

Structural and Cultural Violence in Imayam's Novel Pethavan the Begetter

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Abstract - Violence is considered as a thing resulted from an individual or group behaviour that cause harm to an individual or group. Mostly assaults, physical attacks, rapes, sexual abuses, domestic issues, tortures, threatening others by using power are considered as violence as these kind of violence results mostly from physical power even though it can root from different sources. If we understand violence through literature, we can find different perspectives and various kinds of violence and how violence influences the social and cultural structures. Johan Galtung, a Norwegian Sociologist defines violence and clarifies the forms of violence. He distinguished three types of violence based on the basic need/need groups and established the concept of direct, structural and cultural violence. In this paper, I tried to infer the structural and cultural violence in the novella "Pethavan the Begetter" written by a Tamil Dalit writer Imayam.

Index Terms - Cultural violence, dominance, Hegemony, Power, Structural violence.

I. INTRODUCTION

Violence, a part of human experience was viewed as a destructing, harmful entity that injures or harms both physically and mentally. It is the powerful application of extreme force against humans or animals that ends in deprivation. It is seen as the outcome of the loss of peace whereas peace is seen as the absence of violence. Mostly violence is understood as a harmful use of power against people. But it can also be the evil consequence of the social structure that causes oppression to human beings, especially the marginals. The standard definition refers violence as physical injury and ignores the psychological abuses and mostly understood humans are confined as victims of violence whereas animal abuses are given less consideration. But it differs from the conventional understanding of violence as it includes the threat and

intimidation under the use of power. It is not required to result only in death or injuries but also in various forms of burden over individual or group. As a result, violence operates not only in direct ways but also in indirect ways. The consequence of the violence can be immediate as well as latent.

Apart from that, there are self-directed violence, interpersonal violence, and collective violence. Self-directed violence includes behaviours end in suicide, self-injury or self-abuse; suicide attempts also known as 'parasuicide'. It is a consequence of psychological effects and trauma. Gender inequalities, child abuse, rape or sexual assaults, women abuse, male domination, intimate partner violence and family issues due to power structures come under interpersonal violence.

The socio-political and economic violence comes under collective violence. It can have multiple motives. For instance, fragmenting and creating divisions, denial of rights, and denial of access to essential services, economic attack by a larger groups or community fall under economic violence. Acts of terrorism, mutiny, dictatorship, mob violence comes under political and collective violence.

This paper deals with how violence operates in structural and cultural perspectives in light of Galtung's concept of structural and cultural violence and tries to infer the various forms of violence operated directly and indirectly in the novel.

II. HEGEMONY

Hegemony is a form of domination which keeps supremacy of superior class that subjugates and controls lower class. The term was coined by Antonio Gramsci. In this structure of hegemony, power and majority controls the powerless and the minority. Gramsci focused mainly on the cultural hegemony as

it deals with the dominance of superior class over lower class. Through the light of violence studies hegemony is a violence that operates and work in indirect ways. So, hegemony can cause collective, interpersonal and also a cultural and structural violence. In the novel Pethavan the Begetter, hegemony is one of the factors that victimize a family to be fallen as a prey to the cultural and structural violence.

III.PLOT OVERVIEW OF PETHAVAN THE BEGETTER

The story takes place in Ullunthurpet, a village near Villupuram. It narrates one day life incidents of a family of Pazhani, the begetter of the novel's title. The story starts in a panchayat of dominant community accusing Pazhani's daughter Bakkiyam for falling in love with a dalit community Sub-Inspector Periyasami. In order to keep the honour of their communal power, the villagers demand Pazhani to kill his daughter immediately by poisoning as verdict or she will be gang raped and his farms and house will be set fire. However, Pazhani tries to oppose and to get time to kill her daughter, which the villagers have not accepted. The villagers give him time of a night to kill his daughter only after, he promises on camphor. Pazhani's family is in trauma as they cannot overrule the verdict of the village panchayat and he could not kill her. So, on that night, he takes Bakkiyam to bus stand and send her secretly to make her escape from the village and the following morning Pazhani's body found near a mountain. He kills himself instead of killing his own daughter. The novel ends abruptly without any further description of what happens after Pazhani's Death.

