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**Dalit Consciousness in Gurdial Singh's *Alms in the Name of Blind Horse* and Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*: A Comparative Study**

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**ABSTRACT**

The space of resistance in Dalit literature in gives expression to the lived experiences of caste oppression, characterized by issues of identity, agency, and representation. Whereas Dalit writing of Maharashtra has been extensively explored due to its stark and emphatic political nature, on the other hand little work has been done on Punjabi Dalit literature, particularly in translated formats. This paper focuses on Dalit consciousness in Punjabi literature, based on a close reading of the text *Alms in the Name of a Blind Horse*, translated by Rana Nayar. In order to highlight the differences in the ways Dalit identity is expressed across regions, a selective comparison is made with *Kanyadaan* by Vijay Tendulkar. This paper examines the way in which the Punjabi Dalit experience is depicted through a narrative style characterized by restraint, silence, and a close connection to the rural socio-economic structure. In contrast to the more overt and confrontational expressions found in Maharashtrian Dalit writing, the Punjabi context presents a more subdued yet equally powerful form of marginalization. The paper also discusses how translation plays an important role in disseminating Punjabi Dalit narratives to a broader audience. It critically examines how Rana Nayar's English translation handles cultural specificity, and how it may reshape caste-related meanings and emotional depth. In contrast, *Kanyadaan* presents caste in a more direct and discussion-based manner,



which strengthens the comparative perspective. Punjabi Dalit literature in translation, therefore, requires closer critical attention because of its subtle and layered portrayal of marginalization, where silence itself can be interpreted as an effective narrative strategy. By focusing on the Punjabi context, the study contributes to an in-depth understanding of Dalit literature and highlights the diversity in its forms of expression and development.

Dalit literature in India is an expressive form through which people who have long been pushed to the margin of the society find a voice. It links the concept of narrative, power, and representation, bringing forward voices that were earlier neglected. This literature does not only describe the suffering but also questions the systems that are normalizing such sufferings. It helps the reader to understand that caste is deeply ingrained in the social order and in everyday life. Punjabi Dalit literature is important part of this larger field, as it does not rely heavily on direct expression; instead it uses suggestions rather than stating things openly. A reading of *Alms in the Name of a Blind Horse*, makes it clear that caste is represented in a way that it is disturbing underneath. When the text is compared with Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*, the differences in the expression of Dalit Consciousness across regions and forms become more visible, helping us better understand how marginality is experienced and represented.

In the narrative world created by Gurdial Singh, caste is not shown through dramatic or direct statements. Instead, it quietly shapes everyday life in the village. The village is not a simple or equal space; it is a lived space where hierarchies exist in daily actions, types of work, and even physical spaces. One striking feature of this text is that it does not sensationalize oppression. It simply depicts the oppression in a realistic manner. As a critic points out "Gurdial Singh, in his works, emphasised on the condition of the socio-economically exploited, marginalized people encapsulating the consciousness of the downtrodden or the oppressed people." (Paliwal 321) Instead of showing dramatic scenes of violence, it focuses on the slow and continuous experience of exclusion, where poverty becomes normal and dignity is constantly delayed. This is evident as the writer portrays the routine in rural setting "There in the village, it's not as though we are sitting atop a large heap of freshly threshed grain... Now, we are nowhere, neither here nor there... So you tell me, where we should go." (Singh 60) Here, the Dalit subject exists in a condition where speaking openly is limited. Conversations are often broken, incomplete, or absent. This silence is not simply a lack of action, but a result of living in a system where even speaking is controlled by deeply internalized social boundaries. Thus, the story creates coverage of



what can be termed as a poetics of silence, meaning is not only in what is said, but also what is left out. This makes the reader read between the lines to get the meaning of the text as opposed to straight lines.

