



CIRCLES WITHIN CIRCLES: A STUDY OF BOUNDARIES AMONG DALITS IN S.K. BHANWARA'S DOG'S FUNERAL, A STORY ON UNTOUCHABILITY.

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Abstract: This study is a critical analysis of S.K Bhanwara's novella Dog's Funeral: A Story on Untouchability. The study focuses on the subaltern and Dalit condition of the protagonist, Ram Singh. Using Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, the paper investigates how Ram Singh experiences "double marginalization" in being sandwiched between two systems of caste-based discrimination and his vocation as a manual scavenger. This double identity excludes him from the mainstream Savarna society and creates a clear hierarchy within the Dalit community itself.

The study also discusses the symbolic role of animals in Dalit literature, comparing the innocence of the dead Alsatian dog, Jacky, with the systemic and undeserved suffering of Dalits. It investigates the use of the concepts of purity and pollution as tools employed by upper-caste religious leaders to assert control over society, display power relations and sustain intergenerational oppression through verbal and non-verbal language registers.

Finally, the paper illustrates that though institutional successes such as education do not, in and of themselves, uproot entrenched caste hierarchies, the story ends on a transformative note. The novella subverts established religious authority and offers a potent metaphor for systemic subversion, visibility and the reclamation of subaltern dignity, as exemplified by the scene where Ram Singh eventually performs the funeral rites for the dog, a role traditionally reserved for Brahmins.

Keywords - Dalit Literature, Subaltern, Intersectionality, Double Marginalization, Purity and Pollution, Othering, S.K. Bhanwara.

I. INTRODUCTION

This study aims to analyse the S.K.Bhanwara's, *Dog's Funeral: A Story on Untouchability*. In the text, he meticulously describes the pain undergone by Ram Singh, who belongs to the lower stratum of society. The experiences of Ram Singh are confined not only to him but also to all the Dalits like him. The novella focuses on the social discrimination, othering, miseries, and injustice towards the Dalits. Despite Ram Singh's educational background, caste has been internalised that he never came to the front to defend himself or to speak for himself. This work focuses explicitly on the subaltern, especially the Dalit condition of the protagonist, Ram Singh. The word 'subaltern' was coined by an Italian Marxist Intellectual, Antonio Gramsci, during the 1930s. The word is derived from Latin, where "sub" means "below" and "alternus" means "all other". Initially the word 'subaltern' had a different meaning, which refers to the oppressed position of the working class. But over time, the meaning of the word has completely changed. In the context of Indian history and according to Gayatri Spivak's and Ranajit Guha's definition, 'Subaltern' refers to the people who are oppressed and marginalised and those who don't belong to mainstream society.

2. Role of Animals in Dalit's Life:

Animals in literature and cultural practice often mirror societal hierarchies and prejudices. Certain animals, like cows, are revered, symbolizing purity or sanctity, while others, especially street dogs and pigs, are seen as dirty or polluting. This symbolic association extends to marginalized human communities, those who are collectively cast as "impure" or "polluting" by the dominant culture. By analysing how animals are treated or characterized, one can gain insight into the mechanisms and justification for excluding or degrading entire groups of people. The symbolic use of animals thus becomes a potent language for critiquing systems of social hierarchy.

"The pig, considered impure and unclean in Hinduism, becomes a symbolic representation of the marginalized communities' relegated position as the ones responsible for handling and disposing of society's waste." (Duggal 204). Some animals are considered to be pure in Hinduism, especially the Cows. Because Cow and its urine are considered to be divine, some tend to tease the cow's vagina to make her urinate. Sharankumar Limable, in his autobiographical novel has mentioned about the exploitation of Cows. Though, there were many oxen around, the notion that cow's urine has transformative and purifying properties reflects the reverence and veneration bestowed upon cows. This instance showcase, that certain animal products are considered to be elevated and some or not (Duggal 206). This practice of teasing the animal to urinate for the ritual practices questions the ethical implications of using animals as an object and instrumentalizing them for the needs of humans.

Some Dalits feel that they are treated worse than animals. In Narendra Jadhav's *Untouchables*, the author's father, recalls an incident that encapsulates the trauma of untouchability. He says that, the Mahars were denied the access to drink water from a large vat, but a dog was not denied drinking water from the same vat. Similarly in Bama's *Karukku*, she makes a statement like "Today I am like a mongrel wandering about without a permanent job, nor a regular means to find clothes, food and safe place to live". In Nimgade's *In the Tiger's Shadow*, he says ' *Hai Prabhu, mala pashu kar kimwha pakshi pan mala mahar nako kar!*' (Dear God, make me a beast or make me a bird, but do not make me an untouchable!). (Mukhopadhyay 12). By these statements, one gets to know that the animal metaphors and similes have been internalized by the Dalits and it is used in dehumanizing them.

