



Transgressive Desires: A Study of "Pleasure" and "Pollution" in the Outcaste and the Grip of Change

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ABSTRACT

The Indian caste structure is based on the synthetic ideas of purity and pollution, and the experiences lived by Dalit women challenge this idea through their struggles and resistance. In Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste* (2003) and P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* (2006), the chapter examines the contradictions in caste and gender relationships that show how men from the upper caste use the concepts of orders and their desires to control Dalit women. In this hierarchical system, the body of a Dalit woman represents the limits and the breaking of caste rules. This chapter looks at how "pleasure" and "pollution" converge in sexual violence, where the lust of upper-caste men temporarily overlook the pollution taboo of that specific objected body but restore the social order afterwards. The same society that exclude Dalits from being touched in public and portrayed them as garbage whose touch contaminates the upper caste world, often quietly allows the sexual abuse of Dalit women in private. The ideas of purity and pollution are the basis of the caste system in India. In this system, Dalit women are always seen as "untouchable objects" and are excluded from social and physical contact with any upper-caste people and their belongings, however this idea of purification collapses when it meets the reality of lust, desire, and violence. Dalit Feminist Theory looks at the oppression faced by Dalit



women from the views of caste, gender, and class. They are not just discarded as Dalits and poor by upper caste men but are also silenced within their own Dalit communities. With the stories of Limbale and Sivakami, this chapter analyses the voices of the oppressed figures who have suffered in silence and are always neglected by the world. This study will look at how *The Grip of Change* and *The Outcaste* challenge the notion of ritual purity by portraying how caste limits can fade when comes to strong desire and lust.

Introduction

The paper analyzes the specific aspect of violence over Dalit women. This aspect is called "Purity-Pollution" Paradox, where Upper Caste people label Dalit women as "impure", yet the same impure body becomes the site of desire when it fulfils the desire and lust of upper caste men. The paper further studies the sick ideologies of upper caste people who brings the concept of "raping women" in order to punish them. Rape becomes a tool of advancement to get sexual priviledges without being "sinner" in the society, while women become "whore". The study brings two important texts from Dalit Literature to understand this Paradox better. P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*, deeply explores this "double standard" contradiction by looking at Thangam. She is a young Dalit widow, who suffers from both caste discrimination by an upper caste lady and male exploitation by a man who belongs to the same caste as Thangam. The story takes place with Thangam being harassed by an upper-caste landlord who claims to care for her but leaves her when his interaction with a lower caste lady (Thangam) becomes gossip in his neighbourhood. Through this situation, Sivakami highlights the hypocrisy of caste morals: the same upper-caste society that forbids touch of a Dalit in temples and homes, turns a blind eye to sexual misconduct when it serves male desires. Sharankumar Limbale's *The Outcaste*, on the other hand, provides a disturbing look into a community where bodies of Dalit women are treated as objects and seen as property for upper caste Patils. The story shares a harsh way of survival in Maharwada (a Dalit community), where the narrator's mother, grandmother, sister, and many other women have to "give up" on their bodies and voices to the village Patils in order to provide bread to their families. This exploitation is not a choice but a necessity to the system. Since the Dalit community do not get fair pay and basic rights and are denied land, the sexual availability of the Dalit women's bodies becomes an only way to get food and safety. By portraying how these women have to endure and suffer the desires and lust of high caste landlords to "run the family", the novel exposes the whole breakdown of the purity and



pollution myth. It shows how Brahmanical Patriarchy intentionally keeps the Dalit community in an extreme state of poverty and dependence so that Dalit people, especially female bodies remain "available" as a resource.

Discussion

P. Sivakami's novel, *The Grip of Change* was written by her after the Bodicaste riots in Tamil Nadu between the Thevars and the Pallars (a Dalit caste group). The novel takes place with the central figure, named Thangam (a Dalit widow), who cries at the door of Kathamathu, the leader of the Dalit community, and takes off her sari to expose her beaten and injured body. She states, "I have been raped by the upper caste Udaiyar landlord Paranjoti and assaulted by his brothers-in-law because of my rumoured affair with the Udaiyar" (Sivakami, 2006, p. 2). Kathamathu's dialogue opens the internalized caste prejudice when he replies back to Thangam's cry, "Alright, it happened. Now tell me, why didn't you go after someone of our caste? It's because you chose that upper caste fellow. That four men could come and righteously beat you up. Don't you like our chaps?" (2006, p. 7), while Thangam's relatives say, "She deserves this and more. She seduced Udaiyar....shameless bitch....ignoring all of us she found succour in him" (2006, p. 26), also at a protest meeting, a Dalit political leader is reported to have said, "What would happen if all Dalit men were to marry upper caste women?" (2006, p. 35).

