

Springing from the Margins: G. Kalyana Rao's *Untouchable Spring* as a Dalit Epic

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Abstract

This paper offers a critical analysis of G. Kalyana Rao's Untouchable Spring, examining how its formal and thematic innovations reconfigure the epic to centre Dalit histories, experiences, and cultural traditions. Informed by Dalit literary criticism, the study argues that Rao transforms the conventions of the epic to narrate lives historically excluded from dominant literary and historical discourses. Drawing on the novel's multi-generational narrative, expansive historical canvas, oral storytelling traditions, songs, myths, folklore, and performative practices, the paper demonstrates how Rao reconstructs the epic by redefining heroism, foregrounding collective memory, preserving cultural knowledge, and recovering suppressed histories through alternative modes of narration. In contrast to classical epics that privilege kings, warriors, and divine figures, Untouchable Spring locates epic significance in the everyday struggles of Dalit communities for dignity, survival, and social justice. The novel also functions as an alternative archive, transforming oral traditions and cultural memory into repositories of historical knowledge that challenge caste-based structures of exclusion and the silences of dominant historiography. By reimagining the epic as a form rooted in collective experience rather than elite authority, Rao reclaims Dalit histories and cultural traditions within the literary imagination while expanding the possibilities of the epic itself.

Keywords: Dalit literature, epic, counter-history, cultural memory, G. Kalyana Rao, orality.

Introduction

Dalit writing constitutes a significant body of Indian literature that foregrounds the experiences, struggles, and aspirations of communities historically marginalised within dominant social and literary narratives. One of its defining characteristics is its resistance to rigid generic classification. In the attempt to represent the complexities of Dalit experience, many Dalit writers deliberately transgress conventional literary boundaries, producing texts that intersect with oral, performative, autobiographical, historical, political, and fictional modes of expression. As a result, Dalit literature often combines autobiography with fiction, integrates orality with written narration, and merges literary aesthetics with activist concerns. It may simultaneously employ poetry and prose, realist narration and storytelling traditions, thereby challenging established distinctions between literary genres. This formal hybridity reflects the complex socio-cultural realities from which Dalit literature emerges and underscores the inadequacy of conventional genre categories for understanding Dalit literary expression. Several important works of Dalit literature exemplify this tendency towards generic fluidity. Bama's *Karukku* has been variously read as a novel, memoir, autobiography, and ethnographic

narrative. Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* (Jina Amucha) is an autobiography but has also been described as a "socio-biography," written with "a deep-rooted urge to engage with the history of the Mahar community's oppression" (Pandit 12). Meena Kandasamy's work likewise blurs the boundaries between literature and political activism. Such works demonstrate how Dalit writers adapt and transform literary forms in order to articulate experiences and histories that have often remained excluded from dominant cultural narratives.

G. Kalyana Rao's acclaimed Dalit novel *Antarani Vasantam*, originally published in Telugu (2000) and later translated into English as *Untouchable Spring* (2010) by Alladi Uma and M. Sridhar, stands as one of the most compelling examples of this formal experimentation. Centring on the lives of the Mala and Madiga communities of Andhra Pradesh, the novel reconstructs Dalit histories, memories, cultural practices, and political struggles through a narrative that refuses the limits of any single genre. As K. W. Christopher observes:

It is a hybrid of varied genres such as journal, song, sermon, myth, mission reports, church records and letters, and various mnemocultures, which Kalyana Rao imaginatively weaves into a powerful lyrical narrative which is realist in the sense that it is able to connect characters and events to historical dynamics and social processes, and incorporates many historical events and characters from 'real' life. (4)

Through its incorporation of songs, myths, folklore, oral histories, and collective memories, the novel therefore creates an expansive narrative structure that extends beyond the conventions of the realist novel.