Since the Dalits are not accepted or allowed to live among the upper caste families, they usually stay in the outskirts of the village or with the lifestocks. So the lines that separate animals from Humans (Dalits) are blurring and there is no clear demarcation between the two (Duggal 203). For many Dalits, livelihoods have traditionally been tied to animals considered unclean or undesirable, such as handling dead cattle, skinning, or cleaning.

In Dalit literature, animals frequently become metaphors for the condition of the marginalized. Stories often depict the suffering of animals as paralleling the pain and neglect Dalits face. By giving agency, voice, or dignity to animals, Dalit writers subtly critique social norms and question the very basis of exclusion. This literary strategy not only evokes empathy but disrupts the assumed boundaries between “us” and “them”, human and animal, pure and impure. Animals thus become effective interlocutors in the struggle for recognition, belonging, and justice.

Similarly, in *Dog's Funeral*, S.K. Bhanwara has shown the suffering of Ram Singh through the death of Jacky. When Pan Singh went in search of the Priest, Ram Singh opened up his side of the story to Anjali. It is through the death of Jacky, did Ram Singh get the opportunity to narrate his lived experiences.

Dog's Funeral, is novella that uses the death of a dog and the struggle for a dignified burial as a lens to explore themes of marginalization, social prejudice, and the demand for dignity. Ram Singh stands out as a deeply human figure whose actions highlight both the pain and persistence of those relegated to society's margins. Although, the Priest kept reiterating the fact that he (Ram Singh) was an Untouchable and cannot be purified by the Ganga, Ram Singh did not seem to be bothered at all. Ram Singh, just wanted to finish his work and go home as he has promised his wife that he would be back home in a few hours. “No, this can't be done. If he does so, the Ganga will get impure.” (Bhanwara 44) When the Priest denies the ‘purification’ of Ram Singh, he doesn't have the logical reasoning for his action. The Priest says, “I don't know how to explain all this. But if Ram Singh touches the Ganga, it will be impure.” (Bhanwara 45)

The denied burial of the dog by Ram Singh, powerfully symbolizes the everyday indignities suffered by the oppressed. The parallel between the innocence of an animal and suffering of Dalits brings into focus the arbitrary nature of impurity and exclusion. Through Jacky, Ram Singh was able to perform the funeral rites and rituals. This act of performing the rituals, accepting the Dalit as he is and being allowed to do tasks that are reserved for a certain group of people (here, Brahmins) is the kind of change that one must aim for, in the society. Without the interference of the Dog and the Monk, Ram Singh's status as an Untouchable would have remained static.

Wendy Doniger, a leading scholar of Hindu mythology whose work illuminates how concepts of purity and impurity shape religious and cultural attitudes, analyses how animals are assigned symbolic roles, with certain creatures revered and others rejected, based on their association with gods or ideas of pollution. Her work helps explain not only religious rituals but also deep-rooted social stratification.

In texts such as the *Rig Veda* and *Brahmanas*, animals appear both as symbols of auspiciousness and bearers of contamination. The cow, for instance, is celebrated for its purity and divinity, while the dog and pig often symbolize pollution. “Hindus see the cow as their mother. A human mother is cremated, but when a cow dies, they need a Mahar to dispose it of” (Duggal 205). Such associations become encoded in ritual rules and have real-world implications for how people and animals are treated. These texts have helped shape, legitimize, and sustain the boundaries that separate “upper” and “lower” not only among animals but among social groups as well.

Throughout the novella, religious figures, most notably the priest, exercise authority in determining what is pure and impure. His decisions are not merely about ritual; they have profound social consequences, regulating who can participate fully in the community. The priest's reversal on the dog's burial exposes the hypocrisy of those who claim to uphold spiritual purity while perpetuating social exclusion. These dynamics replicate larger patterns in society, where access to the sacred often parallels access to social dignity and legitimacy. But sooner, he brought some of his friends and told that family that burying a dog in the banks of Ganga is an insult to his religion. In these two incidents, the upper caste person, the Priest gets to decide whether the burial of a dog should take place or not.

Similarly, in other contexts too, the Brahmins (or the *Savarnas*) get to decide if an animal is pure or not. In Narendra Jadhav's *Untouchables*, dogs are allowed to drink water from the vat where the other people drink, but the outcastes are not allowed to drink. *Rig Veda* portrays dogs (Sarama) as

loyal and faithful. In the *Brahmanas*, composed around the 900 BCE, dogs are portrayed as 'impure eater' or the 'outsider'(Mukhopadhyay 8).

