

Voice of Emancipation from Caste Discrimination: Reading Untouchability and Injustice in Dulal's *Gahugoro Afric*¹

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Abstract

This paper attempts to analyze the issues on the untouchability, injustice and voice declaration of emancipation from caste discrimination in Bishowbhakta Dulal's *Gahugoro Africa*. Dalits as Africans are primarily artisans and utilize their skills and perform the imposed duties. 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 the twenty-first century. Therefore, the purpose of this paper was to analyze the voice of emancipation from various evil cultural practices like caste discrimination, untouchability and injustice. The text was chosen purposively and the research was conducted using a library-based qualitative approach, utilizing relevant texts and sources to analyze the objective. The researcher has implemented cultural studies perspective and the discursive approach 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 examined that Dalits have been considered untouchable, distanced and humiliated despite their vital role in the society. The imposed professions that were assigned to them could not suffice their needs. Dalits have presented themselves everywhere still they have been the victims of socio-cultural biasness and injustice. So the speaker strictly declares emancipation from every type of cultural shackles. Freedom from such evil practice is inevitable for Dalits in Nepal. So, it is the representative voice of Dalits (Kami, Damai, Sarki, Badi, Gaine, Mushahar and Cyame) in general. The research is significant due to its focus on the

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inhuman treatment and miserable existence of Dalits in the context of Nepal. The exploration on the voice of emancipation from the caste discrimination in the diverse cultures and cultural practices is valuable to academia.

Key Words: Caste discrimination, Cultural shackles, Dalits, Emancipation, Untouchable

Introduction

Bishowbhakta Dul I's *Gahugoro Afric* [Brown Africa, 2071] collection of poems contains altogether twenty-eight poems. Among them *Gahugoro Afric* [Brown Africa] generally focuses on the multiple issues of Dalits such as: caste discrimination and practice of untouchability, as well as their; lack of socio-economic power, political access and education. *Gahugoro Afric* mainly focuses on the miserably existence of the so called Dam i, K mi, S rki, B di and G ine in the Nepali society. They have been 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. K mi formats temple idol, Cy me sweeps the dirt of the society, G ine blows the fiddle, B di makes the tum- tum, S rki cobbles the shoes for the tender feet of the upper caste people, Mushahar ploughs the field and Dam i sews the clothes but all of them are hated and humiliated in the society due to the practice of untouchability. Besides that they get fewer wages which cannot fulfill their needs. In general, instead of getting respect, they are disregarded and treated inhumanly. This context displays that 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.

When the prime-minister Junga Bahadur Rana put a royal seal on *Muluki Ain* in 1854 A.D (1910 B.S) caste division and discrimination on the basis of caste became structurally strong. 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 attempts to analyze the voice of emancipation from caste discrimination, untouchable practices and injustice. For this, the researcher implies the lens of cultural studies. This research was conducted using a library-based qualitative approach, utilizing relevant texts and sources to analyze the declaration of emancipation of Dalits from caste

discrimination, untouchable practices and injustice. The text was chosen purposively and data were collected from text information, description and record keeping. Stuart Hall's insights on discursive approach 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 untouchable practices so emancipation is inevitable 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 which are valuable to academia.

Literature Review

This section comprises empirical and theoretical reviews of contextual and related insights and ideas about *Gahugoro Afric* which represent Dalits, caste discrimination, untouchability, inequality and injustice. Both empirical and theoretical reviews helped to show a gap and justify why this research is significant. In the first part ideas of Ninu C p g in, Tara Kant Pandey and Shyam Lal Magarati about *Gahugoro Afric* are reviewed. Similarly, in the second part, insights of related theorists are included simultaneously.

In *Gahugoro Afric*, Ninu C p g in 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 Afric* 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 characters 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). He claims that there is presence of the so called untouchables in the life of touchable. He quotes that:

Ma timro mandirako deut ban uneK mi hu
Ma yo gol bhugolko eut gahugoro Afric hu//

