

## **CHAPTER – III**

### ***Bahishkrut***

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## **Chapter – III**

### **BAHISHKRUT**

In this chapter an attempt has been made to assess '*Bahishkrut*', a novel written in 1978 by Arun Sadhu, a writer in Marathi, on the theme of untouchability. An attempt has also been made to depict the evils of unchanged social attitude to untouchables in the Post-Independence period in India. The chapter also brings out the miserable living conditions of dalits i.e. untouchables or outcastes and their humiliation, harassment and their exploitation by the so-called sawarnas in Free India, in spite of their improved social and economic status. A brief attempt is also made to throw light on the novelist's sincere compassion for the untouchables and his earnest desire for the eradication of untouchability, by educating the low caste people.

India became free from the British Rule in 1947 and the Constitution of India came into force in 1950. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was the leader of the low caste people in India. During the Pre and Post Independence period in India, he fought for the fundamental rights of the low castes in Hindu society. After the Independence of India, he became a national leader and achieved a prominent place in Jawaharlal Nehru's ministry. He became the first Union Minister of law of Free India and was made the President of the Constitutional Committee in August 1947. Because he was familiar with the

social conditions of the down-trodden in India, he was completely aware of their problems and felt the need of laws or rules for definite and concrete development of the down-troddens in India. As a result, in the Constitution of India, a fair weightage was given to the development of India as a nation. For building a nation, healthy community is needed, and to create healthy community, due interest was shown in the Constitution of India for the development of the backward classes in the society. Efforts were made for the upliftment of the socially low castes who had been living a poor and miserable life. The Government of India made efforts to raise their social and economic status. The Indian Constitution provided, in its eighth schedule, educational concessions, scholarships for the socially and economically backward classes and reserved seats in higher education and employment for the scheduled castes and tribes. As a result, many untouchables got higher education and many prosperous occupations by leaving aside the traditional work of their castes. Many became doctors, teachers and lawyers and occupied other honourable positions and placements in Class I and Class II administrative posts.

Yet, though the untouchables worked hand in hand together with other upper sawarnas, the traditional attitude to the untouchable did not change in the Hindu society. This fact is highlighted by Arun Sadhu in his *Bahishkrut*.

## **Arun Sadhu : His Life and works**

Arun Sadhu was born in 1941, in a small village of Paratwada in Amarawati district of Maharashtra, Arun Sadhu is a journalist, novelist and a storywriter. After his graduation in science faculty, he started writing for periodicals like, 'माणूस' (Manoos) in Marathi and 'Indian Express', 'The Times of India', 'The Statesman', 'Times' etc in English. Sadhu wrote on various subjects. His 'आणि ड्रॅगन जागा झाला' (Ani Dragon Jaga Zala) 1972 and 'फिडेल, चे आणि क्रांती' (Fidel, Che Ani Kranti) 1972 which appeared in 'माणूस' ( a Marathi periodical ) brought him to limelight. He wrote novels such as 'मुंबई दिनांक' (Mumbai Dinank) 1972, 'सिंहासन' (Sinhasan) 1977. These novels created role models in Marathi novel writing. Among his other novels are 'सत्तांध' (Sattandh) 1977, 'बहिष्कृत' (Bahishkrut) 1978, 'स्फोट' (Sfot) 1979, 'शापित' (Shapit) 1980, 'झिपन्या' (Ziparya) 1980, 'विप्लवा' (Viplava), 'शोधयात्रा' (Shodhyatra), 'तडजोड' (Tadjod) and 'मुखवटा' (Mukhavata). In the recent past he wrote 'ड्रॅगन जागा झाल्यावर' (Dragon Jaga Zalyavar). He also wrote some collections of stories such as 'एक माणूस उडतो त्याची गोष्ट' (Ek Manoos Udato Tyachi Goshta), 'मुक्ती' (Mukti), 'मंत्रजागर' (Mantrajagar), 'बिनपावसाचा दिवस' (Bin Pavasacha Divas). 'पडघम' (Padgham) is his play. His

writings are a portrayal of social life. His *Bahishkrut* is regarded a more matured and introspective work.<sup>1</sup>

### **Bahishkrut : An Introduction :**

*Bahishkrut* is the only one novel exclusively written on the theme of untouchability by Arun Sadhu. His other novels with exceptions of *Trishanku* and *Sinhasan* deal with the political and other themes. In *Bahishkrut*, Arun Sadhu, depicts a phase in the life of the protagonist, Ashok Sokaji Ingale when he fights with an age-old social evil of untouchability in India. The protagonist socially belongs to the lower strata of the society. He is 'Mahar' by caste. Yet he is proud of his caste. When his employer advises him not to expose his caste in the village, he frankly tells him,

“नाई सर, आपल्याला ते पटणार नाई, कोन विचारलं तर आपुन

सिध्दं सांगून टाकनार का आपुन महार म्हनून.”<sup>2</sup>

(\* Translation : No Sir, I will not like this. If anybody asks me, I will directly tell him that I am a 'Mahar')

He is an educated youth. As a result of the reservation policy of the government for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes he is appointed as an assistant teacher of English in the

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\* Hereafter, the sentences in English in brackets are translation of quotations in Marathi without denoting them as 'Translation'.