When Hari Prasad and Anjali approach the Priest for performing the rituals, he says that the dog (Jacky) must be purified and then buried near the banks of the Ganga because the touch of Ram Singh 'polluted' it. So, before its burial, it must be purified either by plunging it in the Ganga or by feeding fresh grass to hundred cows. Since his views did not align with Hari Prasad's and Anjali's, they had decided to pay him and asked him to leave the place.

The novella exposes the double standards with which rules and traditions are applied: compassion and reason are momentarily invoked but quickly set aside when social or religious hierarchies feel threatened. This inconsistency is a symbol, of how rules serve the interests of the powerful, not equality or justice. Those who set or interpret rules tend to do so in ways that reinforce their own status, often under the guise of tradition or community welfare. These double standards perpetuate systems of exclusion while simultaneously denying their injustice.

3. Ram Singh: A Doubly Marginalized individual

The word 'Intersectionality' was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw in the year 1989. It is a framework to understand how people have multiple identities that intersect with each other and pave path to exercise some privilege or oppression. This framework helps analyse the patterns of inequalities, discrimination, marginalization, injustices, etc. It emphasizes that people are not defined by a single social category but multiple interconnected identities like, caste, gender, race, disability and class.

Rather than viewing the forms of oppression or privilege in isolation, this theory suggests that identities and associated system of power (racism, sexism, classism) are intertwined with each other. Social inequalities cannot be fully understood through single axis approaches as the individuals live at the intersection of various social categories and these categories results in either vulnerabilities or privileges (Wong 44). The system of power (gender, race, class, caste) keeps intersecting with each other to shape distinct life experiences and distinct identity. The impact of these intersections depends on context and it is these contexts that mitigate or reinforce privilege and oppression in a particular society or institution .

Marginalization is the act of treating someone or something as not so important (Cambridge Dictionary). It is the process by which certain individuals or groups are pushed to the edges or "margins" of society, resulting in their exclusion from full participation in social, economic, political, and cultural life. People who are marginalized often have limited access to resources, opportunities, and rights that are readily available to others. This exclusion can occur because of factors such as race, caste, gender, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or other identity markers.

Dalit marginalization occurs due to the historical or religious roots, the caste system, formalized in ancient Hindu texts, classified people into hierarchical groups and relegated dalits to the 'outside' and considered impure and untouchable. Religious and social norms codified discriminatory practices and denied Dalits basic rights and dignity. Secondly, the socioeconomic structures like the occupational heredity perpetuated social distance and economic insecurity. With the occupational heredity, the rich get richer, the poor gets poorer, which again caused lack of upward social mobility.

There are social and political structure that continue to reinforce and perpetuate caste hierarchies within families, communities, administrative systems and markets. In Bama's autobiographical novel, *Karukku*, she describes the inequalities faced by her in the educational institutions and how she was blamed for the mistakes she never committed. Stigmatization and internalization of inferiority often press Dalits to accept marginal positions to avoid conflict or violence. As a result, the socialization process, media portrayal and communal memory reinforce these divisions.

Double Marginalization occurs when an individual or group is disadvantaged in more than one way, facing overlapping forms of exclusion or discrimination. The doubly marginalized individuals

belong to more than one marginalized groups, the effects are compounded and not simply additive, and this intensifies vulnerability and restricts opportunities further.

In the novella, *Dog's Funeral*, Ram Singh had multiple identities and was marginalized doubly - by his caste and occupation. The *Savarnas* marginalized him for being a Dalit and other Dalits marginalized him for his occupation as a manual scavenger. These two identities of Ram Singh cannot be separated or viewed individually. Because of both his caste and occupation, he is not allowed in certain rituals, practices, etc. Ram Singh is left only with one profession that is manual scavenging. Since, it is considered an 'impure' occupation, he is regarded as dirty and unfit to lead a basic life, as a result excluded in the social interactions or creating networks. Ram Singh is doubly marginalized by his caste and his class or occupation. This intersection of disadvantages exposes him to compounded discrimination, making his situation more challenging than those who face marginalization on a single front. His character demonstrates how social hierarchies intersect to entrench vulnerability and silence, raising important questions about justice and humanity in everyday life.

Ram Singh is a member of a lower caste, which results in his exclusion from mainstream social and religious activities. "Since he has bought the dead dog while bringing it to the river bank, this dog has become impure; polluted" (Bhanwara 44). He is not invited to village ceremonies, is denied access to communal spaces like temples or wells, and is viewed as "impure" by upper-caste members. This reinforces his inferior social standing and blocks his participation in communal life. Even when educated, Ram Singh's achievements are dismissed, upper-caste villagers do not accept his attempts to assert equality or demand respect in village affairs. Their actions convey that caste identity outweighs personal merit or qualifications.