The significance of this formal expansiveness lies not merely in the novel's generic hybridity but in its reworking of literary traditions themselves. While drawing upon characteristics commonly associated with epic narratives such as historical breadth, collective memory, genealogical continuity, and cultural preservation, *Untouchable Spring* simultaneously transforms the epic from within. Rather than celebrating kings, warriors, or divine heroes, it foregrounds the lives of communities historically relegated to the margins of both literature and history. Heroism emerges not through conquest or divine intervention but through everyday acts of survival, labour, resistance, and cultural continuity. In doing so, the novel reclaims the epic as a form through which Dalit histories and subjectivities can be narrated and preserved.

Such a reconfiguration acquires particular significance in the context of literary traditions that have historically denied Dalits meaningful representation. Sharankumar Limbale notes, "Dalit writers have reacted bitterly to Hindu religious literature. Despite the fact that epics are literature, Dalit society is not accurately portrayed in them. The epics depict people from the 'low' castes using Prakrit..." (34). Limbale's critique points not only to the misrepresentation of Dalits within canonical literary traditions but also to broader structures of linguistic exclusion that historically privileged Sanskrit while relegating lower-caste communities to subordinate linguistic and cultural positions. Echoing Limbale's critique, Rao exposes the exclusion of Dalits from dominant literary and historical archives. As the author observes, "There are no records that history has made a note of them in its pages" (Rao 41). The text further interrogates the erasure and appropriation of Dalit artistic, literary, and cultural traditions by dominant caste groups, exposing the mechanisms through which caste power shapes historical memory and cultural legitimacy. In response, Rao reconstructs Dalit history through memory, oral traditions, songs, folklore, and performance practices that function as alternative archives of knowledge. Through this recovery of suppressed histories and cultural memories, *Untouchable Spring* emerges as a distinctly Dalit epic, one that not only reimagines the possibilities of genre but also challenges caste-based forms of historical, cultural, and epistemic exclusion.

Epic Architecture: Structure and Scale

The epic dimensions of *Untouchable Spring* become particularly evident in its structure,

historical scope, and multi-generational narrative. Structurally, the text is divided into eighteen chapters, a feature that resonates with the structure of the *Mahabharata*, one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India, the other being the *Ramayana*. The *Mahabharata*, the longest epic in the world, is divided into eighteen books (*parvas*). Significantly, the Kurukshetra War itself lasts for eighteen days, with each day marking a crucial development in the conflict between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Another revered Hindu scripture, the *Bhagavad Gita*, situated within the narrative framework of a dialogue between Lord Krishna and Prince Arjuna in the *Mahabharata*, is likewise structured into eighteen chapters composed of *shlokas*. Rao appears to have deliberately adopted an eighteen-chapter structure to establish a parallel with the familiar architecture of the Indian epic. However, he adapts this epic framework to the specific historical and social realities of Dalit communities, suggesting that their struggles are epic in their own right. Through this structural correspondence, Rao invokes the epic themes of conflict, justice, and moral struggle associated with the *Mahabharata* and reorients them towards the history of Dalit oppression and the ongoing quest for emancipation. By mirroring the structure of the ancient epic, Rao asserts that the experiences of marginalised communities deserve the same narrative gravitas traditionally accorded to epic heroes and dynasties.

The significance of this parallel extends beyond structure to the very conception of history embedded within the epic tradition. The *Mahabharata* is often regarded as an *Itihasa* or history, as it narrates the struggle for sovereignty between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, the events of the Kurukshetra War, and the fate of subsequent generations. In this sense, it may also be read as a dynastic or family history spanning several generations. *Untouchable Spring* similarly traces the lives of nearly six generations of a Dalit family in the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh: Yerrenkadu, Yellana, Sivaiah (Simon), Reuben, Immanuel, and Jessie, and their collective struggle for dignity, recognition, and liberation from Brahmanical oppression. Like the *Mahabharata*, the novel constructs a historical narrative across generations; however, it shifts the focus from royal lineages and battles for political sovereignty to the lives of those excluded from dominant histories.

