



Giving Voice to the Unvoiced: The Rise of Indian Dalit Literature

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Received: 03 Apr 2024; Received in revised form: 11 May 2024; Accepted: 20 May 2024; Available online: 29 May, 2024

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Abstract— The word "Dalit" connotes people who are impoverished, oppressed, abused, and in need. The origin of the Indian caste system is not a widely accepted theory. There are several forms of inequality that give rise to social prejudice in every civilised community. Additionally, it is dressed in "Casteism" in India. The subaltern literary voices of the tribals, Dalits, and other minority groups were absent from discourses tailored to the tastes of the nobility. The dalits are denied their basic rights to equality, property ownership, and education. Dalit literature thus arises as a voice for all those marginalised, oppressed, and exploited populations who have long suffered from societal injustice and exploitation. The liberation of Dalits from this never-ending slavery is the central theme of Dalit literature. Dalit experiences and expressions are positing the history in quotidian. Though they may appear as alien and anathema to the "upper" caste sensibility, they can be read as embodying the political in all its dimensions. Since Dalit literature is based on ideas of equality, liberty, justice, and solidarity rather than pleasure, it is important for Dalit critics to find a new imagery of "beauty and truth", which is more responsive to contemporary lived realities. Otherwise, Dalit literature will forever be condemned for its lack of merits and the taste within the overarching framework of traditional aesthetics. The Dalit writers' rejection of the hegemony of a caste-based universalism challenges the neat binary world of postcolonial literary theory and calls attention to the internal contradictions of Indian society.



Keywords— Dalit language, literature, theory, aesthetics, mainstream. Dalit writings, Oppressed, Untouchables, Caste, Expression.

India is one of the fastest growing countries yet is notorious for its rigid caste system. Literature has been an integral part of India since time immemorial and in the post modern era when the problems regarding human rights occupy the central stage, it becomes an evident step to literally portray the marginalised community. Dalit literature is an attempt to bring to the fore the discrimination, brutality, and ostracization faced by the Dalit community in India. The members of the Dalit community have been pushed to the margins and their lived experiences have been disregarded by the majority. Their stories have been deemed unworthy to be written about. However, in the modern era, the name "Dalit" refers to individuals, who have been viewed as "outcasts," meaning they do not merit recognition within the four

categories of the class system. The Manu Smriti, a holy text, describes the "Varna system" of society. It is a four-tiered Varna system that includes four social classes that were created from the body of Lord Brahma.

CONCEPT OF DALIT

The term 'dalit' literally means "oppressed" and is used to refer to the "untouchable" casteless sects of India. Dalit, also called outcaste, is a self designation for a group of people traditionally regarded as untouchables. Dalits are a mixed population of numerous caste groups all over India, South Asia and all over the world. There are many different names proposed for defining this group of people like 'Ashprosh' (Untouchable), 'Harijans' (Children of

God) 'Dalits, (Broken People) etc. Etymology of the word 'Dalit' The word 'Dalit' comes from the Sanskrit and it means "downtrodden", 'suppressed,' 'crushed' or 'broken to pieces'. It was first used by Jyotirao phule in the nineteenth century in the context of the oppression faced by the erstwhile "Untouchable" castes of the twice-born Hindus. Mahatma Gandhi coined the word 'Harijan', translated roughly as "children of God" to identify the former untouchables.

SOCIAL STATUS OF DALIT:

Dalits have been destined for inferior activities such as leather work, butchering or removal of rubbish, animal carcasses and waste; by this so called civilized Hindu society. Dalits work as manual laborers cleaning street, latrines and sewers. Engaging in these activities was considered to be polluting to the individual and this pollution was considered contagious. As a result, Dalits were commonly segregated and banned from full participation in Hindu social life.

DALIT MOVEMENTS IN INDIA:

The earliest known Dalit reformer was Lord Gautam Budha, who preached the abolishing of untouchability. The earliest known reformation within Hinduism happened during the medieval period when the Bhakti movements actively engaged in the participation and inclusion of dalits. In the 19th century, the Brahmo samaj, Arya samaj and the Ramakrishna mission actively participated in the emancipation of Dalits. Saint kabir, mahanubhava sect, varkari sect in Maharashtra rejected the term untouchability and embraced Dalits as brothers. Maharashtra state was the key state in the reformation of Dalit or on the transformation of untouchable to touchable. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Rajashri Shahu Maharaj, V. R. Shinde and the pinnacle towering figure Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar were the prominent social reformers in Maharashtra. In the 1950, Ambedkar turned his attention to Buddhism and converted thousands of untouchable people in Buddhism with himself. In west Bengal chaitanya prabhu initiated a movement called 'Namo shudras movement' (bow to Dalit) which changed an attitude towards untouchable community. Overall, Dalit reform movements had been in India since ancient period right from Gautama Buddha. Still it is in course of reforming state by creative efforts of social reformers.

