



# Destitution, Optimism, and Resistance for Identity in Bandhu Madhav's *The Poisoned Bread*

Pooja Shankar

PhD. English Scholar, Central University of Himachal Pradesh, Dharamshala, India.

Received: 14 Sep 2022; Received in revised form: 02 Oct 2022; Accepted: 06 Oct 2022; Available online: 10 Oct 2022  
©2022 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Abstract**— *Life itself is comprised of many favorable and unfavorable situations. Our lives are hampered by unfavorable circumstances, and these adverse situations change the progress of our life into a decline. Because of factors like caste, poverty, and other comparable issues, we frequently suffer identity crises in our daily lives. But without attempting to change the situation, it is impossible to envision a successful era and identity for us. Having an optimistic outlook on life provides us the strength to confront and alter the circumstances. Literature provides numerous real life examples of such situations, which make us question the assumption that just because there is a human, there must also be humanity. Literature also makes us aware of the conditions under which a person must struggle to survive and to protect his rights. However, only a person with an optimistic attitude on life is capable of enduring this struggle. Bandhu Madhav's short story 'The Poisoned Bread' makes us aware of the helplessness of life but also emphasizes the importance of maintaining a positive attitude, which always brings a ray of hope to our lives. This paper will talk about destitution, optimism, and resistance for identity in Bandhu Madhav's 'The Poisoned Bread' and will convey a valuable message that humans must have humanity.*

**Keywords**— *Caste, Humanity, Identity, Poisoned Bread, Optimism, Resistance.*

## INTRODUCTION

*The Poisoned Bread* was published as part of an anthology of Dalit literature entitled *Poisoned Bread*. The book was edited by Arjun Dangle. This is a short story written by Bandhu Madhav. Marathi Dalit author Bandhu Madhav belonged to the *Mahar* community. Mumbai's Maharashtra Dalit Literature Association felicitated him in 1956 for his writings, which were regarded as profound and socially beneficial. The Little Magazine Movement also benefited from the contribution of Madhav.

## THE TITLE OF THE STORY

The title of the story is very apt and suggestive. Here the word '*Poisoned Bread*' is indicating towards the poison of caste system and poverty in society, which is the root cause of snatching humanity from humans. This short story centers on the lives of various characters, some from the high strata and others from the lower strata of society.

## DESTITUTION, OPTIMISM AND RESISTANCE FOR IDENTITY

*Destitution* is a state of being without money, food, a place to live, or possessions. *Optimism* is a belief that things will go perfectly in the future. The refusal to comply with or accept anything is referred to as *Resistance*, and *Identity* is the distinctive quality or personality of a person. Here, *The Poisoned Bread* realistically exhibits deprivation, optimism, and resistance for identity.

The story revolves around the lives of Yetalya and Mahadeva. Yetalya (Grandpa) is a poor old subservient peasant, who is struggling with a lack of employment, food and lacks the necessary resources for survival, and Mahadeva is his educated grandson. This story takes place 12 years back, during the harvest season. Mahadeva is taking away by Yetalya to Bapu Patil's (land lord) threshing floor for job. Poor tenants receive cruel treatment from landlords. This story tells us about the life of

Yatalya,(Grandpa) who is living his life in deprivation and depends only on the landlord to survive. He could not farm anything even he could not grow anything. He survives on what the landlord provides. His landlord is Bapu Patil, a cruel man who takes pride in his social stocks. Grandpa is very weak and submissive. He considers suffering as his fate. He displayed no reaction to Bapu Patil's insolence. On the contrary, he keeps quite and speaks with respect. "I am your slave. I have come to you on purpose on hearing of the operations at your threshing floor. My lord is our bread –giver and we find it a privilege to beg for our share of corn, master. I am your begging Mahar and feel proud to be so"(Madhav 167).

But this creates a negative effect on Bapu Patil. He again insults and tells Grandpa that they are claiming equality, and they are equal to us, so why do they necessitate a share of corn now? He also accuses and informs them that they are forgetting their religion, that's why rain –God got enraged, and we are facing a lack of rain, and due to this the water of Chandrabhaga river is drying up. This infuriates Mahadeva, and he fights back. As an educated person he has a different perspective on things. He addressed him simply 'Patil' and said-" Patil, will u kindly tell me what you meant when you accused us of forgetting religion...and if a religion can't tolerate one human being treating another simply as a human being, what's the use of such an inhumane religion" (Madhav 168). Landlord's (Bapu Patil) inhuman treatment affects their psyche in two ways. On the one hand, one is forced to believe that living is the only form of development, while on the other, one is resisting for his identity.

