



A Peer-Reviewed International Multidisciplinary Research

**Portrayal of Humiliation and Caste Injustice in  
Shailender Singh's *Fora Tree to Grow (HashiyePar)***

Prof. Ashok Hulibandi

M.A.,M.Phil.,Ph.D.,LL.B(Special)

Professor & Chairman

Department of Studies in English

Karnatak University

Dharwad 58003

[hulibandikud@gmail.com](mailto:hulibandikud@gmail.com)

Shailender Singh's *Hashiye Par* is originally published in 2010 in Dogri; Suman K. Sharma has translated it into English entitled, *Far a Tree to Grow*. Shailender Singh received the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for his Dogri novel *Hashiye Par*, the Oxford University Press has published in English. Shailender Singh is a Civil Engineer graduate and opted politics as his profession; he is now serving as SSP in the J&K Police department. However, besides performing his professional duties with utmost zeal and zest, he has been taking keen interest in the issues that pertain to socio-economic conditions that prevail in the society. *Hashiye Par* takes such a close look at the lives of the very poor in the Chenab valley, Jammu that it reads like an account by an insider. It depicts the life of that segment of society which, for ages, has been pushed to a life on the margins. It portrays the lives of the fishermen, labourers, farm hands and other weaker sections of the society who are the poorest of the poor and belong to the most backward classes. Madan is a sickly and passive man; he lives in utter poverty on the outskirts of a village with his wife and four

children. A tottering old hut built of reeds is his home and he was catching fish from the nearby river his livelihood. Madan and his family seem to have been caught in the whirlpool of penury and all its attendant miseries until Kamal, the eldest son, he secures admission in an Engineering College with the promise of pulling out his kin from the dark abyss of destitution. The family had been prune this long eventually finds a root to draw sustenance from the land to grow to its full potential. *Hashiye Par* is located in Jammu around Akhnoor where the River Chenab descends from the mountains. *Hashiye Par* describes the life and dynamics of struggle of Madan and his family. Madan's story and that of his family has been one of enduring poverty. The friction and humiliation of caste injustice is now no longer that open as it used to be in Madan's childhood when the local landlord pilloried Madan's father for thinking of educating Madan. Madan is not well-treated by his acquaintances or those in positions of authority. Indeed, there is no visible villain in this story and yet there is cruelty and pain. Madan's hut of mud and reeds on the outskirts of a village is hardly a shelter against sodden skies or bitter wintry winds. Yet it holds the promise of a better future : against all odds, Madan's son Kamal excels in school and forklifts himself and his family out of the grip of abject poverty.

*Hashiye Par* narrates the story of the Jheewars from the Chenab valley in Jammu, who have been living on the brink. Shailender Singh illuminates a hundred hidden details of the Madan's life without either romanticising or patronising it as he tells a tale of despair and hopes. Jheewars were treated as slave and performed chores from cooking to dish washing for the wealthy high caste land owners. They never dream for them to own farm land or got decent government jobs. Dogri is a living language of antiquity, it boasts of a rich literature. Madan is the protagonist, is a Dalit, who lives with his family on the fringe of an unnamed village. He was dreaming to construct a cement house and educate his kids. Madan and his father was great sufferer and exploited from the

hands of the upper-caste landlords. There was a small village on the bank of river Chenab; it flowed gently into the plains. Madan's hut was stood, it made of cane and sarooof grass. It has no walls instead canes and blades cut to size stood planted in the ground. Kanta is his wife, Kamba is his eldest son Louke is younger son. Kamlesh and Usha are his daughters.

