



ISSUES IN EMERGENCE OF DALIT LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

Indian Dalit literature, which can be traced back to a corpus of writings from Maharashtra in the 1960s, refers to literature of the oppressed, usually associated with a diverse group of people historically considered the lowest among the Indian population and known as “untouchables.” While Dalit literature developed in response to concerns specific to Indian social and cultural history, over the last 20 years Dalit literature has got itself a spot in the World Republic of Letters through translations into English. In an era when issues relating to human rights have been under critical focus, literary depictions of the experiences of marginalized groups have acquired great significance. The recent spurt in Dalit literature in India is an attempt to bring to the forefront the experiences of discrimination, violence and poverty of the Dalit. Expression of these experiences have long been silenced, often with religious and social sanction and relegated to the margins as non-literary. More recent is the trend to deny their existence altogether.

The emergence of Dalit literature is a new phenomenon in post- independence India. The basic premise of argument for Dalit writers has been caste-based discrimination, humiliation, and subordination of Dalits by dominant castes in the Hindu society. The emergence of Dalit literature is a new phenomenon in post-independence India. The basic premise of argument for Dalit writers has been caste-based discrimination, humiliation, and subordination of Dalits by dominant castes in the Hindu society.

KEY WORD: Dalit Literature, Caste, Poetry, Problematics, Emergence

I. INTRODUCTION

In an era when issues relating to human rights have been under critical focus, literary depictions of the experiences of marginalized groups have acquired great significance. The recent spurt in Dalit literature in India is an attempt to bring to the forefront the experiences of discrimination, violence and poverty of the Dalit. Expression of these experiences have long been silenced, often with

religious and social sanction and relegated to the margins as non-literary. More recent is the trend to deny their existence altogether.

The growing corpus of Dalit texts, poems, novels and autobiographies, however, seek to rectify this phenomenon by examining the nuances of Dalit culture. Dalit literature is one of the most important literary movements to emerge in post-independence India. The transformation of the stigmatized identity of these so called 'untouchables' to a self chosen identity as Dalit is a story of collective struggle waged over centuries. Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, two towering figures in the pantheon of Dalit history, were the first to appropriate the word, Dalit as a noun and an adjective, in the early decades of the 20th century to describe the extreme oppression of untouchables. The term 'Dalit literature' was first used in 1958, at the first ever Dalit conference held in Bombay.

However as an identity marker, the term 'Dalit' came into prominence in 1972, when a group of young Marathi writers-activists founded an organization called Dalit Panthers. The name expressed their feelings of kinship and solidarity with Black Panthers who were engaged in a militant struggle for African - American rights in the U.S.A. Arjun Dangle, a writer and leader of the Dalit Panther movement, writes: "Dalit is not a caste but a realization and is related to the experiences, joys and sorrows and struggles of those in the lowest strata of society. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary."

II. REVIEW OF DALIT LITERATURE

Dalit literature is a new phenomenon in the modern era of literature where the tormenting experiences of Dalit, Untouchable writers are exposed to present the contemporary social, mental condition before Dalit and non- dalit readers. Mulk Raj Anand was the first to insulate Dalit literature through his novels like 'Untouchable', 'Coolie' in English and there are simultaneously translated in English and different languages. The style of Dalit literature covers a wide range of literary genres. This Dalit literature is made popular in Marathi by Maharashtra Dalit poets, writers. It solely aims at generating awareness of dalits about their social situation in the society, to all conscious readers.

a) Dalit poetry:

There is a plenty of Dalit poetry expressing the violent lashing experiences of poet's life effectively. Narayan Surve was one of the prominent poets in the early Dalit literature. His famous poem was 'vidhyapith'. The other poets like Keshav Meshram- "Utkhanan" (Excavation), Dayapawar- 'Kondwada' (suffocating Enclosure), Nandedo Dhasal - 'Golpitha' (The Red Light zone), Triyambaksapkhal - 'Surung' (dynamite) and so on. The new generation of Dalit poetry emerged in the contemporary period as a revolt or protest against the oppressive traditional shackles.

b) Dalit folk poetry:

Unlike the tremendous Dalit poetry as a powerful mean of dalit expressions, folk poetry too practiced for propoganding Dalit sensibility. Vaman dada kardak, Bhimraokardak, VitthalUmap, and so on are the prominent Dalit folk poets. The folk poetry includes Ballads which enthralled the common people of Dalit community. It too creates awareness about Dalit reform movements.