Timro paital ko jutt dekhi sirako topi samma
Timro dristiko durkshitiz dekhi mutuko spandan samma
Ma kah chaina? Ma sarbatrachu.
Mal i timi kasari achut ban una sakchhau chut m nche? (pp. 3-5)
I am the K mi 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 verses clarifies that Dalits present themselves everywhere. K mi, Dam i, S rki, G ine, B di and all other Dalits perform lower level tasks: cobbling shoes, formatting temple idol to sewing the caps. The descriptions of items produced by Dalits are consumed by non-Dalits. So they present themselves everywhere and in every situation even in eyesight and the heart of non-Dalits. The paradox clearly shows that Dalit products are touchable whereas Dalits are untouchable. In this situation the speaker questions how the so called non-Dalits make some people untouchable in this community. The discourse of touchable and untouchable was the socio-cultural construction which compelled Dalits to remain in poverty, ignorance, lack of access and inhuman in general. Such non-Dalit discourse has been supported by structural policy of the nation where dominant people, rulers and policy itself have proved their indifference in serious Dalit issues.

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

"Ma bisau sat bdiko achut hu
Yo golbhugolako eut gahugoro Afric hu.
Ma apam nit itih sko his b c h nchu
Ma kunai pani mulyem mukti c h nchu." (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!"

The aforementioned lines prove that Dalits are created by the cultural construction of the society. The biased history of Dalit has been created by the upper caste people. 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 life of Dalit has been badly affected. The past was miserable, the present is unbearable and future will be the same if such ill-cultural practice continues. Thus, the brown Africa of this round rock was compelled to demand freedom and want autonomy. Everyone demands humanly treatment, equitable response and justice. So, *Gahugoro Afric* is a poem full of conscious aggression and violent expression where Dalit context is made louder. Therefore, Dalits are created they are not born. The nation is responsible for this prejudice.

Magarati in *Gahugoro Afric* claims that Dalit possesses blood similar to the non-Dalits changes into sweat for the service of the upper caste people. Dalits serve non-Dalits innocently. Despite this, people humiliate and maintain distance. The speaker challenges the priest to have nerve to meet his eyes. He demands justice and freedom because his sweat contains on the idols of their temples and the pans but people hate them. The speaker challenges the non-Dalit priest to make eye contact, either destruct his existence or save dharma (religion) or burn down all the religious scriptures that humiliate him and just collect the courage to set fire. *K mi* formats the idols for their temples and *Cy me* cleans dirt from their dwelling so they could find smell of blood. He asks them can they fill Dalits' veins with water or clean the dirt and feel positively. 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. In return neither he gets credit nor proper wage but humiliation. Being confident, the speaker questions them 'why do touchable discriminate Dalits?' Non-Dalits having courage should say the smell of his hard labor cannot be found in the foodstuff or they should collect the courage to regard his Dalit life. Why do not touchable realize the existence of Dalit? Dalits are presented everywhere. The speaker questions them how they can make him the untouchable while claiming themselves the touchable. The speaker giving emphasis asks them to study the history that 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. In general, Dalit character expresses aggressively and demand freedom. Such inhuman socio-cultural practices should be diminished to create harmony within community and the nation.

The researcher in this section reviews the related theoretical insights related to the paper. In the context of Nepal, people speak against the caste discrimination and untouchable practice but they rarely apply it in their action. In this regard Kedarnath Pandey (Rahul Shankritayan) questions the untouchable practice as, "Why do people differ in their words, actions and responsibilities (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 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 a crucial issue 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 is wholly social construction 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 previous studies mainly lack the specific focus on the voice of the freedom and emancipation from the caste domination and discrimination in *Gahugoro Afric* which has not been focused yet.

Methodology

This section comprises the methodology implemented in this research. The researcher has implemented the constructivist approach and selected the text purposively for representing Dalit characters, their imposed professions, caste discrimination and untouchable practice on Dalits. For this, only Dul l’s *Gahugoro Afric* from his collection of poems *Gahugoro Afric* has been selected. To collect the data, representation under the cultural study perspective was employed. Stuart Hall’s insights on discursive approach of 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. The research was conducted using a library-based qualitative approach, utilizing relevant text and sources to analyze declaration of emancipation from caste discrimination, untouchable practice and injustice. The collected data were managed appropriately and analyzed properly using main theoretical ideas of Hall related to representation under cultural studies and Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic’s insights as supportive tools. For the analysis of data, the researcher started background then quotes were put and related theories were imbedded

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and analyzed. Finally, the researcher concluded with the appropriate views. The researcher only tried to analyze declaration of emancipation from the caste discrimination, untouchable practice and injustice on Dalits. So it has great significance for researchers and academia. Moreover, the researcher relied on Nepali pronunciation for Roman transliteration. These symbols are adopted from Turner (1931) and the International Phonetic Association (<https://www.internationalphoneticassociation.org>).

