

Representation of Caste Discrimination and Untouchability in Dulal's Gahugoro Africā

Shyam Lal Magarati (PhD)

*Lecturer in English, Surkhet Multiple Campus, Surkhet, Nepal
shyاملmagarati@gmail.com*

Abstract

This paper presents Dalits as Africans in the poem Gahugoro Africā. Dalits are primarily artisans who engage in various tasks such as crafting temple idols, cobbling shoes, ploughing fields, sweeping the streets, and playing musical instruments like the lyre and tum-tum. They utilize their skills and perform the duties expected of them. However, they get fewer wage and they are hated, humiliated, discriminated, exploited and traumatized in the society by the upper caste people and the nation even in this 21st century. Therefore, the purpose of this paper was to illustrate the presence of caste discrimination and untouchability as depicted by the researcher. The research is significant due to its focus on the inhuman treatment and miserable existence of Dalits in the same society. The exploration of diverse cultures and cultural practices is valuable to academia. The research was conducted using a library-based qualitative approach, utilizing relevant texts and sources to analyze the representation of caste discrimination and untouchability in Dulāl's poem. The researcher has implemented cultural studies perspective and the ideas of Stuart Hall as main and other theorists' ideas as supporting tools for theoretical parameters. The data were collected by text information, description and record keeping. The researcher finds that as a poet, Dulāl seriously raises question that how Dalits are considered untouchables and distanced them by the so called touchable in Nepali society. Dalits present everywhere so, the speaker strictly demands freedom from every type of shackles of discrimination and untouchability. Freedom from such evil practice is inevitable for Dalits in human civilization. So, it is the representative voice of Dalits in general.

Key Words

Caste division, culture, dalits, trauma, humiliation and hierarchy.

Introduction

Bishowbhakta Dulāl "Āhuti's" *Gahugoro Africā* [Brown Africa, 2071] is the collection of poems. It has altogether twenty-eight poems. Among them

Gahugoro Africā [Brown Africa] generally focuses on Dalit context: caste discrimination, practice of untouchability, lack of socio-economic power,

political access and lack of education. Gahugoro Africā mainly focuses on the miserably existence of the so called Damāi, Kāmi, Sārki, Bādi and Gāine in the Nepali society. They are assigned lower level tasks to perform but regarded untouchables by the so called touchable. The so called Dalits have red blood as the upper caste non-Dalits, however, they are dominated, discriminated, segregated, voiceless and made victims of exploitation and injustice. Kāmi formats temple idol, Cyāme sweeps the dirt of the society, Gāine blows the fiddle, Bādi makes the tum- tum, Sārki cobbles the shoes for the tender foot of the upper caste people, Mushahar ploughs the field and Damāi sews the clothes but all of them are hated and humiliated in the society due to the practice of untouchability. Beside they get very less wages which cannot fulfil their needs. In general, instead of getting respect, they are disregarded and treated inhumanly. In this situation, Dalit people have been exiled in the same community. In this age, neither there is possibility of the presence of the caste discrimination based on the Varna system nor the ignorance of the racism. The brown Africa of this round rock demands freedom and wants autonomy. Everyone demands humanly, equitable and behavior with justice.

Caste division and discrimination on the basis of caste became structurally strong when prime-

minister Junga Bahadur Rana put a royal seal on *Muluki Ain* in 1854 A.D (1910 B.S). Among four Varna (Brahman, Chhetri, Baishya and Shudra), Shudra (now Dalit) have been treated inhumanly. To display the social reality, the researcher in this paper tries to explore how Dalits have been dominated by caste discrimination and untouchability. For this, the researcher implies cultural studies perspective. This research is conducted using a library-based qualitative approach, utilizing relevant texts and sources to analyze the representation of caste discrimination and untouchability in Dulāl's poem. The text was selected purposively and data were collected from text information, description and record keeping. Stuart Hall's insights were used as main and some other theorists' ideas were implemented as supporting tools for collecting the required data. After analyzing the collected data, the researcher found that Dalits: Kami, Damai, Sarki, Gaine, Badi and Mushahar have been facing caste discrimination and cruel practices of untouchability so emancipation is inevitable from caste discrimination and practice of untouchability to live as human beings and make a better society. Thus, this research is significant due to the exploration of diverse cultures and cultural practices are valuable to academia.