IV.STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Structural violence can be characterised as the intentional use of physical or psychological power to violate the basic needs. The notion, violence has to be understood with the association of intentional use of force or power has to be reconsidered. For instance, poverty and denial of essential services rooted from the violence which is hidden. The structure that operates violence is hidden. Hence it works in indirect ways. Gaultang in his paper says, if a husband beats his wife, it becomes violence and if million husbands

beat their wives it becomes a structure. Hence the power operates in indirect way in structural violence.

V.CULTURAL VIOLENCE

Culture is a concept of living based on certain knowledge, beliefs, customs, ideas of a particular country, society etc. It is powerful as it derives from the experience. It is understood as totality of values, practices and norms practised by a group or community. But it could cause some conflict when it directed forcefully or when it is neglected. In the 1990s, Gaultang introduced the concept of cultural violence and explained how the culture at some extent constitutes kind of violence. It can more be understood when the norms, beliefs, values, practices of certain group or community direct its power towards the same community. Not every aspect of culture can cause violence, but there are some behaviours and practices which operates its power to get legitimization and at some extent cause violence. This cultural violence does not constitute its power most directly but causes violence indirectly. Hence it can be inferred as indirect violence.

VI.STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE IN IMAYAM'S PETHAVAN

Structural violence operates on the social, political, and economic structures. It is a permanent state of violence as it mostly accepted as the norms of the society which can be legitimized. It is understood as the outcome of hegemony between and within the society and the result of hierarchy and powerful dominance of the upper class or community over the lower. In this novel one of the central characters Pazhani, belongs to upper dominant community. So, his villagers are not ready to let his daughter's relationship with Periyasami grow. In this case, the villagers of the dominant community want to secure the pride of their community by asking Pazhani to kill his own daughter. They demand Pazhani to kill Bakkiyam as soon as possible. Killing a woman for falling in love with the dalit man could be accepted as norms of their community.

The Community operates as a structure of the society. Here power operates as a tool to protect their community pride. So upper community woman falls in love with a dalit man is not considered as a

legitimate thing. So, she is sentenced to be killed. Hence this social structure which imposes its power on a woman and her family becomes violence. The lower community that represented by Periyasami and Pazhani's family fall as victims of this structural violence. The Dalit Sub Inspector's parents and farms exploited by the upper community villagers. "Twice we set fire to his house. In the dead of night, we freed the goats and the cows tethered in his house. We set fire to his cane fields. We set up cast panchayats and had him fined five times. His parents have been tied up a beaten black and blue. It looks like it is going to lead to a big caste war" (Imayam, 4, 5). The structural violence produced and reproduced ideas of racism and leads to cultural violence.

VII. CULTURAL VIOLENCE IN IMAYAM'S PETHAVAN

Since culture is a totality of a set of norms and practices, it is transmitted to generations. In the novel, Pethavan the Begetter, the author truly portrayed the violence rooted in the name of culture. The character Pazhani belongs to a dominant community and his daughter Bakkiyam falls in love with the subjugated, lower, dalit community Sub-Inspector Periyasami. But the villagers of the dominant community could not be able to tolerate the affair of Bakkiyam and Periyasami and in order to part them the villagers harm Periyasami and his family by beating him and his parents and by setting fire his farms. The structure of the violence not only destroys human body but also leaves its mark in the souls. So, this exploitation becomes a legitimate one in the minds of the villagers. This penetration of the ideology will be transmitted to generations, and it can become culturally legitimated practice. As far as the cultural violence exists the marginals will become the victims of their power application.

In the Village Panchayat, a woman with baby on her hip asked Pazhani to pour poison down to Bakkiyam's throat. "You should pour pesticides down her throat and lock her in a room. However, much she screams or shouts, do not open the door said the young woman held a baby on her hip" (Imayam, 2).

When some of the villagers found Bakkiyam with Periyasami beat her and take off their dhoties, ask Bakkiyam to take as much penis as possible to satisfy her sexual desire. These instances, shows that a

woman getting exploited or dominated by men is considered as normal and the men have power over women. This power becomes a structure and causes violence. Hence, this structural violence can be transmitted and end as the norms of culture and cultural violence. Hence Structural and cultural violence get intertwined.

VIII. CONCLUSION

From the above instances, it is clear that the power operates over the lower, marginalised by the superior, dominant social group. Exploiting the lower class or community becomes normal and legitimate one. It cannot be considered as sin. Hence structural violence becomes the process of transmitting power and dominance and makes cultural violence an evolution by its practices. The subjugated and hierarchy becomes the structure and cause violence. The legitimisation of the structural and cultural aspects justifies violence.

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