

Ramakrishnan describes the custom of the clan allows any man to approach any woman that day. The novel is full of a gaze that sees the tribal as the feminine other. In *Maveli Manram*, this gaze operates in a different way. Here, the distinction of the two spaces, Malimala or the space of oppression and Maveli Manram (meaning the clan of Maveli) or the place of freedom is achieved by the reversal of the gaze. In the former the tribal women were seduced by the feudal lords whereas in the latter, as though such simple inversions change the power structure, the tribal men claim the wives of feudal lords. The relation to the tribal community in these two accounts is also ambivalent. It has to be preserved because it is the “monuments” of the history of modern man but at the same time it falls outside “the modern” for its time-lag. For K J baby the very practice of novel writing becomes a matter of preserving the ruining culture. In short, the “tribal” is an inevitable part of modern sensibility and it becomes the other by which the modern self can place itself. *Ponni* provides another important insight to the operations of space. The novel clearly demarcates the tribal space from the office of the Sinna Durai. Sinna Durai works for the “development” of the tribal people and also bridges the gap between the state and the community. He is very sympathetic to them. The Muduga-Irula conflict and the developments after the ban on burning of forests get resolved at the office of Sinna Durai. In many respects, Sinna Durai's office represents the influence of the rationale of secular democracy over an irrational mass of people. The relationship between Sinna Durai and the Adivasi communities is very cordial and they respect each other. Sinna Durai's understanding of the communities is that they are not-yet-citizens and he represents the emancipatory work that the state has to carry out. Here also the strict division of these two spaces equips us to understand how both these were mutually constitutive. In *Maveli Manram* this configuration of the space takes another course. Here, the fundamental division is on the basis of feudal oppression. Kaippadan and Eera want to escape from Malimala, the place where the feudal lords oppress them, to the Maveli Manram where peace exists and servitude is an unknown word. The whole novel is a struggle towards the attainment of this. Kaippadan once tells Eera that in the land of landlords the lords decide what they should do, but as they enter the new place they will be free to decide what they should do. The novel finally leads them to that place, but unfortunately they realize that it was only an illusion, even as they continue the striving. Baby's preoccupation with the culture, myths and songs of these communities presuppose a romantic existence for them. But reading these two novels together points to the coexistence of romanticisation with the instrumental rationality in Sinna Durai's logic of emancipatory work. An important point here is that “the modern” and its other are not essential categories. The novels discussed here can be read in terms of how the sense of modernity in Kerala was a construct of these temporal divisions and spatial imaginations. The modern sensibility does not exist in itself, but depends upon, or is really an effect of such differentiations. The

recent Adivasi self assertion and the shifts in political representation it has effected have questioned this social and historical formation. Such claims may be a beginning to rethink the current certitude regarding our democratic practices.

Endnotes:

- i. This paper is a modified version of my M. A. dissertation titled “Novel as Ethnography: Tribal Discourse and Identity in *Maveli Manram*, *Ponni* and *The Headman of the Little Hill*” submitted to Pondicherry University, Puducherry in 2008.
- ii. Ethnography is a research methodology located within the discipline of anthropology. Martyn Hamersley and Paul Atkinson describe ethnography as follows: “a particular or set of methods which in its most characteristic form ... involves the ethnographer participating overtly or covertly in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions – in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues that are the focus of the research.”

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Gopal Guru's Egalitarianism and the Social Sciences: Theorizing Experiences or Experiencing Theory?

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Abstract: This study presents a critique of Gopal Guru's "Egalitarianism and the Social Sciences" that focuses on the necessity of the edifice of Dalit theory being built by the Dalits, for the Dalits. It narrates how the hierarchy of the Twice of the Top Born (TTB) has been extended to academics where it operates deviously in the guise of condescending conceptions of the subaltern. The constant theorizing of the TTB deprives the Dalit's opportunities to critique themselves and strengthens the notion of *interpretative communities* as a policing academy. It comes across that though the theorizing of Dalit experience is supposed to invert the dialectical pair Brahmin/Shudra, it rather enforces it thereby strengthening power structures. The validity of a subjective theory and the denial of an objective unbiased one is brought into question. Guru foregrounds the justification of the egalitarian principle for critiquing the practice of social sciences, and poses the principle as subversive. The history of the Brahmin/Shudra hierarchy in the intellectual domain as put forward by Gopal Guru functions parallel to Marxist class nature of Art –Klassovost. After analysing the main points and counterarguments pertaining to the theorizing of experiences, the paper arrives at a conclusion as to the validity of Guru's argument in favouring subjective criticism over objective criticism.