c) Dalit short stories:

Short stories and novels are important genre of literature that exploited by dalit writers for expressing Dalit sensibility aptly. The short stories like 'Fakira'- Anna Bhausathe, 'Davandi'- Shankarraokharat, 'JevahMiJaatChorliHoti (When I robbed a caste) - 1963 MaranSwast Hot Aahe-1969 (Death is becoming cheap)- BaburaoBagul, Red stone - N. G. Shende are the best examples of Dalit short stories by Dalit writers.

d) Dalit Auto narratives:

Dalit writers mostly interpreted their own experiences regarding social injustice in their own autobiographies. It is called Dalit Auto-narrative. This form of literature is best suited to Dalit writer.

III. DALIT LITERATURE MOVEMENT

Suppressed class movement started in India in the year 1958 by the thinkers as Dr. BhimraoAmbedkar and earlier inspired by Mahatma JyotibaPhule. This got the spark from the Black Movement of contemporary America. As obvious from the meaning Dalit literature is the writing about and of Dalits or oppressed. This literature echoes the agony of the experiences of untouchables. It portrays the caste humiliation, injustice, atrocities, and discriminations perpetrated by the upper caste people. It expresses the political consciousness that focused on the struggle for self-respect and dignity for the community. This Literature might include writings about the exploitation of nature and environment, the racial discrimination of Afro Americans in America, the women subordination, the rights of homosexuals, the negligence of old age people. The word 'Dalit' has a large periphery and it speaks about every type of domination that any group faces. It has the healing power to cure the traumas of the past.

The British Indian Empire gave some reform schemes to the historically disadvantaged men and women. They passed the 'Government of India Act 1935' and identified the untouchables as Depressed Class or the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The act also provided some welfare schemes to bring out development of Dalits. Even though Dalits were considered as impure and unskilled, they began to articulate their dignity and identity in speeches and writings. This movement produced research articles, poems, drama, short stories, novels and

other forms of mass media about the exploited social life. Foreign writers, non-Dalits and Dalits were aware of the impact of caste system in South Asia.

One of the first Dalit writers was MadaraChennaiah, an eleventh-century cobbler-saint who lived during the reign of Western Chalukyas and who is also regarded by some scholars as the 'Father of Vachana Poetry'. Another poet who finds mention is DoharaKakkaiyah, a Dalit by birth, whose six confessional poems survive, throwing light on those troubled times. Marathi Saint Chokhamela and his wife Soyraibai also explained the condition of oppressed through their poems (Abhanga) in 13th century. In 1958, the term 'Dalit literature' was used for the first time, when the first conference of Maharashtra Dalit SahityaSangha (Maharashtra Dalit Literature Society) was held at Mumbai.

The earliest known Dalit reformer was Lord GautamBudha, 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 Brahmosamaj, Aryasamaj 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 JyotibaPhule,RajashriShahuMaharaj, V. R. Shinde and the pinnacle towering figure Dr. BabasahebAmbedkar 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 chaitanyaprabhu initiated a movement called 'Namoshudras 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.

IV. PROBLEMATICS OF DALIT LITERATURE

As Dalit literature is an emerging field in the vast body of literature available in India and abroad, there are some contentious issues upon which there hasn't been any consensus even within Dalit academia. Dalit, as well as non-Dalit critics and scholars, have tried to problematize some aspects of Dalit literature time and again. It will be useful here to discuss some of these issues to have a more nuanced understanding of Dalit literature. Foremost puzzles that have been in the critical domain of Dalit literature are – 'who is a Dalit?', 'who is entitled to write Dalit literature?', and 'which literature is Dalit and which is not?' Initially, 'Dalit' word as a form of collective identity for untouchable castes was used by Dr. Ambedkar in his writings sporadically to press his demand for separate electorate for this distinct group of people. Ambedkar (2017) didn't like the Gandhian term 'Harriman' for his people. Instead, he preferred to use the official terms like 'Depressed Classes' or 'Scheduled Castes'. Though, before confrontation with Gandhi on the

Poona Pact, Dr. Ambedkar and other leaders from the untouchable community had objected to the official nomenclature 'Depressed Classes' for their people. They thought it "degrading and contemptuous" (317). After that, Dalit Panthers popularized the term 'Dalit' in their writings. In their manifesto in 1973, they clearly mentioned that who a Dalit is, "Members of Scheduled Castes and Tribes, neo-Buddhists, the working people, the landless and poor peasants, women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion" (Satyanarayana and Tharu 62). Though Ambedkar's formulation of the term was in the context of people from untouchable castes only, it was expanded to poor workers and labourers of other castes also by the Dalit Panthers and earlier Marathi Dalit writers because of their Marxist leanings.