The novel further acquires the dimensions of an *Itihasa* through its expansive historical canvas. Traversing multiple time periods and geographical locations, it chronicles significant moments in the history of Dalit communities, including British colonial rule, the role of Christian missionaries, religious conversions, the Indian freedom struggle, the aftermath of Independence, the Telangana Peasant Armed Struggle, and the Srikakulam Naxalite Movement. By weaving these socio-political, cultural, and religious developments into the lives of ordinary Dalit individuals, Rao transforms personal and community histories into a broader historical narrative. The result is a text that not only recounts the experiences of a family but also documents the collective history of a people, thereby reinforcing its status as a reimagined Dalit epic.

The novel's reconfiguration of the epic form is reinforced by its refusal of narrative closure. While classical epics often culminate in the restoration of political, moral, or cosmic order, *Untouchable Spring* ends by emphasising the incompleteness of the story it narrates. In the "Final Word," Rao explicitly reflects on the open-ended nature of life and narrative: "One can write life in any number of pages. 'Untouchable Spring' is not a life that will be completed in these few pages. In fact, it has not been completed" (Rao 265). This reflects Rao's deliberate refusal to contain Dalit experience within a finite narrative frame, thereby unsettling the epic's conventional investment in closure and totality. Instead, Rao gestures towards the possibility of further narration, as the stories of Immanuel, Jessie, Ruby, and Mary Suvarta remain unfinished and therefore open to continuation. This sense of extension is further reinforced when Rao remarks that if Mary Suvarta is moved, "another part of 'Untouchable Spring' will commence"

(265). The novel thus concludes by explicitly keeping both its narrative and its historical world open, resisting the sense of finality that traditionally characterises the epic.

The novel's open-endedness acquires broader political significance when read in relation to Dalit history. Rather than signifying incompleteness as a deficiency, Rao transforms it into a condition of historical possibility. As Dalit histories have repeatedly been interrupted, erased, or excluded from dominant historiography, any claim to narrative completion would risk reproducing the very closure through which those histories have been marginalised. The refusal of closure therefore symbolises the impossibility of treating Dalit emancipation as an accomplished historical event. Instead, emancipation emerges as a continuous collective project sustained through memory, resistance, and cultural self-representation. By leaving the narrative open to future voices and experiences, *Untouchable Spring* reimagines the epic not as a monument that commemorates a finished past but as a living, evolving form through which history itself remains open to revision, reclamation, and renewal.

Orality, Myth and Collective Memory

The oral foundations of *Untouchable Spring* are not merely thematic but are embedded in its narrative technique. As Alladi Uma and M. Sridhar observe, Rao consciously draws upon storytelling traditions inherited from his ancestors in general and his grandmother in particular, describing his artistic inheritance as a "weaving heritage" in which songs, stories, poetry, and performances are collectively created and transmitted through oral means (277-78). This inheritance shapes the novel's formal structure. Rather than unfolding through a single authoritative narrator, the narrative is assembled through a succession of storytellers whose memories, testimonies, songs, and conversations are continually recalled, retold, and reinterpreted across generations. Ruth's recollections of Reuben provide the principal narrative frame, while Reuben himself recounts stories inherited from earlier generations, allowing narrative authority to circulate among members of the community rather than reside in a single voice. The novel thus creates the impression of stories being told and remembered rather than authoritatively recorded, reproducing within a written text the fluid movement of oral storytelling. Rao's preference for the rhythms of ordinary speech further reinforces this oral quality. As he notes in an interview, ordinary people speak in shortsentences that possess their own rhythm and naturalness, a quality reflected in the direct, conversational language of the novel (qtd. in Uma and Sridhar 278). Yet *Untouchable Spring* does not merely imitate oral performance. Unlike oral storytelling, which depends upon the immediacy of a storyteller and audience, Rao adapts the dynamics of oral storytelling into literary form, preserving its fluid, collective and performative ethos. In this sense, the novel enacts what Uma and Sridhar describe as a challenge to "the privileging of the written modes versus the oral modes, the prosodic poetry over the song, [and] the textual and bookish language over the ordinary, everyday language" (277). By relocating oral storytelling to the centre of its narrative structure and allowing history to emerge through successive acts of remembering and retelling, *Untouchable Spring* affirms oral memory as a legitimate repository of history, knowledge, and cultural expression.