Keywords: Egalitarianism, Social Sciences, Dalit theory, Gopal Guru, Dalit experience or theory, Dalit lived experiences.

The Cracked Mirror presents broken images of attempts to marry theory and lived experiences that hitherto have been often perceived as divorced dichotomies. Gopal Guru expresses in his essay "How Egalitarian are the Social Sciences in India" how social sciences are divided into empirically inferiorized and the critically privileged domain of knowledge. From the last sixty years, academic experience within the Indian social science circuit has been placed within the hands of a privileged few giving rise to a cultural hierarchy: the elite theoretical pundits who are presumed to be endowed with a reflective capacity and people with empirical experiences who are deemed as the subaltern. It comes across that though the theorizing of Dalit experience is supposed to invert the dialectical pair Brahmin/Shudra, it rather enforces it thereby strengthening power structures. It functions parallel to Said's notion of the Orient who is constructed as the putative object, by the West and for the West. The practice of the TTB underlines Foucault's assumption of how power is constituted in and through discourses; and how knowledge is born out of the critical relationship between the ontology of the subject and the object. Sarukkai sums up Guru's view of theory thus: theory is based on experience and universal reason, and "theory is to be felt, is to embody suffering and pain, is to relate the epistemological with the

emotional, that is to bring reason and emotion together” (quoted in Satyanarayana 400). The question arises whether emotion can enter theory, and whether theory can be subjective. The objectivity of the same is lost. The validity of a subjective theory, and the denial of an objective unbiased one is brought into question. The question also arises how well theory can depict emotions or express lived experiences. “Jürgen Habermas, for instance, is often cited as an example of a philosopher whose theory is legitimized by its distance from experience. This view is predicated on the dichotomy between theory and experience, and it rules out and delegitimizes the role of experience in the construction of theory” (qtd. in Satyanarayana 398).

The first section of Gopal Guru's essay deals with the justification of the egalitarian principle for critiquing the practice of social sciences. He asserts how it offers a moral opportunity to the Dalits and also endows them with the capacity to analyze the theorizing space of the elite. Furthermore, it may render the boundaries of social science more flexible. This concept of the theorizing TTB may be likened to Stanley Fish's notion of *interpretative communities* as a response to experience. The major criticism against this concept was that it would reinstall the academy as a policing force. Further, what is deemed correct for many not be necessarily right. It would put the principles of establishing right and wrong within the hands of an esteemed few.

Guru foregrounds the significance of the egalitarian principle. Firstly, the egalitarian principle would question the stance as to why some are privileged to do only theory and would question assumptions like why 'one has as innate ability to only do theory,' 'doing theory is art of one's natural disposition' and one is privileged to do theory because 'he been born from the thinking head of pure bodies.' Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* was probably built on similar lines where Devadatta stands for the head, and Kapila the body. Karnad endeavours to invert the dialectical pair in his play that is very evident even in the title. Secondly, Gopal Guru interrogates the hierarchy questioning the assumption that “some are born with a theoretical spoon in their mouth and the majority with the empirical pot around their neck” (Guru, 2012, p. 11). The analogy of the spoon points to the silver spoon of the privileged few, and that of the pot alludes to the pot tied around the neck of the untouchables during the Peshwa rule in nineteenth century Maharashtra. So just as the subaltern were not allowed to relieve themselves openly, it poses as an even more disturbing scenario as they are not allowed to express themselves in public. Arundhati Roy states in “The Doctor and the Saint:” “The practice of untouchability, cruel as it was—(the Mahars for example, the caste to which Ambedkar belonged, had to tie brooms to their waists to sweep away their “polluting” footprints, and hang pots around their necks to collect their spit)—was the performative, ritualistic end of the practice of caste. The real violence of caste was the denial of entitlement: to land, to wealth, to knowledge, to equal opportunity” (Roy). Thirdly, the egalitarian principle would question epistemological

