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IMPECUNIOUS SELF; DALIT LIVES IN SELECT INDIAN WORKS

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Abstract

This article studies on impecunious Dalit women identity in select Indian works. The lives of Dalit woman were mainly taken from the versatile literary works. It elucidates Om Prakash Valmiki's Joothan, C Ayyappan Madness, Prakash Jadhav Under Dadar Bridge and S Joseph Identity card. Featuring Om Prakash Valmiki's Joothan, C Ayyappan's Madness, S Joseph Identity card and Prakash Jadhav Under Dadar Bridge, the research format looks at women's self and their mode of existence in a patriarchal platform.

Keywords: Dalit Women, Identity crisis, Indian writings

The present article analyses on impecunious Dalit women identity in select Indian works. The lives of Dalit woman were mainly taken from the versatile literary works. It elucidates Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, C Ayyappan *Madness*, Prakash Jadhav *Under Dadar Bridge* and S Joseph *Identity card*. Featuring Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, C Ayyappan's *Madness*, S Joseph *Identity card* and Prakash Jadhav *Under Dadar Bridge*, the research format looks at women's self and their mode of existence in a patriarchal platform. Etymologically, the word 'Dalit' derived from Sanskrit word 'Dalita', means 'oppressed'. The untouchables were referred to as 'Chandala' or 'Avarna' in the past. Narasimha Mehta and Mahatma Gandhi used the words 'Untouchable' or 'Harijan' during the 20th century. the famous historian J.H. Hutton unveiled the word 'Exterior Castes' at international level for these untouchables.

In the early 1960's, a new writing movement has been emerged in the Indian Literature, especially in Marathi language, which is later named as Dalit literature. It soon re-generated into a political sphere, who called themselves Dalit Panthers. This movement has extended its various activities to all over India. The poets and writers under this movement used the term 'Dalit' which later substituted as Untouchable or Harijan. However, it was a new term to the English-speaking world in the 1970s. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956), framed a systematic platform for Dalit literature which began to appear in early sixties. The magazines of Dr. Ambedkar named *Janata*, *Prabuddha*

Bharat, *Muknayak* published some stories and poems of untouchables during the 1940s and 1950. it predominantly scans the short stories of Marathi writer Bandhu Madhav with focus on the real life of the oppressed.

Om Prakash Valmiki was born on 30 June 1950 and died on 17 November 2013 was an Indian Dalit writer and poet. He is famed for his autobiography, *Joothan*. It was arguably considered a milestone in Dalit literature. Being a Dalit child, he was tortured and abused everywhere in society. He was blessed enough to be born in a household where everyone loved and cared for him. Om Prakash Valmiki begins his autobiography by stating,

"Dalit life is excruciatingly painful, charred by experiences. Experiences that did not manage to find room in literary creations. We have grown up in a social order that is extremely cruel and inhuman. And compassionate towards Dalits." (Valmiki 7)

Valmiki explains how his entire community depends on the leftover food thrown out by the upper castes in return for their hard but unpaid work. The entire community had to depend on the mercy of the upper castes who, instead of paying labor, exploited them. The title of the autobiography '*Joothan*' literally means food left on an eater's plate, usually destined for the garbage pail in a middle class, urban home. However, such types of foods would only be characterized as '*joothan*' if someone else besides the original eater were to eat it.

Valmiki repeatedly highlights his experiences of pain and exclusion due to the continued practice of

untouchability in the novel. Valmiki describes the harsh reality of his childhood in the village, Baria district of Uttar Pradesh. He writes about the ill treatment done to him when he was at school just because he was untouchable. He writes,

I was kept out of extracurricular activities. On such occasions, I stood on the margins like a spectator. During the annual functions of the school, when rehearsals were on for the play, I too wished for a role. But I always had to stand outside the door. The so-called descendants of the Gods cannot understand the anguish of standing outside the door." (Prakash 16)

Prakash Jadav, one of the poets of this powerful poem *under Dadar bridge*, who comes from the Dalit community and writes of homeless underclass who survive on pavements of Bombay. *Under the Dadar Bridge* has been translated by Shanta Gokhale and Nissim. The poem dramatically expresses the collective, ethical, moral and unsatisfied voice of the downtrodden, neglected and segregated group in Mumbai. The narrator refuses to accept his personal identity either Hindu or Muslim. It leads the readers to explore a new painful identity, which is neither hyphenated nor multiple nor fractured but a "forked identity, without a name, terrain, religion and language. It is a dehumanized condition as mentioned in the poem "an abandoned spark of the World's lusty fires. "Hey, ma, tell me my religion. Who am I? what am I? 'you are not a Hindu or a Muslim! You are an abandoned spark of the World's lusty fires". (Prakash)

Son again asks about his father. Mom says that he is an illegitimate son, whose father may be living in the flat nearby. She is unable to find the particular person as father. She discloses herself as "whore! Tell me the truth, or else..." 'why? Was there only one who mounted and then abandoned my body? How many names shall I mention? Many came and many went."You are whore , sss!" (Prakash)

S. Joseph was born in 1965, a Malayalam poet with four highly acclaimed poetry collections to his credit. He received the Kanakashree Award from the Kerala Sahitya Akademi. He lost his love only because of the red mark in his identity card. By having a dalit identity, he was alienated of his love with an upper caste woman. He is a victim of the loss of his love. His lover denied him when she knew his lower caste identity. Speaker has realized

that the caste discrimination made them introvert at the very young age in his life. Returning the identity card symbolically shows the closure of their relationship.