Literature Review

In this section, the researcher reviewed some writers and researchers' insights and ideas about *Gahugoro Africā* which represents Dalits, caste discrimination and untouchability. Not only this, it helped to determine a gap and justify why this research is significant. The ideas of Ninu Cāpāgāin, Tara Kant Pandey and Shyam Lal Magarati about Gahugoro Africā are reviewed here.

Ninu Cāpāgāin about Gahugoro Africā argues that it is the best poem ever in the history of writing poetry by Dalits in Nepali literature (p. 83). Likewise, Tarakant Pandey shades light on Gahugoro Africā that the Dalit character challenges the upper caste religious priest to tear the pages of

religious scriptures and orders the upper caste touchable to make eye contact to him to justify the reason for caste discrimination and the practice of untouchability (p. 157). Moreover, Pandey compares Nepali untouchable Dalits and African black character and challenges touchable Brahmins to listen to him and understand the voice of the twentieth century. This is a major progressive poem centered on Dalit consciousness where the Dalit character challenges non-Dalit character that conserves the caste based Varna system (p. 148). Furthermore, Pandey asserts that Dulal's poem based on the Marxist's philosophy demarks among the progressive poems related to Dalits where the poet has challenged to tear the scriptures written on

the basis of Hindu Brahmin concept (pp. 147-48). untouchables in the life of touchable. He quotes that: He claims that there is presence of the so called the

Ma timro mandirako deutā banāune Kāmi hu
Ma yo gol bhugolko eutā gahugoro Africā hu//
Timro paitalāko juttā dekhi sirako topi samma
Timro dristikio dur kshitiz dekhi mutuko spandan samma
Ma kahā chaina? Ma sarbatra chu.
Malāi timi kasari achut banāuna sakchhau chut mānche? (pp. 3-5)
I am the Kāmi who made the god of your temple!
The brown Africa of this round rock!
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 me "untouchable" touchable one?

Pandey in the aforementioned verse clarifies that Dalits are everywhere. Kāmi, Damāi, Sārki, Gāine, Bādi and all other Dalits perform lower level tasks: cobbling shoes to sewing the caps. Dalits present themselves everywhere and in every situation even in eyesight and the heart of non-Dalits. In this

situation how the so called non-Dalits make some people untouchable.

Further, Pandey quotes that the speaker in the poem orders touchable to listen and understand untouchables' voice and asserts:

"Ma bisau satābdiko achut hu
Yo gol bhugolako eutā gahugoro Africā hu.
Ma apamānit itihāsko hisāb cāhāanchu
Ma kunai pani mulyemā mukti cāhāanchu." (p. 5)
I am the twentieth century's "untouchable"!
The brown Africa of this round rock!
I claim the accounting of humiliated history
At any cost, I claim freedom/emancipation!"

In this age, neither there is possibility of the presence of the caste discrimination based on the Varna system nor the ignorance of the racism. The

brown Africa of this round rock demands freedom and wants autonomy. Everyone demands humanly, equitable and behavior with full justice. So,

Gahugoro Africā is a poem full of free-conscious aggressive expression where Dalit context is made louder.

Magarati includes in Gahugoro Africā the speaker claims that, his blood is pure and red which changes into sweat, people collect it in the furrows of their soft hand. Despite this, people humiliate and maintain distance. He challenges the priest to have nerve to meet his eyes. He demands justice and freedom! There is his sweat on the idols of their temples and the pans so he challenges non-Dalit priest to make eye contact, either destruct his existence and save dharma (religion) or burn down all the religious scriptures that humiliate him and just collect the courage to set fire. Kāmi made the idols for their temples. The Cyāme scoops dirt from their dwelling. There is also smell of blood. He challenges asking them can they fill Dalits' veins with water or clean the dirt and feel positively. There is a pleasure sack in their mind which is to be filled by him. Either they have the courage to unite him with the beast and give him grass, or they are different from the beast. Dalit blows the fiddle, beats the drum, dig the field, and sew the clothes but he does not get credit instead he has been humiliated. Being confident, the speaker questions them 'why do touchable discriminate Dalits?' Non-Dalits need to have courage to say the smell of his hard labor is not in the foodstuff or they should collect the courage to regard his Dalit life. So he is everywhere. The speaker questions them how they can make him the untouchable while claiming themselves the touchable. He says non-Dalits either have the courage to read and realize the history how Dalits were constructed and treated or have the courage to change themselves and their attitude. He is Brown Africa and the 20th century's untouchable who counts humiliating history and wants freedom at any cost (p. 12). The speaker is conscious enough about caste discrimination, domination and practice of untouchability on Dalits.

