

EXPLORING DYCHE: A READING OF YOIKANA

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Abstract:

This paper will critically analyze the theoretical perceptions of Karnataka based Dalit writer, M. C. Raj, with respect to Dalit emancipation to psychological plane, as it appears in his book, *Dyche* co-authored by him and his wife, Jyothi Raj. Raj delves deeply into the psychic manifestations of different groups in caste-centric society and comes up with remarkable insights into the psychological predicament of Indian society at large. Raj then logically draws the contours for psychological emancipation. This paper will critically read Raj amidst other theorists of psychology of oppression. The impact of his theoretical understanding in Raj's fiction will be then critically analyzed in this paper. The paper will be divided into two parts—the first will deal with the Raj's theory of psychological emancipation, and the second will critically read his novel, *Yoikana*.

The importance of such study can never be overestimated as it throws light into the internal psychic mechanisms of caste society that ensnare the same while converting it into a deformed psyche which Raj names as Dyche. Raj believes that the roots of healthy psyche which is free of Brahmanic hegemony can better be explored out from indigenous culture which is unaffected by caste structure. Raj has successfully drawn the contours of this healthy psyche in his work which provides an insight into psychic liberation.

M.C.Raj, a Karnataka based Dalit writer, has written profusely on the culture and philosophy of Dalits whom he regards as Adi Jans. In his book *Dyche*, co-authored by him and his wife Jyothi Raj, he has come up with highly original and remarkable ideas about the psychic predicament of caste-centric India society. This paper will critically study these ideas and will read his novel *Yoikana* in the light of same.

I

M. C. Raj takes a deep plunge into the field of psychology and comes up with remarkable insights. As he painstakingly explains the hegemony of westernization in the field of psychology, one wakes up to the highly disturbing politics of marginalization. Raj explains how not only Indian context gets ignored, but more particularly, Dalit community suffers most horrible neglect. Though many Indian psychologists have talked about the need for indigenous/Hindu psychology, no one before Raj has actually cared for Dalit perspective in the Indian context. Laungani points out that, “Durganand Sinha (1996) was the most outspoken champion, concerned with promoting indigenous Psychology in India. He was convinced that Indians needed to break away from the stronghold of Western Psychology” (393). M. C. Raj writes about this group of psychologists who champion the cause of Indian perspective, which is actually a Hindu perspective for them based on Hindu scriptures that they totally ignore the Dalit perspective. Exclusion of Dalits in history, culture, philosophy, religion and in psychology speaks volumes about hideous snares of oppression that are as wide as their expansion in various domains of understanding as they are deeply buried beneath historical layers.

M. C. Raj is a Dalit who has lived and experienced life from the periphery where he and his community is doomed to live. As a rare voice from the margin, he is more eligible to question and challenge the mainstream perspective. Raj says that Hindu scriptures have either ignored the presence of Dalits or have presented them in a negative light. Indian society in the present times is predominantly a caste society which does not operate as a complete whole as suggested in Hindu scriptures; it is rather thoroughly immersed in caste violence. Caste hatred and resultant complexes define the essential psychology of Indians today. Indian psychology must take into account Dalit as well as caste perspective, if at all it aspires to be inclusive, and, thus, truly Indian in character.

Raj points out the conflict in the psyche of caste people (Aryans in Raj’s parlance) and Dalits alongside the reasons behind the same. Talking of history, Raj claims that Aryans appropriated and manipulated the indigenous culture of Dalits to establish their own dominating cultural norms which eventually designed their psychology. Though the theory of Aryan invasion is much contested (Thapar) and the Raj’s idea of Aryan invasion is much based upon such understanding of Aryan race, there is much of value in Raj’s explanation of Dalit psychology which is relevant even if the racial theory is totally rejected. Irrespective of whether there was an Aryan invasion or not, there is certainly a caste hierarchy embedded in much of

Indian psyche, which deforms it thereby rendering it unhealthy. This unhealthy psyche is what Raj names as *Dyche*.

As explained by Raj, Aryans/present day Hindus being a migrant race, had no culture of their own as they had no systematic way of living. They used to wander from place to place. Indigenous culture was highly developed with its systematic way of living and rich spirituality which was earth and ecology-centric. On the one hand, migrant races looked at such systematic and developed society with awe thereby appropriating it to represent their own, on the other, they wrote Hindu, God-centric scriptures to dominate indigenous people and to make them conscious of caste hierarchies which established their superiority over them. Raj ruminates that many such hegemonizing mechanisms of migrant races, as they got entrenched in Indian society via various “ideological state apparatuses,” have deformed the healthy, earth-centric psyche of indigenous people, and the same “interpellated” them into subjugation (Ferretter 82-91).

