

**FORGETTING IDENTITY:
DALIT BOURGEOIS IN ARJUN DANGLE'S *PROMOTION***

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The emergence of various kinds of separatist Movements and ethnic conflicts in different parts of the world brought out the new interest in identity. At the global level, questions of identity and culture became more important for the social science disciplines and literature. Even in India, the new social movements emerged in 1980s. These movements created the 'new' mobilizations among women, farmers, dalits and tribals. "The process of social transformation of caste and genders' equality and the development of scientific temper were the major hallmarks during the first three decades of independence. It was during this time that women's movements, dalits and workers' movements progressed" (Dube: 2002: 84). The new social movement of Dalit, lead by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in pre-Independence and post – Independence era, shaped a monolithic and pan-India dalit identity. It brought all dalits of India on a single platform. The dalit Indians formed their own common identity and cultural history. "The dalit identity acquired a monolithic, all-India status as if dalits are a single

social / caste category with common identity, cultural history and unity of interests" (Babu and Prasad: 2009 :25). But the emerging dalit bourgeois caught in the net of hallucination. They started forgetting their past and could not face the harsh social realities surrounding them. It transformed soon them into an inferiority complex. They took all the benefits of the constitutional provisions in the government jobs. Fear of casteist identity was still growing instead of vanishing among them. The casteist identity compiled them to acquire the false identity at their workplaces. They forgot to revolt against the inhuman injustices.

Arjun Dangle, a distinguished scholar, writer and political activist, offers the new dimension to Dalit writers and writings. He urges for new and real identity in the modern dalit writings. Dangle severally attacks on the 'white-collar attitudes among dalits'. He never bears the illusionary 'sanskritaization' of dalit bourgeois as 'Dalit Brahmins'. Such scenario of dalit officers' has been really occupied a major place in today's dalit

culture and dalit literature. *Promotion*, short story of Arjun Dangle, reveals the false identity of Dalit bourgeois. In other words, it is a story of a dalit officer who tries to hide his original identity and exposes his false identity. But 'a true identity, individual or social, should be discovered only in reality' (Waghmare:2001:32).

Indian constitution, mother of all Indian citizens, provided some provisions and safeguards to crippled sons of soil—dalits and tribals. The rules and regulations have been made to protect dalits against violence and humiliation. A number of Acts have been passed to prevent atrocities against members of the SC/ ST. "In 1970, the roster system was introduced in government jobs and it became mandatory to appoint dalit and tribal candidates" (Pawar: 2008: 234).

However, the actual reality is somewhat different. In many areas of life dalits face casteist insurgency, humiliation and remain at the receiving end. As dalits become more conscious about their identity, so the elites or upper caste people. The problem of 'superior' status and privileges is raised. Education and freedom of expression give voice to the voiceless. It does not reduce the gap between dalits and elites of India. What remains the last long is casteist identity. It is percolated in the

mind of each and every Indian. No one says 'I am an Indian' but everyone reclaims himself/ herself with religion and caste. Today, religion and caste decide the real identity of a person.

Pandurang Satwa Waghmare, the protagonist of the story, is an educated dalit officer. He is promoted from 'clerk' to 'Assistant Purchase Officer'. He lives in the officers' railway quarters and travels in the 'first class' compartment. Pandurang usually reminds himself to maintain a certain standard of an 'officer'. He becomes the 'saheb' or an 'officer' but starts forgetting the past of his life. He feels elevated whenever someone calls him 'saheb'. For a moment he forgets his Dalitness. 'Dalitness is a permanent corresponding reality in human affairs' (Jadhav: 2001:40). Fear of 'Dalitness' constantly prevents him from taking action against the guilty in office. Dalitness, on one hand, makes him powerless to file a report against the high caste clerks and peons; on the other hand it becomes cause of resentment against him. In the office neither clerks nor peons listen and respect to him. They humiliate Waghmare saying 'reserved', 'the son-in-law of the government' and 'the bigheaded'. Though he faces the resentment and humiliation, he never dares to complaint it. He never agitates like a 'real dalit man'. His

revolutionary 'self' becomes mortgaged and remains passive thinking that the 'relations get spoilt' (Dangle: 1992: 169).

