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A Critical Study of Vasant Moon's Growing up Untouchable in India; A Dalit Autobiography.

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ABSTRACT: This critical analysis delves into the autobiography of Vasant Moon, “Growing up Untouchable in India,” a ground-breaking work that offers a moving and colourful picture of a Dalit’s (formerly called “untouchable”) existence in mid-20th-century India. The autobiography provides a first-hand account of the widespread prejudice against people based on caste that has plagued Indian culture for many years. In addition to detailing his personal journey, Moon’s story acts as a microcosm of the Dalit movement’s fight for social justice, equality, and dignity.

The analysis explores the themes and literary devices In Moon’s autobiography, emphasising the way he uses incidents from his own life to shed insight on the larger socio-political backdrop of his day. Moon’s depiction of his upbringing, which was characterised by systematic marginalisation and an unwavering quest for knowledge, highlights the tenacity and resolve that define the Dalit people’s fight against injustice. The autobiography is a potent critique of the established caste system and its dehumanising repercussions, not just a retelling of personal events.

I. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vasant Moon: An Advocate for Equality in Society

A well-known writer and social activist from India, Vasant Moon (1932–2002) was also a driving force behind the Dalit movement, which aimed to end the systematic marginalisation and mistreatment of Dalit—previously known as untouchables—in that country. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the chief architect of the Indian Constitution and a prominent supporter of Dalit rights, had a profound impact on both his life and career

Early Life and Influences:

Born in Nagpur, Maharashtra, on December 25, 1932, Vasant Moon was raised in a socio-political milieu where the fight for Dalit emancipation was a major focus. His early exposure to Ambedkar’s ideas had a significant influence on him. Moon’s family experienced severe economic struggle and social discrimination, like many Dalit households do, which strengthened his resolve to fight for justice and equality.

Volunteerism and Involvement in the Dalit cause:

Vasant Moon was involved in the Dalit cause at a young age. Engaging in activism, he supported the causes of Dalit and other marginalised communities through the Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF) and later the Republican Party of India (RPI), two organisations founded by Ambedkar. Due to his commitment to the cause, Moon took on a number of responsibilities, such as planning demonstrations, awareness-raising campaigns, and social reform initiatives.

Moon made a great deal of contributions, one of which was to education. Understanding the transforming potential of education, he worked to ensure Dalit communities had access to it. He thought that one of the most important tools for ending the generations-long cycle of oppression and poverty that Dalit families faced was education.

Literary Contribution

In addition to her activism, Vasant Moon was a prolific writer. His writings recorded the fight for Dalit’s’ rights and offered a moving glimpse into their existence. One of the foundational works of Dalit literature is his autobiography, “Vasti” (translated as “Growing Up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography” in English). The book gives a detailed account of his early years, Dalit’s’ socioeconomic circumstances, and Ambedkar’s effect. “Vasti” is praised for its honest depiction of the prejudice against Dalit communities and their tenacity. Moon’s writing is distinguished by its emotional profundity and simplicity, which makes it an effective medium for bringing attention to the predicament of Dalit.

The legacy of Vasant Moon endures beyond his passing. His contributions to the Dalit cause have left a long-lasting impression on Indian culture. His contribution to the foundation of organisations and policies that uphold Dalit rights and education is significant. His works continue to have an impact and motivate younger people to work for equality

and social justice. Moon's life serves as an example of the strength of a single person's willpower in the face of institutionalised oppression.

II. "GROWING UP UNTOUCHABLES IN INDIA: A DALIT AUTOBIOGRAPHY"

Vasant Moon's book "Growing Up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography" provides a compelling look at the author's upbringing as a member of the Dalit group, who have traditionally been marginalised and oppressed by India's caste system. The book provides a realistic depiction of the emotional, social, and economic hardships that Dalit, often known as "untouchables," endured in mid-20th-century India. Moon's story, which follows him from birth to manhood in Nagpur, is both personal and political. He offers a close-up view of the systematic obstacles and widespread prejudice that Dalit faced, including their restricted access to fundamental human rights, work opportunities, and education. His experiences serve as a stark reminder of the pervasive prejudice and unforgiving caste-based discrimination.

Moon's tale revolves around his participation in the Ambedkarite movement, which was sparked by Dalit leader and chief author of the Indian Constitution Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. This movement promoted equality and social justice by attempting to oppose and destroy the caste system. Moon's devotion to social reform was fuelled by his deep involvement with Ambedkar's ideas, which significantly moulded his identity and objectives. The autobiography also explores the spiritual and cultural facets of Dalit life, such as the Buddhism that many converted to in order to flee the harsh caste system. The moving portrayal of Moon's personal growth and his community's awakening as a whole highlights the Dalit people's tenacity and resolve.

More than merely a memoir, "Growing Up Untouchable in India" is a monument to the ongoing fight for equality and respect. Readers have a clearer understanding of the historical and present-day struggles endured by Dalit as well as the unwavering fight for justice and human rights that still goes on today because to Moon's vivid the narrative.