imperialism and enable them to destroy the inherent epistemic violence in the system itself. It would empower them to explore new epistemological territories that pertain to the Dalit universe. In such a stance, anybody who follows the ground rules, procedures and protocols devised by the 'gatekeepers' of social sciences could enter the zone of knowledge. The Dalits would beat the TTB at their own rules and regulations as Michael de Certeau asserts in *The Practice of Everyday Life* with reference to the Spanish colonization over Indigenous Indian Cultures: they used the representations that were imposed on them, made something else of them. They subverted from within, metaphorized the dominant order, and made it function in another register. They diverted them without leaving it (Certeau, 1984, p. 32). What seems problematic about this assumption is when Guru claims "it would put moral pressure on the modernist to keep off some fields of knowledge that might get better intellectual treatment from others" (Guru, 2012, p. 11). However, this conjecture on his part, in fact, adds to the original hierarchy.

The egalitarian principle is subversive in various ways. It would question unequal treatment and the idea that intellectual positions in some fields must be reserved for the experts. Guru seems to hint at that while superficially reservations are made for the Dalits, what actually transpires is an inverse system of reservation for the elite. Secondly, it would not endorse rigid ground rules, procedures and protocols that are not definitive but rather delimiting in nature, and offers a promise to the culturally ostracized. Guru foregrounds how this aspect may help fight 'aloof intellectuality.' Thirdly, this kind of egalitarianism ensures the stock of theories and classifications are equally available for all for their use as well as 'misuse'. The word 'misuse' is utilized by the author in a rhetorical stance, for only if one knows to use it well enough can one misuse it. Guru claims how young insights may enrich the range of the discourse. The egalitarian principle would therefore keep a check on the caricaturing of the Dalits and the Adivasis or Bahujans. Even patronage that wore the guise of the munificent was practised in a condescending manner so as to lower their self esteem and humiliate them. Guru's voice "should serve as warnings to enthusiasts like Rege, Rawat, Nigam, myself and scores of non Dalits anxious to play progressive parts in the dalit cause, but unintentionally tripping on our own undying caste selves. Rather than using dalit as perspective and denying the task of editing *The Dalit* or a *Seminar* issue on dalit(s) to dalits, we would do better to heed Ambedkar's suggestion and say: 'Let us do something to change the Touchable Hindu'" (Anand, 2006).

Guru argues that social science practice in India is exclusive and undemocratic in nature. The end destroys the means and vice versa. A glaring instance is the apex court with its ruling out subaltern objections as absurd and idiosyncratic at worst and emotional, descriptive-empirical and polemical at best" (Guru, 2012, p. 14). Bridgehead

methodology is adopted by the authorities to silence the nonconformist voices. Therefore, blind justice does not function; rather, the law becomes blind to justice.

History and social context have a pivotal role to play in this categorization of the intellectual elite and the Dalits who were not attributed with a reflective capacity. In India, the artisan castes were forced to deal with labour processes with innovative knowledge systems. The Shudras according to Manu are born from the leg, and hence deficient in terms of their capacity to think. Owing to this factor, groups like the Dalit were restricted to the manual aspects of work processes. This perspective of Guru falls in line with the Theory of *Klassavost* in Marxist theory or the class nature of art that claims how the intellectual processes and material processes of man were unified during the early processes of history. The advent of capitalism restricted the creative and reflective works to the capitalists, and the manual works to the labourers. The capitalists deterred the proletariat from widening their intellectual horizons. Functioning on a parallel, in the Indian context, they were forced to restrict their performances to scavenging and sanitization. As consequence, the repressed creative expressions took form in literature, but the intellectual aspect remained side-lined. "Kancha Ilaiah made a provocative observation that the revolutionary writers (Telugu writers of Maoist orientation) should stop writing literature. Instead, they should take up scavenging, an occupation assigned to the untouchables, and the Dalits, who have life experience, should write literature. Pointing out that the revolutionary writers were all upper castes, the majority of whom were Brahmins, Ilaiah publicly marked the caste identity of the revolutionary writers and foregrounded caste-based social division in this literary discussion. Ilaiah's proposal to reverse the social roles and to value "authentic" life experience attracted a lot of criticism. He was accused of advocating reverse caste discrimination" (Satyanarayana, 2013, pp. 400-401).