This narrative strategy also recalls the oral foundations of the epic. Although the *Mahabharata* is traditionally attributed to Vyasa, its narrative is transmitted through successive acts of narration by Vyasa, Vaishampayana, and Sauti, reflecting the layered and collective process of oral transmission. *Untouchable Spring* similarly constructs its expansive historical narrative through a succession of voices rather than a single, omniscient perspective. However, Rao reworks this epic convention to serve a distinctly Dalit historiographical purpose. Whereas the oral traditions of classical epics have predominantly preserved dominant cultural memories,

Untouchable Spring mobilises oral narration to recover histories excluded from official archives and literary historiography. Orality therefore functions not merely as a stylistic inheritance from the epic tradition but as a counter-archival practice through which suppressed histories are remembered, reclaimed, and transmitted across generations.

Orality in the novel also manifests through the incorporation of myths, legends, and folktales. Sharankumar Limbale observes that “Dalit critics have encouraged Dalit writers to construct new myths instead of using the existing symbols and metaphors of Hindu sacred literature. When Dalit writers did employ religious symbols, it was to deconstruct them, infusing them with new meaning and purpose” (34). Rao also appropriates myths associated with epic traditions only to reinterpret them from a Dalit perspective, thereby exposing the ideological foundations of caste oppression. A striking example appears in the opening chapter through the myth of Kamadhenu, which is invoked to justify caste discrimination and untouchability. In this narrative, Siva, along with other gods, goddesses, and rishis, curses Jambavanta and Chennaiah to “live in Kaliyuga eating the meat of dead cows and sweeping the bazars” for eternity (Rao 4). Jambavanta and Chennaiah symbolically represent Dalit communities condemned to lives of social exclusion. Yet Rao does not reproduce this myth uncritically. Through Reuben’s questioning – “Where did we come from? From the wrath of the Gods, from the piece of meat that fell out. Why is it so?” (4), the novel interrogates the logic of the curse itself, exposing the religious narratives that seek to legitimise caste hierarchy. By appropriating and revising a mythic tale, Rao simultaneously draws upon a characteristic epic motif while subverting its ideological function.

The novel further extends its mythopoetic imagination through the creation of the *Yennela pitta*, an imaginary bird whose name combines the words *yennela* (moonlight) and *pitta* (bird). Endowed with both mythical and metaphorical significance, the bird’s cry becomes a powerful symbol of Dalit suffering and historical trauma. As the novel suggests, it expresses the “agony of an untouchable” and stands as “a condemnation of his birth that was so cruelly painted, of the crime committed on him in history” (Rao 5). Through such myths, legends, and symbolic figures, Rao not only draws upon the oral foundations of epic literature but also creates alternative narrative frameworks through which Dalit experiences, memories, and histories can be articulated, preserved and reclaimed.

Reimagining Heroism: Dalit Heroes and Heroines

A defining feature of epic literature is its celebration of heroic figures; however, Rao departs from this tradition by placing Dalit men and women, historically excluded from literary and historical narratives, at the centre of his epic. Baburao Bagul notes how “the caste-ridden society and its literature have viewed the Dalit as someone who is mean, despicable, contemptible and sinful due to his deeds in his past life; he is seen as sorrowful in this life, poor, humiliated and without history, one whose ancestors could never hope to acquire respectability in either temples or scriptures” (289). He further argues that Karna and Eklavya are portrayed as heroic or sub-heroic figures in Hindu literature; however, they are not Ambedkarite heroes who reject caste and adopt a rationalist attitude towards their oppression. Rather, they remain “consistent with the cultural and mythical value-structure which they have internalised” (285). Baburao Bagul writes:

