

Basudev Sunani: Unveiling the impurities of touch

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Abstract

Dalit literature is an important part of Indian literature. It is marked as revolt. But, it is with hopes for liberation and equal rights of 'untouchables' as human beings. Basudev Sunani is a dalit writer from Orissa. He voices out for the victimized in the society. His poems like *Body Purification*, *Coaching Centre and Smell of Untouchability* help to explore the cultural and racial contempt of the learned men. This paper attempts to reveal the fact that how the working-class men are humiliated in the well-informed society. Sunani relentlessly exposes the inhumanities and prejudices through his poems. The dalit men are exploited in the social environment. Sunani is the defense of the people of impurity.

Keywords: Imposed silences, Social atrocities, Exploitation, Untouchability, Revolution, Inhumanness, Victimization, Casteism, Stereotypical thinking, Discrimination, Imprisonment of emotions.

Introduction

The human touch is like a sword. It possesses both the ends that either to heal or wound. The compassionate touch is powerful to heal the hurt of every human on earth. Every religion insists upon the touch of God to sanctify the sinners. Even in the Bible Jesus Christ touches upon the sick and sinners to heal them physically and spiritually. This paper focuses on the touch that is strong in wounding the feelings of others. Basudev Sunani is a dalit poet. He attempts to bring out the touch of fellow beings which make the so called learned and upper caste men feel impure. The caste factor has become so deep to turn into tradition. Sunani acts as a mouthpiece to exhibit the different forms of social atrocities against the lower caste people. The humanity should play a significant role in every man's life. But, here the poems of Sunani express the inhumanness of the upper caste in the society.

The upper caste men are expected to retrospect about their treatment of the working class men from the lower caste. Neither the stacks of tulsi leaves nor tons of sandal paste are strong enough to remove the unpleasant smell of these people. It is because of the duty of cleansing the drainage. The men from the lower caste, clean the sewer tank of the upper caste people taking out bucket loads of faeces floating on the water. Of course, it gives their body unpleasant smell. They render their services for the people those who live in the society. The

learned or the upper caste men nose snivel, mouth retch and their eyes squirm in return for their service. The absence of these men's service in the society cannot be imagined. It is explained in a wonderful manner in the words of Sunani. Even a single day sickness of a lower caste man makes the streets stay upswept, the latrines choke and hospitals groan because of unhygienic situation. Other people in the society should be ready to face the embarrassing situation of unhygienic. These men expect their respect as other humans who live in this world.

The intelligence and education should help them understand and appreciate the service of any human despite of his caste or religion. The poet views the working class men from the lower caste know the difference between shit and rice. Since, he uses the same fingers for both the works. Neither the intelligence nor the education becomes a failure to teach the meaning of reverence. The insulted identity of them needs to be unveiled. The lines of Sunani's *Body Purification* express the inevitability of their contribution in the society.

You may scoff and sneer at me,
but when I'm not around,
I know you have a mental breakdown.

The upper-class men are compelled to think about the lower caste workers in their absence. The presence of their significance cannot be ignored. Though they are mocked and scorned in their presence. But the absence of them cannot be tolerated because they play an important role in this society. The working-class men do not expect them to be pleased but rather to be respected.

The learned men feel impure when they touch the lower caste men. They take a dip in water in order to purify themselves from their impurity. The impurity lies in their soul. It is not about the body to be purified but their mind. The sanctification of mind and soul is necessary to reach the Supreme. The holy scripts and religious doctrines which they follow end up in failure. Sunani's the poem *Coaching Centre* exhibits the sense of impurity.

Oh learned men!
You surely know
That impurities of touch
Completely dissolve
When a high caste man
Takes a dip in water
And changes his clothes

The upper caste upper men's mind is polluted by the caste and religion. The act of cleansing of the body cannot be a solution to get rid of their impurity. They cannot shake off their "untouchability" which clings to their mind. The education and intelligence have not helped them to treat others as they respect themselves. They remain untouchables mentally. The social atrocities against the lower caste men have been prevailing over thousands of years together. The thinking of these "learned men" remains unchanged. The caste factor is turned into a tradition that

these men need to be treated like this. The social facts are necessary to be understood and not to be ignored. The human being cannot stand in isolation but rather interdependent. The inter-dependence of human beings is inevitable to lead our daily life in the society. The humanity in every human should be highlighted rather than the caste. Either the caste or the social status should not dilute the original fact of interdependence.

Basudev Sunani is specific in addressing the upper caste people as “learned men”. Because, the belief of a few Brahmins that intellectuality is in their hands. The poet is not voicing out either for equality or liberty but for the equal respect as other human beings experience. The work of their hands should not be go unnoticed. The casteism is the root of all these problems. The brutal treatment of untouchability must be unveiled in the society. The education is the right way which can help in the dilution of segregation in the name of caste.

The brutal attitude of untouchability, wounds the feeling of human beings. It remains as a scar for milenia. The imposed silences of these lower caste men make them learn the art of hiding themselves from the “learned men”. Sunani’s thought provoking lines exhibit the question of untouchability:

No-one has been able to decide
If untouchability
Is a colour or a touch,
A feeling or an ideal;
Whether it resides
In the one who touches,
Or the one who is touched

The poet expects the learned men to begin a coaching centre to preach about untouchability. It makes them earn good money out of it. The questions of how and why they have remained untouchables remain unanswerable. There is no one to decide whether the untouchability is a colour or a touch, a feeling or an ideal. The lower caste people have remained untouchables over the millennia. They have been victimized in the caste based society. The thought of untouchability whether lives in the person who is touched by a lower caste man or in the mind of one who touches him. The men who call themselves as learned are laughed at because of their inability to shake off their ‘untouchability’. If they wish, they could start teaching the untouchables how to remove untouchability. The learned men are mocked at because of their attitude of taking a dip in the water to get rid of untouchability. The poet points out such attitudes as blindness of inner self.

The act of sprinkling cow dung water is to purify the street in which the lower caste men’s feet imprinted. The enragement is shown towards the working class people since they belong to the low caste. The air which these upper caste men breathe is suffused with the dirty breath of such men. The bricks of their house are made from the clay of the river where the working class men’s hut stands. Even the bricks are made by the supple hands of them. They are able to accept

the works done by them but not ready to treat as humans. Almost these people are discarded as untouchables. The beautiful houses are built with the help of these working class men but they are neglected.

You preach that untouchables
Are not human beings,
That they are worse than animals,
To be despised”.

These lines represent the utter humiliation of the working class people in the society. The deep repugnance of the learned men is quiet visible. The existence of inhumanity prevents the growth of a social structure. The brutal treatment of a person is the great social crime. The education needs to enlighten the minds of these learned men. The poet calls them to examine their courage to look at the rubble. In order to make them understand, the poet ascertains that every brick of his home bears the sweet smell of untouchability.

The educated dalits like Sunani analyzes the problems of the dalits. He presents the facts in a better way that untouchability is the pollution of the mind. The inner thoughts and ideas are disseminated properly. The impurity of untouchability needs to be unveiled among the people. Sunani enlightens the society on the social and intellectual discrimination of the oppressed people. The social levels of working class men are needed to be uplifted.

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