The expression of people does not match in their action. They speak one thing and do another. Whatever they read in the text, they do not apply it in their practice. In the context of Nepal, people speak against the caste discrimination and practice

of untouchability but they rarely apply it in their action. In this regard Kedārnāth Pāndey (Rāhul Sānkritayan) questions the practice of untouchability as, "Why do people differ in their words, actions and responsibilities (Pandey as cited in Magarati, p. 40)?" In the context of Nepal too, people only talk but do not apply it in action. Similarly, sociologically, a class is defined on the basis of labor division, but unlike of which Bhimrao Ambedkar claims, "Caste system is not only for labor professional division but it is for division of laborers. The whole cultural development of the nation is built up by the sweat and labor of workers" (Elaiya as cited in Maharjan, p. 14). This humiliation concerns not about the religious and political philosophy but also it forms main aspect of upper caste aesthetics. "The conflict centers between touchable and untouchable castes about the aesthetics in Varna system. Dalits' philosophy focuses on hard work whereas the upper castes' philosophy is luxurious life" (Elaiya, p. 302). In the literary genres, "the culture of everyday lives and survival of marginalized people (Dalits) has been represented to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people" (Hall, p. 15).

Moreover, Ambedkar, in *Annihilation of Caste*, reinforces that "It is not possible to break caste without annihilating the religious notion on which the caste system, is founded" (pp. 5-6). Ambedkar further states that "caste is the monster that crosses your path. You cannot have political and economic reform, unless you kill this monster" (p. 42). Ambedkar blames that caste system is the crucial for the evil practice in the society. Similarly, G.S. Ghurye, in *Caste and Race in India* asserts, according to the Rig - Veda there are three classes mentioned: Brahma, Kshetra and Vaisha. The first two represent, a couple of professions of poet - priest and the warrior chief. The third division includes all the common people. In Purushasukta, that "a reference has been made to four orders of society as Brahmana, Rajanya, Vaishya and Shudra, who are said to have come respectively from the mouth, the arms, the thighs and feet of the creator" (p. 23). Further, Ghurye, illustrates quoting *The*

Panchavimsa Brahman: "Shudras' business was assigned to be a servant of another, washing his superiors' feet. He is declared to be unfit for sacrifice" (p. 27). They could not perform a sacrifice, listen to or recite the Vedic texts, nor could practice austerities (p. 31). Furthermore, Ghurye asserts that discrimination of caste was in food and drinks. "It is because the Brahmins put restrictions on the acceptance of food and drink from the Shudras during the second stage of the development of their culture (p. 92)." Food and drink of Shudras was not accepted by the upper castes. Dalits engage in low level works. They have also manner of cooking food items, life style and cultural practice. Their identity and differences are related to representation. So, Hall asserts "our culture commonly takes identity to be expressed through the form of representation; identity is an

essence that can be signified through signs of taste, beliefs, attitudes and lifestyles" (p. 108). Hall (1997) quotes that "Identity are wholly social constructions and cannot exist outside of cultural representations that constitutes rather than express identity (p. 108)." Dalits in Nepal are represented as the society has been constructing their identity.

The above discussion mainly focuses on the caste discrimination, untouchability, hard labor of Dalits and domination on them. The reviews mainly lack the specific focus on the demand of the freedom from the aforementioned domination and discrimination. Therefore, the researcher in this research tries to focus on caste discrimination and practice of untouchability specifically on Dalits in Gahugoro Africā.