High School of Ridgaon in Akola District of Maharashtra. In spite of being a Mahar, he is raised to a social position. But this change in his social status seems to be only outward. When he mingles with the people in the community or with the teachers in his school, he has completely opposite experience. He finds that sawarnas in the society still treat him as a Mahar even though he is a teacher. First he is 'Mahar' to them and then a teacher not vice versa. The people insult him sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly. He is insulted, humiliated, exploited and abused by the upper caste Hindus. If this is the condition of an educated dalit in the Hindu society, what would be the life of poor and humble dalits is a matter beyond imagination. Arun Sadhu has focused this reality in *Bahiskrut*.

*Bahishkrut* is the story of a dalit teacher in a village in Akola District of Maharashtra, one of the developed states in India. It shows an identity crisis for a newly educated youth hailing from a low caste. The ideological trauma that he faces on the professional front is as torturous to him as the emotional humiliation, he has to suffer in his personal relationship owing to caste discrimination.<sup>3</sup> He reaches to the village in the evening. There he meets Mr. Kulkarni, the head-master of the school. Mr. Kulkarni, a Hindu Brahmin who, in spite of his being orthodox, pretends to be a modernist. In the beginning, he supposes that Ashok Ingale is a Hindu Maratha. But when he

comes to know, from Ingale's appointment letter that Ingale belongs to S.C. category, he is disappointed. His disappointment directly comes from his heart but his mouth does not allow to make an utterance of the same. However, his face cannot conceal his feelings. Arun Sadhu describes Kulkarni's condition, after knowing Ingale's caste in apt words,

"कुलकर्णी हेडमास्तरांचा त्याची जात बघून अपेक्षाभंग झाला होता खरा" <sup>4</sup>

(Kulkarni was really disappointed to know Ingale's caste)

However, perhaps as a part of his duty or responsibility, he treats Ingale in a little human way. Even though his contempt for the low castes, peeps out in this form or that. Ashok Ingale is served first water, then tea and lunch. But everytime he is served with a little hatred. This hatred is deeply rooted, in the blood and bone and heart of every member of Kulkarni headmaster's family with a possible exception of his daughter, Sumitra, for Sumitra's mother also tells her,

" अगं ५५ सुमित्रा, त्यांना दे नं मघाचाच तांब्या-पेला, नाहीतर तू आणखीन भांडी करून ठेवशील शिवाशिबीची! " <sup>5</sup>

(Sumitra, give him those earlier pots or you will pollute more pots)

Ingale spends the night in the office of the school and joins his duties the next day, but Mr. Kulkarni marks him present from the earlier day.

In the school, he finds that some children in dirty clothes are alienated from the other children and in the class. They are compelled to sit on the last benches leaving some benches empty in between. Ingale's eyes cannot escape this discrimination and he asks them to occupy the front empty benches instead of back ones. This is his first step unconsciously taken against the social pattern of Ridgaon. This act of Ashok Ingale creates an outburst of the feeling of contempt for Ingale and the outcast students in the minds of upper caste Hindu teachers in the school.

After this, Ashok Ingale goes to his room in the dalit colony in house of Sukdya, a dalit. In the colony, he is received by filth and odour of gutters, mosquitoes, quarrels among the people, noise of children, almost an unsuitable place for his study <sup>6</sup> as he wants to complete B.A. final. He gets acquainted with the life in the colony and becomes a part of the life there. Soon there arises a problem of a dreadful disease which is referred as 'हगवण'<sup>7</sup> i.e. diarrhoea in the novel, caused by bad drinking water provided to the outcaste people. Ashok Ingale peeps into the matter a little deeper and realizes that the well which is exclusively made for the dalits is spoiled by the waste water of the upper well so the water of the lower well is unsuitable for human beings. The water of the upper well which is given to the dalits is not at their discreet. They have to depend first on the availability and then on the will of the upper caste



Hindus. Ashok Ingale finds this utterly miserable and decides to fight for the cause.

He decides to avail the opportunity that comes in the form of Meera's (Deshmukh's daughter) tuition. Mr. Kulkarni asks Ingale to take Meera's tuition of English. Kulkarni insists Ingale to go to the house of Deshmukh at least. Ashok Ingale goes to the Deshmukh and meets Mrs. Deshmukh there. He openly asks Mrs. Deshmukh to make the upper well open to his caste people. He tells her that then and then only he will take Meera's tuition of English. But Mrs. Deshmukh tells him that she does not care for Meera's tuition and warns him not to speak of the upper well any more. To her more important than her daughter's education is the well of the upper caste Hindus.

Ashok Ingale is an educated youth. He knows a little of the law. He is a man with determination and is well acquainted with the thoughts of Babasaheb Ambedkar. So he decides to go through a well planned proper channel, first to the village Head of Ridgaon, then to the Tehsildar of the taluka and then to the Collector of Akola.<sup>8</sup> But the situation does not allow him to take more time and he jumps into the struggle to make the village well open to all, including the dalits of Ridgaon.

