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**LIFE AND STRUGGLE OF THE DALITS IN  
 KALYAN RAO'S UNTOUCHABLE SPRING**

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**Abstract:**

*Kalyan Rao is widely known in Telugu Literary circle as an influential writer, speaker and a vocal presence in Viplava Rachaitala Sangam (VIRSAM) Revolutionary writers Association. He has been with the destiny and struggles of the disadvantaged and the deprived all his life sometimes incurring the wrath of the state oppression in Andhra Pradesh. He was also put in jail for the positions he had taken in the past vis-à-vis state oppression. Therefore, it is not surprising that Kalyan Rao's creative writing is part of his social philosophy with an ultimate dream of achieving just and compassionate society devoid of prejudices and exploitation.*

**Key Words:** *Incurring, oppression, compassionate society.*

Kalyan Rao's *Untouchable Spring* (*Antarani Vasantam*) is about a generational struggle of Dalits who desperately wrestle with the inhuman practices of caste Hindus who forced them to live away from mainstream society with no protection from natural calamities. The novel is about the past memories of Ruth and Ruben. The story moves around six generations of a Dalit family of Enneladinni village in Prakasham district in Andhra Pradesh state. There is a clear change of lifestyle from one generation to another. The characterization is appreciable and almost every character has its own significance in the novel.

G. Kalyan Rao's Telugu Novel is metaphorically titled as the *Antaraani Vasantham* (*Untouchable Spring*), which was recently translated into English by Alladi Uma and Sridhar. This novel depicts the progressive journey of seven generations. The novel shows Kalyan Rao's creative capability as the most compelling and an emphatically affirmative force. Essentially situated in Coastal Andhra, the characters are exposed to Christian education with eventual conversion to the religion. Later, they are inevitable energized by progressive ideologies, which propelled them into social action, there by questioning and rejecting the hegemonic interests. The struggle against dehumanizing circumstances continues and even as they are successful in their efforts, there are sacrifices to be made. The conclusion, however, is an act of affirmation.

In this novel, Rao has explained the intrinsic caste system and its human relationships among the untouchable castes Maalas, Maadigas and other castes. He analyzes the importance of land, its relationship with land owned by various upper castes. He uncovers how Christianity, in its missionary zeal converted Dalits into Christianity, the compulsions behind the conversion, how the Dalits were educated in Christian schools and reached a position to question the traditional Indian caste system. He also presents the flaws of Christian missionaries in gaining funds, land or properties from the English before they left the country.

The condition of Dalits in first two generations was submissive and traditional although, there was a symbolic of social change. The Dalit of first two generations are primarily agricultural laborours. Once the rains fall, all of them, men, women and children go to work in the Karanam's fields(feudal of the village). They are paid starvation wages, which is not enough to appease their hunger. It is almost like

bonded labour since they take care of every aspect of the harvest right from planting to the final harvest period. But they receive meager wages for their efforts; sometimes they receive only food and nothing else.

The role of Ellanna is significant in the novel. Although he bears and performs the mythological narratives of Chenchulaxmi, Hiranyakahpudu, and Narsimha swami much to the horror of the audience, after Nagganna's death, he achieves transformation and he sings primarily revolutionary songs or the songs that reflect the daily struggles of Dalits. Soon he begins to roam from one village to another. In one of his travels, he meets Kummari Kotes, who is a literary person in his own right. He seems to be collecting 'Dwipadas' of Basava. He also writes poetry, which the caste Hindus do not tolerate. Kummari Kotes then advises Ellanna to sing his songs so that he can put all the songs into writing. The Brahminical community pooh-poohs his literary orientation. When he was carrying all the written songs of Ellanna, the caste Hindus instigate some miscreants to kill him.

