

BMC Research Journal

ISSN: 2795-1731

Peer-reviewed, Interdisciplinary

Open Access Journal

Indexed in NepJOL



Birendra Bidhya Mandir Campus

Tikapur, Kailalai, Nepal

URL: www.birendracampus.edu.np

Research Article

Rebel Body against the Caste System in Ahuti's "Gahungoro Africa"

Saroj Kumar Shah

Assistant Professor

Lamki Multiple Campus Lamki,

Kailali, Nepal

Published by: Research Management Cell, BMC, Tikapur, Kailali, Nepal

Publication: June 2024, Volume: 3. BMC Research Journal

Corresponding author: Saroj Kumar Shah, Email: thesunrise_saroj@aol.com

Copy right© The Author (s). The publisher may reuse the article(s) as per the prior permission of the concerned author(s).

Abstract

Applying body politics, this research paper attempts to explore the rebel body against the caste system in Ahuti's "Gahungoro Africa". First published in Mulyankan monthly magazine in 2051, the poem "Gahungoro Africa" satirically airs its voice against those oppressors who exploit Dalit laborers in different ways. The poet raises the issue of Dalits considering them touched or untouched during the caste system. The researcher makes a strong argument that the so-called low-caste Dalit people should be given the right to justice and freedom at any cost by abolishing caste discrimination entirely. The speaker of this poem is a leading figure, the rebel body as well as the voice of downtrodden, underprivileged, and working-class Dalit laborers against the so-called high caste. The paper shows the conflict between the so-called high caste; the exploiter, landlords, and touchable Vedic body, and the so-called low caste; the exploited, slaves, and untouchable non-Vedic body, especially the Dalit bodies who are declared 'untouchable' by the socially construct Hindu caste system. The poem carries out a very sarcastic, challenging, and angry tone toward the so-called high caste and its agents.

Keywords: Rebel Body, Body Politics, Dalit, Social Justice and Caste System

Introduction

This research examines and analyses the rebel body against the caste system in Ahuti's "Gahungoro Africa" from the perspective of body politics. The main theoretical insights developed by the Indic philosophies such as *The Vedas*,

Buddhism, Jainism, and Manu Smirti are used as theoretical parameters to analyze the primary text under scrutiny. The research uses qualitative research methods for analyzing the primary text. The researcher has used library research for the study of the related to the issues. Published books, Research journals, research articles, and unpublished dissertations serve as the secondary data for the research purpose.

The progressive poet, Bishwobhakta Dulal (Ahuti) wrote this poem entitled "Gahungoro Africa" by using two different terms i.e. 'Gahungoro' and 'Africa' from the two different geographical contexts ("Nepal" and "Africa") respectively. By blending the two words in a single poem the poet tries to show the symbolic connection between the color 'ganghuro' of Nepal and the 'racial discrimination' of Africa. The poet has compared the caste system of Nepal with that of racial discrimination in Africa. There are neither white nor black color people in Nepal, but all people have approximately the same color which the poet calls 'Gahungoro' (wheat white). In the Hindu caste system, there is no discrimination among people in terms of race and color. But the same color 'Gahungoro' is discriminated against in the name of caste such as the upper caste/lower caste, touchable/untouchable, and so on. Thus, the person who belongs to "Shudra Varna" (according to the classification of Varna in Hindu scripture) is considered as the low caste untouchable body in our culture i.e. completely socially constructed, not birth-based. The untouchable body is called 'Dalit' in Nepal. Despite having the color 'Gauhungoro' the very word 'Dalit' is harshly treated as the black people in Africa. As a result, the poet has mentioned 'I', the first person as the persona/speaker of this poem, a 'Gahungoro Africa' as the representative of the so-called low caste dalit peoples in Nepal. In this research, the researcher explores the idea of alleviating caste discrimination from society since it was uprooted a long ago. In the name of caste, no one should be treated as bad as untouched, which is socially constructed. And society shouldn't be categorized in terms of caste, color, and economic status. If society treats the people in the name of low-caste and high-caste, the rebel body will stand as the persona in the poem against the caste system. Here, the researcher suggests that cooperative and collective struggle is the boon of success.