This form of silence creates what can be described as structural visibility, where caste is not narrated directly, yet its impacts are clearly visible. It can be seen in how work is structured, resource allocation, and how individuals interact in their daily life. This is especially visible in the exploitation of labour, one of the characters in the novel says, “Our jats are more miserly than the Banias... Here they skin you alive for more than six months, and then say, ‘Wait for another month...’ ” (Singh 30) The characters live in a world where resistance is not always possible through open protest. Instead, resistance often takes the form of survival – continuing to live despite difficult conditions. The strength of the narrative lies in the fact that it does not follow the usual model of loud protest, but instead shows how marginalization becomes a normal part of life. In doing so, it challenges the common idea that agency can only be seen in open opposition and suggests that silence itself can also be a powerful form of critique.

This representation becomes more complicated when we the role of translation arises. The English translation by Rana Nayar is significant in exposing more people to the experiences of Punjab Dalits. Nevertheless, it also poses some significant questions concerning language and cultural transfer. Punjabi has a lot of idioms and cultural connotations which may not easily translate and can be difficult to express the realities of caste. The process can alter or decrease some of the emotional, social, and historical meanings and make the translated text more accessible as well as slightly modified. Translation is not a simple transfer of language but a process of negotiation in which whatever is being translated is being recreated in a new context. The translated piece is in a medium between the old and the new audience, striking a balance between the two. This does not make it less significant, on the contrary it underlines the problem of bringing into a wider literary context very local experiences.

On the other hand, *Kanyadaan* by Vijay Tendulkar represents caste in much more direct way. The play deals with caste through clear discussion and argument, “My anxiety is not over his being dalit... You have been brought up in a specific culture... He is different in every way. You may not be able to handle it” (Tendulkar 13) The urban setting allows for more direct expression of ideas, which is less possible in the rural world of Gurdial Singh’s narrative. The theme of inter-caste marriage in the play becomes a way to explore the limits of liberal thinking, “Break the caste system was a mere slogan for us... today I have broken the caste system in real sense.” (Tendulkar 23) This reveals how ideals often fail when faced with real social conditions. The Dalit character in *Kanyadaan* expresses anger,



frustration, and resistance openly, challenging the comfort of upper-caste liberal thinking. However, there is a complexity in the expression by the dalit character, “It’s a first-class experience! One should rape one’s mother, sister... then life becomes meaningful” (Tendulkar 47), thereby highlighting the problematic nature of representation.

Comparing these two texts, one can easily identify the difference in the manifestation of Dalit consciousness. Speech and confrontation is the central idea in the play of Tendulkar, and the meaning is expressed by absence and implication in the work of Gurdial Singh. These distinctions do not mean that either of them should be more superior to another. Instead, they indicate that diverse social and cultural environments result in diverse ways of expression. Singh’s novel articulates the vain efforts put by the untiring spirit of dalits as, “The novel is full of many Dalit characters showcasing the indomitable efforts to survive against all odds, oppressions and challenges.” (Kumar 1997) The rural setting, where caste is deeply internalised and normalized, leads to a more indirect representation in Punjabi literature. In Contrast, the urban and ideological setting of *Kanyadaan* allows for more open conflict and discussion. The binary opposition is effortlessly evoked by the writer in the play, “The Second Act of *Kanyadaan*, therefore, establishes a confrontation between the worlds of the elitists and that of the Dalits.” (Mukherjee 74) Together these texts deepen or understanding of Dalit literature by showing that resistance can take many forms, shaped by historical and social contexts.

This paper also demonstrates that the Dalit literature cannot be interpreted in a definite or standard manner. When we concentrate on loud and direct protest, we can miss overlook quieter but equally important forms of resistance, like that in *Alms in the Name of a Blind Horse*. This work throws light on the depth of Punjabi Dalit writings by concentrating on the nonverbal aspect, normalization of oppression and the work of translation. It promotes a more cautious and delicate attitude toward reading, the attitude that acknowledges the numerous opportunities of being marginal.

In conclusion, the analogy of Gurdial Singh and Vijay Tendulkar indicates that Dalit consciousness is not an objective and uniform idea, but a dynamic and situational experience. Although with various styles and approach, both authors are adamant in demonstrating the extent to which caste is entrenched in the society. Both texts show that there is a struggle of dignity and recognition whether it comes in silence or in a direct speech. This paper brings out their differences while also emphasizing the importance of understanding Dalit literature as diverse and evolving.



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