equally good-natured and helpful. Beautiful to look at, she was known never for gossip, quarrel or backbite. Premchand was her fourth child, born six or seven years after a daughter Suggi. The first two daughters had died. The baby boy had named Dhanpat, master of wealth. He had also known as 'Nawab' within the family. Premchand was the penname he adopted many years later. Premchand died of gastric ulcer on the Morning of October 8, 1936 when he was just fifty-six years old. Munshi Premchand is well renowned novelist and short story writer of Urdu and Hindi. He has written fourteen novels, three hundred short stories and number of essays and letters, plays and translation. He has presented the realistic picture of poverty and social evils with which people were struggling hard to be emancipate during pre-independence period. Through his stories and novels, he has tried to create aware about exploitation and suffering of society, by selecting the characters from different strata of society including the Dalits. He was the first writer to infuse the spirit of realism in his writings by associating it with social problems. He declares literature is not only a reflection of life in general but also it has a social function to perform. He did not believe in the dictum of 'art for art's sake.'

The word 'Dalit' derives from a Sanskrit word means "दातव्य" and is understand in all the Indian languages those are deriv **शिवजी गेल्टी**: "untouchable." Over the "Dalit" is now widely used in place of the word "untouchable." Over the years there have been several terms used to describe the people of untouchable community, such as "Ati-Shudra," "Scheduled Castes,"

"Exterior Castes," "Out-Castes," "Depressed Classes," "Scheduled Castes," "Ex-Untouchables," etc. The untouchables find that these terms are coined by the upper caste Hindus, officials and social reformers which are abusive in nature and synonymous with derogation, domination and paternalism. That is why the people belonging to this category prefer to describe themselves as 'Dalits' even though there is an inherent denial of pollution, Karma, and justified caste hierarchy, as writes Eleanor Zelliot. The word "Dalit" is an old Marathi word found in *Molesworth's Marathi-English Dictionary* of 1975, reprint of 1813 edition meaning "ground, broken or reduced to pieces generally" (Zelliot 267).

Kafan is the last multilayered story written by Premchand before his death in 1936. It is largely regarded in dominant Hindi literary histories as one of his most classic stories. It is the most famous and controversial story. The story narrates the life of the two main characters (Gheesu) father, his son Madhav and daughter-in-law Budhiya are Dalits devastated by poverty. The Dalit characters are shown in poor light but, it has been tried to project them as stereotype or represent community. The caste is deliberately imposed on character. It is being tried to portray that being from chammur community that they are lethargic, slothful, work-shy and notorious. In his words "It was the community of cobblers and notorious in the whole village" (Muzumdar, 145).

The characters of Gheesu and Madhav in his story '*Kafan*' are Chamars, but the story does not raise any issue that is related to the problems of Chamars or Dalits. There is only a detailed depiction of their idleness and heartlessness. Even leftist critics believe this story of Premchand's to be his best and most artistic. Many critics say that Gheesu and Madhav are representatives of the agricultural class which is known as the lumped proletariat. Premchand has been shown Dalit's poverty as self inflicted rather than situational. No doubt the author is quite sympathetic towards poverty of Dalits but he is more sympathetic towards the poverty of non-Dalit castes. The poverty is portrayed according to the caste. Poverty becomes a subject matter of ridicule. In the case of Gheesu and Madhav Premchand writes, "Gheesu would work for one day and rest for three days. Madhav was such a shirker, that if he worked for half an hour, he would smoke a *Chitlam* (earthen pot on the

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top of hubbub-bubble) for one hour. That is why they did not get jobs anywhere" (Muzumdar, 145).

Omprakash Valmiki, a celebrated Hindi Dalit writer whose autobiography *Joothan* (2003) was recently translated and published in English, also finds fault with Premchand's characterization of the Dalit men in *Kafan*, suggesting that Premchand wrongly conflates Dalits, with farmers and peasants who face economic exploitation but who do not suffer from the specific problems born of the system of caste-inequality. There was a new wave of the interpretation of Premchand's work and, particularly the story, *Kafan*, especially by Dalit litterateurs. Om Prakash Valmiki, who in his president address to the conference of Hindi Dalit Writers in Nagpur (October 21, 22, 1993), made a comment on Premchand's short stories and their paradox, where Valmiki says:

"Premchand has written several important stories on Dalit consciousness like *Sadgati*, *Thakur ka Kuan*, *Dhooth ka Daam* etc. Coming to the last phase story *Kafan*, he seems to be an advocate of Gandhian principles, feudal values and 'Varna' system. There is paradox in his works - One Sympathy with the Dalits and other belief in the 'Varna' system" (Valmiki, 87-88).