Methodology

This section comprises the methodology implemented in this research. The researcher has implemented the constructivist approach and selected the text purposively for representing caste discrimination and practice of untouchability on Dalits. For this, only Dulāl's *Gahugoro Africā* was selected. To collect the data, representation under the cultural study perspective was employed. Stuart Hall's insights on representation as main and some other theorists' insights as supporting tools were used for the theoretical parameters. The data were collected from text information, description and record keeping. This research was conducted using a library-based qualitative approach, utilizing

relevant text and sources to analyze the representation of caste discrimination and untouchability in Dulāl's poem. The collected data were managed appropriately and analyzed properly using main theoretical ideas of Hall related to representation under cultural studies. For the analysis of data, the researcher started background then quotes were put and related theories were imbedded and analyzed. Finally, the researcher concluded with the appropriate views. The researcher only tried to explore the caste discrimination and practice of untouchability on Dalits. So it has great significance for researchers and academia.

Result and Discussion

Representation of Caste Discrimination and Untouchability

In the *Constitution of Nepal 2072*, in part 3, section 18 sub-sections 1, 2 and 3 the provision is that, all citizens shall be equal before law. No person shall be denied the equal protection of law. Similarly, according to general laws there shall be no discrimination due to origin, religion, race, caste, tribe, sex, physical conditions, disabilities, health

condition, matrimonial status, pregnancy, economic condition, language or geographical region, or ideology or any other such grounds. And the state shall not discriminate among citizens on grounds of origin, religion, race, caste, tribe, sex, economic condition, language or geographical region,

ideology and such other matters (p. 6). Policy has been made but not implemented properly.

In the context of Nepal, caste division and practice of untouchability has been practiced from the time immemorial. "The Varna system and caste division was strictly implemented when Jung Bahadur Rana put a royal seal on *Muluki Ain* (Civil Code) in 1854 A. D" (Magarati, p. 40). The upper caste people, rulers, and dominant people started dominating Dalits in words and actions thereafter. Dalit people have been regarded water untouchable and restricted to the public places, temples, the upper castes' houses and water sources. Dalits change their blood into sweat but they are humiliated so Dulal states that "Jaba ma tyo sramko subasyukta pasinā sughna khojchu/ Timi malāi apamān garchau ra tādāhā rākhchau" 'when I try to snort away that sweat redolent with labor, you humiliate and distance me' (p. 3). The speaker in these lines justifies that Dalits perform hard task in their everyday life and change blood into sweat. However, instead of getting love and respect, they are humiliated and distanced. In this situation, it is relevant to cite Ambedkar who claims, "Caste system is not only for labor professional division but it is for division of laborers. The whole cultural development of the nation is built up of by the sweat and labor of workers (Elaiya as cited in Maharjan, p. 14)." Dalits are also responsible to

build the nation but they are not given that credit. Observing the activities of the upper caste people Dulāl compares Dalits to the Africans and declares that "Ma bisau satābdiko achut hu/Yo golbhugolako eutā gahugoro Africā hu" 'I am the twentieth century's "untouchable"! The brown Africa of this round rock (p. 3)! It refers that the so called Dalits in Nepal are water untouchable in this twenty-first century, the period of high technology. As Africans in African countries, Dalits in Nepal have been segregated, dominated and humiliated in the name of caste. In this regard Pandey questions the practice of untouchability as, "Why is there difference between people's words and actions or speech and responsibilities (p. 5 as cited in Magarati, p. 40)?" In the context of Nepali community too, people only speak but do not implement it in action. In our country, policies are made but not applied against mistreatment on Dalits so they have been the victims from the time immemorial.

Similarly, Dulāl clarifies that Dalits are responsible that: Kāmi formats the temple idols, Cyāme sweeps the dirt of the society, Gāine blows the fiddle, Bādi beats the tum-tum, Mushahar ploughs the field and Sārki cobbles the shoes but all of them are the brown Africa of this round rock (3-4). In general, they are considered untouchables so the speaker questions:

"Malāi timi kasari achut banāuna sakchhau chut mānche?"

Ki itihāsko kaTagharāmā ubhine āta gara/

ki āfulāi badalne sāhas gara/

Ākhā judhāune āta gara pujāri!" (p. 5)

'How can you make me "untouchable," touchable one?