C Ayyappan with his intricate narrative style stands apart among the modern dalit writers in Kerala. He was born in Keezhillam, a village in Kerala in 1949 and died in 2011. His short story collections *Njandukal* published in 2003 and *Uchamayakkathileswpnangal* in 1986 were considered as the major turning points in the history of Malayalam dalit writings. In his view C Ayyappan says "A Dalit is the one who lives the life of a dalit, and Dalit literature is the rationalization of one's own dalit identity". (Ayyapan 234)

Braanth is another short story by Ayyappan which is translated as *Madness* by Abhirami Girija Sriram for *The Oxford India Anthology of Malayalam Dalit Writing* in 2021. It is a monologue by Krishnankutty, a dalit teacher who enjoys the privileges of the upper middle class. However, his family still belongs to the marginalized and downtrodden sections of the society. So, the protagonist faces a serious identity crisis throughout the story. He refuses to accompany his sister to the mental hospital. He pretends not to see his sister when she was being taken to the asylum by the neighbors. The monologue of Krishnankutty reveals his inner trauma clearly

Then you pointed your finger at my sister seated in the car parked alongside the road, screaming and tearing at the chains that bound her. And I said: I don't see anything. Though at the time I turned a bit pale at your question, filled with surprise and pain, I somehow got away, shutting the door on your face quite dramatically" (Ayyappan 23)

When his friend shows his insane sister to Krishnankutty, he deliberately ignores his attention towards her plight. This negligence symbolizes the negligence by the society towards the dalits. The complexity of the caste system plays a crucial role here. Krishnankutty, during the course of his monologue explains the reason for neglecting his sister. If he accompanies her to the mental hospital, the neighbors would come to know that his sister is mad and he belongs to the lower caste. And his fair skinned wife and daughter sees his mother and relatives with contempt. This racial disparity in the society forces Krishnankutty to disown his sister and relatives. The story ends with a poignant and valid question from Krishnankutty's friend. He reminds Krishnankutty, "Krishnankutty, you too are mad?" Krishnankutty is a victim of Dalit identity crisis and his character portrayal shows how dalits are crushed and

defeated by humiliation, exploitation, neglect and racial politics.

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¹ On peut y compter des œuvres comme *À l'Ouest, rien de nouveau* d'Erich Maria Remarque (1929) de langue allemande, *La fin des parades* (1924-1928), la tétralogie romanesque d' Ford Madox Ford et *L'Adieu aux armes* d' Ernest Hemingway (1929) de langue anglaise et *La Main coupée* de Blaise Cendrars (1946) et *Voyage au bout de la nuit* (1932), *Le feu* d'Henri Barbusse (1916) et *Guerre* (1934) de Louis-Ferdinand Céline de langue française.

² *Le bataillon créole* de Raphaël Confiat (2013) et *Force-Bonté* de Bakary Diallo (1926) en français, *Across the Black Waters* en anglais de Mulk Raj Anand (1939) et les contes et le roman *Bāndhan-Hārā* en bengalais de Kazi Nazrul Islam en sont des exemples.

³ Les tirailleurs sénégalais - corps de militaires appartenant aux troupes coloniales de l'Empire colonial français, constitué en 1857. C'était le principal élément de *la Force noire* et ils ont été dissous au début des années 1960. Le premier régiment de tirailleurs africains s'est formé en Sénégal en 1857, mais plus tard, ces unités d'infanteries ont désigné l'ensemble des soldats africains noirs qui se battent sous le drapeau français mais qui ne comprennent pas des unités d'Afrique du Nord, tels les tirailleurs algériens.

⁴ En raison de la Première Guerre mondiale, les Français ont pu rencontrer les tirailleurs sénégalais, jusqu'à-là connus en Europe surtout pour leur sauvagerie, et leur voir comme de vrais êtres humains. De plus, leur performance lors de la guerre a établi leur réputation comme des

défenseurs de la France. Donc, l'image du tirailleur sénégalais comme 'un grand enfant' servant volontiers à sauvegarder la France est devenue populaire durant et après la Première Guerre mondiale.

⁵ Fanon discute du rôle du langage comme agent de discrimination et d'oppression dans *Peau noire, masques blancs* « Le faire parler petit-nègre, c'est l'attacher à son image, l'engluier, l'emprisonner, victime éternelle d'une essence, d'un apparaître dont il n'est pas le responsable. » (Fanon 27).

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