*For a Tree to Grow* depicts the economic condition of dalits. Dalit's huts were constructed from cane or sarooof grass, it has no walls. There is a gash in the front wall, which served both on the exit and entry to their hut. Madan woke up and goes to a river; he catches fish and sells it in the market. Women were waked up and collected timber and fired and prepared food. Madan had left the bed early in the morning; he ate roti left uneaten the previous night. He picked up the packet of fish from the alcove in the wall. He passed though the by lanes of his village, he walked alone as usual on the rough stretch of the untarred road to sell his fish in the town, which was two kilometres away. He saw that the village children were dressed in their tidy uniforms and went along the same path to their school. They kept their distance from him, some walked ahead and others followed him. Madan was very fond of looking at the children going to their school. Madan was a man of dreams and optimist, he always thinks positively, "He hoped that one day his own children would also go to school, or even to the city college for higher studies. He was ready to do anything to give his children a good education" (Singh 7-8). He met his good friend Tarsem, he shared his dreams. He has some merits, Madan trusted Tarsem completely. Tarsem's father Shailo Ram and Madan's father Sardari Lal were good friends. Tarsem had become a teacher in a secondary school. Madan nursed his secret desire that, "like Tarsem, his own children should get the best education available and growing up, service themselves good government job" (Singh 9). Tarsem gave some suggestions. He reached the city and sold his fish to Thoru,

Panju is his servant. Thoru was a paunchy, dark-skinned man of average height. He had a bubble nose, thick dark lips and curly hair. Madan approached Thoru and then he arrived at Desu's grocery shop.

*Hashiye Par* depicts the Central Government and State Government schemes. When Madan was in Desu Shah's shop, he heard that the Government would provide money to the poor people for building a brick house "Is it true that Mantriji is coming tomorrow to address a huge gathering?. Asked one customer, 'Yes, the minister is coming!' Replied Desu Shah. 'And, they say, he will personally hand out money cheques to all the poor, homeless families so that they build themselves a brick house' he added" (Singh 11). The matter reached Madan, he was so happy and he was dreaming. He hopes that the government will provide money to the poor people for building a brick house, his neighbour Birumal got the benefit from the Government. His family would enjoy the comfort and prestige of sleeping behind doors and windows barred against a child. Madan's fancies rapidly to built a pukka house before his eyes and he anticipated the comfort of living in a proper house. Madan remembered his childhood days that her family lived in a small sarooft hut, it was built in a corner of the village Madan's father Sardari Lal would bring a basketful of clay, he would heap the clay on the round and the whole family would sit pounding it to a fine consistency. Madan was sitting with his father; he was preparing fashion wheels and bodies of toy, motor cars and dries them in the sun. His neighbours grow, their huts were replaced by one or two room pukka houses, Madan family only grew larger. His siblings got married and started their own families in separate huts though his parents continued to live in their old hut. Madan's father Sardari Lal said wistfully, "If only we had a pukka house, we might have spent our last days in little comfort" (Singh 17). Most of his relatives are living in a small hut except Tarsem,

*For a Tree to Grow* depicts the poverty of dalits; the dalits do not have a single meal in a day. Madan reached his home and he was so hungry. He asked his wife, “Give me something to eat. I am famished. ‘I have given the last night’s left over of rice and fish curry to the children for their breakfast. It was you I was waiting for. ‘Kanta replied” (Singh 17). She served two old rotis and fish curry. While eating Madan’s mind was engrossed with several things and he was dreaming of a pukka house. He told his wife Kanta that the following day was a Sunday and that day *Mantriji* himself was visiting the town to address a large gathering there. He said to Kante, “He is coming here to distribute cheques to all the poor and homeless so that they can have their own pukka” (Singh 19). His children Kamba, Kamlesh and Usha were studying till late in the night like Gulchain Singh’s children. It also depicts the valiant life of dalits and villagers. People in the area, generally used the timber that floated down the river when it was in the spate. Young boys were very active and they were swimmers and they caught big logs and hid them from government officials. They buried the timber and they sell it when everything they get an opportunity. The stolen logs sold less than half their market price. His father Sardari Lal was hard working person, his job was to fetch drinking water from the river for everyone who worked in the field under the scorching July and August sun in the harvesting season and he toiled very hard.

