The Idea of Self-Respect in a Dalit’s life

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Abstract: Contemporary Dalit’s consciousness and everyday experience of humiliation in the Hindu social order is centrally located in the phenomena of ‘self-respect’. Most significant ideas and practices of self-respect can be traced from the life, writings and speeches of Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar etc. These reformers from different generations (times) and contexts (spaces) shared similar sense of ‘self respect’ and used divergent methods to exercise it. The recent phenomena of Dalit autobiographical and narrative writings have unfolded various new categories in which the idea of ‘self-respect’ emerges as the most significant category. In this context, mapping multiple dimensions of ‘self-respect’, which requires reassembling different western and eastern theoretical and philosophical paradigms of understanding, has significance. This paper seeks to contextualize western liberal tradition and Indian dalit-bahujan philosophisation of the idea of ‘self-respect’, to unfold various aspects of ‘self-respect’ in Dalit autobiographical writings in general and in a Hindi dalit autobiography “Joothan: A Dalit’s Life” written by Omprakash Valmiki in particular.

Key Words: Self-Respect, Autobiography, Humiliation, Ambedkar, Valmiki, Contemproniety

Introduction

The term “self-respect” has been implicit in most of the movements and philosophical discourses. There have been connections between the areas of inquiry concerned with ‘self-respect’ as a concept and ‘self-respect’ as a practice. Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology, Literature and literary theory etc. all these disciplines have put focus on the heterogeneity of the concept of ‘self-respect’. For instance, Psychological investigation of human nature has been centrally looked into the areas such as memory, mind and the self. Literary criticism has explored the linguistic nature of the same. A life narrative as a focus of this study provides multiplicity of instances of ‘self-respect’ in the collectivity. Thus, this paper is an attempt to bring together different understandings of ‘self-respect’ and its sufficiency and applicability in dealing with the phenomena of ‘self-respect’ in a Dalit autobiography. First part of the paper discusses Kantian understanding of Self-Respect and its limitation at theoretical level. Second part deals with the question of how ‘self-respect’ has been defined and practiced by Dalit philosophers such as Jotirao Phule, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and E. V. R. Periyar in the colonial context. Third part briefly discusses tradition of Dalit Autobiographical writings. And fourth part looks at various instances wherein different aspects of ‘self-respect’ are reflecting in a dalit autobiography.

Self-Respect: A theoretical exploration?

Understanding any concept requires exploration of web of relational concepts. For example, Oxford Dictionary of English defines the meaning of ‘self-respect’ as pride and confidence in oneself: a feeling that one is behaving with honor and dignity (Oxford 2004). Similarly other sources also define ‘self-respect’ with other concepts such as dignity, humiliation, pride, self, and action etc. But in short, ‘self-respect’ refers to have a sense of respecting one’s own being. At this point, several questions come such as, what is respecting, what is the limitation of sense, what are the aspects of being etc. But, for the purpose of this paper, existing theorizations of ‘self-respect’ can be looked at first followed by the limitations and prospects in the context of caste system.

Liberalism is both perspective and ideology insists on the importance of liberty and equal rights. Liberal way of thinking became major force in the age of Enlightenment in western society which spread all over the world. In Indian context liberalism was introduced in colonial period, resulted in a complex blending of tradition and modernity. In the wake of such new development some philosophers emerged such as Ambedkar, Phule and Periyar in Indian scenario. The essence of liberal thinking has always been grounded in the rational capacity of individual and therefore be given equal freedom and rights to all. Victor J. Seidler observes, that liberal tradition of thought and feeling insists that “it is always possible for us to abstract from these social differences, inequalities and distinctions, to treat people with the equal respect owed to them. This is deeply rooted in the notion that, as individuals, we are free to take up whatever attitude we consider...
appropriate in our relationships with others. In this tradition morality is very much a matter of individual’s decision. Moral discussion and moral theory is focused upon the Principles of individual action. This guarantees and legitimizes prevailing notions of the autonomy of morality, the idea that we are equally capable and able to live moral lives, regardless of the inequalities of social life” (Seidler 1986 p. 1). Such understanding of the autonomy of morality comes clearly from the writings of Immanuel Kant who has been regarded and the most important figure in the liberal tradition of thinking. This paradigm of thinking has been elaborated and re-theorized by various recent theorists such as John Rawls and Thomas Hill Jr. Interestingly Such assumptions are also reflected in the writings and speeches of Ambedkar and other Dalit scholarship, but the purpose and politics is different from that of Kant. These reflections can be discussed in subsequent paragraphs.