Heroes such as Karna and Eklavya are, as a matter of fact, reconciled to the varna system; they are courageous, but because they have been denied the place they deserved in the system, they view life only in terms of suffering; these heroes, because they have been rejected by religion, become simply toys in the hands of fate. Such heroes offer a

lot of suffering, high drama, a good deal of conflict and intense aesthetic pleasure; they easily offer an opportunity to express a fatalistic ideology, which is nothing but taking refuge in religion in order to adjust to the demands of a class-society. Such a hero tries to persuade the reader to believe that life is nothing but suffering, and the reader is so persuaded. (285)

In contrast, Bagul argues that Dalit literature “has accepted ‘Dalit-hood’ (i.e. the status of the oppressed or the downtrodden)” and possesses the potential to be transformative and revolutionary in its essence (289). Alok Mukherjee similarly notes that Dalit literature asserts “the Dalits’ selfhood, history and agency” and that through it, “Dalits are no longer a people without history... they are the central figures of their own history, and from this history they derive the confidence and the right to assert their humanity” (15).

Untouchable Spring exemplifies this reconfiguration of heroism. The central figure of each generation is a stigmatized and caste-oppressed Dalit character who confronts injustice in his or her own way and embodies perseverance, resistance, and the quest for dignity. In foregrounding such characters, Rao subverts a fundamental convention of classical epics. Traditional epic heroes are often warriors, kings, or descendants of divinities who undertake quests, confront adversaries, and achieve their goals through physical prowess, wit, or divine intervention. Rao’s protagonists, by contrast, struggle against the dehumanising structures of caste. Their heroism lies not in conquest but in survival, self-assertion, and resistance.

Yellana’s life, for instance, echoes the cyclical journey of an epic hero. Forced out of the village as a child and later choosing exile as an adult, he eventually returns to his birthplace, Yennela Dinni, only to die alongside Subhadra amidst famine and deprivation. Similarly, Sivaiah and Sasirekha’s migration recalls the exile motif central to the *Ramayana*. While Lord Ramand Sita’s exile results from a royal decree, Sivaiah and Sasirekha are displaced by caste-based oppression and economic hardship. Their journey is not an individual ordeal but a collective experience shared by other Mala and Madiga families seeking survival and dignity.

Likewise, the armed struggle in which Immanuel and Jessie participate echoes the warfare of the *Mahabharata*. The Kurukshetra war represents the Pandavas’ struggle to reclaim their rights and restore *dharma* after repeated humiliation and dispossession. Similarly, Immanuel and Jessie become part of a larger movement against social and economic exploitation. Their participation in the struggle reflects a deliberate effort to reclaim dignity, equality, and a rightful place within society.

Reuben’s search for his roots and family history further recalls Karna’s identity crisis in the *Mahabharata*. Both characters grapple with questions of belonging shaped by birth and social location. Karna, raised in a charioteer family and unaware of his royal lineage, experiences discrimination despite his exceptional archery skills and virtues. Reuben, similarly distanced from his past through his Christian upbringing and fragmented knowledge of his ancestry, embarks on a journey to uncover his roots. His search becomes an effort to understand the legacy of oppression and resilience that shapes his identity. Like Karna, he experiences alienation in a world that defines people by their birth rather than their worth; unlike Karna, however, his quest ultimately serves as an act of historical recovery.

