

**Assassinating Intellect: Caste Violence and Dalit Intellectual Resistance in
Raju Das's *12th June***

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Abstract

In Bengal, Dalit theatre has emerged as a powerful cultural form that exposes caste oppression and social inequality. Raju Das's play *12th June*, translated by Samir Sengupta, is based on a real incident where a minor economic dispute between three Dalit students and two upper-caste shop owners turns into brutal violence. In this play, the conversations among Dalit students and their debate with the upper-caste shop owners highlight the central message. The dialogues of the Dalit students expose how religious authority and mythological narratives historically justify social inequality and caste discrimination, and how media culture often distracts people from serious social issues. This paper offers a close reading of the play to show how the playwright dramatises debates about caste hierarchy, reservation and the politics of knowledge in everyday life throughout this play. Drawing on B. R. Ambedkar's critique of caste, this paper argues that the violence depicted in this play should not be understood as an attack on Dalit bodies. Rather, it must be seen as an attempt to silence the Dalit intellectual consciousness.

Keywords: Dalit theatre, Raju Das, caste violence, Dalit intellectual consciousness, reservation, mythological critique, Bengali protest theatre

Introduction

Bengali Dalit theatre holds an important position within the broader tradition of protest theatre. In West Bengal, mainstream group theatres were mostly aligned with the leftist ideology. Their main focus was on class struggle. Dalit theatre in Bengal, however,

specifically focused on the question of caste and shows that caste oppression can never be explained only through economic inequality in a country like India, where caste has its own social power. Raju Das, one of the key figures in this tradition, was born in the year 1953 in a poor Namasudra family in what is now Bangladesh. He has written more than 100 plays, and his works mainly deal with the struggles of marginalised communities. His plays, as the editor of *Dalit Protest Unbridled: Two Dozen Plays of Raju Das* noted, are not written for elite audiences but for ordinary people, and each play carries “a clear message” rooted in “social issues” (Chatterjee and Biswas 12).

12th June is one of the twenty-four plays collected in this volume, based on a real incident that took place on June 12, 2015, in the village of Meheddinpur near Allahabad in Uttar Pradesh. Three students from backward communities went to a flour mill owned by upper-caste Brahmin brothers. There was a minor dispute over four rupees that turned into brutal violence. Two of the students were killed by the upper-caste Brahmin shop-owners. The play, translated by Samir Sengupta, opens with a “Link Man” who introduces the event and tells the audience that the story was taken from a newspaper report. This announcement by the “Link Man” is an important characteristic of this play, which focuses more on factual reality rather than fictional stories. As Raju Das wrote in his essay in the same book, drama presents “unbearable contemporary fiery social, economic political life”(Das 15).

This paper argues that *12th June* operates on two interconnected levels. On the surface, it represents a real incident of caste violence. However, at a deeper level, it dramatizes a conflict over knowledge and ideology. Those Dalit students' command over history, mythology, and political economy shook the minds of these upper-caste shop owners. So the violence that happens later is not merely over a dispute on money, it is a systematic procedure to silence the Dalit intellectual consciousness.

Theoretical Framework & Research Methodology

This study uses B.R. Ambedkar’s ideas on caste as a theoretical framework. B.R. Ambedkar explains that caste functions as a rigid hierarchical system that restricts equality and controls social interactions within society. As he puts it, the caste system is “not merely a division of labourers — it is a hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other” (Ambedkar 4.1). In the play *12th June*, the Dalit students question caste, religion and social authority in ways that reflect an awareness of how caste inequality works in everyday life. Ambedkar also emphasises the importance of education and awareness in challenging caste oppression. In this play, the Dalit students’ discussion on media culture, caste, reservation, mythology, along with their involvement with “BAMSEF”, reflects

Ambedkar's well-known call to educate, agitate, and organise. Their intellectual argument demonstrates how education can challenge caste authority. By combining close textual analysis with Ambedkar's critique of caste, this paper shows that 12th June not only highlights everyday caste discrimination but also dramatises the intellectual resistance of the Dalit students. Therefore, the violence in this play should not be seen merely as a physical attack but also as a brutal attempt to silence Dalit voices and critical consciousness.