Kantian schema of morality is an overarching theorization which deals with several concepts and practices such as respect, duty, justice, freedom etc. So for understanding Kantian perspective on self-respect, and prevailing liberal moral consciousness it is better to start from his moral theory. Thus, Siedler says, “In Kant our rationality is an independent faculty fundamentally separated from our wants and desires, feelings and emotions. And it is our rationality that gives us access to the moral law, thus, morality is guaranteed as an independent and autonomous realm” (Seidler 1986 p. 5). Seidler further quotes Bernard William’s understanding that “The detachment of moral worth from all contingencies is achieved only by making man’s characteristic; man’s capacity to will freely as a rational agent is not dependent on any empirical capacities he may have” (Seidler 1986 p. 5). Thus for Kant, our ability to live moral lives is only affected by the strengths of our individual determinations and moral will, not by the organization of social life (Seidler 1986 p. 9). This is an important intervention posed by Seidler, says further that “if the chances and possibilities of my living a moral life are affected by the structures of power and dependency and the character of social relations, then morality can no longer be so securely separated from politics, and therefore moral is no more ‘private affair between a person and his conscience’” (Seidler 1986 p.9).

On the other hand, in ‘the idea of Equality’, B. Williams also feels the need to go beyond saying that ‘each man is owed an effort at identification’ as he acknowledges the ways in which our moral personalities, understandings and perceptions are deeply influenced by the social relations of power and subordination. In other words, Kantian maxim of morality basically doesn’t focus clearly the social processes which affect the agency in the realization and applicability of rationality and morality. Kant puts individual’s responsible for using their rationality and moral maxims. Kantian philosophy suggests that “it is the individual’s duty to come out of self-incurred immaturity”. But Kant doesn’t answer the social imperatives which block individuals to be enlightened and to be fit for exercising moral laws made by them. Seidler questions the Kantian proposition of “moral imperatives to treat everyone as an end in him/herself is undermined by his rationalism and individualism because the denial of wants and feelings is in some ways a denial of what is particular in people’s lives and because there are structures of power and morality that lie beyond that language of individualism” (Seidler 1986 p. 12).

As Kant has been regarded as the most important figure of western modernity, who laid the foundation of liberal moral theory, similarly in Indian context, as Gail Omvedt argues, “...JotiraoPhule and his thought stands forth as an expression of first generation renaissance thinking” (Omvedt 2007 p.3). Omvedt says, “He represented a very different set of interests and a very different outlook on India from all the upper caste elite thinkers who have dominated the awareness of both Indian and foreign intellectuals (Omvedt 2007 p. 4). Phule’s thinking was revolutionary from a cultural point of view. He admired and applied two values such as rationality and equality in his entire thought and practice. Omvedt says that “, it may be fairly said that with Jotirao Phule the low caste, non-Aryan, peasant masses of India came to consciousness” (Omvedt 2007 p. 4). Apart from his emphasis on equality and rationality, Phule proved to be important saint who gave an important aspect of consciousness of self respect to the masses. Omvedt says that

“This may be called a kind of equalitarian reversal equivalent to the ‘black is beautiful’ movement among Americans. Specially, in referring to the masses of Maharashtra or India, he constantly uses the words ‘shudra and atishudra’. Shudra, of course, is the term by which the dominant brahminical culture classified those who worked with their hands (including peasants) as part of the lowest order of society. Phule is well aware of the insulting connotation of the term (he states that it is derived from ‘ksudra’ meaning trifling or mean) but he ignores this and continues to insist with a matter-of-fact pride on the use of the term; these, he is saying in effect, are the people, the centre of society.” (Omvedt 2007 p. 8).