Theoretical Perspectives

The Indic philosophies such as *The Vedas, Buddhism, Jainism, and Manu Smirti* are the theoretical insights that speak the following sentences about the Hindu caste system in their scriptures: In *Vedas*, human beings are not

discriminated in terms of caste; rather they are categorized based on their work quality. Varna is used for Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. So, the Varna is adopted by choice. Thus, while Jati is provided by God (Brahma), Varna is its own choice. That's why, Vedic Dharma is called Varnashrma Dharma. Those involved in intellectual activities have chosen Brahmin Varna. Those in defense and warfare are in Kshatriya Varna. Those in economics/business and animal rearing are Vaishya Varna and those involved in other support functions are Shudra Varna. They refer merely to various choices of professions and have nothing to do with any Jaati or birth. Brahmins originated from the mouth, Kshatriyas from arms/shoulders, Vaishyas from thighs, and Shudras from the feet of God.

In *Buddhism and Jainism*, all men are born equal, and Buddha's ideal was to establish a classless society. Four Castes are equal and describe the Brahmins' claim to superiority as an empty boast. Buddha refutes the claim of higher castes to superiority- but on metaphysical grounds: after death, they shall be reborn by their Karmas and not by their caste. All castes are of equal purity. Buddha explains the caste system in terms of the doctrine of Karma in this way:

Not by birth does one become an outcaste, not by birth does one become a Brahman; by deeds or karma one becomes an outcaste, by karma alone one becomes a Brahman. (The Dhammapada, 192-200)

In contrast to *Vedas and Buddhism*, *Manu Smriti* puts forth different views about the caste system in its principles. *Manu Smriti* is the law of Manu in which lower castes are oppressed. Manu as a theorist founded the caste system based on birth. He legalized harsh punishments for Shudras and special provisions for upper castes, especially Brahmins. Brahmin refers to a scholarly person who conducts noble works. And Shudra refers to an uneducated person. Shudra is unfit to receive education. According to *Manu Smriti*, Shudras are treated as slave bodies to support the Brahmins. (278-290)

Moreover, the path toward Dalit representation in the political process started with the dawn of democracy in Nepal in the early 1950s. Regardless of the momentum and sincerity this initially held, lack of consensus among increasingly conflicting factions proved an insurmountable challenge in the times ahead. The Dalit movement of Nepal came with growing anti-Rana and pro-democracy sentiments in the country. Principles of social justice, equal opportunity, and rightful representation gained ground in Nepal. But with the democratic forces

divided, soon to be dominated by the re-emerging traditional elite, the declared promise of holding elections of a constituent assembly and drawing a new constitution that would ensure the representation of the people, did not materialize. In Nepal discrimination and favoritism have been deeply rooted and structural barriers have been created and maintained by the state. Dalits suffering from caste-based discrimination and untouchability have been deep-rooted in an age-old caste system that has reinforced the hierarchy between 'upper' and 'lower' castes. The adverse effect on the lives of Dalits continues to be observable in their state of human development and has barred them from social, economic, and political life. When the country started to embrace democratic values, the community's structural and systematic exclusion was not redressed. The voices of the affected citizens have remained profoundly silent, even after they have stopped being silenced. Now Nepal is resurfacing as an inclusive democracy. Broadening the participation and representation of Dalits is essential in compensating for past injustices, especially in designing a new constitution. It is vital in establishing and consolidating Nepal as a democracy that safeguards the rights and opportunities of all its citizens. (Khanal, Gelpke, & Pyakurel, 71-72)

The issues of social justice and rightful representation of Dalits in Nepal began to rise to a high point in the public debate after the successful "Jana Andolan" (peoples' movement) in April 1990. Following the successful second people's movement, Jana Andolan II of April 2006 which called for political change, it reached its pinnacle. Subsequently, the state has put forward policies and initiatives of 'affirmative action' and 'positive discrimination' to overcome past marginalization. Individuals belonging to the Dalit community have benefited from reservations in education, employment in the public sector as well as representation in the political institutions. Such beneficiaries have advanced their position in society (Ram, 440-441). However, whether or how enhanced education of Dalits and having several Dalit representatives in political bodies affects the representation and position of the Dalit community is not so clear.

