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## UNDERSTANDING THE UNSUNG HERO KARNA THROUGH DALIT AESTHETICAL LENS IN KAVITA KANE'S KARNA'S WIFE: *THE OUTCAST'S QUEEN*

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**Abstract:** Dalit literature is one of the important fields developing in the Indian Writing in English. Dalit literature is a literature which studies the life journey of people who belongs to marginalized community. It includes the sufferings and pain undergone by a dalit or untouchable among other higher ranking people in the society. The main objectives of the article are to explore the themes and ideas proposed in Indian dalit literature, to study the pain and sufferings of dalit community through Karna, to evaluate the status of dalits in the contemporary India, to portray the prevailing caste and class discrimination in the society and to envision people about the sudden need for bringing equality in the society. The research article navigates the unsung hero of Mahabharata Karna in the light of the dalit context as he faced the issues of caste discrimination throughout his life. It also explains that how the Karna's life is perfectly blended with the lives of the dalit people in the Indian society through certain issues. The article statement enlightens that a dalit individual has the right and liberty to have education and identity of their own despite the caste differences and it questions the concept of equality when several people are not treated as such.

**Index terms - Dalits, Caste disparities, discrimination, untouchability, equality and dalit aesthetics.**

### I.INTRODUCTION

The dalit literature has played a vital role in the development of Indian Writing in English. The term dalit was first used by B.R. Ambedkar in the 1950s. In the later years the term dalit literature gained more popularity after the formation of the Dalit Panthers in the year 1972 as it became a voice for the dalit people all over India as it reflects the sufferings and pain of dalit community. The writings based on dalit issues began along with the origin of dalit movement which attempts to abolish untouchability and to gain equality among people without any caste differences. Some of the famous writers of Indian dalit literature are Sharankumar Limbale, Bama, Mulk Raj Anand, Omprakash Valmiki, Meena Kandasamy, Daya Pawar, Baby Kamble and many others.

Karna is the mythological character taken from the great Indian epic *the Mahabharata*. Karna was actually a Kshatriya by birth but it remained a secret till his death because in order to safeguard his mother's (Kunti) virtue. He was brought up by a suta couples Adhiratha and Radha in the city of Hastinapur. Karna is reputedly known for his loyal friendship and his offerings. As Karna was brought by the sutas he was considered as a sutaputra who was a low caste. Due to his identity as sutaputra, Karna faced many struggles throughout his life journey which is similar to the sufferings of dalits in the contemporary society. This article limelight's Karna's

journey through the dalit aesthetical approach with the aid of Kavita Kane's *Karna's Wife: The Outcast's Queen* novel.

## II. DALIT AESTHETICS AND DALIT CONSCIOUSNESS

Many critics states that dalit literature can also be dealt with all literary theories and aesthetics but the dalit critics strongly disagreed this idea as this form of literature is different from others. Thus, Dalit aesthetics concept originated and it is first developed by Sharankumar Limbale in his work titled *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit literature: History, Controversies and Considerations*. In his book he stated that "Dalit literature is a new literary stream of the post – independent period. Not only it is new, its form and purposes too are different from other literature... it cannot be appraised using traditional aesthetics" (Limbale, 115).

According to Mrinmoy Pramanick "Dalit aesthetics is based on the reality of human beings and the society in which they live" (Dalit Aesthetics). The difference between the traditional aesthetics and dalit aesthetics is that the traditional aesthetics portrays the pleasure and beauty of the piece of art and literature while the dalit aesthetics explains about the pain and sufferings of huge population from a particular community in the society. This differentiation is clearly explicated in an article titled "Understanding Dalit Literature: A critical Perspectives towards Dalit Aesthetics" which states that "The purpose of aesthetics in dalit literature is to advocate for equality, liberty, justice and fraternity for the most depressed class in society... Non- dalit writing revolves around 'rasa' and the motive is 'art for art's sake'. Dalit aestheticism is 'art for life's sake'" (p.2). Limbale explains that the dalit aestheticism can be uplifted only when a writer inculcates dalit consciousness among the readers. Dalit Consciousness is explained in simple terms in an article titled "Validating the Dalit literature as a tool to awakening Dalit Consciousness" as "the mental state of people that always believes in throwing away the rules of exploitation and marginalization"(Kumari, p.5070). It is defined by Limbale in his work as,

The dalit consciousness in dalit literature is the revolutionary mentality connected with struggle. It is a belief in rebellion against the caste system, recognizing the human being as its focus. Dalit consciousness is an important seed for dalit literature; it is separate and distinct from the consciousness of other writers. Dalit literature is demarcated as unique because of this consciousness (32).