Result and Discussion

Voice of emancipation from caste discrimination: Reading against untouchable practices and injustice

In this section, the researcher attempts to explore the reason why Dalits are forced to raise voice of emancipation from caste discrimination, untouchable practice and injustice. Generally, all the Dalits in Nepal have been kept on the bottom of the society and treated accordingly in the words and actions. The upper caste people have created the discourse of touchable and untouchable on the basis of Hindu Varna system. Previously, the researcher has highlighted how Dalits have been tortured, humiliated and distanced. Although, Dalits have performed the basic level tasks and productive works but they have been disregarded and made them water untouchable in the society. The poet by his mouthpiece in Gahugoro Afric declares that Dalits have presented everywhere so that inquires the touchable that “how can you make me “untouchable” touchable one (5)?” This discourse from the side of Dalit is voice of consciousness and silent revolt against the socio-cultural biasness, humiliation and discrimination. It refers that structurally constructed discourse of caste discrimination and untouchable practice has put Dalits into marginalization.

As Dulal mentions Kami performs the imposed role of iron smith, gold smith and copper smith including formats temple idols, equipment and household utensils instead they are hated, humiliated and disregarded rather than love, regards and encouragement (p. 3). Similarly, Dulal adds that Cyame cleans the dirt in the society but he gets neither the good wage nor the regards. The upper caste people have made him Gahugoro Afric (p. 4). Gaine and Badi have not acquired the regards from the society though they have sacrificed them for the happiness of the untouchable by singing, dancing and beating drums (p. 4). They have been tortured lifelong for their creative activities. In the same line, Dulal asserts that Musahar changes the barren land into fertile land, grows grains and fruits. Despite their hard labor, they are not credited for their tasks but humiliated,

distanced and tortured in the name of profession and caste (p. 4). Moreover, Dulal exposes the reality of Sarki and Damai that Sarki cobbles the shoes for the tender feet and Damai sews cap and clothes for the upper caste people but they have also been made untouchable even in this present time (pp. 4-5). The aforementioned references display the reality that Dalit community has been misrepresented in general. The reality is that Dalits have been performing their duties honestly, truly and innocently rather the society has been treating them inhumanly and unjustly. In this context, Dulal through the conscious Dalit character demands justice and liberation/emancipation to be real human beings and declares:

Mero r to ragata /
M nisako pabitra r to ragata /
Nilo pasin ko budha banera jaba jhardcha /
Timi fn narama anjuliharum lilag yera th pdachau /
Jaba ma tyo sramako sub syukta pasin sughnakhojchu /
Timi mero apam n garch u ra mal i t dh r khchau /
Ākh judh uune ta gara puj ri /
Ma bisau sat bdhiko achut hu /
Yo golbhugolako eut gahugoro Afric hu /
Ma ny ye ch h nchu /
Ma mukti ch h nchu //
My red blood
Pure red blood of a human
When it spills 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 and distance me
Have the nerve to meet my eyes, priest!
I am the twentieth century's "untouchable"!
The brown Africa of this round rock!
I claim justice
I claim freedom! (p. 3)

In the aforementioned stanza, the speaker claims that Dalit and the upper caste people possess the similar blood in their bodies. Dalits act laboriously every day; change blood

into sweat and produce daily needed things but they are humiliated and distanced rather treating them as human beings. Even in the twentieth century, human beings (Dalits) are untouchable in the Nepali society. So the character questions to the touchable one that, have the nerve to meet his eyes, priest! It has been tortured for ages so that Dalit character claims justice and declares freedom. In this context Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic in *Critical Race Theory* (2016) state “social construction” that race and races (castes in Nepal) are products of social thought and relations. Not objective, inherent, or fixed, they correspond to no biological or genetic reality; rather, races are categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient” (8). Before and after the *Muluki Ain* (1854 A.D), the caste division, touchable, untouchable and discrimination in Nepal was constructed by the society. The practice of bad culture and its practice have not the natural and biological base rather social construction. It has divided the society due to inhuman cultural practices. As black people in African countries, Dalits in Nepal have been segregated but the difference is that black have not been considered water untouchable. The nation has to represent Dalits not as other "the culture of everyday lives and survival of marginalized people (Dalits in Nepali context) has been represented to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people" (Hall, p. 15). The production depends on Dalits. Their works should be valued but the nation dominates them and disregards. Thus, Dalits have been misrepresented. Unless the nation regards basic level works and workers, the social status of them remains the same.