The character of Yetalya (Grandpa) is related to the first category in which a person always do compromises, and Mahadeva comes under the second category in which a person does not compromise with the circumstances, but raises his voice against injustice.

Babu Patil got angry even when grandfather was late for tripod. Again Mahadeva resists, stating that he will not be abused. He will arrive soon. Mahadeva added fuel to the fire as soon as he said this. Bapu Patil again insulted him and said, "So you don't want me to abuse your grandfather. Should I then touch his feet?...This brat of a Mahar has been rudely answering me back"(Madhav 171).

When Grandpa arrived, Bapu Patil informed him that he would not assign him any work. Poor Grandpa, once again, shows his helplessness by telling him that he can kick them if he wants, but please don't starve us. Grandpa begged, his eyes were welling up with tears. They worked, but stony hearted Patil was unmoved, and he did not even give Grandpa a few measures of jowar. They dejectedly left the threshing floor. Here Madhav portrays the day-to-

day realities of a society in which people are judged, based on erroneous criteria, where caste and wealth are the sole determinants of how people treat others and how much respect they deserve.

This story brings to light the situation of extreme poverty in which a person has lost the ability to distinguish between himself and animals, and is compelled to eat anything to satisfy his hunger. We become aware of this pathetic situation when Grandpa spotted a stale, rotting piece of bread lying strewn on the ground in front of the oxen. In addition to this, Grandpa was anxious to eat this bread, which even oxen did not want to eat. Not only this but also the flies were swarming over the mouldering crumbs which had turned green and foul. Grandpa begged Bapu Patil for those crumbs. They were covered with dung and urine. In a state of joyful enthusiasm, he gathered them all and placed them orderly inside his sackcloth. Grandpa said to Mahadeva that we have to face this only because of you, otherwise we would get a larger measure of corn. Mahadeva replied, "We'll gulp down the crumbs you collected. Haven't we got this rotten pieces as a reward for laboring all day long? A good exchange indeed! Are we any better than cats and dogs? Throw a few crumbs and we are happy". (Madhav 172). Grandpa, however, provided a different response in this instance, stating that I am also unhappy with the way the landlord has treated me. Even he admitted that I am helpless. He took a deep breath and told Mahadeva that he couldn't find a way out of his pain. He compares himself to a caged lion who has forgotten how to hunt. The cage here refers to the caste system in which people like Grandpa live and have forgotten how to resist. The word hunt stands for equal rights. People like Grandpa have forgotten their equal rights to live, just as the lion has forgotten to hunt. But Mahadeva's positive attitude had given Grandpa's old mindset a new twist. Grandpa threw a few crumbs from his sack to the dogs. But Grandma didn't like it. She gathered every piece that had been tossed in front of the dogs and scrubbed the mud off them. She then mixed them with dulli, cooked them for dinner. Grandpa was writhing in agony like a poisoned dog due to the toxin produced by the mould in the bread. He was also vomiting. All were rendered helpless when none of the medications the doctor recommended worked. Grandpa expresses optimism after realizing he will pass very shortly. He imparts knowledge to him and tells him that you should educate yourself as much as possible and there is no need to adhere to the antiquated caste system, which is eradicating humanity from human beings. Grandpa died, everything was numb. Mahadeva's anguish was lessened by Grandpa's final words. Finally, despite the sadness, there is a glimmer of hope for a better future.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, firstly we can assert that this story is not only about one Mahadeva and one Grandpa, but it is about numerous Grandpas and Mahadevas in our society who are from the low strata and live in extreme poverty and who are being cruelly exploited by landlords. But regardless of high strata or low strata of society, protecting one's identity should be a priority for everyone. The decision to defend one's rights should only be made after having a positive attitude on life. Undoubtedly, the best tool for this is education. Mahadeva held completely different perspectives about life, and this distinction was the result of education. Because of this Mahadeva was able to alter Grandpa's old-age mindset, in which he had accepted suffering as his destiny. Secondly, if we change the situation and instill some compassion in Bapu Patil's heart, then we will find, he would never abuse Grandpa and Mahadeva in the manner he did, and discover that Grandpa and Mahadeva would receive some jawar from him, and Grandpa would have been alive. *The Poisoned Bread* undoubtedly, gives us an admirable notion that not everyone can be rich, but humanity can exist in everyone, because empathy not money, is what humanity needs.

### REFERENCES

- [1] <https://dictionary.cambridge.org> › dictionary › destitution.
- [2] <https://en.wikipedia.org> › wiki › Identity\_(social\_science).
- [3] <https://www.merriam-webster.com> › dictionary › resistance.
- [4] Madhav Bandhu. "The poisoned Bread" *Poisoned Bread*. Ed. Arjun Dangle, Orient Black Swan, 2009, pp.168-175.