As the consequence of the struggle, the well is declared open to all but at the cost of the lives of three untouchables including Ashok Ingale. How miserable, the people of the dalit wasti of Free India!

Untouchables got equal right with sawarnas of drinking water at the cost of three victims. To bring the law from the book in practice, Ashok Ingale became a martyr in Free India in which the untouchables and sawarnas were equal in all respects in the eyes of the law.

The novel is described as "a sad tale of a battle lost".<sup>9</sup> But it is not true. Devraj, Roopa Mahar and Ashok Ingale lose their lives but for a noble cause, a cause that causes all the difference to the caste Hindus. They die but their death has brought a message from the collector of the district proclaiming the village well (upper) open to all. It is the victory of the untouchable community of Ridgaon. Though the tale is sad, the battle is not lost.

### **Bahishkrut: A Social Realistic novel.**

*Bahishkrut* is a social realistic novel. It presents a socio-economic and socio-cultural reality of the Indian untouchables in the post colonial India. An attempt is made here to illustrate this reality related to their poverty, their humiliation, their harassment and the atrocities by the sawarnas due to deprivation of their constitutional human rights, and the sawarnas' unchanged attitude to the low castes in spite of changing social conditions.

## Poverty And Life Conditions of Untouchables

The novel, *Bahishkrut* covers a short span of time in the life of an educated dalit, Ashok Ingale, who is a teacher in the Post Independence India. The action of the novel takes place in the recent past, when it was written i.e. in 1978, after twenty eight years of the Indian freedom, when all Indians were considered equal by law and untouchability was considered unlawful by the Constitution of India<sup>7</sup> and education no longer remained a privilege of the upper caste Hindus. The development was seen in almost all fields of Indian life. There were tremendous social changes. New facilities and amenities such as schools, transport and medical centers were provided even to small villages. However, dalits, a small section of society was spending life in utterly miserable conditions. The upper caste Hindus known as the sawarnas had the control on the amenities and facilities.

Though the untouchables enjoyed opportunities of education, reservation in jobs and good monetary and other status they were not treated by sawarnas as their equals.

Transport facility was introduced in the village of Ridgaon, but roads in the outcaste colony were not in good condition. No change could be seen in the life the Dalits. Poverty remained as their priviledge and misery as their lifestyle.

The description of the outcaste colony in *Bahishkrut* is realistic as it conveys the things as they are; the poverty of the

outcastes, their humiliation and bustle harassment etc. For example, Arun Sadhu describes,

" बारक्या बारक्या फाटक्या झोपड्या, गटाराची घाण, दाह अन  
ढोरांची घाण, कटकटी, कलकलाट "10

(Small and tiny torn huts; the odour of gutters, the fifth of wine and carcasses; quarrels and noise)

Signs of poverty were seen everywhere. Barking dogs and mosquitoes were found everywhere. Drinking wine was a common activity in the outcaste colony. Untouchables used to drink wine, used to beat and abuse their wives and children. They used to live in their one roomed thatch roofed mud houses. Atmosphere, in the colony was also not good. The youth was also under the impact of wine. Arun Sadhu describes,

" एका गल्लीत त्याच्याच वयाच्या मुलाचं टोळकं बहुधा दाह  
पिऊनच ढोलकी बडवीत आणि अश्लील गाणी गात बसलं  
होतं."11

(A group of youngsters, perhaps under the impact of wine, was beating drums and singing obscene songs)

The outcaste colony was even deprived of street lamps. Arun Sadhu gives a real picture of the streets in the outcaste colony, when he says,

" वस्तीतल्या रस्त्यांवर तर दिवे नव्हतेच. गावातले रॉकेलचे दिवे  
अजून वस्तीपर्यंत पोहोचले नव्हते. "12

(There were no street lamps in the colony. Kerosene lamps were also not introduced in the colony yet.)

Ashok Ingale was a teacher. When the problem of his living in Ridgaon arose, he preferred to live in the outcaste colony of his caste instead of living in the village. Mr. Chavar, one of his colleagues in the school took him to the colony where he was welcomed by the barking dogs.

Mr. Chavar took Ashok Ingale to the hut of Sukadya, a resident of the colony, learning in tenth. There Ashok Ingale could see signs of better living. The writer describes,

"वस्तीतल्या झोपड्या दाट एकमेकीला लागून अशा नव्हत्या. बऱ्याच झोपड्या मातीच्या होत्या. अंगणं पांढऱ्या मातीनं नाहीतर शेणानं स्वच्छ सारवलेली. कितीतरी अंगणात तुळशी वृंदावनं दिसत होती. सुकड्याची झोपडी तशी स्वच्छ, स्वच्छ सारवलेली होती. पण बाजूलाच ते डबरं होतं."<sup>13</sup>

(Huts in the colony were not close to each other. Many of them were made of mud. The front yards were either whitewashed or dunged. In the front yards of many houses were 'Tulsi-Vrindavan'. Sukdaya's hut was a clean one. But there was a dirty pond nearby.)

Sukdaya's colony is called 'Dalit Wasti' by Arun Sadhu. The writer tells that inspite of utter poverty, people in the colony were happy and satisfied.