Consequently, Dalits have been tortured, traumatized and distanced due to caste system, practice of untouchability and injustice. In a great aggression, the Dalit character again questions as follows:

Mal i timi kasari ‘achut’ ban una sakchau ‘chut’ m nche? /
 Ki itih sako kathghar m ubhine tagara /
 Ki ful i badalne s h sagara /
 Ākh judh une tagara puj ri /
 Ma bisausat bdhiko ‘achut’ hu /
 Yo golbhugolako eut gahugoro Afric hu /
 Ma apam nita itih sako his b ch h nchu /
 Ma kunai pani mulyem muktich h nchu //
 How can you make me “untouchable” 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 Africa of this round rock!
I claim the accounting of humiliated history
At any cost I claim freedom! (p. 5)

Finally, in the aforementioned verses, the poet through his spokesperson demands freedom, emancipation and justice because it has been ages that Dalits bared the torture, biasness, discrimination and untouchable practice. Currently, they are facing cultural, physical and psychological trauma that discourse was created by the upper caste rulers and implemented on Dalits to make them slaves ever. It is the representative of Dalit character who raises the question to the pioneer of this bad culture which has been ruining the life of Dalits. It is the compulsion of them to declare the freedom and justice against bad cultural practices. Dalits in Nepal are in minority group and they have been the victim of bad culture constructed by the society. Delgado and Stefancic further, claim that "If race is not real or objective, but constructed, racism and prejudice should be capable of deconstruction; the pernicious beliefs and categories are, after all, our own. Both of them focus furthermore, that "many of our chains are mental and that we will never be free until we throw off ancient restrictions and demeaning patterns of thought and speech and create the discourse to talk about new concepts" (p. 137). Unless the cultural restrictions and demeaning patterns of thoughts are diminished, Dalits will remain in cultural trauma; the incurable social evil. Similarly, Angela Harris in forewords in *Critical Race Theory* claims that "racism is part of the structure of legal institutions" (xviii). It shows that to continue casticism is to continue ignorance and to discourage everyone "to get along." So to emancipate Dalits from evil cultural practices, the destruction of the orthodox culture and cultural practices is inevitable. The biased socio-cultural practices have been the creation of the society which has destructed innocent Dalits in the past; it is destructing at present and will destruct in the future as well. The nation has identified Dalits as other which does not represent well. The "Identity is wholly social construction and cannot exist outside of cultural representations that constitutes rather than express identity (Hall, 1997, p. 108)." Dalits in Nepal are represented as the society has been constructing their identity. Dalit identity is innocent,

laborious, dutiful, devotion, life in poverty, lack of property, less access in education and lack of political access. In contrast, the nation has created their identity something different so they are compelled to proclaim emancipation from imposed cultural issues.

Conclusion

Dalits neither get regards, sufficient wage and social status nor are they counted as human beings despite their hard labor. Instead of gaining love and respect for their valuable works, they are humiliated and distanced. In some extent, they also have fulfilled the responsibility of building a nation, but they have not been credited for doing so. The so-called Dalits in twenty-first century Nepal are still water untouchable. Dalits in Nepal, like Africans elsewhere, have been marginalized, dominated and humiliated in the name of caste. As Dulal mentioned Dalit characters like Kami, Sarki, Damai, Gaine, Badi, Cyame, and Mushahar have been performing their imposed duties but the nation seems indifferent for their domination. Even in this community, rulers only speak and do nothing for implementation of the policy. 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 thus, suggests them to reconsider and study the history or change their attitude. He asks priests to look straight into the eyes of Dalits, stressing that the practice of caste division and untouchable practices was created illogically. Dalits were very responsible and did their duty well. Yet they were 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 inequalities and injustice in the name of caste discrimination and untouchable practices. It concludes that it is an evil cultural practice that the society has created and implemented. 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. Dulal demanding emancipation in the selected text reveals the voice of emancipation from caste discrimination, untouchable practices and injustice in the Nepali society. Thus, this study is substantial because upliftment of marginalized voice of Dalits in diverse cultures and cultural practices in the context of Nepal has academic value.

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