

DALIT ASSERTION THROUGH EFFECTIVE

CHARACTERS:

A STUDY OF JOSEPH MACWAN'S NOVEL *STEPCHILD*

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Abstract

Angaliyat focuses mainly on the Vankar community, a Dalit community in Gujarat, but the narrative develops around the structure of domination where the Patidar calls all the shots. The novel opens with two hardworking and simple Vankar friends who, motivated by a deep sense of dignity, confront Patidar youth when they make advances to a Vankar girl in the neighboring village. The incident is followed by a series of conflicts with the dominant community and ultimately both friends sacrifice their lives. Not only their families, but the entire Vankar vas gets involved in the high drama, pain and suffering. Macwan's narrative skills are both engaging and complex, sharply pointing out the enemy 'within' and 'without'. The preposition of the paper will deal with the effective characters portrayed in the novel.

Keywords: Dalits, Stepchild, Community, conflict.

SETTING

The setting of the novel takes place in three different districts namely Shilapur, Kedaria and Ratnapur. Shilapur is the place where the vankarvas friend Valji and Teeho are living their main occupation is weaving and later they go for auction to the nearby place Ratnapur. Ratnapur is the place where the patels dominate the vankarvas and when valji and Teeho go for auction they come across the patel making fun of the vankar girl and then Teeho takes the lead and then on the vnegance, hatred and bloodshed stars between the vankarvas and patels. Kedaria is the place

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where the childhood husband of Methi resides. When the conflicts comes between the patels and vankavas then the patels secretly plan for seducing Methi and they end up in instigating bad thoughts in the mind of her childhood husband Chuntia. Finally things settle but the enimity between the caste never ends.

TIME

The narrative style of Macwan moves on a linear progression as he never goes back to flashbacks and he never has spiral movement. Opening of the novel discusses about the relationship and the bonding between the characters and how they are connected internally with love. Later on it moves to various other incidents which make the reader get to know the discrimination, vengeance, hatred in the name of caste.

CHARACTERS

Teeho:

Teeho is the main character in this novel he is a man who sticks on to his own beliefs and tradition he never blindly follows any ritual. He was eighteen when his parents had died one after the other in a matter of a year. He had fed the pallbearers when his father died but when it came to his mother's death he turned his face away at the mention of the twelfth day. While the other fellowmen felt that he was greedy for his father's money. For which he said "you will merely eat and forget. How will it benefit my poor dead parents? I don't see how your eating and drinking can reach my wretched parents! The good deeds they earned are gone with them, the rest is only display and I'm not for it. You people may do what you like" (3). Teeho and Valji were close friends though Teeho was younger to Valji, much bigger built, but not yet married; and all schemes and efforts at getting him to marry had been abortive. He was an enterprising business man, very skillful and thrifty. He has inherited three houses and a productive ancestral loom. With all this he never had any bad habit. Teeho and Valji are good friends they fight whole night but it never alters the love between them. "If one were to seem them in that state, one would have thought that they never saw eye to eye. But these two were an unusual pair. Inseparable, two bodies with a single soul." (2). Only two person in the village can engage Teeha in plain speaking they are Valo and other is Bhavaankaka. It was world war time and the cotton was sold under control but Teeho's involvement in cloth making made auction very profitable and in fact

he would help the poor people with clothes and they would pay off the debt on time. It was the time when a bull sprang into the bazaar and it headed straight to the clothes of Teeho but brave Teeho caught hold of the bull's hump and brought it to subdue to him and from then on he was considered to be a brave man in the village. He would sell his auction for 500-600 rupees but still he was not robbed by the highway man even when he returned home late night. When a stone was casted on the pot which a girl carried and when she was drenched in water Teeho questioned the man who did such unjust thing. Even after knowing that it was uppercaste men he was dare enough to pick up fight with them and he attacked the troublemaker and his companions and he was brought to the village square at that time he withdrew the sword and told mukhi "Thakore, it is your responsibility to ensure that this bundle reaches me. Any true son of his mother may come forward. This 'bhavani' sword knows no friends today" (27). He held high values in living he never married after the murder of his beloved friend Valji. When Kanku asks Teeho to give acceptance to Methi's marriage he says

"Teeho has taken an oath bhabhi, if you have denied yourself the world in your widowhood, I have denied myself my desires in the separation from my friend. You've become a widow in a worldly sense, I have become a widower in another. Not Methi alone, but that very direction has become inimical to my existence. Bring that up again over my dead body" (118).

He gives shelter for Methi and her son and takes care of his education and till the end he serves the people and due to Methi's urge he marries Vali and makes a life of his own with two boy babies but still he takes care of Methi and her son and looks after the marriage of Methi's son. One day when he goes for auction to the town with his son there he is being attacked by the upper caste men and beaten to death.

Valji:

Valji is three years older to Teeho he is close friend of Teeho and he will go to the extent to risk his life for him. He is married to Kanku and has one son he tells that "I owe so much happiness to you Teeha!" (2). Kanku proved to be a best better half for Valji she supported him a lot. Valji understood his wife that "she wasn't just his wife, but his true companion. Very practical, extremely affectionate and truly committed to his happiness. On the whole, she was more

concerned about others, rather than herself” (4). She mourned a lot for his death. He risked his life to make Teeha get married to Methi. Valji’s mother Monghi was the second wife of Bijal.