Arun Sadhu comments,

" दारिद्र्याच्या कळा त्या सगळ्या झोपडीवर आतील सामानावर,  
त्या सगळ्यांच्या कपड्यांवर आणि शरीरावर दिसत होत्या. पण  
चेहऱ्यावर मात्र दैन्याचा मागमूस नव्हता. समाधान होतं असं नव्हे  
पण जिन्हाळा होता. एकमेकांविषयी प्रेम होतं. अशोक इंगळेला  
आणखी काय हवं होतं ? "14

(Signs of poverty were clearly seen in the hut of Sukadya, on the belongings, on their clothes and on their bodies. But on their faces, there was only love and affection. And what else Ashok Ingale wanted?)

There was shortage of food in the outcaste colony. It had a bad effect on the physique of the people in the colony and Sukadya's mother was a speaking example of this. Sukadya's mother, in the author's words, was

" काळी किडकिडीत आणि वाळलेली दिसत होती. वय फारसं  
नसेल. असेल पस्तीशीची, पण वय आत्ताच उतरणीला  
लागल्यासारखं दिसत होतं. "15

(She was looking extremely slim and tired. She was not much old. May be she was thirty five. But she was looking in decline of her age.)

The people in the outcaste colony could not provide good and sufficient food and clothing to their school going children. In the eyes of law, all students are equal. Law has ended untouchability from the social life. But, in reality the matter was

reverse. The children of the outcaste colony had to sit on the back benches. Arun Sadhu sympathetically describes them as,

"बहुतेक मुलं अर्ध्या चडुयांत होती. बहुतेकांचे सदरे मळके, चेहरे शरमिंदे, अंगावर सगळ्या दारिद्र्याच्या आणि अपमानित जगण्याच्या खुणा होत्या."<sup>16</sup>

(Most of the children were in half pants. Their shirts were dirty and there were signs of shame on their faces. Poverty and humiliation were clearly seen on their faces.)

In spite of poverty, fifth and small room in Sukdyas house, Ashok Ingale was fully satisfied in the outcaste colony for the people there were his own men. In spite of being poor, they were hospitable towards him. In the village also, people showed hospitality towards him; Kulkarni Headmaster greeted him warmly, gave him bedding etc; Sumitra, Kulkarni's daughter gave him cool water and tea. She served him with food. He was given 'Paat' to sit on. Sumitra's mother took him for her own son 'Mukunda' and advised him to be careful about his stay in the village etc. However, Ashok Ingale felt relaxed in the colony of his caste people. Arun Sadhu rightly describes him,

" गावात त्याचा जीव गुदमरत होता. वस्तीत आल्याबरोबर त्याला एकदम मोकळं मोकळं सुटका झाल्यासारखं वाटू लागलं. " <sup>17</sup>

(In the village, he felt suffocated. He came in the colony and felt happy and relaxed.)

Childhood memories of his widowed mother's efforts to bring him up crowded in his mind and made him restless. He had spent his childhood days in utter poverty. He was without food sometimes.

The outcastes were unable to fulfill their basic needs even. In such conditions money was a matter like day-dreaming to them. Arun Sadhu describes Ingale's economic condition and his feelings when the thought of salary came to his mind in very apt words,

" त्यानं आणि त्याच्या म्हातारीनं दोघांनीही शंभराची अख्खी नोट  
कधी हातात धरली नव्हती ".<sup>18</sup>

(He and his mother had never held a hundred rupee note.)

This indicates the poverty of the untouchables besides their deprivation of good food, good clothing and good residing facilities, especially when Indian government was trying to raise the living standard, business standard and agricultural and Industrial status of the country, and was paying a special attention to the overall development of the rural sectors of the Indian socio-economic spectrum.

### **Humiliation and Harassment of Untouchables:**

It is an age-old practice that only a poor is treated in insulting manner. If poverty is supported by untouchability, humiliation is subject to reach the peak. In such socio-economic



background of the untouchables in India, their humiliation by the sawarnas was but natural in spite of legal prohibitions. In the 17th schedule of the Indian constitution, the observance of untouchability is completely banned. In the fifteenth schedule of the Indian constitution, observance of untouchability is considered a cognizable offence and untouchables are given free entry at public places such as hotels, barber shops, temples and public wells etc. In the 46th schedule, observance of untouchability in schools is strictly prohibited. Even 25 years after Indian freedom, efforts to end untouchability by law did not succeed to forget untouchability. It continued to be practised since the high castes dominated the social life especially in the countryside area of India on one hand and the dalits faith in the traditional view of their life on other hand. The untouchables were humiliated as they were poor. The sawarnas inflicted harassment on them. The untouchable suffered their humiliation sometimes willingly and sometimes unwillingly.

*Bahishkrut* is the touching story of humiliation of untouchables (dalits) by the so-called sawarnas.

Though, Ashok Ingale is educated and a teacher, he experienced the sorrows of his caste as a small child. His mother's humiliation and sexual exploitation left a permanent deep impression on his sensitive mind. He had the first hand of the same.