Theme of the Dalit Autobiography, "Growing Up Untouchables in India" by Vasant Moon

Vasant Moon's important autobiography "Growing Up Untouchable in India" explores the author's personal experiences growing up as a "untouchable" in Indian society. The following are this autobiography's main themes:

- **Caste Discrimination:** The story eloquently illustrates the widespread prejudice Dalit experience on the basis of caste. Moon highlights the social, economic, and cultural obstacles that Dalit face as she discusses their systematic subjugation and marginalisation.
- **Identity and Self-Respect:** In a culture that dehumanises Dalit, the autobiography examines the fight for identity and self-respect. Moon is on a quest to regain his honour and affirm the worth of his tribe.
- **Education as Empowerment:** Throughout, education is identified as a central topic, acting both as a vehicle for empowerment and as a counterweight to the repressive caste system. Moon's personal experiences highlight how education can break down societal barriers in a transforming way.
- **Community and Solidarity:** Throughout the book, there is a strong emphasis on the Dalit sense of community and solidarity. Moon highlights the value of cooperation and group efforts in the struggle against caste discrimination.
- **Resistance and Resilience:** The story highlights Dalit's tenacity and fortitude in the face of institutionalised prejudice. Moon's narrative exemplifies tenacity and the never-ending pursuit of equality and justice.
- **Ambedkarite Influence:** A recurrent subject is the impact of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a pivotal figure in the Dalit cause. Moon considers how Ambedkar's teachings influenced both his life and the larger Dalit rights movement.

"Growing Up Untouchable in India" gives a more comprehensive commentary on the socio-political aspects of caste in India through these topics, in addition to offering a personal narrative of Moon's experiences. The autobiography is a potent illustration of the ongoing struggle for social justice and Dalit rights.

III. HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

Vasant Moon's book "Growing Up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography" provides an insightful look into the hardships and way of life faced by Dalit in India, particularly throughout the 20th century. It is essential to consider the historical and social conditions that influenced Moon's experiences and tales in order to fully appreciate the value of this work.

Historical context

Colonial India and Social stratification:

India was deeply ingrained in a strict caste system during British colonial control, with the Dalits (previously known as "Untouchables") at the bottom of the social order. These distinctions were frequently maintained and formalised by the British government through census classifications and regulations.



Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement:

B.R. Ambedkar, a Vasant Moon contemporary, became a key figure in the Dalit' movement. He promoted social changes, political representation, and education as part of his efforts to end caste discrimination. Ambedkar's contributions, particularly his part in the Indian Constitution's writing, established the groundwork for the advancement of Dalit rights.

Post-Independence India:

The Indian Constitution prohibited caste discrimination following India's 1947 declaration of independence. Dalit, however, continued to suffer harsh socioeconomic realities, including pervasive prejudice and restricted access to opportunities and resources.

Social context

Life in the Slums:

The autobiography of Vasant Moon clearly depicts his childhood in Nagpur's slums, emphasising the day-to-day hardships faced by Dalit. The living conditions in these slums were subpar, there was poor sanitation, and there was restricted access to healthcare and education.

Education as an Empowerment Tool:

Moon highlights how education has changed his life. Motivated by Ambedkar's own academic accomplishments, he continued his studies in spite of institutional obstacles. For Dalit, education became a vital means of escaping traditional caste jobs and pursuing greater prospects.

Social Discrimination and Resistance:

Throughout the autobiography, several examples of caste-based discrimination are described, ranging from economic exploitation to social exclusion. But it also emphasises how strong and resilient Dalit communities were, organising movements, adopting Ambedkarite ideology, and fighting for their rights and dignity.

IV. VISUAL AND CULTURAL REPRESENTATION

Visual representation:

Graphic Illustration Moon's autobiography makes effective use of graphic elements to illustrate the hard realities and tenacity of the Dalit population. The book's cover, which frequently includes pictures of Moon or other symbolic imagery, establishes the tone for the reader and calls attention to both the more general social background and the narrative's personal aspect right away.

The actual locations that Dalit occupy are brought to life by Moon's detailed descriptions of his surroundings. He depicts the segregated neighbourhoods in great detail, setting them in sharp contrast to the upper-caste neighbourhoods. This geographical split serves as both a backdrop and a crucial component of the Dalit experience, highlighting the structural marginalisation and exclusion they encounter. For example, contrasting the spacious, well-maintained upper-caste houses with the tiny, decaying homes of Dalit colonies graphically emphasises the socio-economic differences that are sustained by the caste system.