*Hashiye Par* describes the exploitation of poor people and domination of landlords. There was no government but landlords were dominant and C.M. and *Mantriji* were puppets in the hands of landlords. Everything happens with the blessing of landlords; they were keys to everything in the society. Zildar Dayaram was the biggest landowner in the region; he lived in a mansion proportionate to his status. He visits his farms at least once in a week to view the hush crops, “His fifty odd years at lightly on him, Assertive in his white turban, immaculate kurta-payjam and black leather *juttis*” (Singh23). He

commands his servants. Landlords would not tolerate if a dalits get education, they discourage dalits to get education, Shailo Ram's son Tarsem had passed the eighth grade and in a moment of joy he took his son to the Zaildar to seek his blessing, Zaildar had enquired briskly, "Shailo Rama, what's the matter? Why have you come here? 'Mai baap, my son has passed the eighth grade. You know with what difficulty I have seen him through his studies. Could you put in a kind word to Mansukh Ray Sahib, the MLC to get him a job? You are everything to us mai baap" (Singh 25). The landlord was so angry and unhappy he could not tolerate. He shouted, "If your sons go on to take government jobs, who will do the work that you Jheewar do? If things go on like this, it is amatter of days before our village goes without a workman. Now get out my sight. And take you son with you. Tell him to assist you in what you do here" (Singh 25). Shailo Rama was disappointed. *Hashiye Par* depicts a social condition of the dalits. Government jobs were meant for only big people in India, rich will enjoy the privileges. The Brahmin and the upper caste create a fearful atmosphere and exploits dalits that, "To serve others was his dharma, his prime duty. There was great merit in it. God was with those who did their duty" (Singh 25). Tarsem was revolt against ideas of dharma

*Hashiye Par* describes exploitation of labours and the upper caste treats the lower caste very badly. The upper caste treats lower caste like non-human beings. During the wedding feasts of the big farmers, the poor reached the place early in the morning, they draw water from the well and scrub cauldrons, frying pans and pots to prepare for the community feast. A dabs was dug and fire lit in it, peeling onions and other vegetables and cutting them into pieces of the right size. They have to prepare rice and sweets and serves to guests. After the meal is over, poor people picked up the leaf platters leaf bowls and clean up the mess. Sardayi Lal sometime serves all and leftover food would distribute to rest of the workers. Madanandhisfathercleanedvesselsandcleanedmess.Shailender

Singh described the worst condition of poor labourer in India. During the wedding ceremony the marriage party had arrived in the evening, they received them. The groom's people were invited to sit in rows for tea and snacks. Sardari Lal and his wife were attended the wedding day, the groom's people were served food on leaf plates, and they left many things. When the guest gets up after the meal, "Sardari Laland Madan collected the leftover sweets in a basket. Sardari Lal's wife had picked up the used leaf plates to throw them to the dung heap some distance away" (Singh 28). Sardari Lal has collected other leftover food like dal rice and sweets; they reached their house in the midnight. His children waited for arrival of their parents but when they did not turn up they got sleep on the floor.

*Hashiye Par* describes the role of politician and caste discrimination in the society. The panchayat president and the head of the village exploit poor people. Madan was dreaming, he said to his wife Kanta, "Today, I will come back only after receiving the cheque from Mantriji. I might be late. Give the children whatever you have in the house. When I come back in the evening with the cheque, I'll bring eatables for both of us" (Singh 32). Madan gazed into Kanta's eyes and turned to go, he half eats Thoru's eatery. He deposited his fish for a hundred rupees and left with wasting a moment, the cross road at school gate were adorned with a large picture of the Prime Minister and other leaders. Police had erected a device at the school gate, police men frisked every person before allowing him to walk through the gate. Madan walked through this path and stood before the policemen, policemen scanned him from top to toe and then said, "If you are carrying any cigarette matches, leave them here" (Singh 33). Loud speakers had been installed strategically to broadcast the minister's voice in all directions. People began to drop in after some time and in a few movements the pandal was more than half full, Pritam Singh, the local block president, Mukhtayar Sing, the contractor and the headman of Madan's village