Here, Phule seems to provide a perspective of ‘self-respect’ where indigenous community has ‘self-respect’ and doesn’t need any external recognition for it. On the other hand, Phule’s writing such as “slavery” is not only a social and political project for rights and justice but it very much contributes for the inauguration of a counter factual history of the Indian society. Where aboriginals of India were
the practitioners of ‘self-respect’, but cunningly subordinated by foreign invaders. This writing is also significant in the sense of psychological empowerment for lower castes and shame for upper caste people and somehow produces a genealogy of critical tradition of writing in the Indian society. Such insights of self-respect has been used and developed by recent scholar kancha Illaiah in his book post Hindu India. Illaiah also claims the every scientific knowledge and tradition belong to indigenous dalit-bahujan group, which has been tactically appropriated by Brahmans. Such sense of self respect is also reflected in the autobiography of OmprakashValmiki, that we see later.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar laid the foundation of social justice in real sense where primacy of equality is the essence of society supported by fraternity and liberty. He endeavored lips and bounds to bring social endosmosis, and succeeded in bringing conscience of self respect in the minds of down trodden and challenge the brahmanical hegemony. He just turned the whole scholarship tradition in India by bridging gap between theory and practice. He was liberal more than the founding proponents of liberal theory and revolutions. At theoretical level, there are resemblance between liberal philosophy and philosophy of Ambedkar. Ambedkar in one occasion expresses his view about who is free man:

What is the proof to judge that the flame of mental freedom is not extinguished in the mind of person? To whom can we say that his mind is free? I call him free who with his conscience awake realizes his rights, responsibilities and duties. He who is not a slave of circumstances and is always ready and striving to change them in his flavor, I call him free. One who is not a slave of usage, customs, of meaningless rituals and ceremonies, of superstitions and traditions; whose flame of reason has not been extinguished, I call him a free man. He who has not surrendered his free will and abdicated his intelligence and independent thinking, who does not blindly act on the teachings of others, who does not blindly accept anything without critically analyzing and examining its veracity and usefulness, who is always prepared to protect his rights, who is not afraid of ridicule and unjust public criticism, who has a sound conscience and ‘self-respect’ so as not become a tool in the hands of others, I call him a free man. He who does not lead his life under the direction of others, who sets his own goal of life according to his own reasoning and decides for himself as to how and in what way life should be lead, is a free man. In short, who is a master of his own free will, him alone I call a free man (Pandagle 2011 p. 251).

At this point Ambedkar also gives primacy to the notion of rationality as Kant does. He argues that only those persons are free, self-respected and has freedom in real sense that is governed by his own rationality. But on the other hand unlike Kant, Ambedkar was very much emphatic about the other social imperatives which hindered people to act according to their rationality and universal moral laws. Ambedkar in his ‘Annihilation of Caste’ which is the most brilliant work ever produced on social system in India, argues that the core of Hinduism is based on anti-scientific and non-rational assumptions which has been legitimized by religious authority of Shastra. Smriti and Shruti has been the founding theoretical base of caste system, which prevent individual not only nobn-brahman but also to Brahman to use rationality. Thereby irrational acts have been conceived by Brahmans as the model of their dignity. As Ambedkar says, “In November 1935 some untouchable women of well-to-do families started fetching water in metal pots. The Hindus looked upon the use of metal pots by untouchables as an affront to their dignity and assaulted the untouchable women for their impudence” (Annihilation of Caste 1935. P. 16)

Other example of the notion of Hindu’s dignity, Ambedkar brings an incident took place on 1st April 1936 in a village Chakwara in Jaipur State. An Untouchable of Chakwara after return from pilgrimage arranged a dinner to his fellow untouchables, and used ghee in the food. Knowing this, hundreds of upper castes: “armed with lathis rushed, rushed to the scene, despoiled the food and belabored the untouchables who left the food they were served with...the reason given is that the untouchable host was impudent enough to serve ghee and his untouchable guests were foolish enough to taste it.... The Hindus of Chakwara thought otherwise and in righteous avenged themselves for the wrong done to them by the untouchables, who insulted them by treating ghee as an item of their food which they ought to have known could not be theirs, consistently with the dignity of the Hindus. This means that an untouchable must not use ghee even if he cash affords to buy it, since it is an act of arrogance towards the Hindu” (Annihilation of Caste 1935. P. 16)

