



VOICES OF THE SILENCED PEOPLE OF INDIA AND THE HISPANIC CARIBBEAN: A COMPARATIVE VIEW

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Abstract

This article is about the voices of the segregated, oppressed and socio-economically and culturally marginalized people in India and the Hispanic Caribbean: the Dalits and the Afro-Caribbean people. The genesis of these margins is located in the histories of the respective societies.

The recovered histories of the caste system and the race indicate how these people are discriminated and marginalized on the basis of caste and race. The roots of the voices of this marginalized people go back to the history of both literatures that have represented various ways in which Dalits and Afro-Caribbean people were victims of marginalization not only socio-economic and cultural but also based on their body language, gestures, skin color etc. And the ways in which these people subvert that practice to resist.

As a theoretical framework, I will make use of the discussions and arguments presented by the famous political scientist Iris Marion Young in the article "the five faces of oppression" makes the analysis of exploitation, marginalization, lack of power, cultural imperialism and violence, and examines in preliminary, the meaning and content of the expression oppression as used by social movements: women, black people, Chicanos, Latinos, indigenous, Jews, lesbians, gays, workers, etc. in the U.S.

Later on, in this article I will illustrate, in a comparative way the representation of oppression based on caste and race in Dalit and Afro-Caribbean poetry as resistance against all kinds of oppression.

Keywords:Oppression, Marginalization, Exploitation, Violence, Resistance.

Introduction

The voices of the marginalized people are part of the literatures of the marginalized peoples of the global south, such as: the Dalits in India and the Afro-Caribbean in the Caribbean and Latin America. Until the present time these people remain on the fringes of the respective societies.

In this article we will make use of the discussions and arguments presented by the famous American political scientist Iris Marion Young on the five faces of oppression: exploitation, marginalization, the idea of impotence, cultural imperialism and violence.

Then, I will explore in a comparative way the representation of oppression based on caste and race in Dalit and Afro-Caribbean poetry and the resistance of these people against oppression.

According to her, **Exploitation** is an act of using people's work to produce profit without compensating them fairly. That is to say, the workers are not paid a reasonable salary considering the amount of money they earn for the company.

Marginalization is a process of exclusion. Marginalization is, in a way, worse than exploitation because society has decided that it cannot or will not use these people, not even as labor.

The idea of impotence is linked to Marx's theory of socialism: there are people who "have" power, while others "do not have it." Those without power are dominated by the ruling class and must take orders and almost never have the right to give orders or decide.

Cultural imperialism deals with taking the culture of the ruling class and establishing it as the norm. Stereotypes are the most common forms used by cultural imperialism.

Violence is probably the most obvious and visible form of oppression. Members of some groups live with the knowledge that they must be afraid of unexpected and unprovoked attacks to harm, humiliate or destroy the person (Young 2009).

These five faces of oppression are linked to the life of marginalized people on a global scale in general and in this context with the life of the Dalits in India and of the Afro-Caribbean in the Caribbean in particular.

Dalits belong to the lowest caste and are oppressed in the Indian society, dominated by the Hindu religion; their status at the lowest link in society takes away all rights. They live in separate neighborhoods in rural areas of India. They have to use their own



wells, ponds to drink water, etc. Eventually, they are socially marginalized. They are considered untouchable. They have the most detestable occupations in society. Dalits traditionally sweep, clean roads and latrines, tan and carry dead animals etc. However, they earn very little for their services, that is, they are victims of economic exploitation, the most serious problem of the Dalits. Furthermore, they are obliged to follow certain dress codes and behave in a particular manner, that is, the life and behavior of the Dalits are controlled and arranged according to the wishes of the upper caste people which is nothing more than a manifestation of cultural imperialism.

Finally, violence against Dalits occurs when they refuse to follow assigned codes of behavior. Regarding this, Ghanshyam Shah says: "Violence and atrocities against Dalits is not a new phenomenon. It's a technique adopted by the ruling castes to reinforce their power and assert their established higher status in the society" (Ghanshyam shah 2006).

On the other hand, the history of oppression and racial discrimination of the Afro-Caribbean people dates back to colonial times in the Caribbean. It is known how they were forcibly loaded, chained, onto slave ships and after a long journey in which thousands died, they arrived on a strange land, where they were sold and bought like animals, without any human dignity and identity.

Since then, they were declared slaves (as private property) and were forced to do hard work on land and plantation area under inhumane conditions. Generally, their trade consisted of working in the sugar plantation, breaking stones, tilling the land, etc., and they had a minimum wage, and at times almost nothing.

This is how the eminent Cuban intellectual Esteban Morales Domínguez says who has dealt extensively with racial issues in the Caribbean:

A set of disadvantages are still observed for blacks and mixed people, in terms of access to the best jobs. Their representation is very little in public sector but, their representation in marginal neighborhoods is huge, they have the worse housing and living conditions in general, among others (Dominguez 2007).