Ram Singh works as a manual scavenger, a job historically forced upon lower-caste groups, especially Dalits. "Even among the Dalits, all do not accept menial or scavenging jobs; only class historically known for scavenging among the Dalits undertake scavenging jobs" (Bhanwara 3). This occupation is considered so "polluting" that it not only degrades him socially but also reinforces boundaries, he is required to clean human waste and is then shunned by the very people he serves. His work exposes him to hazardous conditions, with no safeguards or basic dignity. The same community that relies on his labour refuses to acknowledge his humanity, ignoring his health, wages, and safety.

When the need arises, such as the disposal of the dead dog, Ram Singh is called upon not as a respected villager, but as a "scavenger", his caste and occupation intertwine to define his only value in the eyes of others. He is visible only for menial tasks, invisible when it comes to recognition or rights. His opinions are disregarded, and his role in rituals remains restricted or altogether denied. Despite education and the aspiration to transcend his caste, Ram Singh cannot escape the grip of both social stigma (from his caste) and economic compulsion (need for survival), which force him into hereditary, caste-defined labour. Thus through social exclusion, prejudiced treatment, stigmatized labour, occupational violence and neglect, identity of being visible and invisible, and lack of social mobility, Ram Singh's double marginalization is clearly evident.

Not all the Dalits accept to do manual scavenging as their profession, only a class historically known for scavenging among Dalits undertake the scavenging jobs. When other Dalits are offered these jobs, they immediately get defensive. "They not only refuse to accept the menial jobs offered to them but also react in an offensive manner on being given some offers" (Bhanwara 3). They restrict themselves to their own profession like pottery, artisans, barbering, etc. In the novella, *Dog's Funeral*, when Pan Singh approached a shoe maker, he responded aggressively. "Look here, my profession is to make leather shoes, and slippers. We are not daily-wagers and we don't do such menial work" (Bhanwara 11-12). Similarly when he approached a barber, she replied, "What! Do you think that all people living here are servants? Why don't you go ahead and find the daily wagers? Why spoil my good morning asking silly questions?" (Bhanwara 12). So, it is evident that not Dalits take up menial jobs. Scavenging is meant for certain people - Untouchables, it is carried out by them and are considered 'dirty' and 'polluted'. It is not a choice for them but an only option to lead their lives.

Ram Singh's double marginalization is evident, when the priest doesn't allow him to conduct the funeral rites of the Alsatian dog and suggests the dog's purification in the Ganges because it was 'polluted' by the touch of Ram Singh. "Look, there's a problem. Ram Singh belongs to a scavenging caste- untouchable to other castes. Since he has brought the dead dog while bringing it to the river bank, this dog has become impure- polluted. First, I must purify it." (Bhanwara 44)

Although, Anjali, wife of Hari Prasad, insisted the Priest to 'purify' Ram Singh, Priest never paid any heed to her and dismissed her opinions. The Priest also told that the Ganges would be polluted if Ram Singh (Untouchable) is purified. "*Manusmriti*, an ancient legal text, delineates the rules and regulations governing each varna and outlines the penalties for transgressing caste boundaries" (Sharma 245).

On the other hand, the weavers, potters, leather makers do not speak to the 'Untouchables', as there is a clear hierarchy within the Dalits, like other castes. The manual scavengers are Dalits of Dalits. In U.R. Ananthamurthy's, *Samskara*, there is a clear demarcation between the higher caste and lower caste Brahmins. The protagonist, Praneshacharya, is considered to be high caste (orthodox) Brahmin, learned and knowledgeable, whereas, Naranappa, is considered to be a low caste (rebellious) Brahmin, because he consorts with a lower caste prostitute, Chandri, drinks alcohol, eats meat and is close to his other Muslim friends.

Intersectionality in Dalits can include having complex multiple identities by race, caste, gender, occupation, etc. Ram Singh depicted as belonging to a lower caste or a socially marginalized community. He is not afforded dignity or respect by the upper-caste villagers when it comes to decisions about participation in communal rituals, including the dog's funeral. He faces restriction in the society, persistent discrimination in social interactions and limited say in community affairs, regardless of his feelings or perspective.

Ram Singh performing menial tasks or physical labour as a manual scavenger is economically vulnerable. His income and livelihood depend on upper caste employers, making him less able to speak out against unfair treatment or assert his rights. This economic dependency compounds his social exclusion, reinforcing a cycle where challenging discrimination also means risking survival. In the part 2 of the novella, *Dog's Funeral*, when Pan Singh was told to find a manual scavenger or a person who would be ready to bury Jacky, Ram Singh was brought from a far place. He was told that he would be giving 200 rupees as his remuneration. Even without discussing with Ram Singh, the employee in this case, Hari Prasad has fixed his pay. Ram Singh did not pay any heed to the fix rate. He was stubborn that he wanted to a sum of 1000 rupees as his pay. Ram Singh was sure that he would not accept anything less than the quoted amount, that reflects his dire need of the money and he is responsible to take care of his wife, back at home.