The story of the third generation is riddled with tumultuous events such as their encounter with evangelical and ecumenical Christianity. This generation is represented by Martin, Sivaiah, Sharamna, Sasirekha and other people of the village. The period in question is the later part of 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is also affected by severe drought and famine. As it is, the Dalits of the village are at the mercy of the caste Hindus of the village such as Karanam and the Reddy's. Their survival is guaranteed to a certain extent at least for their service to the domestic as well as agricultural spheres. With famine and drought devastated the village life, the Dalits of the village have no other recourse except to migrate to different places looking for work. As it happens, they migrate en masse to a place where the construction of Buckingham canal is in progress. They quickly look for work as manual laborers. Before the contractors enlist them as laborers, they ask questions their antecedents such as caste and other details. On being informed that they belong to Maala and Maadiga communities and they were stoned. Eventually, Martin comes to their rescue thus representing Christian charity and compassion.

Although Christianity as such does not recognize hierarchy and subjugation, it has been a major feature of Indian Christianity that the Indians who converted into Christianity brought into the new religion the same habits of exploitation and subjugation. It is in this context that Dalit Christianity should be understood from the perspective of double alienation. In the court of law, Martin's representation is favored as a result of his untiring efforts. As a mark of celebration and jubilation Martin wanted to bring all the people of the village for a Christmas celebration.

The fourth generation begins with Sivaiah's son Ruben the sole survivor of the massacre who is now into youthful age. A Christian who lives there brings him up. Ruben is curious in learning, about his ancestors. There is a search into the past to know their roots and to appreciate that great culture. Ruben is an example of such a search in Kalyan Rao's *Antarani Vasantam*. Here Ruben calls himself the son of Sivaiah, though he knows that his father had a different name as Simon and lived with that name till his death. He talks of the greatness of his past:

Then I came to know that Ellanna, my grandfather used to create songs and sing them. He was well versed in Urumula dance and knew Veedhi Bhogotam (Street play). My paternal grandmother Subhadra was hidden in his songs. Then I felt that so far, all these days, I was away from a great heritage. (159)

The generational life of the Dalits and somehow intertwined with Ennela dinni. The other major characters in this generation are Ramanujam, Ram Reddy, Chinnasubbadu, Sendri and others. This generation also sees the source of the pre-Independence ideological discourses such as Communism, Gandhism and subaltern systems of thought including Ambedkarism, and the social theory of Jyothi Rao Phule, Ramaswamy Nayakar. As the conversation between Ruben and Ramanujam was going on, they also talked about "Phule's Satyashodak Samaj's, Tamasha Troops", "Phule's revolt against Shetji and Bhatji" (177). And they further talk about socialist movement in Tamilnadu. In this conversation, the word

'communism' is also discussed.

The significant factor in this generation is the emergence of the Communist movement, which is antithetical to colonial British rule in India. The British Raj outlaws the movement ultimately. Their revolutionary fervor is much admired by Ramanujam the teacher who is solely responsible for the historic Dalit awareness because of which the Dalits of the village collective march into the tank for water. Although their march is minuscule, it is certainly symbolic and theoretically important suggesting long marches of China. And when the caste Hindus conspires to attack the perceived travesty of Dalits, they successfully tackle the mechanizations of caste Hindus; they drive them off including the major sinister figure *Choudari*. In this task they are adequately assisted by the revolutionary strategies of communists.

Communism becomes the major landscape, which brought about changes in Dalit consciousness. For the first time, there appears to be a radical alternative in communism. This ideology stems from Marx's writings where he tried to reflect on the great German Philosopher Hegel. German Historiography is premised on certain evolutionary cycles of human progress, which is called dialectical interpretation of history?

Therefore it is not surprising that many people of the village are favorably inclined towards communism; their faith in communism is more than justified since they remain a pillar of strength in claiming their right of human dignity. Another important aspect of Gandhi; he was born in Porubunder, Gujrat who belonged to the trading community. He goes to England and becomes a barrister. He has an epiphany experience when he is ill-treated by White man, while traveling by train. His consciousness is completely transformed when he realizes that no matter how educated he is simply a brown Indian under British rule. What Gandhi experiences is no different from Dalit humiliations at the hands of caste Hindus. Gandhi's ultimate entry into Indian politics is an attempt to conscientise the humanity within all of us.

On the occasion of Dalit temple entry movement the activists sung songs and jubilant. They made speeches on national integrity. Ramanujam was also in the midst of the procession. Linga Reddy expressed his happiness for the presence of Ramanujam. The procession passed by near the caste Hindus' houses. But that procession did not go through the middle of the village. The temple of Lord Siva was located outside the village. It was covered with dust and dung. Only to organize the program, the premises of the temple have been cleaned up.