Here, Ambedkar brings the notion of dignity and self-respect of the high caste Hindu perpetrators. Their notion of dignity is not based on their worth as rational human, acting on the Kantian maxim of universal morality and no conception of equality, fraternity and freedom. But moreover, they are servile under their arrogance. Their conception of dignity is based on domination and injury to others. The term undignified and cruelty is insufficient to define the Hindu conception of dignity in the above circumstances. There is no instance in the history of humanity or even animal world when such kind of dignity is practiced. Even animal kill other animal for food and survival only, not for dignity. Nevertheless this is the only one side of the story of self-respect and dignity where autonomy of morality in Kantian sense has no relevance, because
in caste society even Brahman individual’s conscience is not governed by non-rationality. Ambedkar defines the omnipresence of caste:

“Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made Public opinion impossible. A Hindu’s public is his caste. His responsibility is only to his caste. His loyalty is restricted only to his caste. Virtue has become caste-ridden and morality has become, caste-bound. There is no sympathy to the deserving. There is no appreciation of the meritorious. There is no charity to the needy. Suffering as such calls for no response. There is charity but it begins with the caste and ends with the caste. There is sympathy but not for men of other caste. ....there is appreciation of virtue only when the man is a fellow caste-man. The whole morality is as bad as tribal morality” (Annihilation of Caste 1935. P. 16-25)

Ambedkar makes it very clear that rationality is caste; there is no transcendental apriori faculty of reason which is essential in high caste Brahmans. Caste is synonym of morality, rationality, charity, sympathy and every act in the society. Everything starts from caste and everything ends with caste. On the other hand, what about the ‘self-respect’ of the victim untouchables? For this Ambedkar has given very systematic elaboration of procedure which exactly fits in the Indian context. He has been much emphatic on the social reform, before any political or economic reform. Because, giving proper conscience and providing opportunity to the individual to use their rationality, rationality can never be applied by anyone. For Ambedkar, the very basis of ‘self-respect’ has been hindered by Hindu social order, where caste as an omnipresent social category has established a strong space even within the sub-conscious of not only Brahman but also non-Brahman. Thus there is a need to come out of ignorance is the precondition for non-Brahmans to use the faculty of reason for becoming self-respected. In Chaturvarna, there is no right to military service as it was in Europe. Such discrimination had led to not only physical but also moral servitude to the untouchables.

Ambedkar further argues that, Why have the mass of people tolerated the social evils to which they have been subjected? There have been social revolutions in other countries of the world. Why have there not been social revolutions in India is a question which has incessantly troubled me. There is only one answer, which I can give and it is that the lower classes of Hindu have been completely disabled for direct action on account of this wretched system of Chaturvarna. They could not bear arms they could not rebel. They were all ploughmen or rather condemned to be ploughmen and they never were allowed to convert their ploughshare into swords. They had no bayonets and therefore everyone who chose could and sit upon them. On account of the Chaturvarnya they could receive no education. They could not think out or know the way to their salvation. They were to be lowly and not knowing the way of escape and not having the means of escape, they became reconciled to eternal servitude, which they accepted as their inescapable fate (Annihilation of Caste 1935. P 10-27).

So there are no way remains apart from total annihilation of caste. Ambedkar says that for this inter-dining; inter caste marriage, removal the authority of chaturvana which is shastra and finally conversion into another egalitarian religion such as Buddhism. In some senses, Ambedkar while being Liberal, went beyond the conservative liberalism and prioritises the social reality. He highlighted the multiple instances of denial of ‘self-respect’ and how to become self-respected and use reason as the basis of our day to day life in the society.