These given instances highlight that Kathamathu and the whole of Dalit group portrays her assault and rape as a punishment she deserved because she violated sexual integrity of caste that denies intimate relationship between upper caste men and lower caste women. In contrast, when a Dalit man tends to marry an upper caste woman, it leads to violence against both the man and woman. This caused a violent reaction that affected the lives and property of both Dalits and of that woman. This notion of foreshadowing the caste order when it comes to punishing women and treating them as a tool to teach them a lesson provides the extreme sense of hate towards them. The highlighted quotes portray how the system runs with the rigid idea of caste and gender hierarchy. Higher caste people do not create problems when a man from their caste violates the dalits but they punish when a woman has done the same. Additionally, they punish men when they belong to a lower caste. In this way, a woman is suffering from both sides. The rules of caste purity are based on the notion that being touched by a lower caste person makes them dirty and disrupts the social order, yet sexual assault and longing of fulfilling the lust are seen not as dirty but as a way to dominate them, a violent display of privilege that strengthens the caste system. Thangam becomes a target of harsh accusations, when she was the one who was sexually



assaulted and treated as trash, believing that a woman's sexuality does not deserve protection and is justified for the harassment. Limbale highlights the crushing realization of his social standing. He talks about the moment he mistook a slur with the title of parental appearance, writing, "I didn't know the meaning of the word 'whore', I thought it meant 'father'. But what a venomous word it is. It implies an impure, foul vagina. Who would willingly enter the gigantic gate of that vagina?" (Limbale, 2003, p. 60)

The psychological world in Limbale's *The Outcaste* shows how the idea of "purity and pollution" is taken to justify sexual control, at the same time, also portraying the deep trauma and mental disruption in Dalit families. In the Maharwada, represented by Limbale, where the Patils who belong to the superior caste often take their "rights" over Dalit women, the presence of the oppressor is always around, making it hard for a child to understand the difference between violation and family kinship. When the narrator gets to know that "whore" means an "impure, foul vagina", the narration highlights how Brahmanical tactics often try to label Dalit women as something which is "polluted" even as they "willingly enter" her. This sense of getting advantage is the ultimate hypocrisy: the upper caste people, after being satisfied, label the site of their own pleasure as "filthy" and "foul" to distance themselves from the act they have done intentionally and to maintain their social image. This raises a critical question connected to the idea of "punishment" in a caste society, which apparently never gets a logical answer. If the goal of the higher caste were simply to target and stop Dalit mobilization or claiming their lands, they could use economic boycotts, physical beatings, abuse, or deny them from getting food. But the constant choice of sexual violation as a "punishment" shows that the system is built and designed to provide shelter for the oppressor. The idea of choosing rape over other forms of violence, the upper caste men frame it as a "necessity to teach the entire community a lesson", while simultaneously satisfying their lust at the same time. It's a predatory convenience, men from upper caste always fulfil their desires under the guise of maintaining social order. This normalization of treating women as a tool of getting punishment, she never committed, has become so normal that the violator doesn't see the act as a crime anymore, but as a permitted ritual of control. This portrays that the Brahmanical Patriarchy is not based on a strict set of rules but rather a fragile system of power that changes its idea of purity and pollution when it benefits them. The system is completely advantageous because it lets the oppressor act like a "sinner" while still being seen as a "saint" in the social order at the same time, to keep his image superior. This shows that the caste system is an empty, hollowed belief where only the protection of high caste privilege stays the same, which comes at the expense of the Dalit woman's body and the dignity of the whole community. Jyoti Diwakar, in her essay "Sex as a Weapon to Settle Scores against Dalits: An Quotidian