In a sense, *Dyche* – which is an elaborate explanation of Dalit psyche along with migrant psyche – add up to the field of psychology of oppression and liberation psychology because it critically examines the socio-political and psychological oppression of Dalits and recommends Dalit liberation not only at a personal level, but at societal level. “Psychology of oppression” as defined by Ratner is the “way of understanding psychological debilities as products of social oppression”. (“The Psychology of Oppression”)

M. C. Raj works as “liberation psychologist” amidst his people in Tumkur, Karnataka where through his NGO he enlightens Dalits about oppressive social structures prevalent in caste society and empowers them for self liberation (Moane).

Raj sees similarity – in philosophical, cultural, and psychological planes – among all the indigenous people of the world on one hand, and all the races who dominated indigenous people to get themselves settled, on the other. Raj believes that this similarity in the philosophy and culture of indigenous people across the world springs from one common factor: their closeness to mother earth. Such closeness leads towards a very healthy earth centric attitude. As a result, indigenous people regard the earth as their mother and believe that the earth provides space to every other being like them. It is in contrast to the philosophy and psychology of dominating races in the world who regard the earth as an immaterial space which can be owned by them.

Raj's perception is though too much generalized as it divides the whole world into two clear halves where one is the evil and the other is good.

In his renowned publication *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar has done a detailed study of caste society and has pondered over the debilitating individualistic tendencies which are inherent in it. Ambedkar has explained how caste makes Indian society insecure, fractured, isolated, selfish, and hypocrite to the core. M. C. Raj affirms the same and writes that caste system promotes self centeredness which “nurtures unbridled psychological dysfunction like greed and violence” (79). Against such individualist tendencies, authors of *the Dyche appeal* for coming back to the indigenous culture and philosophy which are community based because they lead towards a healthy psyche.

Explaining the mechanism of psychic damage, authors write that the dominating attitude of Aryans wounds the healthy indigenous psyche of Dalits and creates a psyche of worthlessness in them. It induces a fear of the gods in Dalits which later on converting into the hatred of the gods and violence. Frantz Fanon has also talked about such violence in the context of colonized and colonizers. Frantz Fanon says that “the native's psyche was repeatedly represented, savaged, and ‘treated’ as inferior.... Eventually, the native also admits loudly the supremacy of the white man... After years of unreality, the native discovers this reality and transforms it into the pattern of his customs, into the practice of violence and into his plan for freedom. When the native can't fight the colonizers, the violence turns against his own people to work off their hatred”. (Nayar 22)

Raj explains that whenever a Dalit is wronged against because of caste prejudices he feels righteous anger deep within but he has to ultimately suppress it because a healthy outlet of such anger is not allowed in the oppressive caste society. Caste atrocities are perpetuated by one human being but the responsibility for them falls upon the whole caste structure and thus a single person seems innocent. Anger is thus left as such, deep within, without any manifestation of it and eventually it either wounds the psyche of Dalits or is realized in the form of aggressive violence within Dalit community.

Dalits are full of so much of anger that whenever they come to any negotiating table with caste fellows, they become aggressive over one or the other issue which results in their failure in the negotiating table. In the lack of appropriate channel to take out their anger, Dalits invent

various other methods like excessive masturbation, masochism, sadism, alcoholism, etc., To do the same.

Writers elaborate upon other mechanisms of psychic oppression and note that “The caste forces have set their fixed standard of behavior in public spaces... Dalits cannot buy the type of dress that a rich or dominant caste group demands in public. They simply do not have the money... Most Dalit people genuinely feel and think that they are unworthy of public spaces”. (324-325)

Further delving into the different mechanisms that wound the healthy Adijan psyche, the authors highlight the vicious proclivity of giving negative names. “The names that are generally and traditionally given to Dalit children also signify a low self esteem: a strategy to establish a low self image in the Dalits already from their early childhood” (317). Names are important because the meaning they convey “interpolates” very strongly. Negative references via names create negative psyche.

The psychology of oppression elaborates the impact of the politics of viewing others with prejudiced lenses in the context of Black Americans:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by a tape of the world that looks on in an amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Quintana & Herrera 271)

Such interpellation leads towards the development of false consciousness in the oppressed group where oppressed group internalizes this false and inferior image of itself.