The third important scholar who practiced self-respect more than theorized is EVR Periyar. A booklet, “Periyar and ‘self-respect’ philosophy” written by M. K. Subramanian systematically describes Periyar’s philosophy and practice of rationalism, egalitarianism, humanism, ‘self-respect’ marriage, nationalism etc. There are four articles directly relevant to the ‘self-respect’ philosophy. The foundation of Periyar’s thought on ‘self-respect’ is basically grounded on reason, critical intelligence, analytical intellect, empirical evidence, statistical verification and scientific approach. He wanted to bring creative destruction of the society in which destruction of old system and reconstruct a new. The method he used for such reconstruction was ‘self-respect’ marriages which were a kind of destruction for Purohit marriages. For Subramanian, the creative destruction is a primary principle in Periyar’s ‘self-respect’ philosophy and ‘self-respect’ movement as well. The author also focuses on how Periyar’s ‘self-respect’ philosophy evolved throughout his life and expanded to cover wider issues of caste system.

His social theory of creative destruction was nothing but an important way to make the society self-respect. He delivered his presidential address in the South India Reform Conference held in 26th Nov. 1928. Periyar began his address with a metaphor. He spoke, Subramanian quote; “take for instance a deep well. Let us assume that the well has a sacred, old purana which, it is supposed, certified that the sprinkling on one’s head of water drawn from the well or drinking of the same or taking bath in it will absolve one of all sins including the unpardonable ones and ensure a place in the other world called, moksha. But now the water is contaminated such that if one drinks little he will be immediately exposed to poisonous epidemics like cholera and if one bathe in it, he will get itching on the skin and even contract incurable skin disease. What will, then, be our
reaction? Thinking that poisonous germs have possibly spoil the water we will spray in the well some germicide. Still, water remaining impure and contaminated, what would be our next step? Feeling again that the water is worst contaminated beyond remedy, we may propose to wash the well by draining it off. Even then if the new water flowing afresh is not free from contamination what would be the reason? It may then be easily presumed that the mainspring from which water flows out is poison-carrying and consequently, the well depending on that spring for flow of water is poison-ridden.” Here “the work of a reformer is to apply germicide to cleanse the water and to wash the well by draining it off. This is called social reform. But to close down well by dumping it with the rubbish and other wastes and by mud is a destructive work undertaken by a social revolutionary. I am in the latter sense a social revolutionary.” (Subramanian 2009)

The above paragraph can be understood in two ways. First, Periyar like Ambedkar trying to annihilate the source of authority of caste system which is poisonous. After doing this one come to the stage to use one’s reason and become ‘self-respect’. Second, the act of doing such revolutionary work is itself an act of ‘self-respect’, because, one is well aware of the bad effect of such tradition on oneself and others as well. Here Periyar's idea of ‘self-respect’ movement as an act of doing well for all.

**Contextualizing the idea of Self-respect in Dalit Narrative**

After a brief discussion on the philosophies of ‘self-respect’ and its practices in Indian context, there is another tradition of assertion of self respect in the post-colonial India. That is the tradition of Dalit autobiographical writing, which has now become most important challenge for the dominant brahmanical intellectual activities. Raj Kumar in his book Dalit Personal Narratives: Reading Caste, nation and Identity, tries to analyse dalit autobiographies written by dalit men and women to see how dalit autobiographies are different from non-dalit autobiographies. In this book, Raj Kumar, tries to answer, “do they celebrate their self, does they perceive their self while writing their autobiography, do they write differently, what is the motivation of such genre” etc. Kumar brings certain questions of language, movements, religion, education and economy factors which a/effect this genre of writing. Kumar sees this genre of as a challenge to the hegemony of the upper caste and make way for the assertion of the marginal self. For him, writing an autobiography is a political act because there is always an assertion of the narrative self, which is documented through the active help of memory. Finally, he also finds complexities and multiple meaning in dalit autobiographical writing through different identities such as, caste, class, ethnicity, religion, language, gender, etc. the question of women’s suffering and ‘self-respect’ has been highlighted by Kumar has also been elaborated by Sarah Beth in her article “Hindi Dalit Autobiography: An Exploration of Identity”.