Destigmatized occupations were imperative for the Dalits for acquiring intellectual calibre and confidence, according to Guru. Another consequence of confining themselves to sheer mechanical pursuits was the struggle for the time to intellectually reflect, and the lack of freedom. Only those with freedom and economic security could pursue philosophy and theory in the formal sense of the terms. Feedback from liberal interlocutors, support from institutions with strong traditions of solid theoretical research and financial support may not suffice (Guru, 2012, p. 16). They are inadequate, and do not guarantee jobs suited to widen the Dalits' intellectual horizons. Guru points to the instance of Ambedkar, who for instance, realized the same and went abroad detaching himself from the constraints of working class tenement life. This example of Ambedkar makes one ponder upon the concept of the *choice of lived experiences* that has been hitherto contested with regards to non-Dalits who write about Dalit experiences. For instance, writers like

Arundhati Roy have been questioned as to her authority to write about Dalits though she was a part of lived experiences with the Dalits. Critics term that such writers had a choice and did not do it owing to necessity. Ajay Gudavarthy states how Dalit scholars argued that the uniqueness of their claims rests on the exclusivity of this experience – an experience that cannot be replicated. Sarukkai asserts how “the live experiences of the Dalits is not about sharing their lifestyles, living with them and being with them, but being them in the sense that you cannot be anything else...lived experience is not about freedom of experience but about the lack of freedom in experience” (Gudavarthy, 2013, p. 101). Nevertheless, when one resorts to the same out of choice but not owing to inevitability, one actually is an inch taller as it does not occur out of compulsion. Furthermore, instances like Ambedkar, of Dalits living abroad or studying in foreign universities, and coming back with the choice of returning to 'lived experiences' also points to the concept of the *choice of lived experiences* that is not exclusive for non-Dalits.

The Shudras according to Manu are born from the leg and hence are deficient in terms of their capacity to think. Though the social structure is described in terms of the part and whole, it is in no way a synecdochical existence: the part does not stand for the whole here. These accumulated cultural inequalities have reinforced and strengthened these power structures. Guru ascertains how with religious sanction, it has been conveniently naturalized within folk consciousness. Critics like Dilip Chitre rationalize the harsh experiences of Saint Tukaram who was, in keeping with the trends of the time, denied rights in the religious or literary arena just because he was not born in a Brahmin family (Sharma, 2009, p. 52) Guru is right in claiming this, for even Rama, the righteous had denied enlightenment to Sambooka; or as in legend, Drona had denied the same to Ekalavya. Gandhi's conceptualization of a Ramrajya strengthens these hierarchies, according to Arundhati Roy. Gandhi had never denounced or renounced the concept of the Varna system in his writings, according to her. In fact, his earlier writings actually advocated the same. “Caste is another name for control. Caste puts a limit on enjoyment. Caste does not allow a person to transgress caste limits in pursuit of his enjoyment. That is the meaning of such caste restrictions as inter-dining and inter-marriage... These being my views I am opposed to all those who are out to destroy the Caste System” (quoted in Roy). Twenty five years later, there was a change in his attitude towards the lower caste though he never wholly gave up the concept of the caste system. On the other hand, the Dalits where struggling with a very idea of a home, leave alone the ideal of Ramrajya. “In 1931, when Ambedkar met Gandhi for the first time, Gandhi questioned him about his sharp criticism of the Congress (which, it was assumed, was tantamount to criticizing the struggle for the homeland). 'Gandhiji, I have no Homeland,' was Ambedkar's famous reply. 'No Untouchable worth the name will be proud of this land'" (qtd. in Roy). The endorsement of Indian and foreign scholars added insult to injury, according to Guru.