Phenomenon", argues "Dalit women face collective, physical, and sexual atrocities publicly on a regular basis. These function as a means to punish Dalit women and men for asserting their rights against caste hierarchy. Most of such acts have a telling effect on the psyche of Dalits as a whole and women in particular. This structure of violence makes them easy prey to the list and wrath of upper castemen" (Diwakar, 2020, p. 23). Limbale reflects on the irreversible nature of a woman's standing after she is cast out by her husband, writing that, "A man can eat and spit as many times as he likes, but the same is not possible for a woman. It is considered wrong if a woman does that. Once her chastity is lost it can't be restored." (Limbale, 2003, p. 36) while also noting, "They did provide bread but in exchange satisfied their lust with our women. I can't bear to think of Masamai caught between bread and lust. Who will rescue my mother? She will die blemished, an object of someone's lust." (2003, p. 64)

As depicted in the given quotes, the concept of pollution is a fragile tool rather than a rigid moral code. In *The Grip of Change*, the upper caste Udaiyar exposes the hypocrisy of the social system after raping Thangam privately, he argues, "Even if she was hurt, she was hurt by the hand adorned with gold! A Parachi could have never dreamt of being touched by a man like me!... And then the dirty bitch betrays me! How can I face the world with my name thus polluted?" (Sivakami, 2006, p. 31). While the privileged caste portray that a Dalit touch is contagious and spiritually damaging the purity of the upper caste sphere, this supposed "impurity" suddenly fades away behind the doors when it benefits them. The fact that "A poor Dalit girl on attaining puberty has invariably been a victim of their lust." (Limbale, 2003, p. 38) shows that the fear of "pollution" is not rigid and not built on the surface of strict law, but rather just a hollowed structure of getting advantagement. If the Dalit bodies were truly as disgusted as their religion depicts, then things like rape or sexual exploitation would be unimaginable to perform. But instead, pollution is always ignored in order to allow pleasure and domination which reveals that the caste hierarchy is based on keeping power, not on the real moral or spiritual beliefs. The fact that the way society views women as objects is connected to the made up ideas about female anatomy. The article "Men and Menstruation: The Patriarchal Taboo Surrounding Periods" (2009) by Ria Das Mukherjee, explores how the silence and shame around menstruation and female biological factors aren't just random cultural thoughts but a way to keep women aside in the social order. It also studies how men's uneasiness, which often shows up as disgust, acts like a tool to control society. She writes, "Women experiencing their periods are often barred from participating in social activities on a diurnal basis. Such ostracism stems from predominantly religious beliefs that deem women on their periods as "impure" or "unclean." (Mukherjee, 2019, p. 2)



The way the society sees "pure" and "impure", is somewhere tied with the menstrual cycle and the anatomy of women, which is used to keep women out of religious participation and important roles in homes and society, often thinking them as less valuable, weak, and objects to hide. This shows how purity has been used in history as a tool against women. By portraying menstruation as Asaucha (impure), men create a system that makes women seem "lesser" or "tainted" during part of their lives. It transforms something that is actually a sign of health and fertility into a "biological defect" that keeps women from having power or being seen as holy. This temporary break from caste rules is a demonstration of how sexual violence is a deliberate political strategy to control. The upper-caste man asserts that he is administering "punishment" or "social correction" in order to mask his own lust, and use violence as a means to shame the community. Through the sexual assault of a Dalit woman while "maintaining order", the oppressor implies his "purity" is indestructible, while the woman's "chastity" is seen as lost and never to be restored. This establishes a hierarchy: the upper-caste man remains "pure" despite the "pollution" and the Dalit woman is further marginalised. It demonstrates that the idea of Brahmanical Patriarchy is a false one; it is a system of "privileges" in which the rules of "purity" are followed only when they aid in the oppression of the other, but not when they are inconvenient to the whims of the upper class. The "honor" of the upper-caste is not in their adherence to ritual purity, but in their ability to transgress without penalty while keeping the Dalit community within the boundaries of purity through violence and shame. The system is not about religion; it is about the unhindered right to rule over the "other" while trying to be superior to them.