On the other hand Kanwal Bharati pointed out that "though it should not be concluded from this story that Premchand was not sympathetic with Dalits but this fact also cannot be repudiated that he ridiculed the life of Dalits in this way" (Kanwal 89). Though many non-Dalit critics have detected in Premchand's story a critique of institutionalized systems of poverty and caste oppression that are forces for dehumanization, many Dalit writers have severely criticized Premchand's depiction of these two Chamar characters as such heartless and lazy drunks. For example Bhartiya Dalit Sahitya Academy (BDSA) president Sohanpal Sumanakshar writes, "Why would Premchand make such a characterization of Dalits in '*Kafan*'? Only so that he could win the praises of the upper caste Brahmins and have them call his work 'literature'. Premchand indeed won the praise of the Brahmins and was bestowed with the rank of emperor for his literature which displays Dalits as loveless, soulless, base characters" (Sumanashar, 18).

Both the Dalit characters are portrayed very indifferent towards Budhiya. It is accepted that both are lethargic, slothful, work-shy and indifferent towards Budhiya. But it is very improbable that they will eat

and slept at hut's doorstep and Budhiya was moaning and groaning in labour pain inside the hut, until and unless both are drunk. It seems biased in portraying them. Premchand did not portray any of his Non-Dalit characters like them. In his words, "They both ate potatoes, drank water, covered themselves with their dhotis (loincloth) and slept like crocodiles." (Muzumdar 147-148)

Dalits have portrayed as if they don't have the affections at all with other family members. Madhav's wife was suffering whereas both (father and son) are sitting outside differently and gossiping the last time they have good food. They are showing that they are waiting her to die. The reason behind was not going to see her inside the hut that his father would devour the major share of potatoes. Madhav got irritated been asked by his father to see the condition of his wife who was in the hut. In his words, "If she has to die, why doesn't she die soon? What will I will I do by seeing her?" (Muzumdar 145) It is quite obvious that the portrayal of Dalit Characters is biased and lopsided.

There are so many incidents which show that this story is an Anti-Dalit and artificial. For example, when Budhiya is undergoing pain, no woman of the community was with her. One side we can accept that husband behaves indifferent with his wife who was in labour pain. But we know that in any part of India and in any society a woman in labour pain is not left alone, even if doctor or midwife are not available other women of neighbor of community helps her and support her. Not only of this community but the women from the other community who are totally stranger also support or assist in this condition. It was not that they have been excommunicated, living alone or otherwise. When they saw her dead body they start crying. In his words: "When they heard this, the neighbours came rushing, and according to old tradition, started consoling them" (Muzumdar, 148).

It is the real fact that, not all the family members of the family leave the dead body alone and go to buy shroud. Even if it is not the possible to all members to stay with dead body, at least one member stays back with dead body. And in any case dead body would not left by with other people society, and all family members went to buy shroud. It has been tried to portrayal that being Dalit itself implied that they are lethargic,

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sloughful, work-shy and notorious. Not only both are individually but whole community is portrayed as stereotype.

The inhuman situations which are shown in the story that, Madhav wishes his wife to die soon so he and his father could sleep freely, he is not going to see her because his father will devour major share of potatoes, drinking liquor from the money collected for shroud all these situations portrayed by the author shows prejudice. Yatendra Kumar Nigam points out that, "The characterization of Dalit by Premchand is not justified, as in the line of mainstream literature. It is more painful that story like *The Shroud* (Kafan) is from the pen of literary figures that cannot be classified in a class, who is a class by himself." (Nigam 151)

Kanwal Bharati reiterates, "*Kafan* is an anti-Dalit story because it has made a mockery of the Dalits through its characters who have been portrayed insensitive and inhumane" (Kanwal, 194). Some other Dalit writers like Shyoraj Singh Bechain consider that *Kafan* is far from realism and "completely an imaginative story to portray a totally distorted humane and the purpose of the story is to portray a totally distorted picture of the Dalit community" (Bechain 110). The story *Kafan* is most controversial story that invited numerous interpretations by critics. Meenakshi Mukherjee considers this story "almost perfect distillation of a situation that disturbs the reader with interest but understand horror" (Mukherjee 146). True to the form of public debate, however, there is another side to the literary and ideological debate over Premchand one which suggests Hindi Dalit writers need to rethink the ways in which they judge and categorize literature. Anita Bharti categorically refuses to include Premchand as a contributor to Dalit literature. She writes in defense of Premchand:

"So then what is this opposition of Dalit writers towards Premchand? On one hand they believe that besides "*Kafan*" his stories "*Thakur ka Kua*", "*Pus ki Raat*", "*Sadgait*", and "*Ghasvali*" to be great Dalit stories, but on the other hand, taking up the subject-matter of "*Kafan*" they label him with epithets like "anti-Dalit" and "non-Dalit". If we were to make a comparison between Premchand's Dalit characters and other Hindi writer's Dalit characters, then we can decidedly conclude that Premchand's characters are everywhere more prominent, argumentative, fearless, rebellious, and willing to clash with Brahminism" (Bharti 210).