Gulchain Singh arrived and took their seats on the stage along with some other members of the panchayat Petty leaders began to speak. The mob was waiting for arrival of *Mantriji*; Madan was waiting with a lot of hopes. The minister had come; he was tall fair skinned, white haired. He was an imposing figure in his spotless white kurta payajama and black leather shoes. The slogan shouting was going; Madan had got up and managed to get close to the minister. Mukhtyar Singh, the contractor, and the president of the party's youth wing he began raising slogans in favour of the minister and the audience responded enthusiastically.

*Hashiye Par* describes the wicked nature of politician; they are lusty for wealth and position. Galchain Singh, the village head had illegally grabbed government land adjoining the canal bank. He had even barricaded the path leading to the canal. He did not permit anyone to win a contract for any government project in his village. Mukhtyar Singh moved with five goone. Mantriji gave a speech, "Nobody here shall sleep hungry in our party's rule. No one shall remain homeless. The government will give money to every poor family to build house. That is our minimum programme. That is our party's motto" (Singh 39). Madan was waiting for a cheque; he thought that, "Mantriji is God incarnate. He wants to give every poor family of this place a house to live in" (Singh 39). Suman Varma was the stage secretary, she read the name, she pronounced 'Ram Rakka', her husband had died seven months ago and she was very poor young widow. She read all the fifteen names the respective fifteen people had gone up to the stage and received the cheque from the minister but Madan's name was not called at all. Madan was so unhappy, he met BDO and enquired and he met a clerk and he scanned the bundle of cheques but he did not find his name. The clerk advised him to meet BDO, he checked but he did not find his name in the list. Madan felt his boat was sinking in deep waters, he said, "But my name does not exist in the village list" (Singh

46). Patwari Pradip Sharma came behind the table and said, “Madan, if your name is not in the list, you won’t be given a cheque” (Singh 46). He was searching here and there but he did not get a cheque. Mantriji declared, “No one in his regime would live without a brick house, that all those families who live in mud house be given money to build pukka houses. I am poorer than the poorest. I live in a hut. My hut is worse than a mud house” (Singh 46). Madan was so unhappy and disappointed, he kept standing before the BDO in his humble posture, and he says in a quivering voice, “I live in as a roof thatched hut in the village. I am the poorest of the poor, yet I didn’t get a cheque for building a brick house...” (Singh 48). No one could understand feelings of Madan; he was disappointed and reached his house. He was a gentleman; he had not quarrelled with anyone in the village and he did not annoy anyone. He would humbly say namaste to everyone; he was equally respected government servants. Madan muttered himself, “When my luck is bad how I can blame anyone? I wonder what bad deeds, I might have committed in my previous birth that god is annoyed with me” (Singh 52). Politician and BDO humiliate Madan but he was not angry with them.

*For a Tree to Grow* depicts humiliation caste injustice and the role of bribe in the Indian society. V.S. Naipaul said in his travelogues that the corruption’s role is vital and it is major issue in Indian society. It is true that corruption is vital role in getting government schemes in India. Government had introduced a new scheme “NREGA” the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. It means the government will give work to unemployed village people. Madan discussed with Chaman Lal and Sardara regarding benefits of the government scheme. Madan felt that the government scheme was meant for people who had no regular job. He thinks that he should get benefit from it. Unemployed people should register their names with BDO Officer, the work will allot only to those who are registered. He met Tarsem and discussed, he has

collected information about NREGA. The government will pay wages for a hundred days in a year. B.D. Officer will enlist; the enlisted man would be employed on the development jobs in his own villages. The bribe's role is vital in getting NREGA, Tarsem and Madan searched and got information. Madan was so happy he said, "We people keep wandering here and there in search of work. I have to pay him ten rupees out of a day's wage of one hundred and for nothing" (Singh 57). The government paid wages through cheques, they issued in the names of men who actually show up for work. Madan got job but he could not continue work.