Sivakami is crucial not only for speaking up for the oppressed, but also for giving her a voice and agency, and to make sure that her voice echoes across the society. As a writer and victim from Dalit community, she explores what Sharmila Rege describes as a counter narrative as a "Savarna Feminist Narrative" (Rege, 1997, p. 33). In her seminal text, she points out the triple struggles endured by Dalit women, facing oppression from upper caste men as a Dalit and poor as well as from the Dalit Patriarchy for being a woman. Limbale's words "I was angry with him. I felt like raping his mother someday. I was livid with rage." (Limbale, 2003, 46) reveals that a female body is not considered as her own, instead her body is treated as a "property" or "instrument" of her community's purity. When a higher caste person as well as a person from Dalit community wants to punish a man, the person will not directly attack the man but the woman associated with him. This happens because, in the patriarchal caste system, a woman is not seen as an individual or as an independent "free agent" (Rege, 1997, 19), rather, a woman is constructed as the symbolic repository of her family's and the community's honor (izzat) or (maan-



maryada). In Rege's words, "The state has in all its programmes assumed the women to be 'free agents', outside the boundaries of caste, class, and religion" (1997, p. 19). Limbale and Sivakami's narrative explores this idea and shows it through a real lens, demonstrating how caste and gender come together in order to control pleasure and create pollution. By writing a story about silence, exploitation, and finally standing up against it, *The Outcaste* and *The Grip of Change* breaks down the concept of ritual purity. As Anupama Rao in her work, *The Caste Question* (2009), observes, "Dalit publicists and reformers underlined the susceptibility of Dalit women to sexual violation according to 'custom' and focused on enforced sexual servitude through women's ritual dedication" (Rao, 2009, p. 53). It exposes that the idea of purity and pollution aren't fixed but are shaped by those who hold power and imposed on those who are seen as marginalized. The book makes the audience face a troubling contradiction: caste lines become less clear when people act on their pleasure and lust, but these same actions also strengthen the very social system that made those lines. In those strong moments when Thangam and Masamai realize their worth and identity, and also stand up for themselves, Limbale and Sivakami take back the Dalit woman's body, not just as a place of victimization of resistance, control, and self awareness. Sharmila Rege in her essay "Caste and Gender: The Violence Against Women in India", asserts that "In almost all regional languages in India the word for 'Rape' is equivalent to the phrase 'stealing the honour of' and since lower caste women by the virtue of their double oppression have no 'Honour' to speak of the right to redressal is often denied" (Rege, 1997, p. 30). The novel represents this intersectional dynamic clearly. A touch, in a caste society means more than just a physical action. It holds a deeper and religious meaning related to equality, dignity, and identity. So, when a person from the upper caste does not allow a Dalit from touching their belongings or entering into a religious place they are not just concerned about the physical contamination, instead they are trying to protect the social lines that keep upper caste and lower caste separate. In this way, when a privileged caste person rapes and exploit a woman, they aren't crossing a boundary in their way of thinking because it doesn't uplift lower caste or acknowledge their purity. Instead, it uproots casteism, which is why such violence fits perfectly into the beliefs of caste ideology. This paradox is further explained by Louis Dumont's theory of "purity and pollution" in *Homo Hierarchicus*, where he states that "Caste is fundamentally based on the one-sided superiority of purity over pollution" (Dumont, 1966, 116). This creates a huge contradiction: A finger of a Dalit woman or even a shadow is seen as filthy, but the whole body of the same woman is acceptable for sexual abuse. The double standards of purity and pollution, and how they are related to sexual exploitation, depicts how a society stuck in its own silly rules under the guise of spirituality and religion, defends "tradition" even when those traditions break down due to the hypocrisy and fake morality. This change in morality shows



the illogical base of social order. It's like a cultural stage or theater, where everyone acts like they believe in purity rules, but the act falls apart as soon as male desire and patriarchal control become more important.

Conclusion

Tradition starts to seem less like wise advice and more like a ritual that society follows automatically, even when the outcomes are pointless. What makes this system really sad is not just its cruelty but its emptiness; people lose their dignity for rules that fall apart as soon as they are questioned. The language of touch becomes a strategy instead of a cultural belief: it creates distance when society wants it, and it disappears when the powerful want access. In the end, the absurdity of purity and pollution is in how fiercely society defends these ideas, even though they break down with every contradiction. This is the darkest part of tradition, its ability to cause real pain for no good reason.

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