The paradox that occupies the place in the mind of dalit officer can easily be traced out in his 'keeping the relations.' The dalit officer to maintain the status in office does not hurt the staff members. For that he prepares himself to do rites and rituals of dominant caste Hindus. Here Waghmare 'Saheb' reminds his staff member Miss Godambe to offer an '*abhishek*' on behalf of himself to Shirdi's Sai Baba. He thinks that doing the '*abhishek*' is earning the blessing of God. The dalit officer seems to be very conscious in preserving and maintaining the relations to superior caste staff members. But to his own caste fellows his behaviour is critical one. He calls Awale Saheb, the bold and courageous officer of backward class, for his help. Awale Saheb then advises him in the matter of issuing a memo to Godbole who denies to do his work. 'No one ventured to make enemies with Godbole.' Because 'the entire department knew that Godbole was Joshi Saheb's emissary and carried his tribute every month to appease the powers that be' (pp. 168). So Waghmare saheb bows his knees to dominant 'so-called' traditions. His helplessness in the office suddenly vanishes when Awale reminds him that 'no

one has obliged you promoting you in the reserved category' (pp. 169). In fact, Waghmare does not want to remember the past that 'these other (upper caste) people have enjoyed the privilege of being in the 100% reserved category for centuries' (pp. 169).

Awale always supported Waghmare firmly 'whenever he was tormented by problems concerning his caste' (pp. 169). But the company of such supporter Waghmare never bears and hopes he will go away.

Waghmare willingly donates money to offer an '*abhishek*' to Shirdi's Sai Baba whereas he denies the printing of some receipt books for Ambedkar Jayanti sponsored by the Backward Class Workers' Association. He thinks that 'it will unnecessarily create problems' (pp. 169). Dr. Ambedkar, the most important symbol of the contemporary dalit identity politics, does not matter for him. Promoting to the 'Saheb' positions, Dalits forget their real identity and accept the false one. They are confined to only the false identity 'Saheb' or 'an officer'. Even some dalits try to say 'Jai Bheem', the identity of Ambedkarite not in booming voice but in soft and unclear way. They take care of not to hear such greetings to the others. They do not want to expose their original identity. They never attain

the meetings of their social movements. After receiving the benefits, the dalit officer loses the contact with common and poor people from his own community. He also forgets the commitment to his own community. In this 'exclusive' and 'luxurious' life of 'Saheb,' he never allows his relatives from the slum. His world is only 'reserved' for classy furniture, colour TV and phone.

Kusum, wife of Waghmare, invites her lovable aunt who lives in the slum opposite to the Railway Quarters. Her aunt 'a dirty, shabbily-dressed woman, accompanied by two equally unkempt children' visits the house. Kusum receives her aunt in grand style as offered to a special guest. This entry and grand style of offerings to such shabby woman makes him disgust. So in angry mood Waghmare warns his wife 'we don't live in the B.D.D. Chawls.... Learn to maintain your status. After all, you're an officer's wife' (p. 172). Waghmare threatens his wife saying 'an officer's wife' but in reality he never cares her emotions and feelings.

Dalit officers like Waghmare worship the Hindu gods and the followers of that god humiliate the members of 'reserved' category. Even they kick the innocent sons of 'reserved' officers for drinking the water of 'super Ganpatiwalla'. However, the persons like Godbole never

accept them as their 'Saheb'. To them 'dalits' are only 'untouchables' who pollute the lives of touchable. Dalits are never superior but always inferior in status to them. Though dalit officers "took great care to keep these symbols of their caste hidden from the public eye, in a less prominent place" (Pawar: 2008: 271), they have been identified as 'untouchables or the down-trodden' in any colony. They live unknown and unseen to the world. They look after their own interest alone. They hide their castes, change their surnames and do not hang the images of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and Lord Buddha in their own houses. Only one fear prevails on their mind 'what will our neighbors say' (p. 172). They know so much about their neighbours but think that nobody knows about them. To maintain such false identity dalit bourgeois ignore their relatives, perform the religious traditions of caste Hindus. Even they also become unconscious to Dr. Ambedkar, 'a source of pride and self-respect' (Zelliot: 2005:153). They enjoy every thing in the world of hallucination.

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