Cultural Representation

Moon's story is full of cultural allusions that offer insight into the Dalit way of life. He presents the distinct cultural identity of Dalit by painstakingly describing celebrations, customs, and everyday activities. Awareness the community's internal cohesion and resilience in the face of external adversity requires an awareness of these cultural components. Moon's depiction of education as a means of empowerment is among the autobiography's most touching elements. Moon's quest for education is a recurrent motif that emphasises the transformational power of knowledge despite enduring extreme discrimination. His triumphant and challenging scholastic experiences mirror the larger battle of Dalit to overcome the bonds of caste. The graphic depiction of educational settings, ranging from run-down village schools to more modern metropolitan establishments, highlights the disparities in Dalit's' access to and quality of education.

V. LEGACY AND CONTINUING RELEVANCE

Vasant Moon's "Growing Up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography" is a moving examination of the problems and hardships that Dalit encountered in India, illuminating their cultural oppression, socioeconomic hardships, and resiliency. Moon's autobiography, which was published in 1991, is still regarded as an important literary work that not



only captures the author's personal experiences but also offers a critical analysis of the larger caste discriminatory systems in society.

Legacy Relevance

Moon's autobiography is renowned for its candid depiction of the brutal reality that Dalit face from the moment they are born. Moon describes his early years in Maharashtra, describing the institutionalised discrimination that permeates all aspects of daily life, including social interactions, religious customs, and access to education and employment possibilities. His story highlights the ingrained stereotypes that support Dalit's' marginalisation and inequity for decades to come.

Continuing Relevance

The persistent caste-based violence and prejudice in modern India highlight the significance of Moon's study. Dalit still confront structural obstacles in their pursuit of social mobility, career opportunities, and education notwithstanding legislative safeguards and affirmative action initiatives. Moon's autobiography urges readers to confront hard truths about caste privilege and to fight for real change, serving as a reminder of the ongoing fight for social justice and equality.

VI. PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND REFLECTIONS

Vasant Moon sheds light on the social and cultural inequities that are pervasive in Indian society through his autobiography, "Growing Up Untouchable in India," which is a moving account of his experiences as a Dalit. Against the backdrop of the strict caste system, which has historically been known as "untouchables," Moon's story is set, Dalits are subjected to institutionalised prejudice and marginalisation. Moon tells a moving story of growing up in a small village where caste-based discrimination dominated many facets of daily life. Moon reveals the widespread discrimination that moulded his early years, from being denied entry to temples to experiencing cruel treatment at the hands of those from higher castes. His observations on how societal prejudices tainted childhood innocence draw attention to how deeply ingrained caste-based discrimination is.

In Moon's journey, education surfaces as a transformational element. Moon embraced education despite enormous challenges, such as financial limitations and social rejection. His scholastic accomplishments demonstrated the transformational power of knowledge in tearing down caste barriers by challenging the constraints and preconceptions placed on Dalits. In addition, Moon's story explores the intersection of gender and caste, highlighting the dual burden that Dalit women bear. He shows how Dalit women face compounded discrimination, frequently taking the brunt of caste-based violence and exploitation through personal experiences and observations.

VII. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

Comparative Analysis

"Growing Up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography" by Vasant Moon provides a moving personal story that explores caste prejudice. In his moving account of his early experiences with tyranny and marginalisation, Moon offers a critical perspective on the difficult circumstances that Dalit in India must contend with. His autobiography pushes readers to confront structural injustices while also exposing the pervasive prejudices present in Indian society.

Critical Perspective

Vasant Moon's "Growing Up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography" has received high praise from critics for its candid depiction of the caste-based prejudice that Dalit's endure in India. In addition to providing insight into Moon's personal journey, his story acts as a microcosm of the systematic oppression that millions of people face. Critics applaud Moon for skillfully fusing personal tales with more general socio-political allegory, illuminating the relationship between injustice, power, and identity.

From a critical standpoint, Moon's autobiography is regarded as a spark that challenges prevailing narratives that support prejudice based on caste. Readers are forced to face the harsh reality of caste-based discrimination and segregation through his in-depth tales of daily humiliations and struggles. Academics value Moon's careful examination of the power relationships in Indian society, which shows how caste is a ubiquitous factor that shapes both individual identities and collective identities.



VIII. CONCLUSION

Vasant Moon ends his autobiography, “Growing Up Untouchable in India,” with a moving meditation on his experiences growing up as a Dalit. He describes his journey from a difficult and discriminatory upbringing to his eventual activism and education. Moon’s story highlights the widespread caste-based injustices that characterise Indian society and sheds light on the difficult conditions that Dalit must endure on a daily basis.

At the end of the book, Moon describes how he overcame institutional obstacles to pursue social justice and education, which speaks to themes of resiliency and willpower. He is a fervent supporter of Dalit’s’ rights and dignity and has called for a radical change in society norms and laws to end caste prejudice. In addition to being a personal biography, Moon’s story is a potent critique of the deeply ingrained caste system that still marginalises millions of people in India.

In the end, “Growing Up Untouchable in India” ends with a call to action, imploring readers to face and oppose discrimination based on caste and to work towards a more just and equitable society where everyone can live with opportunity and dignity, regardless of caste or background.

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