One is P.V. Kane who argued that Brahmins were the founders of the Indian philosophy. In the same vein, Louis Dumont avers that Brahmins were the creators of value and different branches of knowledge. Both the Brahmins and Buddha resorted to reasoning, though people like Ambedkar and Sharad Patil may find the latter more practical. Brahminism, Ambedkar said, "is the very negation of the spirit of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" (qtd. in Das). The elite as postulated by Guru as the TTB (Top of the Twice Born) have gained edge over the Dalits and Bahujans owing to a number of reasons. First of all, they did not have access to modern education from the imperialists, and ventured to Western countries though it went against their religious tenets. Princely states and the colonial state were magnanimous enough to bestow fellowships upon them. Their stint with premier institutions like Cambridge, Oxford, Harvard, etc. lifted them above the empire of empirical research that was left to the Dalits. However, of recent, institutions like Oxford and Harvard have become hospitable to Dalits and their issues. Therefore, the basic aim in such a stance as echoed by Guru, and as stated by Foucault is not isolating the empirical conditions that isolate the subject, but to comprehend what determines the subject, and more significantly who determines the subject.

Guru claims that institutions' obsession with modernity has undermined the egalitarian principle with the elite managing to secure positions in globally operating academic networks pushing others to relatively less attractive institutions in India. They do not pass the modernist test and waste away in empiricism. In such a context, central bodies such as the University Grants Commissions (UGC) and the Indian Council of Social Research (ICSSR) may function as a panacea to their ills. "The dilemmas of Dalits before becoming a thinker or theorist lies in their social inclusion or exclusion related to education in general and higher education in particular. As a result, the process of becoming a dalit theorist is essential for the registering of their voices, but the fundamental question is to address the forms of inclusion/ exclusion. Scholastic enclosures on exclusion, theory building is superficial and avoids the basic Dalit issues related to education" (Neelakandan & Patil, 2012, p. 96). The high priests in theory who attempt to stick on to the empirical jargon of these intellectuals verging on Anglo-Saxon vocabulary further undermines the confidence of the Dalits, who also have their grammar mistakes other linguistic inconsistencies pointed out in public. Due to their 'shared habitus' the Dalits are isolated. Even though the Dalit has a challenging insightful position, the crushing derision bogs him down. These intellectuals restrict Gramsci to the elite though it goes against the very essence of Gramsci himself, and contributes to cultural hegemony or Marx's concept of social alienation or estrangement of people from their human nature (*Gattungswesen*) particularly in terms of their capacity to think and reflect. The intellectual exercise of these intellectuals is based on the data collected by the Dalits during their empirical endeavours. The empirical conditions of the Dalits function as a base on which they establish a

career. Disraeli had mentioned in his *Tancred*: The East is a Career (for the West) (qtd. in Said 13). Gramsci states how the subjected also contribute to cultural hegemony by submitting to the same. Likewise, theory does not attract the Dalits as a “responsibility based on sacrifice that the Dalits have to make in terms of spiritual rather than temporal power” (Guru, 2012, p. 21). The ensuring and encouraging of ground rules and terminology by the social sciences further ensnares the Dalits. What needs to be insisted upon is a strategic distinction as propounded by Gramsci to build a proletarian culture whose native value system counters to the cultural hegemony of the TTB.