Dalit Theatre as a Political Form

To understand *12th June*, we first need to know about the history of Dalit theatre in India, especially in Bengal. Dalit theatre did not come out of nowhere. As the introduction of *Dalit Protest Unbridled: Two Dozen Plays of Raju Das* explains, "Like Dalit Literature, Dalit Theatre, as part of a movement, also originated in the Marathi-speaking area" and grew up alongside "*the Dalit Panther Movement of the 1970s*" (Chatterjee and Biswas 11). It emerged as a counter-cultural form that rejected the polished style of mainstream theatre. It focuses on the lived experiences of the Dalit communities. Raju Das was very clear about this, and according to him, drama or theatre should be "the faithful presentation of the incidents of life" (Das 15). In Bengal, Dalit theatre developed along with the Dalit literary movement. After the Bangiya Dalit Sahitya Sammelan of 1987, Bangiya Dalit Lekhak Parishad was formed, and after a few months, "Dalit Kantha", a quarterly magazine, was published. In the year 1992, after the tragic incident of Chuni Kotal, Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sanstha was founded (Das 18). Street theatre and protest theatre in India have a long history. It is closely linked with the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), founded in 1943, that focuses on social issues, women's issues and communist ideology (Chatterjee and Biswas 9). Later in the 1960s, writers like Girish Karnad started writing plays on socio-political issues (Chatterjee and Biswas 9). Dalit theatre continues this tradition, but it changes the main motif. Instead of focusing on class struggle, it focuses on caste oppression.

Dialogue as Intellectual Resistance

The most striking part of *12th June* is not the violence; it is the conversation between three Dalit students – Rahul Bhartia, Rajat and Suman¹, and the upper-caste shop owners – Rakesh Dubey and Suresh Dubey. In this conversation, they discuss cricket and the role of

¹ At the beginning of the play, the three Dalit students are clearly identified as Rahul, Rajat, and Suman. However, in the body of the text, there are inconsistencies in the spelling of names (e.g., "Suvam" for Suman and "Rohit" for Rahul). This paper retains the original spellings in quotations and provides the correct names in brackets at relevant instances for clarity.

the media, reservation policy, mythology, and the politics of Hindu nationalism. This conversation becomes the central point of conflict because it raises some important issues and questions the dominant upper-caste beliefs. The Dubey brothers, however, cannot answer these questions, and they attack the Dalit students.

- **Cricket as a Distraction**

Their conversation begins with the cricket match. Suvam [Suman] was very excited about the previous cricket match. At first, it looks like an ordinary topic, but Rahul steers this into a political conversation and asks, “How many of our 125 crores of people go to the playground, by purchasing tickets, to enjoy it? Who are they who go?” (Das 208). Rajat replies that only those people who have enough money and time to spend. Rahul points out that “the print and electronic media constantly campaign in favour of these games” and makes cricket popular among ordinary people like us (Das 208). Because of the excitement of cricket, common people forget that they are hungry; they have no jobs, and they are daily facing caste discrimination within society. Thus, entertainment media spectacle silently diverts the real social issues like caste discrimination, unemployment, and economic inequality. Throughout this conversation, Raju Das, in his play, highlights the political awareness of the Dalit students.

- **Reservation and the Politics of Dispossession**

The conversation then moves to the issues of reservation. Rakesh expressed anger at the reservation policy and called Ambedkar a “tanner bastard” who ruined their lives by uplifting the backward caste people (Das 210). However, Rajat said that political reservation for Dalits was for 10 years and “reservation in service and education will exist so long as caste system will exist”(Das 210). But the casteist slur delivered by Rakesh reveals several things simultaneously. It highlights the misunderstanding of the purpose of the reservation among the upper-caste people. Suresh further continues this argument and claims “you, the people belonging to SC/ST and OBC are getting the cream of privileges and we’re deprived” (Das 212). The word ‘cream’ is important here because it portrays reservation as some kind of luxury benefit. Through these dialogues, Raju Das shows that even the upper caste people historically enjoyed social and economic power, yet they portray themselves as the victims of the reservation policy. Then Rajat calmly corrected this claim and said that the reserved quota for Dalits is still not filled, but the government and society hide this fact and spread a false narrative that Dalits are enjoying too many

benefits(Das 212). Rahul adds another point that “the so-called upper castes in spite of being only 15% of the total population have occupied, for ages, 85% of the government jobs, business, land and posts of the ministers” (Das 212). And this fact not only exposes the hypocrisy of the upper-caste people, but also proves again that reservation is just a small attempt to correct the long history of exclusion. By the end of this argument, the Dalit students factually correct misleading claims against the reservation policy. And on the other side, the Dubey brothers have no concrete factual answer. This argument aligns with Ambedkar’s view that reservation is not a privilege but a necessary step to correct historical inequality.

- **Mythology as Evidence**

One of the most striking parts of this conversation was when the students began discussing Hindu mythology. Rohit [Rahul] stated that the Dalits even dislike uttering the name of Rama because he was a “misogynist and the killer of the Dalit”(Das 211). This statement shocks Rakesh, and he says, “you bloody swine, tell me, which woman was tortured by Sri Ram, which Dalit was killed by Sri Ram?” (Das 211). Rajat then replies, “Don’t you know that he suspected his virtuous wife, Sita and banished her, out of his suspicion that she had illicit connection with Bharat, ¿Laxman and Ravan? Didn’t he, as per the instruction of a sly Brahmin, kill Sambuka, who, the son of a Sudra, had eagerness for learning?” (Das 211). This response again exposes the hypocrisy of those upper-caste people, such as Rakesh and Suresh, who have been strongly defending Hindu mythology, as they admit that they had not read the Ramayana. Rajat next refers to the story of Ekalavya, who was forced to cut off his thumb so that Arjun would remain superior (Das 212). Thus, the playwright shows that Dalit students read the Hindu mythology in an alternative way because traditional readings of the Hindu mythology justify the caste hierarchy as a natural social order. This reinterpretation becomes a form of intellectual resistance.