*Hashiye Par* depicts the importance of an education. Tarsem's father Shailo Ram and Madan's father Sardari Lal had the same paternal grandfather. They were very close and the first to reach out to each other in an hour of need. Tarsem did master's degree and worked as a teacher. Madan reflected his past life, he started work. The government schemes were always benefitting to the rich people. Jamit Raj and Sardari Lal discussed the government schemes. Sardari Lal said, "The government-constructed canal made the rich land owners richer. We poor folks got nothing out of it, except that we can bathe in it with our sons during the summer season and draw water from it in places which are for from the well" (Singh 75). Sardari Lal lost hopes in his life and listener took a long breath. The poor people strongly believed in the fate and the Karma theory. Sardari Lal blamed himself, "It's nobody's fault. My own bad luck, that's what it is. I must have done something terrible in a previous life. Now I have to pay for my karma in this life" (Singh 75). *For a Tree to Grow* depicts the Government policy; some policies are in favour of peasants and poor people. The government has declared the peasants are masters of the lands, those who are tilling; it is on the basis of the Patwari's records in the year 1971. Presently Zamindars did not have any right whatsoever on the lands they had once owned.

*For a Tree to Grow* describes the political issues in Jammu and Kashmir. Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah was the Chief Minister of the state. He was declared that, “the peasants who laboured in the fields of the landowners would be accorded ownership of the lands they tilled” (Singh 77). The public meeting was held, Jangi and Sardari Lal had attended the public meeting. There was a heavy crowd; Chief Minister delivered a splendid speech. Madan was thinking in different way that, “Barbars, Carpenters, Blacksmiths and odd-job men-Jheewars had not received the land deeds as they were not directly engaged in the tilling of land and harvests” (Singh 80). The Land Reform Act would not affect on other workers. The government is always exploiting poor people and the government benefits reached only the rich people, Madan was roaming here and there to get a cheque for constructs a pukka house. B.D.O. said that his name should be in the BPL list. BDO looked at Madan and said, “He has not been allotted a BPL number. A villager who does not have a BPL number is not entitled to receive financial help for constructing a pukka house” (Singh 84). Tarsem is a good friend of Madan; he took him to B.D. Office. B.D. Officer rejected to help Madan because his name is not in the list of BPL. Madan realized that his greater dream of having a pukka house would remain unfulfilled because his name did not appear in the BPL list. Rama Krishna Madan Tarsem have been discussing the society and the government. Presently the society has not turned truly democrats, Tarsem thought that, “We take decisions on the basis of caste and religion and these national and social flaws in our public conduct influence, the government decisions as well politics too is in a state of decline. Government runs schemes to benefit all the citizens in equal measure but the political parties, particularly the ones in power, twist and turn the schemes in such a manner as to garner all benefits for their own workers and supports. And finally, this sort of administrative discrimination becomes the undoing of the grandest, finest and biggest schemes”(Singh 89).

Madan was upset but Tarsem has convinced him. There is a big politics in the village, the leader of the panchayat always supports their persons. Bhimu and Baldar did not figure in the list of the below poverty line persons because they had cast their votes in favour of a candidates of their own choice. Gulchain Singh in turn suppressed their names appear from the list of BPL families. Madan was unhappy and he was denigrated all the government officials. He has decided to send his children to school and wants them to become key officers after they completed their studies. *For a Tree a Grow* depicts the significance of education. Madan was unhappy; he could not get benefits from the government. He nursed benefit from the government. He nursed a desire that his children should receive a good education and get government jobs and become good officers. He has personally seemed other people getting important jobs and felt that one day his dream might come true. He sent his children K amal, Kamlesh, Usha and Louku to Government school. Tarsem also fulfilled Madan's desire. He paid their fees and continued to support children, where they went on to the next higher classes. The eighth class examinations were conducted in the town to write the examination. Kamal Dev stood up in the third place. He received the prize and teacher patted Kamal on the back. The townboys began to discuss Kamal Dev's achievement. Teachers were amazed, "how the son of a man who sold fish and worked for daily wages could outrank of host of students from the zone" (Singh 100). Happiness was explored in Kamal's heart, he wanted to share his joy with someone but there were no friends and relatives around him. Madan was waiting for Kamal's eighth class result which was due but Kamal's school teachers in the village always had a word of praise for a boy. But Madan had confident that he would pay the examination. When Madan received the result of his son Kamal his wife and Madan were so happy. Kamal narrated the day's events to his parents and the siblings. He got the third position among the students of the eighth class who had passed the examination. Kamal took money