They faced or still face racial discrimination because of their dark skin and a different body structure. The Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano argues that white-skinned people legitimize the old ideas and practices of superiority / inferiority relationships between dominated and dominant: "Over time, the colonizers color-coded the phenotypic traits of the colonized and assumed it as the emblematic characteristic of the racial category" (Quijano 2000).

To maintain racial supremacy, whites created negative stereotypes of the Afro-Caribbean body. As Ronald L. Jackson says in his book *Scripting the Black Masculine Body* (2006): "There is a supra-consciousness, for example, of the negative inscriptions associated with the black male body as criminal, angry, and incapacitated" (Jackson 2006).

In addition, violence served to make the slave run out of resistance mechanisms and make him see the unlimited and arbitrary power of the masters.

So, it is evident that the caste and racial oppression in Indian, Caribbean and Latin American societies has not been erased till the present time.

Regarding the representation of such situation in poetic works, we will see how these people affirm their space with their rebellious voice.

The Indian Dalit poet Om Prakash Valmiki asks the oppressors some subversive questions:

What would you do?
If they throw you out of your town,
you can't get water from the common well,
they abuse you in the afternoon full of screams and echoes,
they send you to break stones,
instead of a genuine job,
they give you leftover to eat,
What would you do?
If they insult you in public,
they take away your property in the name of religion,



if they send your women to become Devadasis¹ and prostitutes,
What would you do? (Valmiki 2008) (Translated by me)

The poet shows his anger against the upper caste people who have forced them to live in such a situation in their own country. It is a direct attack against the oppressors loudly and face to face.

In the following poem the poet speaks about the collective violence unleashed by the upper castes on the Dalits. The poet highlights the places where the massacres of the Dalits took place:

on the map of my body
are emerging
in the form of blisters
a place called Belchhi
or Sherpur
Somewhat Paras Bigha
and Narayanpur ... (Valmiki 2008) (Translated by me)

The poet wants to remember why violence was unleashed against them at different places. For example, at Belchhi, the reason was that the Dalit workers demanded higher wage. In another town, violence broke out because the Dalits decided not to follow the dress codes; in another because a Dalit boy fell in love with an upper caste girl; and in another because they drank water from the public well etc...

These poems also show that the Dalits are assuming the strength to speak and narrate their sorrows in their own words, thus seeking the meaning of their life with dignity and respect.

However, it is important to note here that Dalit poets only write about the affairs of a particular community, which is a trend in Dalit literature today. They do not include the affairs of other marginalized people of the society, which confines their literary movement to a particular community. This has restricted the scope of their literature in central discourse. While the eminent Afro-Caribbean poets Luis Pales Matos, Nicolás Guillén, and the eminent poet Nancy Morejón etc ... spoke about the problems of all the dispossessed Cubans, Caribbean and Latin American that has given them global recognition.

Nicolás Guillén, the Cuban national poet began his poetic career describing the Afro-Caribbean trafficking to the New World and pointing out the exploitation and brutality or all kinds of oppression that was imposed on the Afro-Caribbean body. He says:

I came on a slave ship.
They brought me.
Cane and whip wit.
Iron sun.
Sweat like caramel.
Foot in the stocks.
Aponte spoke to me smiling.
I said, "I want to."
Oh death! Then silence.
Shadow later.
What a long violent dream!
Hard sleep. "
This poem itself points to oppression of all kinds (Guillén 1974).

But when we talk about Nicolás Guillén's poetic work in its entirety, it would not be fair to conclude that his writings had a unique orientation of racial discrimination and people of color. It is true that in the first books it is important to indicate this feature. However, the following works: SongoroCosongo (1932) West Indies Ltd. (1934), El son entero (1947), etc ... are those that made him the spokesperson for marginal people throughout the Caribbean and Latin America. In these works, the poet focuses on the problems of general interest and of all the dispossessed people of society, even the dispossessed white people. This strategy gave him the opportunity to speak to blacks and mulattos in a national and continental context. In the poem Balada de los dos abuelos, speaking of

¹ A girl dedicated to worship and service of a deity.



the black and white grandfather, he became a poet of the racial / social synthesis and spokesman for all the poor. According to Alfred Melón, he was a poet of synthesis.

Such an evolution has not been seen in Dalit poetry. However, to bring his literary movement to the center and to make common cause it is necessary to deal with all the dispossessed peoples of society like Guillén.

To conclude, it can be seen how the people have been or continue to be victims of all kinds of oppression. But Michel Foucault says that where there is oppression there is also resistance. Now the voices of the marginalized people, through the literary movements of Dalit literature in India and Negrismo in the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, affirm their existence and their human rights in the respective regions.

Dalit literature is inspired by Afro-American literature and the two literary movements with the same goal mobilize the marginalized people who unite to fight against the oppressors. And on this journey, like Nicolás Guillén, Dalit poets perhaps have to include the issues of marginalized peoples of other castes of society as well and unite with marginalized people of the world for the emancipation of marginalized beings from all kinds of oppression. Cuban liberator José Martí also said that all the marginalized peoples of the world have to unite against the oppressors.

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