

## **Voices From the Margins: Caste and Dalit Consciousness in Kolakaluri Enoch's Select Telugu Short Stories**

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**Abstract:** The caste system in India has existed for centuries sustained by religious leaders who propagated it through scriptures like the *Mahabharata*, *Githapodesha* and *Ramayana*. These texts portrayed caste as divinely ordained making resistance seem like a violation of sacred law, punishable by eternal damnation. This belief system was further strengthened by what Dr. B.R. Ambedkar termed a "graded inferiority" a hierarchy that allowed each caste to feel superior to another ensuring widespread acceptance.

Professor Kolakaluri Enoch, a Padma Bhushan awardee and a prominent figure in Telugu literature has written extensively on caste oppression. His short stories, including *The Village Well* and *Asprusaya Ganga* highlight caste's pervasive and dehumanizing impact on society. Enoch emphasizes that caste is not only the root of social inequality and injustice but also continues to dominate individual lives.

Referencing the *Bhagavad Gita*, Enoch critiques the idea that "Caste is dharma; Casteless society is adharm." He argues that true humanity lies in love and compassion beyond caste boundaries. Though reformers like Mahatma Jyoti Rao Phule and Periyar Ramaswamy challenged the system, caste persists. Enoch envisions a future India free of caste discrimination, where humanity and equality prevail.

**Key Words :** Mahabharata, Githapodesha, Ramayana, Reformers and Humanity.

### **History of Indian Short Story**

The short story stands as a technically demanding and esteemed literary form considered a pinnacle of literature. Its roots extend to ancient times preceding even poetry and music with the genesis of Indian tales found in the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Panchatantra, Hitopadesha, and Jataka Kathas. Over time, the short story has undergone evolution marked by numerous experiments in structure and texture by various authors. Eudora Welty aptly noted that stories encapsulate a personal vision weaving elements like plot, characters, setting and style into a vivid portrayal of everyday life's mystery and magic.

The influence of English education and Western writers offering realistic portrayals of social sciences propelled Indian short stories' maturity post-1920. Shanker Ram's works, such as "The Children of Kaveri" and "Creatures All" delved into rural India's reality. Post-independence writers like Malle Roy Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao navigated evolving visions, focusing on shaping a new India. Noteworthy contemporary short story writers like Shashi Deshpande address issues faced by housewives exploring themes of marriage, separation, love and societal change, reflecting the multifaceted landscape of modern India.

### **KOLAKALURI ENOCH**

Professor Enoch stands as a versatile figure encompassing the roles of a storyteller, poet, researcher, teacher, artist and preeminent critic. His life, marked by self-actualization, serves as the foundation for both personal success and literary contributions. Enoch, a symbol of profound interpretation, particularly champions the progressive role of women in literature, opposing patriarchal norms.

Despite facing numerous adversities during his academic pursuits, Enoch's upbringing by a mother enduring suppression and oppression moulded him into an astute observer, interpreter and

commentator on contemporary societal issues. Evolving into a writer analysing societal maladies, Enoch distinctly affiliates himself with the cause of feminization.

As an adept storyteller, Enoch introduces characters uniquely, delving into their mental struggles with a distinct style. With a rich teaching background in universities, Enoch's extensive experience has honed his perspective drawing from a wide array of social causes for his story plots. His critical vision encompasses a broad spectrum from the impoverished to the affluent, focusing on minute social or human issues. Every event becomes a source of introspection and Enoch meticulously examines its nature before crafting a narrative. His stories revolve around individuals grappling with societal curses with Enoch applying these social problems to his own life seeking solutions that manifest through his characters. Enoch's narratives intriguingly unfold, culminating with the main characters offering solutions to their predicaments.

### **Definition of Caste by Various Theories**

The term "caste" originates from Spanish and Portuguese rooted in the Latin word "cactus", signifying "pure". According to Nesfield caste is a community class that severs ties with others prohibiting intermarriage and shared consumption with those outside their community. H. Risley defines caste as a group of families sharing a common name often associated with a specific occupation and claiming descent from a common ancestor whether human or divine. Core to caste principles are endogamy and heredity enforcing marriage within one's caste.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar notes that blood relationships between people of distinct races aided in blurring distinctions between natives and Dravidians. However, in a caste ridden society, apparent goodwill visits from upper castes to lower caste households mask an underlying refusal to accept water, food or other offerings from untouchables.

Three short stories by Kolakaluri Enoch "The Village Well", "A Continued Blaze" and "Idiot" serve as focal points for research on Dalit issues, addressing water problems, untouchability, upper caste dominance and physical discrimination against lower castes. Enoch advocates perceiving humanity beyond caste distinctions, urging Dalits to be wise in combating injustice and securing their rightful place in society. Through his narratives, Enoch calls for empathy and humanity, emphasizing the need to resist cruelty and advocate for justice in societal relationships.

### **History of the Indian Caste System**

India grapples with its unique manifestation of discrimination, often labelled as "Casteism", akin to racism. Rooted in socio-economic or ideological factors, the caste system took shape around 1500 BC when Aryans arrived, establishing warriors, priests and farmers as the primary groups. Over time, priests or Brahmins, emerged victorious, wielding supremacy over the nation. Inheritance played a pivotal role, with sons adopting their fathers' professions, solidifying the concept of communities, known as "jaatis" or castes. Brahmins, in particular, propagated socialism within their groups, perpetuating inequality across the diverse nation. Inter-caste disdain is commonplace and publicly accepted, with professions like drainage cleaning associated with the marginalized "Scheduled Caste" or "untouchables", while forest-dwelling tribes align with "Scheduled Tribes".