Indian epics frequently bestow divine or royal names upon their heroes, and Rao reclaims this convention as well in *Untouchable Spring*. In Chapter Three, Yellana is referred to as “the nude Shiva” (21), signalling an attempt to reclaim Hindu deities from upper-caste ownership. The names of characters such as Sivaiah, Subhadra, and Sasirekha, all drawn from divine and Puranic traditions, are similarly assigned to Dalit characters. Through this symbolic act, Rao challenges the exclusion of Dalits from mythology and epic history:

His mother’s name was Subhadra. Wife’s name was Sasirekha. Puranic names. Royal

names... But his father was not Arjuna. He was not Abhimanyu. No Lord Krishna was on their side. There was no Kurukshetra that would take place because five villages were refused. All that they had was caste. The caste outside the four castes. A castaway caste. All the struggle was only to live... (131)

Significantly, Rao extends heroism beyond male characters. Women such as Boodevi, Subhadra, Sasirekha, Ruth, and Mary Suvarta embody courage, endurance, and resistance in the face of both caste and gender oppression. Among them, Subhadra emerges as a particularly heroic figure. She openly defies caste norms through her appearance and attire. As opposed to stealing water, she revolts against the injustice inflicted upon the Mala and Madiga communities by sending down the space into the water channel in order to divert water towards their parched fields. In this moment of open defiance, Rao elevates her to an almost divine stature: "She looked like Kali at Atchireddy's men who were looking wonderstruck at the sunshine over the flowing water dancing on her golden body" (116).

Through these carefully constructed parallels and characterizations, Rao transforms the epic tradition by placing Dalit heroes and heroines at its centre. Rather than celebrating royal lineages, divine favour, or military conquest, *Untouchable Spring* locates heroism in the everyday struggles for dignity, equality, and survival, thereby constructing an epic grounded in Dalit experience and historical agency.

Art, Performance and Cultural Memory

Alongside its expansive narrative structure, oral storytelling traditions, and reimagined heroism, *Untouchable Spring* incorporates another characteristic feature of epic literature: the centrality of songs, dances, and performative traditions. In the *Mahabharata*, music, dance, and oral performance frequently accompany ceremonial, ritualistic, and communal occasions. Rao similarly foregrounds the rich artistic traditions of Dalit communities but transforms them into repositories of historical memory, cultural identity, and resistance rather than mere aesthetic expressions. Songs, dances, and folk performances in the novel become living archives through which experiences of oppression, survival, and collective identity are performed, remembered, and transmitted across generations.

The transmission of these art forms likewise recalls another important feature of Indian epic culture: the Guru-Shishya tradition, through which artistic, literary, and philosophical knowledge is passed from one generation to the next. In *Untouchable Spring*, this pedagogical lineage is reflected in the relationship between Chandrappa, Naganna, and Yellana, all of whom are artists and folklorists. Through the tales, myths, and Puranic stories that Naganna teaches Yellana, artistic practice becomes a means of inheriting, reinterpreting, and sustaining the community's cultural memory. At the same time, these inherited narratives are not reproduced uncritically but are reinterpreted from a Dalit perspective, transforming mythology into a medium for challenging caste ideology. Consequently, the songs, stories, and performances depicted in the novel are deeply rooted in the everyday realities of the community and become vehicles through which experiences of oppression, suffering, resilience, and survival are transmitted across generations.

This function is particularly evident in Yellana's songs. He "weaves" his own experiences, the collective history of his community, and the deconstructed tales taught by his guru into his songs. One such song traces the history of mala's mound, from the landscape of Yennela Dinni and the lives of the malas and madigas to the flood, Narigadu's death, and Mataiah's story, unfolding "like history" for three hours (Rao 94–95). Yellana's songs travel beyond the boundaries of the village and become part of the community's folk memory: "Wind carried Yellana's songs. When labour migrated from that village to this or from this village to that, it carried those songs"

(Rao 98). Their circulation reflects the oral transmission of communal memory. Reuben later recognises their significance when he reflects that his grandfather had written “a song about the entire history of Mala’s Mound. That’s a heroic tale” (Rao 180). Through these songs, Yellana records histories of untouchability, caste violence, hunger, labour, exploitation, and resilience from the perspective of the community itself, transforming oral performance into a repository of alternative historical memory. Their significance becomes even clearer when contrasted with mainstream epic narratives. While the *Mahabharata* recounts Guru Dronacharya feeding flour mixed with water to Ashwatthama as a sign of poverty, it remains largely silent on the everyday hunger, deprivation, and humiliation experienced by untouchable communities. By foregrounding these neglected experiences, Yellana’s songs transform the everyday realities of labour, suffering, and survival into the substance of epic history.