Organisational Consciousness: BAMSEF and Ambedkar’s Idea of Change

The Dalit students are not just educated individuals; they are part of an organisation that tries to spread awareness. Rahul talks about BAMSEF and says, “No Sir, we do not belong to any political party. We belong to an apolitical organisation, BAMSEF”. Rajat also adds here by saying, “Just like your RSS. As they apolitically work for political awareness of the people, we also awaken the Dalit people” (Das 212). This idea of awakening connects directly with Ambedkar’s thought that caste survives because people are made to accept it as natural and unquestionable. To dismantle the caste system, the first step is to make people aware of this unjust system. Ambedkar also believed that education alone is not enough. People must come together and organise if they want to challenge caste. Rajat’s comparison

between BAMSEF and the RSS is sharp and meaningful here because it refuses the upper-caste assumption that only their organisations can claim political neutrality while doing ideological work (Das 212).

Violence as a Structural Response

When the upper-caste Dubey brothers cannot counter those Dalit students in factual arguments, they choose violence as the easiest way. Those questions by the Dalit students during the argument gradually undermine the authority of the Dubey brothers. The turning point comes when Rajat throws “a 20 rupee note” (Das 213). It is not just a careless act; rather, it is a deliberate gesture of disrespect. Rajat does not want to give the social respect that those upper-caste Dubey brothers expect from a Dalit. Rajat’s act of throwing the note shows that he does not accept the authority of the upper caste. Rakesh angrily slaps Rajat and says, “How dare you. You throw Devi Laxmi to my face” (Das 213). This response again exposes the hypocrisy of the upper-caste people. By invoking Devi Laxmi, Rakesh turns his personal issue into a religious issue. Because Rakesh knows very well that society can forgive rudeness, but always punishes blasphemy. After this, the violence happens quickly: Rajat is stabbed, Suvam [Suman] and Rohit [Rahul] are shot. The play does not spend much time describing violence; rather, it jumps straight to the aftermath of political reaction. Suresh calls the local leader and reports the incident. He requests the leader and says, “Guruji, please save me for the time being” (Das 214). An offstage political leader instructs Suresh to “Call the police” and report to them that “the armed Dalit villagers attacked your house and shop and you had to fire in self-defence” (Das 214). This conversation shows how easily truth can be fabricated when political power is in place. The reference to “Gujarat massacre” is also important here (Das 214). The leader is not shocked by the killing; he is more concerned about his political career. Finally, the play ends on a dark note. The Link Man reports that “Rajat and two more who were attacked by the followers of Dubeyji are in the hospital; death is knocking at their door” (Das 215). The members of Dalit communities burn “a part of the grinding mill and the residential house of the Dubey brothers” in anger (Das 214). Thus, the play ends without any proper justice. The playwright deliberately refuses a confronting ending because he wants to highlight the harsh reality of caste violence and how the dominant political structure protects it.

Conclusion

To sum it up, in the play *12th June*, the central argument lies in its dialogue, not only in its violence. The long conversation between the Dalit students and Dubey brothers, the upper-caste shop owner, is the central point where the playwright highlights the real political

meaning of the play. Throughout this conversation, the Dalit students, first of all, speak with clarity and confidence. They prove that they know history, religion, mythology and social reality better than those upper caste Dubey brothers. Their argument is factual. They question religious authority and mythological narratives that historically justify caste discrimination, and show how media culture often distracts people from serious social issues. They factually correct misleading claims against the reservation policy. On the other hand, the Dubey brothers were unable to answer those questions properly and lost the debate at an intellectual level. Those Dalit students' command over history, mythology, and political economy challenged the Dubey brothers' authority. So the Dubey brothers choose violence instead. This is the most important message of this play that caste consciousness and education can threaten the structure of caste power. Proper knowledge of history and religion can expose the years of exclusion, so often such knowledge is suppressed. In this context, the ideas of B. R. Ambedkar become important. He always said that education is not just a way to get a job but a weapon to fight back. That's exactly what the students in the play are doing. They are intellectually aware. They know how the system works. So, they are murdered. Therefore, the killing of those Dalit students is not just an act of violence over some economic issue. It reflects a system that fears the Dalit intellectual consciousness and tries to silence it.

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