When he was just six, his widow mother, used to collect faggots and sold them in the city. She used to sell them not for money but for food, stale food. Once she went with fire sticks to an upper caste Hindu house. Ashok was also with her. But for a longer time, nobody used to take notice of her presence. Then she entreated for food, and after a long time, some one shouted from inside the house,

" ये ऽऽ म्हारडे, गप्प, केव्हांपासून ओरडून राहिली आहेस. अगं  
ओऽऽ ती काय म्हणते आहे बघ बरं..... काही सांगितलं होतं का  
तिला ? घाल तिला काहीतरी... "19

(O, woman of mahar community, shut up. Why are you shouting ? O, see what she is saying. Did you ask her anything? Give her something and let her go. )

People were not ashamed to call a low caste woman by her caste. They very boldly and openly called Ashok's mother by her caste. And when his mother spread her 'padar' to accept the food from an upper caste woman, the woman almost shouted at her out of fear of being polluted.

" अगं दूर... जरा दुसून... विटाळशील मला तू... आणि पोराला  
आवर जरा... फारच बाई या आजकालच्या महारणी "20

(Distance... from distance...you will pollute me. And hold your son ... Damn these women of Mahar community.)

In Pre-Independence India, the touch of the untouchables was considered unholy. Their touch polluted the people, their

houses, their temples and their wells. It was expected after the freedom that there would be considerable change in the age-old practice of untouchability.

But no considerable change could take place. If there was any, it was temporary and outward. The woman openly said to Ingale's mother, " अगं दूर... जरा दुरून... विटाळशील मला तू... " <sup>21</sup> (Distance...from distance you will pollute me) and these words left an everlasting mark on Ingale's mind. The words " आणि पोराला आवर जरा " <sup>22</sup> (and hold your son) disturbed Ashok as a child. This past childhood experience, was a humiliation. It was past experience now proves to be humiliating.

The present humiliation of Ashok Ingale started with his first step in the village named Ridgaon. Castism was seen and experienced in the blood and flesh and hearts of the people of Ridgaon. But they did not speak of it openly.

They spoke that the castism was a nonsense but they observed it in their practical life. They believed in the traditional untouchability existing in Hindu society; but they hypocritically refuted castism out of the fear of law. This dual policy of the so-called sawarnas is known as their double headedness.

Kulkarni, the Head Master expresses his faith in traditional caste system and questions the legal ban on it,

" .....संस्कार आहेत हो पिढ्यापिढ्यांचे. धर्मांनी घालून दिलेली  
बंधनं आहेत. ते संस्कार काय सरकारच्या कायद्यांनी जातात ?

„23

(They are a part of our culture. They are the taboos imposed by our religion. The government's laws cannot remove them.)

Ashok experiences a chain of events of humiliation owing to his low caste everywhere:- in Kulkarni's house, in the school, in Deshmukh's house except in the outcaste colony.

In the first meeting, Kulkarni was disappointed to know Ingale's caste, though he showed no such expression on his face. He advised Ashok to conceal his caste from the villagers. He gave its reason that the traditional beliefs were deeply rooted in the villagers' minds and to remove them was difficult. Double headedness of Kulkarni comes out when he tells Ashok Ingale,

" मी सांगतो उद्या दोघा-तिघांना तुमच्यासाठी खोली बघायला.  
तुम्ही आपलं नांव सांगून गुपचूप राहा म्हणजे झालं. काय ? इंगळे  
म्हणजे इंगळे... झालं. कोण कशाला विचारील आणखी काही?  
आपण आपलं व्यवस्थित राहिलं म्हणजे झालं. नाही, म्हणजे, तसं  
इथं कोणी काही मानीत नाही. पण जुने संस्कार असतात. ते  
लवकर जात नाहीत. "24

(I will ask some people to make a search of room for you. You tell your name and live quietly. Ingale, means Ingale okay. Why will anybody ask anything else. We must live neatly and it

is okay. No, I mean, here, nobody observes anything.... But they are our practices. They don't leave us so easily.)

Kulkarni' spoke the truth of social psychology.

Though this was a social reality and accepted social truth, this was humiliating to Ingale. But he did not mind it. He only recalled the past memories of his childhood. Mrs. Kulkarni's comment reminds him the similar painful memory of his childhood.

The Brahmin family does not believe that a mahar can be a teacher though it is a fact. The reaction of Sumitra's mother to the fact is little surprising but more shocking and humiliating,

" आता तुझ्या हाती आमच्या ब्राम्हणांची पोरं शिकतील. आनंद

आहे ! काळच फिरला म्हणायचा. "25

(Now, our Brahmin children will learn under you. What a surprise! Time is changed)

She can not stomach the idea that a 'mahar' can be a teacher. However, she asks Sumitra, to serve Ashok with a mother's sensibility and shows sympathy on Ashok's declaration that he lost his father.

After the Indian Independence a school is regarded as a place of communal harmony. It is supposed that the frame of national integrity is shaped in schools. A school is a moral centre of the society. Children are supposed to be the prosperous future of country. The teacher shoulders this responsibility.

As such, no one can believe and tolerate the idea that a school is the centre of anti-social, anti-national spirit and anti-human activities.