Textual Analysis

The poet has brought references to the misconceptions and mistreatments of the so-called high caste towards the so-called low caste untouchable people. The very beginning two lines of the poem "My red blood/pure red blood of a human" (1-2) are heart-touching and give the universal meaning of equality through the color of the blood of all human beings i.e. read universally. However, the poet further views that the same blood is used differently by constructing social and

cultural hierarchies and discriminations in the name of caste, color, race, religion, and so on. The poet is the voice of underprivileged, downtrodden, and untouchable working-class people who are oppressed in society in the name of caste. Representing the rebel body against the so-called caste system in the poem the poet describes the pitiable condition of the untouchable working-class people. The first stanza talks about how the working-class Dalit people are badly treated by the so-called high-caste people. Here, the speaker as a rebel body strongly presents his voice against the agent of the so-called high caste and finally claims for justice and freedom.

When it pills as a drop of blue sweat,
You collect it in the furrows of your soft cupped palms.
When I try to snort away that sweat redolent with labor,
You humiliate & distance me.
Have the nerve to meet my eyes priest!
I am the twentieth century's "untouchable"!
The brown African of this round rock!
I claim justice.
I claim freedom. (Line 3-11)

The above stanza shows that the untouchable working-class people are the tortured bodies used as the commodities, means, and instruments of the so-called high caste, landlord, and touchable bodies. They work hard from dawn to midnight and get nothing for themselves. They sell their blood and sweat, and toil and moil on the soil to accumulate property and capital for the so-called high caste people. Consuming their product by themselves is beyond imagination. They are even deprived of getting the smell of their product. Because of this, the poet as the representation of the rebel body raises a strong voice against the exploiter, the sucking body. The poet challenges the priest (the sucking body) to level his eyes with the eyes of the rebel body. The poet introduces himself that he is the 20th-century untouchable body and the 'Gahungoro Africa' of this round geography as well. He satirically presents that no one can be misbehaved and discriminated against in terms of caste in this 20th-century era, the age of conscience and reason. He as the rebel body claims justice and freedom as the main goal and manifesto of his movement.

In the same way, the poet has presented each superstructure such as the temple, building of the high-class people, different works, and the goods they use do have the strong stamp and signature of the toil of the untouchable working-class people. The scripture and literature are the product of the high caste people which are used to exploit and suck the blood, sweat, and toil of the working-class Dalit people wearing the mask of religion. The poet himself as a rebel body represents Kami, Chyame, Gaine, Badi, and Musahar among the Dalit peoples who are declared 'untouchable body' by the so-called high caste. On the other hand, the poet calls these names such as the priest, pious, clean, conscious, and gluttoned bodies who are the agents of the so-called high caste. In every stanza, the poet expresses anger towards them by challenging them to level their eyes with the eyes of rebel bodies representing the low caste working class Dalit bodies. The poet is proud of being an 'untouchable body' in the sense that whatever he finds the activities and possessions belonging to the high caste people are the result of the blood and sweat of low caste working class people.

The untouchable body is defined as a tortured, exploited, and oppressed body in social, cultural, religious, economic, and political aspects while the touchable body is regarded as powerful and superior to the untouchable. The poet as a voice of working-class Dalit people concludes that he is everywhere from the bottom of the feet to the top of the head of the so-called high caste man. Then he questions why he is untouchable. He challenges the so-called touchable Vedic body by saying to stand in history's witness box and to have the courage to change himself. Finally, the poet claims the accounting of his humiliated history for freedom at any cost in the stanza given below:

From the shoe on your foot to the cap on your head,
 From the farthest horizon of your vision to the rhythm of your heart,
 Am I nowhere? I am everywhere.
 How can you make 'untouchable' to touchable one?
 Either have the nerve to stand in history's witness box
 Or have the courage to change yourself.
 Have the nerve to meet my eyes priest!
 I am the twentieth century's "untouchable"!
 The brown African of this round rock!

