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Murdahiya: Demolishing oppressive socio-moral beliefs

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Abstract

To write an autobiography is an act of tremendous courage because in our society the habit of telling the truth is very less and the courage to listen and bear the truth is lesser than that. Dr. Tulsiram's autobiography *Murdahiya* makes a special appearance in the list of those selected autobiography in which the truth of their experience is told by the author with enormous courage and without any hesitation. "Murdahiya" is a place where the dead bodies of humans and animals cremated which in Tulsiram's word 'centre of Dalit existence'. This autobiography is an amalgamation of profound knowledge, thoughtfulness and spontaneity. Tulsiram gave a deep account of his personal experiences in *Murdahiya*.

Keywords: Murdahiya, Demolishing and Socio-Moral Beliefs

Introductions

Dr. Tulsiram who belongs to a small village Dharmpur in Azamgarh district of Uttar Pradesh was primarily a professor of international studies in Jawaharlal Nehru University and a marxist Dalit thinker, but he has left an indelible mark in the literary world due to his interest in literature and through his writings like *Murdahiya* and *Manikarnika*. He has a different aura in the field of Dalit literature. Born in a poverty stricken dalit community Tulsiram expresses his economic and mental anguish in his writings that he had faced in his life. He offers us a glimpse into the world with which we have no familiarity. Even well-known sociologists called *Murdahiya* a work done on anthropology. No book of sociology will tell us what the introductory chapters of *Murdahiya* do about the social structure of a village in Azamgarh and the life of the Dalits who lived there.

Murdahiya is not a mere description of the experience of the author's life but a living portrayal of the society which belongs to the author. The readers who know the difference between description and portrayal will be able to understand this very well. Description is just presenting the things or incidents as it is while when pictures emerges from words and sentences through depiction is portrayal, and when a reader goes through Tulsiram's *Murdahiya*, spontaneously the pictures starts emerging in the mind. This art of portrayal makes *Murdahiya* a fine literary piece of work. It's an autobiography as well as a narrative of socio economic structure and folk culture. Profound literary critic Professor Namvar Singh said that "the lively description of the rural life which is in *Murdahiya* is not found even in Premchand's creations."

("मुखता मेरी जन्मजात विरासत थी") "Illiteracy was my innate legacy " the first sentence of this autobiography makes it very clear that there is a close association between poverty, superstition and illiteracy in the authors life. Tulsiram lost his right eye due to the superstitious beliefs. Instead of giving medical treatment, goddesses were worshipped in various ways for the treatment of his suffering from smallpox and in this way he lost his one eye. People used to tease him as 'kanwa' and also see him as a bad luck because according to the conservative beliefs of our society a man who can only see from his one eye is considered as ominous. Although this legacy of illiteracy has been mentioned by the autobiographer only for the Dalit community but superstition and illiteracy permeate both the upper and lower caste societies. This is evident from the quote of the autobiographer -"Apart from me, many other people in my village used to fall under the category of ominous. One was Jangu pandey, a Brahmin about eighty years old man who remain unmarried for his life, he had no one of his own and the other was an old childless widow known as 'panditayin'. There was a panic in various families as soon as Jangu pandey or panditayin arrives, people

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used to instruct their new 'bahus' (daughter-in-laws) to stay inside the house because they believed that once they lay their evil eye on them, it is a bad omen for the whole household and probably they will become childless. *Murdahiya* is a documentation of the squidiness and savagery of Hindu religion and culture.

The caste based system where man's first identity is caste, marking this distinction in *Murdahiya*, Tulsiram elaborated the tragedy of Dalit lives. He has given a realistic depiction of the agony and sufferings of dalits dependent on agricultural labor. Dr. Tulsiram writes that "my grandfather-great grandfather and many other landless dalits were bonded labourers of the upper caste landlords and this practice continued for generations." The author describing this feudal system of 'Jajmani pratha' shows the sheer horrors of endless famines and their consequences on these helpless deprived communities. *Murdahiya* is not just the saga of one person, one caste or group, but it's the communization of anguish. Liberation from obtuseness of Hindu society and emancipation of the oppressed and deprived communities is one of the main objective of *Murdahiya*.

The audacity to unfold the truth of experience makes any work significant and Tulsiram's *Murdahiya* is one such creation. In almost all the Dalits autobiographies only the poignant portrayal of atrocities done by the upper castes on the dalits is demonstrated while in *Murdahiya*, there is feeling of neutrality and objectivity. There is no sense of hatred towards any caste or community in this autobiography, only he has presented the life as he lived. The autobiography while depicts the abuses, misbehavior and exploitation done by the upper castes, on the other hand the affection, sympathy, love, encouragement and help which he get from the upper castes are also mentioned. In fact, there isn't any problem with any brahmin or any upper caste community but from the Brahminical mindset which is an inhuman conservative mindset that divides the society on the basis of caste or racial superiority and establishes Brahmin superiority according to Hindu 'varna' order. Exploitation in the name of caste is the basic tendency of this ideology and individual of any caste can get affected from this inhuman ideology. A person who has nothing to do with any upper caste can also be of a brahminical mindset and Tulsiram is well aware of this fact. There is no mud-slinging or hatred towards the upper-caste but only an objective presentation of the reality, stark and raw in its often gory details. While reading *Murdahiya*, it seems that it inspires readers to change the society and the system.

Conclusion

Dr. Tulsiram believed that "not any piece of writing or literary creation could make its real existence until the social-moral beliefs were destroyed." In '*Murdahiya*' Tulsiram exposes the double standards and hypocrisy, deeply embedded in the very fabric of the Hindu society and culture. The experience that he had to undergo, because of the misfortune of being born into a so called low caste family is so horrifying to say the least. *Murdahiya* provides fresh insight on the plights of lower strata in rural India which unfortunately has not changed even after seventy four years of the independence. Tulsiram's *Murdahiya* gave a new pace to the Dalit discourse and this one eyed creation of the author proved to be a shocking eye opener for the many.

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