## III. KARNA IN DALIT AESTHETICAL LENS

Kane's novel explores the pain and sufferings of Karna from his Kshatriya wife Uruvi's vision. The novel begins with the Hastinapur Contest held to showcase the talent of Pandavas and Kauravas in front of public where Uruvi first met Karna who challenged Arjuna for a archery contest. This novel from the beginning till the end clearly represents the pain and sufferings of Karna that is similar to the dalit people sufferings. During his childhood Karna faced many humiliations because of his low caste. Karna's talent was appreciated by everyone gathered in the contest including Bhishma Pitamaha. But he faced rejection and humiliation when he challenged Arjuna for a duel and he has to reveal his identity in the archery contest, "The cheering spectators had gone mute, now that the great warrior had turned out to be no kshatriya at all but a lowly charioteer's son" (Karna's Wife, pp.11-12). Even though Karna was pronounces as the King of Anga by Prince Duryodhana his identity became a main block in recognizing his talent.

Karna was denied the basic right of education in his childhood because there is norm that the rishis are allowed to teach Vedas, Puranas and other skills only to a Kshatriya and Brahmin alone not to the other caste or Varna below them. From that time onwards Karna began to fight against the social ostracism that he faced and also to begin his quest to gain identity in the society. "...the young Radheya, the son of Radha as he was also called, approached the best teacher of martial arts in Hastinapur—Guru Dronacharya—the guru of the Kauravas and Pandavas, but the guru refused to teach him because he was not a kshatriya" (17). Karna's mother even mentioned once to his wife Uruvi that he was well aware about this discrimination and always tried to rebel against this oppression in the society.

'Radheya has always been a rebel against caste and the social hierarchy,' her mother-in-law said, after a brief pause. 'He has constantly been cruelly reminded that as a sutaputra he cannot aspire to more than he deserves, but he believes in his own worth and is contemptuous of those inferior to him in merit. And he did not hesitate to ask Drona, who had refused to train him with the Kuru princes, why he could not be taught by him. He asked why the royals were so privileged —were they blessed with special gifts like a hundred arms? Why do they get this importance?' (66).

Karna was even refused by the princess herself to showcase his talent in a competition held during Draupadi's swayamvar quoting the reason that as a Kshatriya bride she cannot marry a man below her caste or Varna system. Many people's lives became better because of the offerings of Karna after he was crowned as the King of Anga. But his longtime wish of offering food to the poor people was not fulfilled till his death because even poor people refused to take food offerings from a sutaputra. This event describes one form of untouchability similar to the dalit people who are not allowed to take water from wells and not allowed enter in temples those days. Karna even participated in the kurukshetra war against his own brothers because of his friendship and loyalty to him as he was the first person to give recognition for his talent inspite of his low caste as well as to get a social identity of his own.

#### IV.CONCLUSION

In the contemporary Indian society, the dalit people even though got few of their rights like education and job offers. There is a loophole in this also like still many upper caste people are not ready to accept the dalit community equal to them. For example, there is an issue in a school from North India where the students refused to have food cooked by the lady cook belongs to the dalit community. This incident clearly represents the prevailing caste discrimination and social ostracism among the people in the Indian society. The most affected are the dalit community and few tribal people.

The character of Karna from Kane's novel cleverly portray the dalit characteristics of social exclusion and caste discrimination faced by him picturize the same problems faced by other dalit people in the present society. Karna's character depicted in the novel represents the dalit aesthetics as well as he resembles the rebellious character to fight against such disparities found among people in the society, this clears that there is the usage of dalit consciousness by Karna which focuses on the equality, liberty and fraternity among the people in the society.

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