Due to his caste-based marginalization and social marginalization, Ram Singh's experience is too harsh. His voice and agency are severely curtailed, even more so than those facing a single layer of exclusion. When issues like the dog's funeral arise, he becomes both visible and invisible. Visible, as an instrument to solve a 'problem' and invisible, as a person with emotions and rights. Historically, Dalits are vulnerable to violence and atrocities and even in the contemporary times, 2025, it remains unchanged.

Identity is the unique set of characteristics, qualities, beliefs, values, and roles that define who an individual or group is. It encompasses both personal traits such as personality, memories, and experiences and social affiliations like gender, ethnicity, religion, occupation, and cultural group. Identity provides a sense of self-continuity connecting who we are, how we see ourselves, and how others recognize us. "In a traditional set-up, untouchable identity is considered and treated as fixed and static, born with the birth, and gets transferred to the next generation." (Kumar 17)

Personal identity is the distinctive qualities, traits, and values that make one individual different from another. Social Identity is the part of a person's self-concept derived from membership in social groups, such as nationality, caste, religion, gender, or profession. Sense of Self, Identity gives

individuals a feeling of personal unity, direction, and meaning in life, as well as a behavioural compass that guides actions and choices (Hog 503).

In the novella, *Dog's Funeral*, Ram Singh's socially identity is completely low and damaged because of his caste and occupation. Aniket Jaaware in his work, *Practising Caste: On Touching and Not Touching*, rightly puts in words, the fate of an Untouchable is being created even before their birth. "The caste of a baby, however, is determined even before it is conceived." (Jaaware 149)

Identity is formed through an ongoing process called identity formation or identity development. This process is shaped by both internal and external influences throughout a person's life, especially during adolescence. Identity is dynamic and can evolve over time as experiences and environments change. Internal factors include Personality and Temperament, interests and values and life experiences. Similarly, the external factors include family, peer groups, culture, society, social groups and opportunities (Devos et al. 160).

"The unborn already have a caste. It is assumed that it will be "of" the same caste as its parents" (Jaaware 149). Just like a king's child is going to be a prince or a princess, which is determined before their birth, a Dalit child will, undoubtedly, be a Dalit. This why it seems difficult for the caste to be abolished. "Caste, it seems is not biodegradable" he notes that there is a 'category' for people with double sex- transgender, but for there is no category called 'transcaste; it only has "outcaste".

Ram Singh has an identity, one shaped by his social, economic, and cultural background. His sense of self is a combination of personal traits and social labels imposed by the community. In the novella, his identity is multiple and layered, not limited to just one aspect such as his name or occupation. The overlapping Identities of Ram Singh are caste identities, Economic or occupation identity, community identity and gender identity. Ram Singh belongs to a lower caste group, which defines his social status and how others perceive and treat him. He is a manual scavenger, who performs menial tasks for the upper caste families, which makes him economically disadvantaged. As a villager within a tight-knit rural community, he shares local customs, dialect and collective experiences. As a male in a patriarchal environment, certain roles and expectations are attached to him, although these do not shield him from other marginalizing factors.

These overlapping identities of Ram Singh are often cause by Caste, economic status, community membership and gender. Being both a lower caste individual and economically poor intensifies his marginalization. Even among the other poor villagers, his caste sets him apart, restricting his opportunities and exposing him to discrimination and exclusion. While he is a member of the community, his caste status means he cannot participate equally in rituals or decision making. He experiences both belonging, as a resident, and exclusion, because of his caste, creating internal and external conflicts. The place in the village where Ram Singh stays is very dirty and unclean. His street is comparatively narrower than other streets where the upper caste families reside. Although his male identity may afford him some authority at home or among his peers, it does not override the strong stigma attached to his caste. He might bear greater pressure to remain silent and compliant, reinforcing his subordinate social standing even among men. This is evident when Priest is having a heated argument between the Monk and Anjali, Ram Singh decides to keep quiet as he feels it is his unnecessary and is tired of fighting over this matter of caste. No matter how many times he raised his voice, he bounced back to his original position of being an 'Untouchable' and it kept him silenced.

Despite Ram Singh's educational attainment, he couldn't raise his social mobility and move upwards in the social ladder exposes the deep rooted nature of structural marginalization in society. Since Ram Singh resides in a village, his caste identity remains as a primary marker of social worth and acceptance. Even with formal education, being from a lower caste overshadows credentials. Villagers and employers often consider him as an "inferior", denying him respect, roles of responsibility, or participation in rituals and community decisions.