The authors say that Dalits never thought of acquiring the ownership of the earth because they always believed that it is the earth that owns everyone else and not the vice versa. They were then robbed of all the land and were deprived of it by those who established their individual ownership. Such deprivation led towards craving and craving inculcated self centeredness in Dalits. The authors say that the deprived ownership leads to the deprivation of responsibility which has resulted in Dalit silence and non participation in the important issues of the nation.

Dalits show a peculiar characteristic of “stonewalling psyche” (383). Raj explains that Dalits are forced to unbearable indignity and wretched treatment in caste society and it becomes hard and, in fact, impossible for them to deal with their emotions. And thus, Dalits invent a psychological mechanism of stealing away from their emotions which Raj names as stonewall or steeling. “Steeling refers to a particular psychological state of being and action wherein a person either consciously or subconsciously decides to close the shutters to respond emotionally to situations that are beyond his control. Generally steeling is marked by a high level of rationalization even in situations that may require a high level of emotional response” (383-384).

Highlighting another aspect of Dyche, writers say that in order to compensate for all the wrongs done to them, some peculiar habits are developed by Dalits. These habits include open rebellion, over achievement, faking illness, being verbose, being too reticent, being always berated, or being always moralizing. Authors exemplify Ambedkar as a personality who tried to seek mental succor by concentrating upon personal achievement. He, like many other Dalits, thought that achievement in different spheres will bring respect to a Dalit like him. Similarly, some Dalits develop the habit of being always reticent as it is their way to show anger against the society that doesn’t listen to them. Some Dalits become verbose because they force people to listen to them in response to their anger towards the society that doesn’t give them the opportunity to speak.

Last part of the book concentrates upon the process of healing. Negotiation and mutual healing are some techniques for healing and liberating Dyche. The authors ponder over the limitation of working exclusively with structures and systems of society as they acknowledge the importance of working at a psychic level. Authors say that dyche, in case of Dalits, must be healed and must be lead from weakness towards strength. They recommend a trajectory that focuses upon the strength of Dalits. This approach of reconstructing personality through a concerted endeavor to consolidate and expand the latent strength is generally recognized as a Jungian approach.

As a sure way to heal Dyche, writers appeal for coming back to the original Adijan philosophy and culture. They call this process ‘Digitization’ (*Dalitology* 7). Adijan philosophy and culture as an assertion will act as a means to let out the age old accumulated anger and will help exploring the latent strength of Dalits.

II

Reading of *Yoikana: The Romantic Revolution*

Yoikana: The Romantic Revolution is a novel written by M. C. Raj that can be read in the light of his concepts like dyche as explained in his above mentioned book. In this fiction, the writer has depicted similarity among Sami people who are the indigenous people of Norway, and Dalits who are the indigenous people of India. The Author has worked out the idea that a healthy assimilation of these two indigenous cultures is possible because of the inherent similarity in the philosophy of both. The title of the work is itself suggestive of such assimilation: Yoiking is a kind of instant singing that expresses deep feelings of Sami people and is very similar to Sobana that Dalit women sing in South India. Writer formed the title Yoikana by using these two words – Yoiking + Sobana.

The plot revolves around two central characters. One is a Dalit boy called Veeran and other is a Sami woman Romana. Love affair and consequent marriage of Veeran and Romana is again symbolic of the assimilation based upon the similarity of Sami and Dalit culture. The writer has focused upon the healthy indigenous psyche of Dalits and Sami people. At the same time writer has reflected upon the dominating psyche of Caste Hindus as well as the deformed psyche of Dalits with the help of few other characters in the novel. Unlike other Dalit writings that depict wretchedness of Dalit society, *Yoikana* sings eulogy to the indigenous culture of Dalits.

The Author has stressed upon the earth centric character of indigenous cultures. The very first line of the novel is: “Earth is our Mother, Reindeer is our Ancestor. The captivating sound of Disney replayed in Sapmi, the land of Sami people”(1). Veeran recalls that “back home in my land, we call buffalo our ancestor” (3). Raj has brilliantly portrayed the Dalit community of India with its internal conflicts. Kathir is a Dalit, like Veeran, but he is influenced by the caste lord of the village named as Boraiah. Kathir is dependent upon Boraiah’s authority for his personal petty benefits and he is jealous of learned Veeran who could any time challenge his otherwise unquestioned authority over Dalit households.