I claim the accounting of humiliated history.

At any cost I claim freedom! (Line 41-51)

This last stanza of the poem shows a very challenging tone towards the so-called high caste, and it also evokes a sort of new realization of body and the body consciousness to the rebel body who represents the voice of low caste working class Dalit people. This voice of the rebel body is very powerful just like in the play *Dikshanta* by Dr. Shiva Rijal in which the character named Prakash Bishwokarma speaks the same lines in a full rebellion manner. It shows how the rebellious voice comes out spontaneously through the inner heart after severe domination and exploitation of the Dalit body as an untouchable outcast. In the same way, Bhagat Sarbajeet Bishwokarma has also challenged the so-called Brahmins to level his knowledge with them during the Dalit Aandolan in Nepal.

Conclusion

The so-called low-caste working class people are doubly victimized in society in terms of caste and economic status. I agree with the poet who stands as a rebel body representing the voice of underprivileged and downtrodden low-caste Dalit peoples in this poem. The issues the poet has raised regarding the Dalit laborers are the burning ones in the context of our country. The Dalit laborers have been used as the means and instruments of the so-called caste system. They have made everything for the higher caste people, but they haven't made anything for themselves yet.

Liberation of Dalit Movements has been taking place in the country for a long ago, but still, there is caste discrimination in our community. The reasons behind it are quite clear there is internal inequality within the Dalit community and a lack of integration among oppressed, marginal, native ethnicity, and all the proletariat peoples even from the so-called higher caste. Therefore, the poet as a voice of low-caste working class people against the so-called higher caste in this poem seems quite successful in his movement by making an alliance of Kami, Chyame, Gaine, Badi, and Musahar among the Dalit peoples. The poet has satirized every agent of the so-called high caste by challenging them to level their eyes with the eyes of the poet as a rebel body. As biology knows no caste and color discrimination, no one should be categorized as superior or inferior and touchable or untouchable. Treating people based on their caste and color parameters are entirely social and cultural constructs that existentially are utter nonsense in the 21st century. At one point Lord Krishna says when people laugh, sing, dance, and

cry even without a sense of hesitation and discrimination, such people will purify the world. Since these discriminatory parameters (caste and color) have no existential realities and had emerged out of feudal mentality from different periods, the researcher strongly suggests getting uprooted such an inhuman and culturally constructed caste system.

Works Cited

- Ahuti. "Ganhugoro Africa". *Gangugoro Africa*. Sangri-La, 2051, pp. 3-5.
- Barali, Ranendra. "Bhagat Sarvajeet Bishwakarma ra Dalit Aandolan". Eds. Rajendra Maharjan and Yam Bahadur Kishan. Samata Foundation, 2070, pp. 35-52.
- Bishwakarma, J B. "Pashupati Mandir Pravesh Sangharsha: Jaba Rajya Jhuknu Paryo". Dalanbiruddha Partiroodh. Eds. Rajendra Maharjan and Yam Bahadur Kishan. Samata Foundation, 2070, pp. 53-69.
- Khanal, Krishna; Gelpke, Frits Sollewijn & Pyakurel, Uddhab Prasad Dalit. *Representation in National Politics of Nepal*. Nepal National Dalit Social Welfare Organization (NNDSWO), 2012, pp. 71-72.
- Ram, N. "Social Mobility and Status-Identification among the Scheduled Caste: A Synoptic View", in K.L. Sharma (ed.) *Social Inequality in India: Profiles of Caste, Class, Power and Social Mobility* (Essays in Honour of Professor Yogendra Singh). Rawat Publications, 1999.
- Rijal, Shiva. *Dikshanta*. Sangri-La, 2016.
- Sri Aurobindo. *The Secret of the Veda*, Lotus Press, 1995.
- The Dhammapada*. Trans. Ekanath Eastwaran. Penguin, 1996, pp. 192-200.
- The Laws of Manu*. Trans. Wendy Doniger. Penguin, 1991, pp. 278-290.