



Discrimination in ‘ The Village well’ of Kolakuluri Enoch

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Kolakaluri Enoch hails from a Dalit community, He is social activist, championing the cause of Dalits through his works. His writings portray the life of marginalized section of the society and the discrimination faced by them at the hands of upper class communities. The select book revolves around one such stories where the Dalit community is barred from accessing water from the village well and eventually how the members of the Dalit community rebelled and raised their voice against such discrimination.

Kolakaluri Enoch, born on 1st July, 1939 in a Madiga, family in the small village of Vejandla, is an Indian writer, teacher, and former Vice Chancellor of Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati. He was honored by the Government of India, in 2014, by bestowing on him the Padma Shri, the fourth highest civilian award, for his contributions to the field of literature. Telugu fiction writer Enoch is a multi-faceted personality. He is too familiar with a range of fields and has a penchant for Dalit literature, Feminist literature and even revolutionary literature, but is not a member of any of these associations. An eminent short story writer, his works are a diorama of poverty-ridden society and he is a master in bringing rural life style before the readers’ eyes. His stories often end abruptly, but the untold part conveys more than what is told. He is one of the few writers who capture real lives and present them on paper with the effect intact. He explains that irrespective of the financial position, certain lives are prone to suffering based on caste, religion and gender. Prof. Kolakaluri Enoch, who hails from Dalit Community came forward to champion the cause of Dalits. He portrayed in his writings the life of marginalized sections in the society i.e. their painful experiences, failures, achievements, their protest to the point of perfection. He also supported the cause of Dalits, women, minorities and other oppressed people by organizing meetings, literary programmes where the problems of these sections had been discussed and tried to find solutions.



As a short story writer, he published thirty nine collections of short stories so far. His compilation of short Stories ‘Urabavi’ was nominated for the Sahitya Academy Award in 1987, While the latter was even recommended for translation into French.

Enoch's famous story Urabavi i.e.’ The Village well’ begins with a sentence “People swarmed around the Village well.” After focusing the attention of the reader on the carcass of the Ox that has been hanged into the well, the writer skillfully makes the readers to be puzzled with the question, "Who did it?" Enoch knows where narrate and where to dramatize the story. The similes he uses get perfectly synchronized with the mood and tone of the story.

It is the story having several themes. First is about the problem of drinking water. Today especially in India, people talk about water scarcity, about water being a very precious commodity. But how many of us realise that this water has been denied to the majority of Indian people in the name of caste. Water is meant to be a great cleanser, but unfortunately it is the same water that keeps people of certain castes away, terming them unclean. We can see in both ‘The History of Srirangaraja’ and ‘The History of Rajasekhara’, the earliest Telugu novels, the incidents where people of the lower castes feel that they have been born ‘low’ for having sinned in their previous births, and that they would commit a greater sin by offering drinking water to a thirsty person from the upper castes. Similarly, Mulk Raj Anand one of the foremost Indian writers in English, wrote in 1935, about a day in the life of Bakha, an untouchable boy in a novel titled ‘Untouchable’. It is significant to note that Dr.B.R. Ambedkar in his Autobiographical Notes recounts the incident of his having faced the problem of access to water in his very office from even his subordinates. Drinking water from a common source and entry of Harijans into temples were in fact used across the country by Indian nationalists to bring together a fellow feeling among people of all castes.

Similarly we can see from the lines in the story ‘The Village well’ also that low caste people are not allowed to touch water of the well.

The people of palle dont draw water from the village well. They shall not! Until there is someone to draw water, they have to wait, however late it is! Some days those who come in the afternoon wont be able to take water even till the evening.



Its disgusting to know that these abusing, pleadings, insults, beatings are there in villages just for a mouthful of water- for quenching thirst....

Another thing we could see that even within Dalit community gender, sub-caste, class and political affiliations often determine how each writer views his or her community. The main plot of the story The village well revolves around the carcass of a bull that has been hanged into a well used by all the villagers, purportedly by Chidambaram, a young Dalit, who had the reputation of not having got up to give his place to the upper caste youths. The upper castes see it as a deliberate move by the Dalits to pollute the well which the upper castes use, when the other well used by them goes dry. Precisely because this well was used jointly by the upper castes and the Dalits, the Dalits had to wait at the mercy of the upper castes for drawing water from it. The woman protagonist who remains curiously unnamed throughout the short story-who is referred to either as Chidambaram's wife or as Ramudu's daughter-in-law-has to put up with the experience of being ogled at and physically handled by an upper caste male while going to fetch water from this well. And she being unnamed becomes even more puzzling when we at the end of the story realize that it was she who had thrown the carcass into the well. From this we can say that Enoch gives such a significant role to a Dalit woman as far back as in 1968 is indeed commendable. Having said that Enoch does invest the Dalit woman with power, we find that he cannot help himself falling into the stereotypical representations of a woman by a male writer towards the end of the story. This happens when Chidambaram's wife enters the well to remove the carcass which no other character manages to successfully accomplish. Noticing that none of the many onlookers was looking forward to help her in this act, she screams out, 'Arent there men among you! Are all of you only women? If there are men, come and help me. While this may be justified as a move to provoke the men and spur them to action, we wonder whether a woman writer would have used such expressions.

We cannot obviously expect a story written in 1968 to have used the word Dalit as the term had yet to gain currency. Enoch uses the word Harijans for the Dalits and Harijana palle for the locality they live in. But we wonder why he does not make the further distinction of the separate locations of the Madigas and the Malas within the Dalits till he is well into the story.



This is surprising because Enoch is obviously very conscious of writing this story as an insider to convey the experience of the profession of leather tanning and making footwear by the Madigas. The story is remarkable for the detailed description of the different stages of the process of making chappals, for its presentation of the taken for granted attitude of society towards those who practice this profession. They treat them shabbily, sometimes not even thinking that they need to be paid for their labour. There are indirect references to the time period of the story. There are indications that the story must have been written after the Harijan Temple Entry Act was passed in the 1940s. There are also indications in the story that though the act may have come into force, it has been slow in its implementation. It is clear that the Dalits are still hesitant about temple entry and are scared of the consequences of facing the wrath of the upper castes in some parts of the country, like Chidambaram who wants to break a hundred coconuts in the temple for getting to marry a girl of his choice. He has to ultimately fulfill his wish with the help of a policeman. The policeman here does not represent the human angle but the law, for often law precedes actual societal changes.

Given Enoch's commitment to deal with several specificities in the story, it is rather surprising that the geographical location of the story is not mentioned. I personally feel that it is deliberately done by him to generalize the experiences of the Dalits and to show that these caste based injustices exist not just in any one part but across the country.