Raj has repeatedly stressed upon the need for going back to the indigenous culture so as to heal dyche. He believes that Dalits should be given an opportunity to rule themselves in

accordance with their own native culture and philosophy. Hence, there comes his concept of Dalit parliament. In the fiction he showed Sami parliament in a positive light. Romana says to Veeran: “When we have a parliament of our own, in our country we are integrating ourselves with the governance of the nation as a people with independent identity, culture, history, and language... It is Norway that stands to gain by the strength we accumulate by governing ourselves as a people” (24-25) It is to be noted that M.C. Raj has already established a Dalit Parliament in Karnataka for which he wants a legal status and the idea of which is similar to the Sami Parliament of Norway.

The way Raj depicts more affinity of Dalits with indigenous people from the other nations like Norway than with the caste people within the same country is interesting and it points out at the strong indigenous links. This link is shown by the blue color which is used in Sami parliament and is considered as a Dalit color as well. The idea is same in both the cultures: blue represents the distant sky and deep blue sea. It suggests that people do not own any space, but space owns many people. Raj has then repeatedly stressed the similarity in Sami culture and Dalit culture with examples like shamans, drums, meat eating, belief systems, and historical struggles etc. Which are common in both the cultures. All such cultural manifestations form a beautiful imagery in *Yoikana*.

M. C. Raj criticized the approach of conventional Dalit leadership that does not focus on the latent strength of Dalits as recommended in *Dyche*. In *Yoikana*, he thus says through the voice of one character:

Our leaders have focused on all the negative things the caste society and Hinduism has done to us and the wound they have caused in our psyche. Conventional Dalit leadership has converted this wound as a resourceful capital in their pursuit of offloading anger and gaining visibility. This psychic mechanism amongst Dalit leaders has become very popular as it has often cleared the way for unrestricted self-aggrandizement. We found out from our people that this approach to liberation further reinforces a psyche of being victims amongst our people. They gain and internalize a self-image that is very low and inferior, as the caste forces are willy-nilly presented as villainous victors over them. (233)

And then he says about the impact of listing the enormous strength that Dalits have in them. He explains in this context that, “When they discovered themselves, their self image took a

complete U- turn towards their self-worth and self-dependence” (233). In the plot itself, Veeran and Romana were able to mobilize the Dalits of village because they continuously strengthened them by making them trust their latent talents and instigating hope in them.

Raj has discussed about the psychic mechanism of steeling in his book *Dyche*. He says that Dalits have to generally face tremendous emotional setbacks in caste society and thus they naturally develop a behavior of stealing away, which denotes the shutting down of one's emotional shutters so as not to feel any pain or hurt. Dalits, then always work with their intellect even when emotion is needed. When Deepti's husband, in the fiction, was killed by caste people, she takes refuge in such “steeling” and thus “She had cocooned herself solidly inside the steel cave that she fabricated for herself as if by self-protective intuition” (272).

The complete novel, *Yoikana*, can be explained as a creative re-statement of what the writer has largely said in his book *Dyche*. It is a statement about the indigenous philosophy which spreads similar among all the indigenous cultures across the parts of the whole world and this philosophy is set in contrast to the migrant philosophy which is anti-art and anti-cosmos and which dominates and cripples the whole humanity. Raj aspires to seek a political unity among indigenous people in the whole world on the basis of such similarity.

In one of his interviews given to Alok Mukherjee as it appeared in *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*, Limbale defines the relation of Dalits with caste people as a ‘love-hate relationship’. He believes that to construct a different identity and culture of Dalits which has nothing to do with caste people is easy and it doesn't need much effort. Limbale says that it is precisely to seek equality with savarnas that Dalits enter into a dialogue with them (145). Whenever such a dialogue via literature etc. Doesn't change the savarnas who continue proclaiming superiority on the basis of caste, and when Dalits start losing their faith in dialogue, finding solutions in separatism becomes inevitable for them. It seems at first glance that M. C. Raj's emphasis on Digitization is a similar sort of solution via separatism as Ambedkar's embracement of Buddhism; but, in actual Raj has nothing to say about separation. M. C. Raj's appeal for ‘digitization’ or coming back to indigenous culture is not exactly separatism. Raj underscores the importance of strengthening Dalits so as to prepare them for negotiating with other groups like caste society. His fiction, as is written for both Dalits and non-Dalits, is a form of dialogue above everything else, but his fiction is different from the one that aims to generate a specific empathy and which is recommended by Limbale who writes that, “pain or suffering is

the basis of the aesthetics of Dalit literature” (114-115). Raj speaks more from the intellectual plane than from emotion and the justification that he gives for this on psychological grounds deserves attention.

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