But this is true in respect of the Zilla Parishad school of Ridgaon. The school proves to be a centre of mental torture and humiliation to Ashok. Sometimes this humiliation is verbal and sometimes mute. But Ashok Ingale receives it meekly, but unwillingly. Ashok Ingale feels humiliated when he finds his own caste pupils on the back benches.

Further, he has humiliating experience in the teacher's room of the school. Other teachers, belonging to the so-called high castes, do not expect Ingale to drink water from the common pitcher as he is a 'Mahar'. When Ashok Ingale takes water with his own hands from the common pitcher, the reactions of Patil, Adho, Shirbhate, Pande and Deshpande are mute, indirect and but humiliating. Arun Sadhu describes their reactions in following words,

" पाडे गुरुजींचं तोंड उघडं पडलं होतं, चवर तोंडातल्या तोंडात हसत होते, आढोच्या कपाळावर आठ्या आल्या होत्या; शिरभातेनं जोरजोरानं तपकिरीचा बार भरायला सुरुवात केली होती. देशपांडेनं आपलं लक्षच नाही असं दाखवण्यासाठी चष्मा पुसण्यासाठी काढून घेतला होता. काहींच्या चेहऱ्यावर उघड नाराजी दिसत होती. पाटील गुरुजी तर संतापलेले दिसत होते." <sup>26</sup>

(Pande Guruji's mouth was wide open. Mr. Chavar was laughing in cheeks. Adho's forehead was wrinkled. Shirbhate started to fill his nostrils with snuff. Deshpande took his specs to show that he did not notice anything. There was oen dislike on some teachers' faces. Mr. Patil was looking furious.)

All this was humiliating, but Ashok was prepared for that. Only Chavar Guruji was on the side of Ashok. When Patil Guruji asked Bhimya, the peon,

"मडकं धुवून आन थे. आपल्यास पिता न्हाई येनार पाणी  
तेच्यातलं"<sup>27</sup>

(Clean that pitcher. We can not drink its water.)

It was Mr. Chavar who took Ashok outside the teachers' room and called the teachers ' आडाणचोट <sup>28</sup> (begotten by idiot). Ashok was prepared for all that was happening. This is indicated by his own words spoken to Mr. Chavar

" जाऊ द्या, तुमी मनावर घेऊ नका. मी बघतो यायचं काय  
कराचं ते. " <sup>29</sup>

(Let it be. You don't mind it. I will see what to do of that)

Love is sublime and it is not confined by religion or caste. But the people defiled it on the basis of caste and religion. A teacher's comment indirectly refers to Ashok's caste,

" अरे त्या धेंडाले कोण लाईन मारु देणार बामणाच्या पोरीवर.. " <sup>30</sup>

(Who will allow that brat to woo on a Brahmin girl ?)

This is humiliating to Ashok. Ashok Ingale has the same humiliating experience in the Deshmukh wada, the centre of power of the village. There too, he is not treated as a human being or as a teacher but only as a 'Mahar'. Mrs. Deshmukh speaks,

" म्हार असलं गुर्जो म्हणून काय झालं ? लागलं तर मी बशीन  
अभ्यासाच्या वेळी जवळ "31

(What if the teacher (Ashok Ingale) is 'Mahar' ? If required, I will sit beside (Meera) at the time of study)

Though he is treated as a 'Mahar', he is given concession. But it should be noted that the concession, given to Ingale Guruji, is need based and not with honour.

Ashok's experience at the village (upper) well is also humiliating. It is insulting, humiliating, harassing and exploiting. When he sees his caste women standing nearby the well, with their pitchers in their hands totally depending on the mercy of the upper caste women, he is disturbed. This humiliation is non verbal. Nobody insulted the out-caste people. Everything goes as usual. But dependence of the out-caste women on sawarnas humiliates him. He feels sorry for his caste people have to drink only dirty water of the lower well. And this humiliation prepares his mind either to clean their well or to make the upper well open to all.



Vithaji Patil is the village head. Ashok Ingale decides to go to him with a request for making the well open to all. But there too, he faces the same humiliation. Ashok Ingale tells Vithaji that it is their constitutional right to draw water from the village well. To hear Ashok's words, Vithaji Patil bursts into anger,

" कायदा न घटना तुमची तुम्माजवळ ठिवा, आमास शिकवू नोका. ह्ये गाव आहे. आन इथे गावचा कायदा चालते. आमी देते ते मुकाट घ्याचं तं तुमी लय टुरटुरच करता आणि थोडं दिलं का तुमी माजता.. "32

(Keep your law and constitution with you. Don't teach us. This is a village and it has its own law. Instead of accepting calmly what we give you, you people always whine about it.)

The arrogance of the village head does not allow him to use his conscience and he does not respect the constitution of the country though he is a responsible official of the village. This is humiliating not only to Ashok Ingale but also to any Indian citizen. These words of Vithaji Patil are not only striking to any Indian ears but also indication of his arrogance. Perhaps Arun Sadhu indicates the living conditions of the poor and humble untouchables in a village like Ridgaon where the villagers openly speak ill of the Constitution of India.