After few days of marriage to someone else Monghi had gone back to her parents and been divorced. Bijal had fallen in love with Monghi and a month after the divorce they were married. Valji was born in the seventh month. But people took it in a wrong way saying that Valji was not the son of Bijal. They said that” Valo is not Bijal’s child, he is from the previous house. He was born here, that’s all. Otherwise he is definitely an angaliyat” (68). These words made Bijal angry and he sent word to the Brahmin and to all mohalla to have meal in their household and he stated that “Those who consider Valji as his son may come, the rest who think he is an angaliyat can stay away!” (68). Everyone came home and had the meal though they had diverse opinion towards the child they kept calm and never talked about it. Valji was lost in thought Dana asked Valji to have the food but he told him that he was disturbed by his wife’s words. He further said that “I can’t get this damn thorn out of my flesh- how long will the world consider me an outsider?” (69).

One day he put forth the proposal of marriage to Teeha but he never accepted and it led to fight between them and Valji promised that he would not step into his threshold nor see his face again but the next day morning as soon as the rooster crew valji went towards Teeha’s house such was the friendship between them. Bhavankaka helped them and gave moral support to them always he was the man behind them in taking decisions for their life. when he ran after the car to rescue Methi he was attacked badly and he fell from the car “ with blood-filled eyes he had momentary and fading vision of Kanku smiling with a son in her arms, Teeha breathlessly slapping the loom and that was the end of his consciousness. The arms that reached out to hold his son collapsed lifeless on the sand” (77). Valji was Teeha’s soul without him Teeha was like a body without soul, an unlighted lamp.

Bhavaankaka:

Bhavaankaka has inherited from his forefathers a natural intuitiveness and foresight. People looked up to him for his knowledge wisdom, and presence of mind that he brought to bear upon intricate problems. He knew how to separate the grain from the chaff. That’s why it

was said even among the upper caste that “there was none like Bhavaankaka within hundred miles” (52). It was only through a quirk of fate that a person like Bhavaankaka was born in an inferior caste like Vankars. After the death of Bhali his wife he bade goodbye to the worldly and personal matters. At the age of 26 he lost his family. It has been seven decades and six years but he has no desire left over. He was a great support to Teeho and Valji. It was for Teeho’s marriage he went to Heera to talk about the wedding between Methi and Teeho. When he came to know that Teeho was beaten to death by the upper caste men he lost hope and was broken and he left the village and no one knew where he went. All through his life he lived with great values and his philosophy helped other people.

Methi:

Methi was a Shilapaar girl. She met Teeha when he fought for her with the uppercaste men. She developed love on him. Even though they belonged to different Paragna they planned to get married and she told Bhavaankaka ““There is very little traffic between our villages. I may not be able to send a message again; on the noon of the next full moon day, I shall be waiting for him, like Okha, here by the fallow land. Hire a van, if need be, and rescue me!” (57). But when the tick was played by the upper caste patels towards her she felt broken and it ruined her life. when she knew that Valji died in terms of rescuing her she felt the pieces of jigsaw fell into place, her heart splintered. “Valji was Teeha’s soul. Without him Teeho was like a body without a soul, an unlighted lamp. He had died because of Methi. How was she to show her face to Teeha? Would Teeha be interested in marrying at all after losing his best friend? There was a tragic clarity in Methi’s mind: ‘All avenues are closed to me now!’” (80) with a scroaching sigh, she lamented vala’s death.

When she received the false letter of Teeho stating her to get married and settle in Keradia. She does according to his wish after long time of waiting to rejoin. In Chunthia’s house Methi continued to live her life. She made the house clean and her clean behavior changed the bad qualities of her husband too. She gained repute in the place. She even helped Khushla’s daughter-in-law deliver a baby. She sent word to Moti and Ujjam that she was happy. When she went to her house everything was changed her husband came in the night fully drunk and he started beating Methi and abusing the child by saying it was not his child. It continued everyday

Methi could not bear the humiliation and she went to Khushal's house and his daughter-in-law explained the incident which happened in her absence. Everyday Chunthia attacked his wife brutally and for ten days he never returned to the house. Finally one day he arrived and started attacking the child now it was time for Methi to rebel back she also attacked her husband and knocked him down on the floor. She knew that she has murdered her husband. It was midnight she went to Khushal's house and asked help from him to accompany to her parental house.

She felt to finish her life at that time she was saved by Teeho and brought home and she continued to live there. Later in the morning she came to know her husband was alive. She lived separately till she died. She persuaded Teeho to get married and start his life and she helped all the women who are pregnant to give safe birth. She proved to be a good midwife. Teeho's loss hurted her so much and after some days she too passed away.

The effectiveness of the Dalit novel lies in the assertive characters which portray the sufferings and injustice upon the Dalits. Each character in its own way opposes the upper caste society by rebelling against the atrocities. Finally some characters succeed in their attempt while other sacrifices their life for their own community people.

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