In the Article “Hindi Dalit Autobiography: and Exploration of Identity” written by Sarah Beth focuses on some important question of Dalit Autobiography. Beth explores in detail that how the rise of Hindi Dalit Autobiographies as a source of Dalit cultural identity becomes especially important in North India. This started in mid 1990s, has created an important literary space for the expression of Dalit identity. In this article Beth addresses three importation questions; first how Autobiographers narrated the story of their lives and what incidents or key spaces came to define their experience as a member of this marginalized community. In other words, “what” characterize a Dalit as a “dalit” belonging to certain marginalized community? Second, Beth finds certain ambivalence when dalit writers attempt to redefine the meaning of dalit identity. And third, the importance of dalit autobiography outside the literary sphere/space, which assert an influence over the public perception of their own dalit identity. On the most important question of women’s space and face in Dalit Autobiography, Beth points out all three Hindi Autobiographies: Joothan, Apne Apne Pinjare and Tiraskrit; have not given representation to women. On the other hand, the question of distinctness of Dalit literary space she has brought recent scholarly debates to show the multiple struggle, problematic and prospect of dalit autobiographical writings.

**Joothan: A Dalit’s Life:**

“Joothan, A dalit’s life” written by Omprakash Valmiki, is a life narrative of Omprakash Valmiki, which exposes a crude reality of a dalit’s life. He belongs to a ‘chuhara’ caste which is also known as ‘bhangi’ in Uttar Pradesh. The life of a ‘chuhara’ whether is child or young has to go through same kind of humiliation, but the instrument and modalities of inflicting oppression and humiliation changes that depends on circumstances. And it is right to say that education and circumstances offer one to get out of humiliated life. But for Valmiki ‘self-respect’ and humiliation countered him against he had to continuously fight. In this Autobiography, Valmiki brings multiple temporalities of Humiliations and ‘self-respect’ consciously, but there are certain unintended dimensions of ‘self-respect’ and humiliation that can be interpreted.

**Being “Chuhara” to “Valmiki”**

Caste as a living reality has a wider philosophical, psychological, sociological aspects that has become ‘commonsenseism’ similar to the ideas such as ‘belief’, ‘idea of god’, ‘kismat’ etc. This ‘commonsenseism’ of Hinduism has in turn
produced various practices such as servility and humiliation etc. The term ‘commonsenseism’ can be analogically understood what Ambedkar termed as ‘ignorance’. The practice of common-sense is beautifully articulated in Hinduism which has becomes the ‘absolute truth’ and has no binary opposite of it. And this becomes the base of dalit’s servility. But a major question G. Guru Poses that a servile has no sense of self-respect and humiliation. But here it is necessary to look at the temporality of instances where it becomes difficult to distinguish whether a person is servile or humiliated to self-respect. For example when Valmiki was getting married then his father had one condition. He said, “You must worship the pig before the marriage”. Further Valmiki says “I had refused point blank. I don’t believe in worshipping any deities. Pitaji had been angry.....Up till now he had not pressured me to participate in the puja ceremonies, perhaps thinking that my resistance was caused by my youthful immaturity. But now he became enraged when he saw that I was protesting even at an important occasion like my marriage” (Valmiki p. 103)

Here how can we distinguish whether Valmiki’s father is servile or self-respected? One can say that action at particular time determines whether one is servile or not. But I would argue that it is not the action but the knowledge whether conscious or unconscious determines a particular action. And phenomenology of knowledge as a problem has to be unraveled before we distinguish any act (includes state of being) such as servility, humiliation or self-respect. For such situations Ambedkar has put forward how to come out of self-incurred immaturity and ignorance. Ambedkar answers such situations, in which we act but doesn’t know the history of our psychology which unconsciousness leads us to act. And this has of course been given by religious consciousness, whose authority has to be annihilated. At his point one has to go deeper than the Kantian understanding of “self-respect as a duty of oneself to get out of servility” or “enlightenment as to get rid of self-incurred immaturity” (Hill 1992). Here the phenomenology of servility needs to be understood primarily which has been created by Hindu social order.