Ramanujam, the teacher, insists that they should go to Vaishnavanva temple, which is used by the caste Hindus in the village. This rattles the otherwise calm Linga Reddy and causes commotion. He is certainly caught unaware and is greatly confused at the moment. He later manipulates and convinces the priest of the temple and brings the Dalits into its premises. The Dalits are ecstatic at the historic and momentous occasion. For them, it is an unprecedented experience. They suddenly become part take of spiritual domain of Hinduism, which has been deprived to their predecessors. What they don't seem to realize is the fact that they are not allowed into the sanctum sanatorium of the temple, which is noticed by Ramanujam, the teacher. However it is still an experience to be cherished may be some day they would get the real darshan.

Once these Dalits return home after their historic experience, the entire temple is purified and washed to clean the impurity caused by their presence. The Priest as well as Linga Reddy, the so-called Gandhian supervises the entire proceedings. Another Gandhian witnesses it also who happens to be a Dalit a fact that is not known to Linga Reddy. We don't want purification. We don't want them to as if doing us a favor. Everyone's caste has its own greatness. If I am an untouchable to him, he is an untouchable to me. They are becoming popular by killing us. Are they doing us a favor? No, we don't need their sympathy. Better die than living with their sympathy. We don't want their ruined temples to be reopened. If there is substance and sincerity in their reforms, they will do a small thing. There is a large piece of land near Maladi Debba now occupied by the Karnam. If we Mala

and Madigas want to occupy that land, will the reformers and the followers cooperate with us. Even Gandhi would not accept that word.

Emmanuel's is the story of the fifth generation and is suggestive of liberation theology of South and Latin America, which principally stems from Christian humanism. Emmanuel's religious upbringing is modeled on countless biblical stories of oppression and liberation. These stories of Hebrews ultimately end in liberation and founding a peaceful society with the blessings of God. It is no wonder then that Emmanuel is attracted to extremist movements. When is arrested, the police humiliate Ruben but Ruben says that he is proud of his son.

Chirst is my faith, struggle is my necessity. My son is a symbol of the conflict of centuries. My son's struggle is not a Maala or a Maadiga. That is an ideal struggle it is a necessity. I was born as an untouchable. I do not have a piece of land. I was excommunicated. For all these questions my son provided answers...you remove the cross from your neck. You are not on the side of cross carriers. You are on the side of the people who crucify others. I came to meet my son. I am not here to listen your speech (Rao 211).

Multiple themes such as globalization the significant chapter of Telangana Armed Struggle, marginalization of folk culture, the views of Christian mission of upper castes for purely materialistic reasons, and caste factor seen in governmental positions under colonial British. "It seems that caste system took a new life in British period", said Ramanujam and look at Ruben....The British introduced caste in the law and judicial system. The advisors of the British judges were Brahmins. What they obviously wanted was to get equal status to Sanskrit with English language and the translations from Sanskrit were also on rise. (176-177)

And the dimensions of radical aesthetics are subsumed into Rao's narrative. To be sure, the dialectic of radical aesthetics is the essential governing principle in this generational take since at one point or the other; there has been protest or rebellion either symbolically or otherwise. Kalyan Rao deliberately touched the Telangana issue as he intends to inform about the Telangana Armed Rebellion in which Chakali Iamma, Doddi Komuraiah fought against Visunoor Deshmuk's private army, sacrificed their lives and became martyrs.

In fact, the very mention of Telangana Armed Struggle is necessary to energize the vision of the novel, which is predicated upon the recognition of caste and class as the defining moments to be addressed by the radical politics. In fact, the role of art and literature is as much an exploration into the complexity of the principles of aesthetics as well as its ultimate usefulness in contributing to the social transformation. Therefore Rao's novel frequently reminds us of the anxiety of socialist realism. Similarly globalization is mentioned as the major political platform for the beneficiaries of market economy regulated by America. The developing countries will have to contend with the confluences of globalization. In conclusion, it can be safely surmised that the various themes projected in the novel are ultimately directed towards the humanistic society.

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