Guru elaborates on the moral conditions of reflective capacities that disable the Dalits from theorizing. Doing theory entails patience, endurance and discipline that goes into making theoretical statements. Since it requires perseverance, and does not promise instant recognition, they resort to easy methods for temporal power. “Practical reason takes precedence over theoretical reason” (Guru, 2012, p. 21). Guru's statement goes against the stereotypical image of the Dalit as the enduring and sacrificing figure. And they are promoted by the Dalits in power structures as the empirical data comes in handy to them. They become callous towards theory; they make up for theoretical deficiency by producing brilliant poetry. Pandian states regarding Guru's assertion: “It is my submission that brilliant poetry(and other representational forms such as fiction, autobiography and testimony) need not be a compensation for the theoretical deficiency of the Dalits, but could very well be a compensation for and/or a challenge to the dominant modes of theory making in the social sciences. Not bound by the evidentiary rules of social science, the privileged notion of teleological time, and claims to objectivity and authorial neutrality, these narrative forms can produce enabling descriptions of life-worlds and facilitate the re-imagination of the political” (Pandian, 2010, p. 97). One may not see eye-to-eye with Gopal Guru in totally deriding objective criticism, though one cannot relegate the existence of Dalit theorizing. Distance enables a better vision. However, Guru stresses on how poetry cannot function as a substitute for theory as it does not possess conceptual clarity, principles and self-critical. In *Modernity in Indian Social Theory*, A. Raghuramaraju claims how “instead of transporting Dalits into social theory, Guru should encourage more Dalits to migrate to a literary and poetic realm” (Raghuramaraju 163-64). Nevertheless, the Dalits make the following claims not to opt for empirical research. Firstly, they assert that their lived experiences are rich enough and can survive on their own. Secondly, their privileged access to reality does not necessitate a privileged representation. It is assumed that non-Dalits do not have the innate ability to comprehend Dalit realities because of their different spatial locations. Thirdly, in defence of empiricism, they argue that doing theory renders one conceited, egotistic and socially alienated. The question remains whether to evolve a specific theoretical framework or fit into the caricaturish stereotypes as formulated by the TTB. Gopal Guru foregrounds the fact how theory is a social necessity for the Dalits. They

need to combat the reverse orientalism that deteriorates their status and thrive on their body language to assert themselves as superior. The TTB feed on the description of the body for cultural and political satisfaction. The Dalits should aim at becoming the subjects of their own thinking rather than becoming the object of someone else's thinking" (Guru, 2012, p. 25). They would then be far from caricaturish representation. They would not be treated as specimens or museumized as amusing objects. Anthropology and sociology have led to this caricaturing of Adivasis and Dalits. What becomes ironical regarding Social Sciences in India is that it harbours the same tormenting forms of orientalism against which it had fought in the first instance. The non-Dalits who take up the theoretical cause of the Dalits profess that they do to restore voice and visibility to the Dalits. The claim to epistemological empowerment has condescending overtones. We find the traditional *jajmani* relationship reenacted here: the muknayak becomes the patron, and the dumb becomes the client to define the patron. We find a similar construction of the Oriental woman in Flaubert, the celebrated stereotype-Kuchuk Hanem. Silence, in such a stance, also functions as a performative act. Guru affirms how this relationship makes the Muknayak indispensable for rhetorical appreciation. The *jajmani* system tends to undermine the discursive capacity of such groups who under "favourable hermeneutic conditions can develop an epistemic stamina" (Guru, 2012, p. 26). For instance, in Gujarat, the Patels and the Darbars scotched any sort of resistance from the untouchable' castes for they were thereby ensured cheap (sometimes free) labour under the *jajmani* system. (Macwan & Ramanathan, 2010, p. 21) This idea can be seen in Ambedkar who started his first journal with the name *Mook Nayak* (Leader of the Voiceless), and rendered the strategy of the Muk Nayak as subversive. This postmodernist construction of Dalits remains blind to the hegemonic politics that it thrives on. It points to an inability to point out as to who has arrived as-the subject/object, and as to whether those who live outside these experiences can theorize the same. Further, these kinds of discourses already feed on precepts laid down by (contemporary) Marxism and feminism. This aggravates differences rather than closing gaps. While Marxist criticism introduced terminology such as class, exploitation, proletariat and labour and alienation for everybody, it left the Dalits in a state of historical deficiency in order to define themselves. Ambedkar acknowledged that there was "neither caste discrimination nor untouchability in communism, he considered Indian Marxism to be incomplete as it did not think about eradicating caste" (Limble, 2004, p. 63). Therefore, they must alleviate their condition for theoretical adroitness by going to an Oxford or Harvard but returning to their roots. The modernist theorist becomes not a necessity, but an undesirable option. According to Guru, theory becomes a double commitment both to scholarship and cause. The durability of their theory will be tested through popularity and not based on certificates handed over by the elite. They should also render language comprehensible so that theory does not remain confined to the *crème de*