DALIT WRITING

The untouchables were long denied access to formal education, which would have energised and inspired them

to launch a legitimate literary movement in opposition to the established literature's monopoly. Some educated "Untouchables" came into contact with contemporary education during the post-Independence era, and they saw they needed to adopt a new way of thinking. The birthplace of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the champion of the oppressed, is where this literary movement got its start. Thus, in the early 1970s, "Dalit Literature" gained popularity and quickly expanded to surrounding states like Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and many more. In Dalit literature, the Dalits themselves convey their rage and bitterness towards those who they hold accountable for their current situation. It calls into question the standing and circumstances surrounding the Dalits. Hira Dom's poem is regarded as the earliest work of Dalit literature, and Swami Achyutanand's writings and social activity exposed an oppressive societal framework. Dalit reality is portrayed in Dalit literature. With this portrayal, the untouchables subvert the upper class's purported purity and speak out loudly throughout the caste-ridden society. Since the 1970s, a large number of poets and writers from Dalit communities have been producing poems, short stories, novels, and autobiographies brimming with themes of caste oppression, identity issues, poverty, untouchability, and revolution.

These writers, in general, do not express their disapproval of any one group; rather, they see themselves as cut off from both the government and the social structure, which they believe keeps them impoverished and debased. Stated differently, the pursuit of identity is fundamental to Dalit culture. Because of this, Dalit writers have responded in a number of ways to issues relating to poverty, hypocrisy, injustice, social discrimination, and other social practices. These answers are kinds of protest meant to bring about a revolution in order to bring about social change. The primary distinction between Dalit and mainstream literature is that the former rejects the long-standing Indian customs of caste, class, and religion while the latter maintains that customs cannot be completely disregarded. According to the Dalit writers, a particular class has been using the word "tradition" as a "safeguard" for their own purposes. Regarding this, Dangle states A tradition is created and nurtured by ideas and ideals, and it is these ideas and principles that give rise to and maintain a tradition. A tradition's foundation is determined by the overall set of circumstances as well as the social structure in place at the time.

The privileged elite is constantly looking to create a useful custom that protects its interests. The weaker segments of society are sick of this custom. In actuality, a small number of people have forced all of our traditions—religious, social, literary, and cultural—on the majority.

(Dangle, 261). Comparably, Bama, a Tamil Dalit fiction writer, has created incredibly valuable works about gender, caste, and marginalised groups in society. She pens the first autobiography by a Tamil Dalit woman. Her books, which have been translated into English and several other Indian languages, include *Karukku*, *Sangati*, and *Vanman*. She reveals the shame of religious conversion and the caste system in *Karukku*. Her work effectively highlights the issue of Dalit consciousness. She fiercely opposes the caste-based Indian society in general and the Roman Catholic Churches in particular for their practice of untouchability.

A NEW FLAVOUR

One of the solid arsenals produced by the Dalit community, apart from its resolute commitment to love, forgive and fight, is the articulation, through literature, of human emotion, and writing about bodies and sexuality, compelling rage and justifiable challenges to authority. Over the first half of the twentieth century, besides BR Ambedkar, a proliferation of Dalit writers produced work in multiple vernaculars, writing in a tone that conveyed their selves in the most direct form. The list below attempts to cover some of the recognised and popular works, which gained prominence through their craft and expression. They have given rise to thought, philosophy and meditation, and let many bathe in the pain and joy they put forth. For generations, Dalits had to be locked in someone else's hateful interpretation. Their registers of protest and sweetness in life were not only undermined but stolen by their oppressors. Dalits, therefore, had to witness their beauty being manipulated and relegated to an ugly demeanour. Dalit writers, though, used this to their service. Time was made unavailable to Dalits, so they slashed the rigid conventions of temporality and space in their writing.

CONCLUSION:

On the whole, Dalit literature gives a message about their community not individuality, about revolt not passivity, about progress not backwardness. This message is to the entire world about their status in society by portraying the exploitive, helpless, and engrossed with grief, suppressed and enslaved and a subaltern state. To some extent, Dalit in India can be compared with African American regarding the mutilation. The shared political position of these authors is against the hegemony of upper and middle class Hindu beliefs and for the power of the human beings against oppressive social rules. Dalit author questioned religion and Identity throughout their literature. It could be said that Dalit literature achieved a firm foundation in the

mid-20th century; but its framework was established in the early 19th century. Today Dalit writers have their literary foundation with ideology and publish numerous journals. They also have a number of political organizations supporting them. The most prominent of these is the Dalit panthers (begun in the 1970s), which has borrowed much of its ideology from America's Black panthers. The future of Dalit literature is embarked on the present status of Dalit and their sensibility. And certainly new reforming waves are blowing for the radical development in Dalit literature as literature of protest. Thus Dalit literature is a new dimension in the day today and used up literature. With great amaze, people fascinate towards this new charismatic dimension in literature i.e. Dalit literature.

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