Either have the nerve to stand in the history's witness box

Or have the courage to change yourself

Have the nerve to meet my eyes priest!"

In the aforementioned extract, the speaker challenges the so called touchable that how they can make some people untouchables and treat accordingly. The speaker requests the upper caste

people to revisit the history and study well or change their attitude or asks the priest to see in the eyes of Dalits directly. It clearly emphasizes that caste division and practice of untouchability was

the creation of the nation, the upper caste dominant people which does not have any clear logic. In the literary genres, "the culture of everyday lives and survival of marginalized Dalit has been represented to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people" (Hall, p. 15). It is the discourse that brings Dalits in the center. The power and discourse determine the culture so in the context of Nepal, the upper caste people have the dominating culture.

The whole world has been the global village, however, Nepali Dalits in Nepali society have been

leading inhuman life. They still have been facing problems: in schools, water sources, temples, public places and the upper castes' houses. Not only this, Dalits have been very responsible and performing their duty well. However, they are tortured, exploited, discriminated, segregated and mistreated in words and actions. They are compelled to live inhuman life and are exiled in their own nation. In this condition the speaker declares emancipation from every kinds of obstacles in the name of caste discrimination and practice of untouchability and asserts:

"Ma bisau satābdiko achut hu/

Yo golbhugolko eutā gahugoro Africā hu/" (p. 5)

I am the twentieth century's "untouchable"!

The brown Africa of this round rock!

In the aforementioned lines the speaker wants emancipation/freedom from every kinds of shackles based on the caste discrimination and practice of untouchability. Dalit people have been regarded similarly as Africans in the other countries. He demands the accounting of the long humiliated history and declares the freedom. In this regard, Hall asserts "our culture commonly takes identity to be expressed through the form of representation; identity is an essence that can be signified through signs of taste, beliefs, attitudes and lifestyles" (Hall, p. 108). Again Hall quotes that "Identity are wholly social constructions and cannot exist outside of cultural representations that constitutes rather than express identity" (p. 108). Dalits' identity is misrepresented due to the caste discrimination and untouchability. It is better to represent well in the society. As Ghurye asserts, in Purushasukta, that a reference displays as Brahmana, Rajanya, Vaishya and Shudra, who were born respectively from the mouth, the arms, the thighs and feet of the creator (p. 23). Further, Ghurye, quotes from *The Panchavimsa Brahman*: "Shudras were assigned to be a servant of another, to clean his superiors' feet. They were declared to be unfit for sacrifice" (p. 27). This division was the creation of the society not the nature. The upper caste people consider Dalits

lower graded and behave accordingly. Such mistreatment in words and actions has been hurting Dalits. In this regard, Dulāl declares the freedom from the evil cultural practices: caste discrimination and practice of untouchability.

In this research, the researcher's focus was on Dulal's poem on which caste discrimination and practice of untouchability is analyzed. Here, the speaker has compared Nepali Dalits with Africans in terms of discrimination, segregation, humiliation, exploitation and inhuman treatment. As the upper caste people, Dalits have red blood which they transform it into sweat for hard labor and get insufficient wages; however, they have been hated, humiliated and considered water untouchable in the society. Besides this, they are responsible for the assigned tasks and present everywhere. Moreover, Dalits have been treated badly even in words. In this context, the speaker is conscious and asks with the so called pious ones that how they make them (Damāi, Kāmi, Sārki, Bādi, Gāine and Mushahar) untouchable and treat inhumanly. He again questions "Why do non-Dalits distance Dalits?" So, that the speaker demands the accounting and declares the freedom for the so called Dalits. The aforementioned results lead to the discussion that,

Dalits have been under the domination of the upper caste discourse on cultural practice. This is a kind of structural domination created by the nation itself. Dalits, innocent, laborious, hardworking, marginalized, poor and victim of cultural aspects have been waiting real brotherhood, love,

encouragement and support from the upper caste people, dominant groups and the nation as well. Moreover, they want freedom from cultural domination and discrimination: especially from the caste discrimination and practice of untouchability.