Stereotypes about the intellectual capacity and value of lower-caste individuals persist, making many question the legitimacy of his degree or his right to social mobility. Prejudice may manifest subtly, through exclusion and patronizing attitudes or overtly, through denial of jobs, roles, or entry

into certain social spaces. Access to jobs that match his qualifications is constrained, as hiring practices are often influenced by social ties and recommendations, networks dominated by upper-caste individuals. Social capital that is connections, references, and trust built over generations, remains inaccessible, curtailing chances of upward mobility. If he would have been hired or recognized for his degree, Ram Singh may experience token inclusion that is being showcased as an 'exception', in a negative way, without true empowerment or leadership. Persistent isolation and lack of acceptance can make it emotionally and psychologically difficult to assert one's identity and aspirations. Rural settings, In particular, uphold tradition and hierarchy more tightly, with little recognition given to individual achievement when it conflicts with inherited status.

Ram Singh's situation illustrates that education alone cannot overcome entrenched systems like caste. For true social mobility, changes must occur not just at the level of individual qualifications, but across community attitudes, institutional practices, and access to networks and resources. Social identity in such contexts continues to overpower personal merit, making upward movement extremely challenging, no matter how hard one works to improve oneself. Thus Ram Singh could not raise his social standing despite having a B.A degree because of the caste based discrimination, social stigma, prejudice, limited opportunities, limited networks, tokenism, isolation and inertia of traditional structures.

According to the Mariam-Webster, the 'Other' is defines as "Being the one remaining or not included". Othering is the process by which a dominant group (the "in-group") defines another group (the "out-group") as fundamentally different, inferior, or alien. This distinction is maintained through stigma, negative stereotypes, and the construction of social hierarchies. Othering serves to reinforce the identity and cohesion of the dominant group, while keeping the "other" marginalized and excluded from the benefits, privileges, and full participation in society. The concept of identity is a dynamic and multifaceted construct, fundamental to how individuals relate to their environment and others. Defined as the framework through which we associate with various entities, individuals, groups, objects, and environments. Identity is a unique and evolving variable for each person. It adapts across different life stages, with these evolving facets collectively shaping a distinctive individual identity (Ahmed 112).

In the context of India's caste system, the privileged groups that is Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and often upwardly mobile shudras occupy the in-group position. Untouchables or Dalits are systematically cast as the 'other', socially impure, polluting and outside the bounds of accepted society. Othering perpetuates power and neglect as well. The *Savarnas* get to define what is 'normal' and desirable, casting Dalits as undesirable and impure. This not only justifies their own privileges but also naturalises the marginalization of untouchables. "For the Brahmins, they could enjoy privileges easily from the simple fact of being being in a certain family" (Jaaware 151).

The process involves seeing Dalits as fundamentally different, sometimes less than humans, thus justifying their exclusion, neglect, and even violence against them. Laws, customs, temple access and social occasions, all encode and reproduce the othering, making it difficult for even educated Dalits to change their status. As long as Dalits "make no noise", their suffering is ignored and the *Savarnas* feel no shame for the harshness of the system. Compassion is withheld or patronizingly dispensed, not extended as genuine solidarity. Thus because of his intersecting and multiple identities, he finds it difficult to escape from the deep rooted caste based discrimination. "Caste system is the backbone of the Hindu religion" (Jaaware 153). Just by educational qualifications, one cannot free themselves from caste. It requires a lot of acceptance and understanding from *Savarnas* too.

4. Linguistic Stratification

Language acts as a powerful indicator of both internalized status and external power. In *Dog's Funeral*, Ram Singh's language is characterized by humility, tone of politeness and insecurity. He employs simple, indirect speech, and apologetic tones, a linguistic manifestation of generations of learned deference and systemic oppression. His words are often measured, careful, and deferential, as he attempts to avoid confrontation or offense. When Anjali raised her voice against the discrimination

caused by the Priest, Ram Singh asked Anjali not to take pain for him. In lines like, “*Bahin Ji*, please do not take pain because of me. Follow the Priest’s guidelines and get your work done” (Bhanwara 49), one gets to experience and feel the pain and inferiority that has been internalized by Ram Singh.

In stark contrast, the priest communicates in a tone of authority, confidence, dominance and ritual precision. His speech is filled with commands, assertiveness, and formal phrases, demonstrating not just ritual expertise but also social power. “If I decide to reject your assignment of conducting you dog’s funeral, what will you do?” (48), one can observe the sense of dominance and authority in the tone of the Priest. Even his casual remarks carry the weight of one who is used to being listened to and obeyed. This contrast is not accidental. Language in the novella, *Dog’s Funeral*, is a mirror of social hierarchy. The difference in their tone is formed due to the generations of oppression and dominance which has been internalized by both the parties (Brahmins and Dalits). Ram Singh’s suppressed, hesitant voice highlights his position on the margins, while the priest’s assertive tone reaffirms his centrality and dominance within both the sacred and social spheres.