Rao similarly foregrounds the *Urumula Nrityam* (Thunder Dance) of the Mala community as a powerful form of artistic expression. Described as proceeding “with great fury” (21), the dance marks Yellana’s initiation into the life of an artist and becomes an outlet for the rage and turmoil generated by caste oppression. Significantly, Rao recreates the performance through vivid sensory detail. The “tempo of the dance” gathers force, while the “grating noise of the cane stick” heightens its rhythmic intensity, allowing the movement, sound, and emotional energy of the performance to unfold before the reader (Rao 19-21). Rather than merely describing the dance, the narrative conveys its embodied expression of collective anger, suffering, and resilience. During the performance, Yellana is described as the “nude Shiva” (21), a description that simultaneously invokes and reclaims a sacred image. Rao further notes that the *Urumula* dance is the “grand thunder-spring of the untouchables” but has been “stolen and hidden in temples by the upper castes as Perini dance” (21). Through this observation, the novel draws attention to the appropriation and erasure of Dalit cultural contributions within dominant histories.

The exclusion of Dalit artistic traditions from mainstream cultural narratives is articulated explicitly through Ruth’s reflections: “There are no records that history has made a note of them in its pages. In this country, caste is more important than art. Art is also weighed in the scale of the caste” (Rao 41). The novel repeatedly exposes how Dalit artists and their contributions have been marginalised, forgotten, or appropriated. Yet it also demonstrates how artistic expression enables the preservation of collective memory and the assertion of cultural agency. In this context, Bama’s observation that “In the history of the dominants, there is no place for the culture, art, language cult and literature of the Dalits. Therefore, every dominant literature should be inverted” (97) becomes particularly relevant. The art forms represented in *Untouchable Spring* thus function as acts of cultural resistance. Through songs, dances, and performances, Dalit communities preserve their histories, transmit collective memory, challenge cultural erasure, and assert their dignity and humanity. In doing so, Rao not only documents Dalit artistic traditions but also positions them at the centre of his reimagined epic narrative.

Conclusion

G. Kalyana Rao’s *Untouchable Spring* stands as a monumental work within the corpus of Dalit literature, not only because of its powerful representation of Dalit experiences but also because of its innovative reimagining of the epic form. By weaving epic conventions into the lived realities of Dalit communities, Rao creates a narrative that simultaneously engages with and challenges the literary traditions that have long shaped Indian cultural consciousness. Through its multi-generational narrative, oral story-telling, folklore, songs and performative traditions, the novel demonstrates that the epic can become a powerful medium for articulating Dalit

experience, history, and identity. Its open-endedness further highlights that the history of Dalit struggle continues to unfold and that the quest for dignity, equality, and social justice remains unfinished.

At the same time, *Untouchable Spring* functions as a powerful form of counter-history and counter-memory, recovering suppressed experiences, voices, and cultural traditions while challenging inherited modes of historical remembrance. By reconstructing the past from the perspective of the oppressed, Rao legitimises forms of knowledge and memory long excluded from literary and historical discourse, affirming oral traditions, folklore, and collective memory as valid modes of historical knowledge. In doing so, the novel leaves the work of historical recovery deliberately open, inviting future Dalit writers, artists, and activists to continue the process of remembrance and reclamation. Ultimately, *Untouchable Spring* demonstrates the transformative potential of storytelling as a mode of cultural and political resistance, self-representation, and collective empowerment through which suppressed histories are reclaimed, preserved, and continually rewritten. Rao's contribution is therefore both literary and historiographical, compelling readers to reconsider who has the authority to narrate the past, what forms of knowledge are recognised as history, and whose lives are considered worthy of epic remembrance.

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