

**G. Kalyana Rao's *Untouchable Spring*: A (Re)presentation of Dalit
Resistance and Emancipation**

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Abstract:

Kalyana Rao's *Untouchable Spring* a memory text, is a family or community saga, a novel and a historical document rolled into one. Using the oral story-telling tradition, Rao has brought to the fore, in cogent fashion, not just the social and cultural life of generations of Dalits, but their art forms. Through the stories of successive generations, we are taken on a journey to their heart- from those who were exploited to those who discover their humanity through defiance. The reminiscences of Ruth take us to her husband Reuben's family in Yennela Dinni, to the boy Yellanna, his being chased away by his caste superiors, his music, his son Sivaiah's escape from the drought along with his wife, the latter's conversion to Christianity, the brutality against him and other Dalit Christians, the birth of Reuben when things seem to fall apart and he is later left in an orphanage, and then to Reuben's search for his roots. This faithful translation from the telugu, arousing pity for all that is pitiable and rage at what man has done to man, points to the growing awareness of people's rights and how they are driven to armed struggle.

Key Words: conversion, humiliation, Dalit Christians, resistance

Dalits have endured pain and humiliation at the hands of upper caste people since ages. They spent their lives in darkness where they cannot even see a ray of hope which could have emancipated them from the atrocities. They used to live in a 'tunnel' of which one end was blocked by poverty and the other by identity crisis. They were stuck in between of these two social stigmas which were imposed on them by the people of their same religion. G. Kalyana Rao, through this novel, *Untouchable Spring*, has tried to portray the lives of Dalits in colonial Andhra and detailing about the 'weapon' for the emancipation of Dalits. As we know a weapon is used for primarily to save oneself and to fight against the enemy in a battlefield. Likewise, Dalits have used the weapon of Conversion not only to form their identity but to fight against the poverty which are the bi-products of their lower caste against the upper caste people.

G. Kalyana Rao presents the historical background of Dalit conversion to Christianity through the character of Sivaiah. Sivaiah grew up in the village of Yennela Dinni and the other adjacent villages around it. Being a Mala, Sivaiah and his wife Sasirekha migrated to other village for their survival. After a long journey of toil, Sivaiah and his wife Sasirekha reached the Buckingham canal, which was considered as the biggest colonial plan for the development of farming and conveyance on visualising this scene, Sivaiah and Sasirekha felt happy because they thought that both of them could do a digging job in the canal and also could get some wages for their survival. "On reaching there, Sivaiah was no longer afraid that they may not live. It would be enough if he started working" (139)

An upper caste man was supervising the coolies. In the following lines we can observe the humiliation that Sivaiah faced because of his belongingness from lower caste. He was hurled abuses and insults on the grounds of being a Mala, one of the lower castes of Andhra Pradesh. Rao

highlights the humiliation of Sivaiah by the man. He says, “He bowed to him four times. He did not know if he noticed him or not. The Fifth time the routund man looked at him inquiringly. The look was like that of a vulture looking at chicken. Sasirekha looked on, frightened.” (140)

Finally, the upper caste man asked his name. When he replied Sivaiah, the man became furious. The extreme humiliation of Sivaiah and Sasirekha is disclosed by G.KalyanaRao when the man said “This son of a mala wants a job here, I believe” (140) This treatment from the upper caste is the testimonial of the fact that Dalits are not treated as human beings.

It is only the curse of untouchability that made Sivaiah and Sasirekha to suffer enormously. Thus the atrocities and barbarities received by Dalits from the upper caste Hindus is the major reason for their conversion to Christianity. Had the dominant caste Hindus have considered Dalits as human beings they would have never changed their faith. G. KalyanaRao praises the Christian missionaries who supported Dalits at the time of famine. Conversion of Dalits to Christianity never meant for their material comforts but it always meant for their liberation, identity and status. G. KalyanaRao presents the benevolence and compassion of Christian missionaries who always assisted the Dalits at the time of need. This fact is documental when a missionary, Martin, gave water and food to Sivaiah and Sasirekha.

“Martin. The name was new. This was not the name of this religion. They knew Mataiahs, Muttaiahs. Mallannas andYellannas. They knew many such names. Martin did not appear to be a name they knew. Even so he gave them water to drink. He gave them jowar roti to eat.” (146-147)

The humble treatment given by Martin and Saramma stunned them completely because they could not believe that a stranger is helping Dalits. Sivaiah got fascinated with the treatment

towards his neighbours and other people.

“Sivaiah kept observing how Martin spoke in the palls, how he mingled in Christian houses and what terms he explained in detail during his prayers. More than anything else, Sivaiah appreciated the excitement, the roused emotion and straightforward that emanated from Martin” (165)

He became a fan of his God who teaches him the real meaning of brotherhood and how to help the people. Finally, Sivaiah accepted the Christian Faith and became Simon. “One day he told Sivaiah, ‘Christ wants to use you for his purpose. Do you like that?’ Sivaiah kept quiet. Sivaiah became Simon” (165)

KalyanaRao’s *Untouchable Spring* tries to inform us that the main purpose of Dalits for the conversion is to protect themselves from the heinous curse of untouchability, humiliation, oppression and exploitation. The novel is a graphic (re)presentation of Dalits and their struggle of resistance and emancipation.

References:

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