

III-effects of Brahmanism: Reading of Mukta Salve's 'About the grief of the Mangs and the Mahars'

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Abstract

Mukta Salve, a girl from Mang (Matang) community, wrote an essay entitled 'About the grief of the Mangs and the Mahars' when she was studying in standard III as a result of which she was honoured by Major Candy for being the best essayist in the school. It was Major Candy who offered the expensive chocolate that she politely rejected and asked for the Library. The girl who knew the importance of reading that the person who reads a book, gets his head strengthened, and a person with strengthened mind never bow down in front of anybody without thinking. She wanted that her fellow-lower caste Indians be self-confident and self-dependent and it can only be achieved by reading books. The girl having such revolutionary thoughts learnt in the school that was run by Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Savitribai Phule. This response can be studied from a different perspective as well. It shows the quality of education that the educational institute provides. Only the girl who is influenced by the thoughts of the social reformers and who wants the fundamental change in the society can ask for such a favour. Her essay 'About the grief of the Mangs and the Mahars' was read in front of 3000 people in the presence of Major Candy. She takes anti-Brahmin stance in her essay.

Keywords: Dalit, marginalization, exploitation, Brahmanism

Mukta Salve is of the view that if the untouchables and all non-Brahmins are not worthy to read the scriptures created by Brahmins, then the religion of the Brahmins and non-Brahmins cannot be the same. The Brahmins consider that the Vedas are their private property, so the non-Brahmins should not try to read them. It is surprising to note that it means that the non-Brahmins do not have a book of religion. According to her, if the Vedas belong to the Brahmins, only they are the people authorized to behave according to Vedas. She thinks that if Vedas are only for the Brahmins, the other non-Brahmins are not supposed to follow what is said in Vedas. She writes in a very straight forward way:

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If the Vedas belong only to the Brahmins, then it is an open secret that we do not have the Book. We are without the Book – we are without any religion. If the Vedas are for the Brahmins only, then we are not bound to act according to the Vedas. If merely looking at the Vedas can get us into grievous sins (as the Brahmins claim), then would not following them be the height of foolishness? (Mukta Salve)

Without having a Book of religion means being in existence without any religion, observes Mukta Salve and points out that Muslims have the Koran, English have the Bible and the Brahmins have the Vedas clearly meant that the low caste people have no religion and no religious book at all. She questions the God very clearly: "Oh, God, please tell us, what is our religion?" and requests to teach the true religion to those who are without any religion and expects from the God at the same time to destroy the religion which gives privilege to few ones and the majority of people are deprived of each and every right- social, political, economic, cultural, educational and so on.

Teach us, O God, your true religion so that we all can lead our lives according to it. Let that religion, where only one person is privileged, and the rest deprived, vanish from the earth and let it never enter our minds to boast of such a (discriminatory) religion.

She then describes how the Brahmins had displaced her ancestors from their own lands to build large buildings for the comfort of the Brahmins. She becomes very emotional when she writes about how the *mangs* and *mahars* were made to drink oil mixed with red lead and buried in the foundations of their buildings wiping out the generations of dalits. This reminds us of a famous proverb 'where is King *Bhoj*, where is *Gangu* the oil-presser.' *Gangu*, the oil-presser, had given his life and became ready to bury himself in the foundations of the building. It shows the sacrifice on the part of *Gangu*; still, the people say that one should not compare the king with a common man. Even the sacrifice of life of a low caste person is not worth celebrating. It was the time then (and now as well) where the cows and buffaloes were worshiped and low caste people were untouchable which reminds us of an 18-year-old Indian youth, *Bakha* in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, a sweeper, Strong and able-bodied, fascinated by the life and ways of India's English colonizers but he was in depression due to his untouchability. Mukta Salve is very critical to the Brahmins, she says:

Did they not consider us even lower than donkeys during the rule of Bajirao Peshwa? You beat a lame donkey, and his master retaliates. But who was there to object the routing thrashing of *mahars* and *mangs*?

Even the donkey may have some possibility of justice, but the Dalits had not. They were prohibited of the basic human rights. In the reign of Peshwa, dalit was not allowed in or in front of a gymnasium; otherwise "they would cut off his head and play 'bat and ball' with their swords as bats and his head as a ball, on the grounds." Dalits were punished only for passing through their doors, how they could have the freedom to learn to read and write. When any *mang* or *mahar* would learn reading or writing, it was taken as taking away the jobs of the Brahmans. Peshwa Bajirao was very strict and would not allow Dalits to take education. Mukta Salve quotes the words of Peshwa:

How dare they get educated? Do these untouchables expect the brahman to hand over their official duties to them and move around with their shaving kits, shaving the heads of widows?

Further, Mukta Salve criticises the low caste people who consider themselves superior to each other, though they are untouchable to the Brahmans. She observes that even the *mahars* avoid the company of *mangs*. She counts the problems of Dalits and states that no job opportunity is given to Dalits on the ground of their castes. So they have to live their lives in poverty. The condition of women is worse than that. When low caste women give birth to babies, they do not have a roof over their heads and have to suffer in the rain and the cold as well. She fears if these women get some disease while giving birth, they will not get enough money for doctor or medicines. And the most important thing was that no any doctor would treat such poor people free of cost. Here Mukta Salve depicts the condition of Dalit women who are double marginalized because of their caste and sex like what we find in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' There was no opportunity for the *mang* and *mahar* children to lodge a complaint even if the Brahman children throw stones at them and injure them seriously. They had to suffer silently because they knew very well that they have to go to the Brahman's house to beg for leftover food. She becomes so sad that she fears that she will cry. She considers the British rule better than the God because the British Government had stopped the human sacrifice for the foundation of forts and mansions and even the harassment and torture of dalits had stopped. She depicts the picture of torture during the reign of Peshwa:

Earlier, Gokhale, Apate, Trimkaji, Andhala, Pansara, Kale, Behre, etc. [all Brahman surnames], who showed their bravery by killing rats in their homes, persecuted us, not sparing even pregnant women, without any rhyme or reason.

Like Savitribai Phule, she is thankful to the British government for the good things done in India. She considers British as the mother of *shudras*.

English Mom| English Goddess
Reforming *shudras*| By heart||
English Mom| Not a Mughal Empire
Not a Peshwai| The empire of fools||

(English Mom: Tr. Satish Saykar)

In the same way, Mukta Salve asserts that under British rule anybody with money can buy and wear clothes. Excessive and exploitative tax had stopped. The practice of untouchability had stopped at least in some places. Killing has stopped on the playground. Dalits now can visit market place. Though she is critical of Brahmans, she also notes that some Brahmans want Dalit to be free of their plights. Some bad Brahmans still hate Dalits and target and outcaste the Brahmans who try to liberate Dalits. Some noble people with good intention had started schools for *mahars* and *mangs*, and such schools were supported by the British government.

Like Mahatma Phule, she be wares Dalit that it is only education or knowledge which is the answer for all your worries. It will take them away from wild beliefs and superstitions. They will become righteous and moral as well. It is education which will stop exploitation. People who treated dalits like animals, will not do so any more. She urges Dalit's to work hard and study, get educated and be good human beings. Though she advises to take education, she is not sure whether the new learned people would be good human beings because "those who have received good education also sometimes surprise us by doing very bad deeds!"

Mukta Salve, in her essay, depicts the plight of Dalits during the reign of Peshawa and writes about the positive changes brought by the Britishers in India. She also advises her fellow- Dalits to take education because it is the only way which can lead them to the freedom, far away from slavery.

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