Conclusion

Dalits perform heavy duties in their daily lives, turning blood into sweat. But instead of gaining love and respect, they are humiliated and distanced. They also have the responsibility of building a nation, but they do not have the honor of doing so. The so-called Dalit in twenty-first century Nepal is said to be unable to touch water, even in the age of high technology. Dalits in Nepal, like Africans elsewhere, have been marginalized, dominated and humiliated in the name of caste. Even in this community, rulers only speak and do nothing. In our country, policies against abuse of Dalits have been issued but not implemented, so Dalits are always victims. Similarly, Dulal reveals that lower level tasks depend on Dalits, but they are brown Africa of this round rock. Dalits have been ruled by both deeds and words. So the speaker asks the so-called "touchable rulers" how they can make some people untouchable and treat them accordingly. The speaker asks the upper caste people to reconsider and study the story or change their attitude. He asks priests to look straight into the eyes of Dalits, stressing that the practice of caste division and

untouchability was created by the state and the dominant upper caste people without clear logic. The Dalit was very responsible and did his duty well. Yet they are tortured, exploited, discriminated, marginalized and abused in their words and actions. Forced into an inhuman life, they are exiled to their homeland. In this state, Dalit character proclaims liberation from all kinds of disabilities in the name of caste discrimination and untouchability practices. It concludes that it is an evil cultural practice that the society has created. Dalits have been misrepresented in the society disregarding their vital roles. The state has a responsibility to eliminate such atrocious practices and get rid the so-called Dalits from this disease in order to improve society. This paper is significant because in the context of Nepal, the study of different cultures and cultural practices has academic value. However, due to the wide range of cultural studies and representations, this study is not definitive. On the same subject, researchers can focus on the representation of Dalit women, economic aspects of Dalits and so on.

Acknowledgement

After multiple efforts, I have been given an opportunity to carry out a research and share experiences. So, I would like to thank UGC and Research Division for providing me an opportunity to carry out a Small RDI research grant on the topic **An Exploration of Emancipation from Caste Discrimination and Untouchability in Dulal's Gahugoro Africā**. Due to this, I have carried out a research about the people (Dalits) who have been

still at the bottom of the society in every aspect. Moreover, Dalits, a marginalized people suffering from all the aspects generally rather traumatized from the caste discrimination and practice of untouchability particularly waiting for the equitable treatment, justice and emancipation. Once again thanks UGC, Research Division and whole staffs for this opportunity.

References

- Ambedkar, B.R. (2018). *Annihilation of caste*. Rupa Publications India Pvt. Ltd.
- Bhattarāi, R. (2070). Dalit saundryeshāstra ra sahitye [Dalit aestheticism and literature]
- Dalit Saundrye Bodha* [Comprehension of Dalit aesthetics], edited by Rajendra Maharjan, Samata Foundation, 215-217.
- Cāpāgāin, N. (2070). Dalit Saundryeshāstra ra Sahitye [Dalit aestheticism and literature] Dalit saundrye bodha [Comprehension of Dalit aesthetics], edited by Rājendra Maharjan, Samata Foundation, 55-111.
- Constituent Assembly Secretariat. (2072). *Constitution of Nepal*. Singha Darbār.
- Dulal, B. (2071). *Gahugoro Africa* (Brown Africa). Sāngrilā Pustak Prali.
- During, S., editor. (1993). *The Cultural studies reader*. Routledge.
- Ghurye, G. S. (2016). *Caste and race in India*. 5th edition. SAGE Publication.
- Hall, S., editor. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Ilaih, K. (2007). *Indian counter culture*. Ambedkar in restrospect: Essays on economics, politics and society." Edited by Sukhadeo Thorat and Aryama. Indian Institute of dalit Studies and Rawat Publication, 301-304.
- Magarati, S. L. (2021). *Cultural representation of Dalits in Nepali literary writings*. An unpublished PhD dissertation from TU, Nepal, 12.
- Pandey, K. (Rahul Sankritayan). (1983). *Tumhāri kshaya* [Your destruction]. Kitāb Mahal.
- Pandey, T. (2070). Samasāmaik pragatisil kabitāmā Dalit cetanā" [Dalit consciousness in contemporary progressive poems] *Dalit saundrye bodha* [Comprehension of Dalit aesthetics], edited by Rajendra Maharjan, Samata Foundation, 127-162.