According to Kanwal Bharati "Only Dalits can write Dalit literature as they are the sufferers of multiple oppressions and they have felt trauma of caste atrocities. He regards that sympathetic upper caste authors (non-Dalit writers) cannot be the part of the Dalit literature as they won't be able to express trauma of the Dalit community because they have not felt it. Hence, he regards that Premchand, Nirala, Amritlal Nagar and Dr. Jagdish Gupta cannot be a part of the Dalit literature" (Sharma, 78-79).

Here it needs to be pointed out that both Om Prakash Valmiki and Kanwal Bharati have appreciated Premchand's works and his concerns for the Dalit cause. Kanwal Bharati made it clear when he says, "it is not doubtful that Premchand was the first person, among the upper castes, who voiced the Dalit cause. He was against untouchability and made efforts to eliminate it. But despite this fact, Dalits cannot consider his literature as the Dalit literature. It was written out of sympathy and several national and international pressures can also not be ignored for its creation" (Kanwal, 92).

He further emphasized that "it would be wrong to conclude that we are against Premchand. We are not against Premchand and Premchand is not against the Dalits. His stories on the Dalits and their lives were based on his understanding of the contemporary Dalit discourse. We may agree or disagree with his today but Dalit discourse and its exponents have every right to reinterpret and re-evaluate Premchand and these interpretations should be understood as the statement of this right by the Dalits writers" (98).

As Renuka L. Nayak points out that, "some critics say that Premchand presented downtrodden/untouchable as idiots, insensitive and lazy. But here I would like to argue that the writer has employed different mode to depict caste based society, their suffering and revolt. It is a natural human tendency to take it as it comes when suffering crosses the limit of tolerance" (Nayak, 1).

Thus, it can be concluded that *Kafan* representing isolation produced by the insensitive and exploitative socio-economic system that leads to dehumanization but at the same time it cannot be understood as a story representing the Dalit community. After the profound study of the story of *Kafan* of Munshi Premchand, the researcher observes that he has written



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for the betterment of society, particularly the Dalits, suppressed untouchables and all the sufferers at the hand of the Savarnas. For the exploration of such society, Premchand has presented the social reality in his writings through the power of imagination. Thus, there is no doubt that Premchand has sympathy about Dalits. Therefore, he doesn't meet the expectations of the Dalit critics.

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15. A Journey from within and without in Jayant Mahapatra

Somnath Barure

Jayant Mahapatra is now a known poet to a vast number of readers of poetry across the country and abroad. He has written amply. *Relationship* by Mahapatra is a long poem earning for him the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award in 1981. This poem of Mahapatra demands seriousness from the reader. Keeping him haunted, takes him deep into the cultural roots of his land while, the other time, voyaging through the glorious legends and wishful historical events waking him up into reality around ultimately. No doubt, the poem is an epitome of loneliness within and without, but it also attempts to find meaning through his strong relationship. Relationship: with the land, its being, people, history, faith, sacrifices and what not? This article attempts to read and locate the journey in this poem from within and without.

Jayant Mahapatra is known as a poet of his land Orissa for his incessant connection with the issues related to the mythical landscape. Every human being has an attachment of some place for his own reasons. In fact, the place of birth of everyone enshrines the psychological attachment with various issues in the mind of the individual concerned. In case of Mahapatra, this observation seems to be very much true. The poet wanders across the physical, historical, social and cultural landscape of Orissa, with his haunted imagination and perception. This gives him an identity of being a representative poet of Orissa and India. Nothing that exists remains unturned from the forbidding myths, the grand as well as embarrassing history, inexplicable faith with innumerable contemporary issues like poverty, orthodoxy, corruption, exploitation, domination with other responsible issues for the pathetic situation of Orissa ultimately.

Relationship: A Journey

Relationship (1980) is completely different in its theme/s, nature and overall scope, if read in comparison with his earlier poems. This poem



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