"Caste is not simply confined to ritual ranking. It is based on common economic and occupational interests. Caste is not what it was before 1947. Based on the study of a village in Tamil Nadu, Harris observes that castes give coherence and meaning to the structures of actual social relations. Castes are both an actual structure of social relationships and an ideology. The structure of caste does not depend upon unequal access to the means of production and the appropriation of surplus by a dominant caste alone. A dominant caste must be a part of a dominant class" (Govind, Class and caste in India, 5).

The caste system significantly influences various aspects of citizens' lives, from marriage and employment to education, economy, mobility, housing, and politics. Marriages are often constrained

by caste considerations and educational opportunities are impacted by caste-based reservations, with public universities allocating seats for underprivileged backgrounds. Employment opportunities, especially in public sectors, are also influenced by caste reservations, disproportionately affecting impoverished Brahmins. Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar aptly notes that caste poses a substantial obstacle to political and economic reforms in India. While eradicating this entrenched system is challenging, he asserts that it is not insurmountable, though the path to reform is fraught with numerous obstacles.

Caste Reflections in Kolukaluri Enoch's Short Stories

### ***Viparyayam (Turnabout)* :**

I would like to articulate my observations regarding the portrayal of Dalit women characters in Enoch's Telugu short story, specifically focusing on "Viparyayam". This narrative delves into the intricate inner conflicts experienced by Dalit women, with Sunitha serving as the central character. Sunitha, a destitute young Dalit woman adept in studies, secures a UGC fellowship, showcasing her scholarly prowess in mathematics. Orphaned in her childhood, Sunitha is nurtured by her grandmother. The narrative unveils Sunitha's protagonist role, marked by the complexities arising from her father's remarriage to another woman. Amidst these challenges, Sunitha finds herself entangled in a romantic relationship with a classmate named Yogi, an upper-caste scholar at the same university. Sunitha, harbouring dreams of marriage with Yogi, becomes ensnared in his exploitative behaviour. Yogi, however, reveals intentions of marrying a girl from his community and his parents proceed with the necessary formalities for this union. Through the lens of Sunitha's experiences, "Viparyayam" poignantly captures the struggles faced by Dalit women, highlighting societal complexities, caste dynamics and the exploitation they endure. Enoch's narrative skilfully navigates the intricacies of Sunitha's journey, shedding light on the challenges and conflicts that define her narrative arc within the broader context of Dalit women's experiences.

"This is a very pitiable and obnoxious situation in the life of Sunitha. She is untouchable when it comes to marriage but she is not treated as untouchable at the time of intercourse" (Swarupa Rani, Enoch gari Kathalu, 104).

Here the author Kolakaluri Enoch talks about Dalit women's sufferings, exploitation, pains and social and economic conditions clearly through his stories. Enoch talks through his characters in every story. Dalit women should become educated, enlightened, bold, courageous and knowledgeable to raise their voice in society. Particularly Dalit women should be careful in every moment to achieve their goals. According to Ambedkar "Educate, Agitate and Organize".

When the woman becomes an educator, she shall know what is good and what is not.

### ***Oorabaai (The Village Well)*:**

This renowned Dalit short story unfolds within the Dalit Wada and the surrounding village, featuring four pivotal characters: Ramudu, Chidambaram, Ramudu's daughter-in-law and Munusub, an uppercaste individual. Chidambaram's wife, unnamed in the narrative, epitomizes the Dalit woman's struggle, as she is young and beautiful but relegated to fetching water from the village well where she lacks the right to draw water. Waiting for hours, she encounters an upper-caste young man, Munusub, who exploits his dominance based on caste. Attempting to draw water, he subjects her to unwarranted advances. In response, Chidambaram's wife resists, retreating when he touches her inappropriately. The pot, however, falls and breaks, drenching her in water. Undeterred, she delivers a resounding slap to the upper-caste youth. Returning home, she recounts the incident to her husband, Chidambaram and father-in-law, Ramudu. Chidambaram's wife emerges as the protagonist, embodying Dalit consciousness and resisting oppression with wisdom and leadership. Seeking revenge, she places a skeleton in the village well, challenging the upper-caste social order. In another narrative, Sunitha, a Dalit woman, confronts discrimination in matters of marriage and intimacy.

Despite undergoing two abortions for Yogi, an upper-caste man, she faces rejection in matrimony, exemplifying the pitiable and obnoxious life imposed on her. Enoch underscores the plight of Dalit women, victims of sexual oppression and discrimination in a hegemonic upper-caste society. The stories vividly depict their struggles against excesses and injustices, portraying them as symbols of resilience in the face of societal bias and exploitation.

“Enoch proves in 'Oorabaavi' that Harijans can achieve not only water but also any social facility with sincere efforts. He instils in them courage and determination and instils in them the feeling that they are not inferior to any other person in society. Indirectly, he advises them not to feel ashamed of their caste and to know that their caste is as important as the other upper castes”. (Acharya Kolakaluri Enoch Shastipurti Sanmana Sanchika, 165)

Here, Enoch talks about the differentiation between the village and Wada. The village has power over the Wada for the sake of the village people 's development. The village always maintains authority and dominance over the Dalit Wada people. Dalit Wada people are helpless and powerless and are given no respect.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, the situation of Dalit men and women is becoming worse day by day. They still face caste discrimination, violence and bad treatment from upper-caste people. Even though many policies are made for Dalits, there is still no proper justice. The government needs to take serious steps to stop caste discrimination, untouchability violence against Dalits and other weaker sections. Kolukaluri Enoch rightly says, “Love human beings and do justice to everyone without gender bias and caste relation.” This means we should treat everyone equally, without looking at their caste or gender.

India cannot grow socially, economically or politically until people remove the idea of caste from their minds. We must start seeing others simply as human beings, not by their caste. Only then can we build a fair and equal society for all.

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