In literary terms, Bhanwara uses this differential linguistic register to make visible the deeply ingrained power dynamics of caste. The division in language usage goes beyond semantics, it brings out the lived experience of inequality and the embodied realities of exclusion and authority.

Body language of the characters in *Dog’s Funeral* is as revealing as spoken language, offering non-verbal commentary on the distribution of power and status. Ram Singh’s body language is shaped by lifelong experiences of marginalization, he avoids direct eye contact, stands at a physical remove from those in authority, and keeps his posture stooped or withdrawn. His movements are cautious, hesitant, and calculated to display respect and avoid misinterpretation, manifestations not just of personal disposition, but of ingrained survival strategies in a hostile social environment. In section three of the novella, *Dog’s Funeral*, when Pan Singh was asked to look for a Priest, Ram Singh just was lying down in a corner, he would just open his eyes occasionally. “Ram Singh was taking a nap in the corner. He was opening his eyes intermittently to update himself about the situation” (Bhanwara 36). This action of his doesn’t just show his tiredness, but also his powerlessness in the society.

The priest, by comparison, demonstrates a body language filled with confidence and control. He stands upright, gestures expansively, assumes positions of centrality during rituals, and often addresses others from a position of physical and symbolic elevation. His movements are assured and authoritative. His learned silence and his way of turning his head around when confronted with logical questions, suggest his unwillingness to let go of his caste identity. “He turned his head around and replied, The whole Ganga will be impure” (Bhanwara 45). Physical cues like posture, gesture, and spatial orientation in the novella serve to further codify the social hierarchy enacted in speech and action.

Ram Singh’s deferential demeanor is a product of social conditioning and structural violence, whereas the priest’s commanding presence is an embodiment of inherited and institutionalized authority. Body language in *Dog’s Funeral*, operates as another “language” of caste, one that, consciously or unconsciously, signals who is to lead, who is to serve, who is to be visible, and who must remain invisible and silent.

In the novella, *Dog’s Funeral*, Ram Singh is given the voice to speak his experiences. He had had a warm conversation with Anjali Sharma about his struggles, his children, education system, dowry demands etc. It is through this conversation, one gets to know Ram Singh’s story. His body language, other villagers and the place where he lives, describe a lot about him. The society considered him ‘impure’ but after revealing his part of the story, it is understood that he is rich by heart, strong and resilient to stand up for himself.

Jacky, the Alsatian dog is the central focus of the novella, *Dog’s Funeral*, it is because of Jacky, the story progresses. Jacky is portrayed both as a pure, kind soul and an impure being. When Ram Singh demanded his remuneration, he keeps asking the family members, to think how Jacky had been

like one among them in their family. He always had been a support and a happy place. In Uttar Pradesh, there is a big statute built solely for dogs, honoring its courage and spontaneity.

When the Priest is asked to bury Jacky with the final rituals, he refuses to perform it because he considers the dog 'polluted' as he was brought by Ram Singh, an Untouchable. Later on, after he was sent back, he comes back with his friends to deny the burial of Jacky in the banks of Ganga stating that burying a dog in the banks of holy Ganga is an insult to his religion. Considering an animal 'pure' or 'impure' is dictated by the Brahmins or the Upper Castes and this double standard act of the priest serves as an evidence for it.

From being a Dalit, Ram Singh's status elevated to that of a priest (not in terms of social mobility or financial status) by performing the rituals with whatever *mantras* and *shlokas* he knew. This positive ending of the novella happened because of the dead dog and it serves as a metaphor for Ram Singh's life. Jacky was not considered 'polluted' or as an 'insult' before the Priest was sent back, as soon as his religious status was threatened, Jacky was considered to be an 'insult' to his religion. Similarly, Ram Singh was visible to other as a solution to bury Jacky but his emotions and basic rights seemed to be vanished and invisible.

Overall, Jacky has unintentionally helped break the caste system (its rigid rules). Since, the performance of rituals were given to Ram Singh at the end especially in front of the Priest, marks a successful and empowering culmination of the dog's funeral. Initially the Priest's dialogues were very authoritative and orthodoxy. From insisting caste discrimination, to accepting Ram Singh's way of performing the funeral, Priest knew where he went wrong. "His caste identity and stigma attached to it will remain forever" (Bhanwara 76). "Therefore, I have no objection to Ram Singh's performing the dog's funeral" (Bhanwara 83).