from his father for securing admission in the town. Master Banarsi Dass had helped him a lot, he provided 9th standard book. Kamal passed 10<sup>th</sup> standard and joined 11<sup>th</sup> standard. The result of Kamal's twelfth class examination was declared, he had travelled to look at the Board's gazette. He passed the examination in the first division, not a single student from his school had ever scored first class marks. Kamal has proved to the whole town that the son of an unlettered labourer could pass the twelfth class examination in the first division. The matter of success of Kamal was being discussed among students and teachers. He appeared for entrance exam to the Engineering College, the results were announced in the news paper, he scanned his name, and it was appeared in the paper. Tarsem sat up in bed eagerly took the paper from Kamal, he called his wife and said, "Rani our Kamal has cleared the entrance exam to the Engineering College" (Singh 113). Tarsem felt proud of Kamal, he hopes that there would be a big officer in his class. Kamal reached his home but his mother has gone to hospital. Whole family members were happy; they were dreaming that their brother will be an Engineer. There is a respect for achievers and education. When Kamal passed the entrance examination for Engineer College, Srinagar, everyone respected him. Madan's daywork was over; he collected his wages and went to Desu Shah's shop to buy groceries. Desu wished him, "come, Madan, how do you do? Congratulations! Your son has brought glory to all of us" (Singh 117). Numbers of boys appeared an exam to be admitted to the Engineer College but Kamal was only selected. It is the first time he received so much respect; he sat on the bench. He realised why most of the people in the bazar were looking at him strangely. Madan's happiness was very short, his happiness drained from his face. He began to worry about expense of his son's study at a professional college in the city. Tarsem had vowed to himself that he would help Kamal to pursue his studies. He is an ideal person; he is willing to invest on Kamal, "To spend on human development was the best form of

investment ever and Kamal not only belonged to his community but also to some family” (Singh 119). Tarsem and Kamal stayed night at Jammu at Tarsem’s in-law and in the morning left for Srinagar.

*For a Tree to Grow* describes discrimination and a social hierarchy in Indian society. Kamal took admission in the Engineering College and stayed in the hostel. The college situated near the Dal Lake; Kamal took some time to adjust to the new environment. Kamal had two companions in the room, one was Niraj from Jammu and the other was P. Raju from Andhra Pradesh. He began to study till long after college hours, he was working very hard and he exchanges a letter to Tarsem. Kamal remembered his past for one day at a time. We don’t have enough money to buy rations for a whole week. If someone falls sick in the family, we depend on free medicines from the hospital. We cannot afford to buy all the medicines the doctor prescribes” (Singh 128). Kamal was in deep thought; he was pained by such memories. Every time he came out of such moods with a stronger resolve to study more to work even harder. Kamal is hard working student; he would clearly see his path ahead. His aim was getting good marks and get good job. He was dreaming, “It was to score higher marks in the exams and get himself a good job, then to run his family with his earnings and build a pukka house of brick, mortar and of wood, with a reinforced concrete roof” (Singh 130). He was worrying about his family member and his village. Kamal scored highest marks in the examination; government sanctioned a scholarship for standing first in class.

#### Work Cited

Singh, Shailender. *Far a Tree to Grow*. Trans. Suman K. Sharma. New Delhi: OUP, 2014. Print.