Being educated, Ashok Ingale never expects positive response immediately. He is prepared to face the situation. He is mentally and spiritually resolved to solve the water problem of

Ridgaon. His humiliation and his harassment prove to be helpful in making him a moral preacher and strong leader of the outcaste colony.

### **Exploitation of Untouchables :**

In *Bahishkrut* also, the dalits are victims of exploitation by the so-called high caste Hindus, Exploitation in this novel is of social kind. In this novel, we see sexual and intellectual exploitation and poverty and caste is its basic cause.

Mr. Kulkarni asks Ashok to go on the Deshmukh wada and accept the tuition of the Deshmukh's daughter. In fact, the head master of the school himself is a teacher of English. He can also accept the tuition of Meera, Deshmukh's daughter. But he does not accept it and asks Ingale to accept it. However Ingale does not pay heed to what he says. Mr. Kulkarni, Mr Deshmukh try to exploit Ashok of his intellect for he is an outcaste.

Sexual exploitation is also suggested by Arun Sadhu through a stream of consciousness technique in the novel.

To see Sukdya's slim and dark mother, Ingale recalls the memories of his own mother's seduction when he was hardly six and his mother, was then a widow. She used to collect and sell faggots in the city. There, she fell a prey to the sexual lust of a man whom Ingale used to call 'मामा' (maternal uncle), as she had

no other alternative after her husband's death. The following feeling of Ashok is suggestive in this regard,

" एखाद्या घरी मोठी टाकायला माय गेली की तिथली पुरुषमंडळी  
तिला शिव्या देत. पण पुन्हा मुद्दाम लघळपणे का वागत? आणि ते  
आपल्याला का आवडत नसे ? "33

(When mother went to some house, the men there used to abuse her then purposefully, they used to behave unwantedly. Why did I not like it?)

Ashok Ingale gives the example of the uncle, who might had used his mother to quench his sexual thirst only because she was poor and alone in the world,

" अश्याच एखाद्या घरी तो मामा दिसला असावा. हा मामा  
आपल्या आईशी एवढा गोड गोड का बोलत असायचा ?  
आपल्याला सारखं भातकं का द्यायचा ? कित्येक वेळा झोपडीवर  
येवून तासनतास बसून रहायचा. आपल्याला झोप लागायची. जाग  
आली तरी मामा घरीच. मधूनच मायच्या अंगावर एखादं नवं लुगडं  
दिसायचं, मामा आपल्याला नवे कपडे का आणून द्यायचा ? पाच  
वर्षापूर्वी एका अपघातात मामा गेला तेव्हा मायनं आठवडाभर  
अंथरुण धरलं, खाणं पिणं सोडून दिलं... "34

(I might have seen that uncle in some house. Why did he use to speak so sweet with my mother? Why did he give riceflakes to me always ? Many times, he was seen to be in the hut hours together. I slept. But when I woke up, then also the

uncle was there in the hut. Sometimes I could see a new saree on my mother. Why did that uncle give me new clothes ? Five years ago, the uncle passed away in an accident. At that time, mother fell ill and stuck to bed. She left eating.)

Exploitation is but natural when there is poverty. Poverty results in humiliation and, in turn, humiliation turns in exploitation. Ashok Ingale's mother was young when she was widowed. Sexual satisfaction was another thing but she had no money to shoulder the family responsibilities. She was poor. So she had to undergo that kind of immoral relationship. Question may also be raised about Ingale's mother's morality. But where was the morality of that uncle? If he wanted to show sympathy towards the widow, he could have helped her without any immoral expectation of sexual satisfaction from her. But he never did that. He used her immorally for she was poor and needy.

In fact, Ashok's mother was not immoral but circumstances compelled her to keep illicit relations for her need of money with the uncle.

### **Deprival of Constitutional Fundamental human rights:**

In *Bahishkrut*, there is exposure to the deprival of fundamental human rights which have been given by the Indian

Constitution to every Indian national. The outcastes are a part of Indian society. According to the Constitution discrimination on the basis of religion and caste is prohibited and banned. All people are given open entry at the public places. And mention of anybody's caste causing him humiliation or insult is considered as cognizable offence. Education is considered the fundamental right every Indian child.

But the untouchables in *Bahishkrut* are deprived of these basic human rights. In the school of Ridgaon, the outcaste students are compelled to sit on the back benches. They are given discriminating treatment by the upper caste Hindu teachers.

The Zilla Parishad school and the village well are public places. But the untouchables are not allowed to draw water from the village well as their touch to the well is considered as water pollution. They have to depend on the availability and mercy of some sawarnas for water. In the school also, there is separate provision of drinking water for Ashok Ingale. He is not supposed to take water from the common pitcher.

No one is supposed to mention anybody by his caste in insulting way. Still, every uppercaste Hindu with an exception of Sumitra and Mr. Chavar in *Bahishkrut* makes an insulting mention of the untouchables including Ashok Ingale. Even among the school children, castism is deeply rooted. When

Ashok Ingale asks the untouchable back benchers to sit on the front empty benches, other children speak,

" म्हारवाड्यातले पोटे हायेत थे गुर्जी, थे कायले इकडं बसतीन ?"<sup>35</sup>

(These children are from the Mahar colony. How can they sit on the front benches?)