In this autobiographical narrative there are various sub-narratives, which are indeed related to each other, reveals a whole phenomena of ‘caste’. One can look at the practice of ‘cry’, ‘name, title and naming’, ‘religion and religious symbols’, ‘idea of god, ritual practices and norms ‘belief’, ‘money and work’ and ‘family, friendship, understanding and relationships etc. this paper takes one particular instance, for analysis such as the use of the term ‘Chuhra’ which is the name of the caste, and try to locate the phenomena of servility, humiliation and ‘self-respect’.

Instances of being Chuhra

Valmiki says that “when a person were older, than he would be called ‘Oe Chuhre’. If the person were younger or of the same age, then ‘Abey Chuhre’ was used” (Valmiki 2007 p.2).

There is an instance, Fauza Tyagi Singh, who was a landlord of the village came to him on a day before his Board exam was to be held. He was studying mathematics, and very afraid because a teacher of mathematics once some days before had called valmiki to his home for teaching but in lieu of teaching ordered for work and avoided to teach.

Here Fauza asked to valmiki “Abey Chuhre, what are you doing?”

Then Valmiki replied in a low voice “I am appearing in the Board exams. Tomorrow I have to do the maths paper”. Fauza ordered “Study at night... come with me. I have to sow cane”

Here, Fauza’s words “Abey Chhre, what are you doing” reflects that it is well understood that Chuhra need not to study. This sentence has an illocutionary force of threaten as Skinner would argue. While asking question, Fauza threatens as Valimiki was doing some wrong work or conspiring against him. The use of words in language with frowned eyes is enough to humiliate and threaten a dalit. On the other hand, despite under threaten Valmiki replies to Fauza reflects Valmiki’s sense of self-respect implicit in the language. But the degree of arrogance was so much high and ignorance of the castist morality functioning within Fauza, led him not to respect the ‘self-respect’ of Valmiki. Such ignorance in Fauza and sense of ‘self-respect’ in Valmiki collided at the work place.

Then within fear and terror valmiki had to do work whole day, then in mid day he was offered ‘two rotis and a piece of pickle in a manner people don’t use even with a beggar’. Then Valmiki refused to take proffered rotis. Fauza shouted and swearing:

“Abey Chuhreke... just because he has learnt to read a little he has gotten above himself.... Abey, don’t forget who you are...” (Valmiki 2007 p. 57)

This instance, reflects a revolt by Valmiki, which had got birth at the time when at first instance Fauza could not respect Valmiki’s ‘self respect’ implicit in his words. Now the degree of illocutionary force of threaten become more explicit in saying “Abey Chuhre ke..... don’t forget who are you...?” That means, now Valmiki deserve beating, because whatever delicious food (two rotis and pickle) in whatever manner given by Fauza is unacceptable to Valmiki. Valmiki was not in the need of respect nor of food but against humiliation. But for Fauza any opposition against
inflicted humiliation is humiliation for his brahmanical self.

Thus in these circumstances, the primary concern of day to day life is all about ‘self-respec’, humiliation and arrogance. There are several instances below, when only the name of the caste and title is enough for gross humiliation.

Once, Valmiki asked to his teacher that “how come we never mentioned in any epic? Why didn’t an epic poet ever write a word on our lives?”

Then teacher screamed, “Darkest Kaliyug has descended upon us so that an untouchable is daring to talk back”.

Then teacher punishes him and said, “Chuhre ke, you dare compare yourself with Dronacharya...hare, take this, I will write an epic on your body” (Valmiki 2007 p. 23)

One morning when Valmiki was going to school SurajbhanTaga’s son Brajesh much older than him, having a long stick called,

“Abey Chehre ke, stop ... chuhre ke, you really have sprouted horns, you have become arrogant. Even your stride has changed....you will remain a chuhra, however much you study” (Valmiki 2007 p. 28-29)

Many times both students and teachers taunted him deeply during his school time, saying “look chuhre ka, pretending to be Brahman”.