CONCLUSION

The protagonist of the novella, *Dog's Funeral: A Story on Untouchability*, Ram Singh, is an Untouchable. He was not able to move ahead in terms of social mobility or escape from the complex web of caste system because it was internalized by him and reinforced by the people of other castes (including the Dalits). Ram Singh in his previous job drank a glass of water in a tumbler which is used by all the workers, when he was thirsty and this resulted in Ram Singh losing his job. The other Dalits did not allow an 'Untouchable' to drink from the common tumbler (Bhanwara 35). This act of drinking water is a basic need and he couldn't fetch it for himself. When he tried going against the norm, he was pushed back to square one reiterating the fact that he was an Untouchable.

Alongside, he was also denied jobs and did not have much networks with other villagers. Even when he tried making connections, he had a strong thought that people hated his caste. "People hate our caste" (Bhanwara 35). Despite all his struggles, he made his children get good education but it did not help Ram Singh. He tried saving up all his money and resources for his children, but his children did not bother to look after him. The social stigma and prejudice that came along with Ram Singh's birth, ended up isolating him and making his situation worse. Just by having a B.A degree (or education), he could not stand up for himself and it wasn't useful for him in terms of evading caste discrimination especially in a place dominated by the upper caste people. Even after he was educated, he was given the role of a manual scavenger. Education is seen as a 'ladder' for people for upward social mobility and it can break free from the taboo attached with a person's birth. Undoubtedly, Education is needed, but education alone is not enough to dismantle Caste discrimination.

Jacky, the Alsatian dog was dead. It is because of this incident that Ram Singh was called. He was called, not to perform the rituals but to bury the dead dog. When Pan Singh was asked to find out someone who could bury the dog, he approached few people before Ram Singh. He asked them they were willing to bury the dog, but when he approached Ram Singh, he did not ask him if he was willing to do the job. Pan Singh just assumed that these menial, 'impure' jobs are meant and done by people like Ram Singh.

Jacky, the dog is a metaphor for Ram Singh's life because, when the Priest was asked to bury the dog, he informs Hari and Anjali that, it cannot be buried because it was touched by Ram Singh. After few minutes when the Priest's social identity and religious reputation was threatened, he informs the family that the burial cannot take place in the banks of the holy Ganga because it is considered as an insult to his religion. Similarly, Ram Singh was excluded from being jobs, basic amenities, etc. He was the only 'solution' to bury the dead dog. Ram Singh is both visible and invisible to the society. He is visible as a solution to do the scavenging jobs, and invisible about his feelings, emotions and opinions. Both Ram Singh and Jacky (dog) were taken for granted. The rituals, traditions, and rules are made according to the convenience of the Brahmins. It is they, who get to decide what is pure and impure.

In, texts like *Rig Veda*, Dogs are portrayed as loyal and faithful gatekeepers (Sarama), but in *Brahmanas* composed in 900 BCE, Dogs were portrayed as 'dirty' and 'impure'. This differentiation of Dogs' representation symbolize the socio-cultural hierarchies and systemic oppression. Some Dalits are compared to dogs and in autobiographies like *Karukku*, *Untouchables*, *The Outcastes: Akkarmashi*, by Bama, Narendra Jadhav and Sharankumar Limbale, they feel that being born as a dog, bird or beast would be better than to be born as an 'Untouchable', because they were treated worse than animals and it has been internalized that being born as an animal would not be as painful as being born as an 'Untouchable'.

Rituals are a vital part of Hinduism, it promotes communal togetherness, unity and happiness. But these rituals are supposed to be performed only the Brahmins. Rituals are given utmost importance in Hinduism, thus these 'respectable' professions or duties are taken up by them keeping them on a higher pedestal. It gives them the authority to include or exclude people from participating the rituals. By default, during the ritual process the Dalits are othered because they are considered to be doing 'impure' or 'dirty' jobs.

The Brahmins have privilege just by being born to a Brahman family and this makes them powerful, they're introduced to many opportunities and networks, etc thus it is easier for them to lead a happy and satisfied life. Their language has a tone of authority and dominance because, they were placed in the top tier of the hierarchy. The Priest in the novella too follow the same pattern. He is dominating and threatening in his conversations. Whereas, the Dalits have a polite and kind tone while speaking because, they have internalized, generations of suppression.

Although Ram Singh was othered and oppressed, the novella concludes on a positive note by making Ram Singh perform the rituals for Jacky. He did whatever he knew and the Priest too understood that it wrong from his part. Ram Singh, through the Dog's funeral was elevated to the status of Priest. These kind of positive changes make the world a better place to live. Education and Inter-Caste marriage are essential in breaking free from the clutches of Caste system but it is not the only solution for it. A little acceptance from the Brahmins can go a long way and help the Dalits to lead a respectable and happy life.

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