The innocent souls of the school children are polluted by upper caste Hindu teachers.

### **Arun Sadhu's compassion for untouchables :**

Arun Sadhu wrote *Bahishkrut* on his first hand experience in Marathwada region of Maharashtra. Around 1974, he had seen that the upper caste Hindus disallowed SCs i.e. the scheduled caste people (untouchables) to draw water from the wells. There were many deaths due to drought. This religion based mercilessness of the high caste Hindus inspired him to write this novel.<sup>36</sup> He felt sorry and also compassion for the untouchables.

Out of this compassion for dalits, Arun Sadhu wrote *Bahishkrut*. The title is suggestive and apt as the novel is based on the story of a struggle by untouchables for water. By 'bahishkrut', he means, one who is dispelled from the common walk of life, from the social life. To disallow anybody social life is very inhuman and anti-social. The high caste Hindus, then almost alienated the dalits and dispelled them from the social

life. This happened more in small villages. There were so many villages like Ridgaon in Maharashtra and in India. The writer's view is to bring the social evil before the world of the exploited and the exploiters. For them, the novel is not less than an introspection as it is the re-assessment of their own behaviour. Now, they are the judge and have every right to justify or denounce their behaviour. But at the same time, the author suggests in very clear words, the remedy over the problem, he has presented.

Ashok Ingale is the mouthpiece of the author. But Ashok's actions and reflections are the author's own decisions. On one hand, he is the protagonist of the novel and on the other hand, the author's mouthpiece (spokesman). Through Ashok Ingale, the author suggests a permanent, though slow pacing, remedy over the problem of untouchability and it is 'education'.<sup>37</sup>

Arun Sadhu, being a literate, has firm belief in education as an important factor in the process of social reformation. He speaks the same through Ingale when Ingale gets angry with his community children and advises them to study hard,

" अरं, तुमच्यासारख्या पोरानी अभ्यास नाही करायचा तर कोनी ?  
फुकटात शाळा मिळते, नादारी मिळते. अभ्यास केला पायजे.  
परीक्षा दिल्या पायजे. त्याच्याशिवाय भविष्य नाही रे बाबांनो.  
आपल्या लोकांना शिक्षणाची जास्त जहरत आहे काय ? कारण  
आपुन आधीच अशिक्षित, अज्ञानी. थोडं आणखीन ज्ञान आलं तर

सुधार. पैसे कमवू. जरा दोन सुखाचे घास खाऊ. आपले मायबाप शिकले नाही. म्हणून ते अर्धपोटी मरतेत. अपून तरी आता सुधारायला नको ? "38

(Eh, who else are to study. You have free education, and scholarships. Without education, there is no future. We people have more need of education. Our parents did not get belliful of food for they were uneducated. Without education, there is no progress.)

The author sincerely suggests that progress goes with education. Till the moment, he sees only one solution over the problem of untouchability and that is 'education'.<sup>39</sup>

The author makes the high caste Hindus feel that changes are inevitable. He suggests, though indirectly, that either the high caste Hindus must accept the dalits as an integral part of their society and respect their rights, or get ready to face the consequences. This is suggested through Deshmukh's words, when he speaks,

" आता दिवस पालटले. सगळं कसं साजरं जमवून घ्यावं लागतं.

पूर्वीसारखं नाई चालत. "40

(Now, times are changed. We have to accept the changes. We can not continue old practices.)

Deshmukh has accepted that the times have changed. Further, Arun Sadhu becomes philosophical and suggests that the sawarnas should not forget the laws of nature,



" साऱ्या जाती जमातींना ँका पंक्तीला आणून बसवणाऱ्या  
निसर्गनियमांचा त्यांना विसर पडलेला आहे. "41

(They have forgotten the nature's laws that bind all caste people into an integrated whole.)

In order to prove his philosophy, he gives example of rain,

" असा पाऊस सगळ्या रिदगावावरच कोसळत होता.  
महारवाड्यावर, गावावर, शाळेवर आणि देशमुखाच्या  
वाड्यावरही. "42

(It was raining over the whole village of Ridgaon, over the Maharwada, the village, the school and the Deshmukh wada.)

To be brief, *Bahishkrut* is the story of the protagonist's struggle for clean and sufficient drinking water for the outcastes in free India. He is insistant to open the village well to all including the dalits. In his efforts he succeeds. The village well is declared open to all but at the cost of the lives of three dalits including the protagonist. Water problem of dalits is not the only problem as is dealt with in the novel. Their overall development is desired in the novel. Arun Sadhu advocates them that education is the ultimate remedy on their problems.

As such, *Bahishkrut* is a documentation of the social and overall change brought by the law in untouchables' life in Free India. But without the change in the traditional attitude to untouchables as the lowest section of Hindu society. The mentality of the sawarnas to look down upon untouchables is

still continued. In addition, the novel records realistically the poverty, humiliation, exploitation and deprivation of their human rights in the changing modern India. The realism in the novel is striking and eye-opening.

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## **CHAPTER - III**

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