Once he established close friendship with a Brahman girl Savita, but when she came to know about his caste, then said

“... how can you be an SC?... she stared at me, totally shocked. She still thought I was joking with her.... Savita appeared grave. Her eyes were filled with tears and she said tearfully, you are lying, right?... she started to cry, as though my being an SC was a crime.... she sobbed for long time...” And then relation was over.

An Army Commandant came to valkmiki’s residential area, had good relation with one of valmiki’s friend kureshi. Commandant Sahib was also from the same village (bara) from where Valmiki belongs to. Kureshi wanted Valmiki to meet Commandant Sahib, as he was well educated and obviously must not believe in “caste”. But valmiki raised confident doubt about, and then they went to meet Commandant Sahib. Valmiki says

“He was delighted when he heard that I was from Barla. Before we sat down, he asked, ‘bara is a Tyagi village. Which caste are you from?’ I looked at Kureshi whose face had changed color. The question had been asked conversationally. The moment I said that my caste was Chuhra, he became uneasy. Suddenly all conversation stopped, as though there was nothing left to talk about”.

Then Story takes a turn when Valmiki starts writing and participating in dalit Politics. ‘Valmiki’ as a title of name becomes problematic in both intellectual community and in the family as well. Even his wife ‘Chanda’, Valmiki says, “would use ‘Khairwal’ as her last name, and she would put pressure on me to use it too. When I tried to avoid the issue, she came back with arguments that made me defeat. Once I almost gave in, thinking that changing my surname was better than this daily squabbling. But I had come back to my old surname with an even greater determination.” (Valmiki 2007 p.126)

Through the time Valmiki realised that “this surname is now indispensable part of my name. ‘Omprakash’ has no identity without it. ‘Identity’ and ‘recognition’, the two words say a lot by themselves”.

**Conclusion: From Humiliation to ‘Self-respect’**.

Valmiki tries to show the centrality of ‘caste name’ in communication and the multiple temporal spheres of humiliation as ‘Oe chuhre’ and ‘Abe Chuhare’. Here this reflects that ‘Chuhra’ has to be continued as ‘chuhra’ there is no escape and be applicable to all contexts. But importantly, the way or the linguistic instrument of humiliation is somehow changed based on the context of ‘age’. The same essence of being chuhra is continued in Fauza’s case but a degree of warning increases as Valmiki revolts. The language of humiliation is attached with threat as well, in terms of both consciousness and life. A language of humiliation again changes in teacher and students as ‘taunts’ because here Valmiki simply does nothing but studying.

Love, which is supposed to be and of course has nothing to do with except one’s nature and heart. In this context ‘language’ does matter less than the expression. And the sudden expression of Savita reflects the depth of castism which is inbuilt in ones heart, if not only in mind. Here facial expression and untold words were enough for humiliating not only the norms of love but also Valmiki’s sentiment. The crucial turn is taken in the essence and function of ‘humiliation’ takes place in the family and literary society. It is very difficult to understand the working or transforming nature/essence of humiliation which takes place in one’s closest one (such as wife) and in one’s own mind. Here how Valmiki’s mind often thinks of removing his title and then later conceive it as his identity as becoming self-respected. The large question can be asked that how the term ‘chuhra’ used by others to humiliated Valmiki gets transformed in a very different combination where
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humiliation and ‘self-respect’ are dialecting, fighting, making a synthesis which becomes blurred or unintangible in Valmiki’s own mind and understanding. This blurredness is not new which lies somewhere between humiliation and ‘self respect’. But this blurredness was there as well in the mind of an illiterate person such as Valmiki’s father when insisting valmiki to “worship pig”.

Finally what to be concluded? The phenomena of humiliation, denial of self respect and cultivation of ‘self-respect’ are deep social, cultural and psychological phenomena. These phenomena keeping its essence which comes from the ‘idea of God’, Hindu Religion and changing socio-political and economic dimension of society dialect to each. These dialectics produce and reproduce humiliating spaces according to time and space. Until the entire structure of caste system is not annihilated as Ambedkar, Phule and Periyar had suggested years back, then equality liberty and fraternity will never be realized.

References