He may well say here that untouchability is not the only reference point for defining the Dalit. However, the fact is that it is precisely the experiences that flow from a centuries-old hierarchical and hereditary system, unalterable because sanctioned by religion, with the concomitant notion of people as polluted and untouchable, which make the Dalit unique and distinct. All other experiences of exclusion, subjugation, dispossession and oppression, experiences that resemble those of other groups, result from this fundamental reality. Dalits may attain educational, economic, social and political success, but their unique Dalitness remains.

Further advancing this discourse, for example in Hindi Dalit literature, Dalit writers and thinkers clarify that it is 'Dalit Chetna' (consciousness) which is must in a writer to write Dalit literature. Dalit consciousness comes from the life experiences of pain, humiliation, poverty, hunger, inhuman treatment, etc. Otherwise, there is no way to know or realize the Dalit life-world. One can be sensitive, sympathetic, and helpful in case of writing for 'other' but can't replace the self and subjectivity of the 'other'. 'Dalitness' is that aspect of self which can only be realized through self-experiences. Omprakash Valmiki (2018), the prominent Hindi Dalit author, writes down about the acquisition of Dalit consciousness

It is difficult to feel the intensity of dalit consciousness without understanding the Indian social-system. Suppressed by the atrocity, exploitation, jealousy, hatred, and discrimination of thousands of years, dalit seems to be aware of the search of his identity. He nowhere finds his identity in the historical scenario. For him, past is more dreadful than hell.

Therefore, for a non-Dalit writer, it seems very difficult to portray the Dalit subject and his life-world. If he ever tries to enter into the Dalit world like Premchand, Mulk Raj Anand, U. R. Unanthamurthy, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, etc., his representation will be distorted, biased, and shallow. For that reason, non-Dalit writers who have written about Dalit life and characters are not considered in the canon of Dalit literature by Dalit writers and critics. For example, Mathivannan, a Tamil Dalit poet who has been engaged with the Arundathiyar movement in Tamil Nadu, criticizes Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, an iconic Malayalam leftist writer, for his

casteist, insensitive, and irresponsible portrayal of scavengers as coward, worthless, and inherently dirty people in his novel Scavenger's Son.

V. THE EMERGENCE OF DALIT LITERATURE

Dalit discourse on caste can be characterized as anti-caste discourse. Dalit writers, following the footsteps of their icons like Jotiba Phule, Bhim Rao Ambedkar, Narayan Guru, and other Dalit thinkers, took caste head on and talked about it directly without deviating in any other conceptual categories like Marxism and other progressive non-Dalit writers' movements. It is caste as a category which has been responsible for their discrimination. Dalits criticize Brahmanism and other Hindu philosophical ideas which justified their inferior and untouchable status in the Hindu society. Dalit writers and scholars trace the lineage of anti-caste Dalit movement in the philosophy and movements propounded by Buddha, fourteenth century Dalit saint poets and reformers, Jotiba Phule, Periyar, Ambedkar, Swami Achhutanand, Ayyankali, Narayan Guru, etc.

Contemporary Dalit movement in literature traces its origin in the first Dalit Literary Conference held in 1958, about two years after Ambedkar's death, by the Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangha. Initially, Marathi Dalit literature was informed and guided by the revolutionary writings of Marxist-Dalit writers like Anna Bhau Sathe, Baburao Bagul, Narayan Surve, etc. Later on, it was taken forward by the Maharashtra Bauddha Sahitya Parishad which held a conference in the year 1967 in which some basic questions regarding Marathi Dalit literature were discussed. On 9 July 1972, Namdeo Dhasal, Arjun Dangle, and J. V. Pawar established the Dalit Panthers which paved way for the future struggle and emergence of the Marathi Dalit literature in full bloom. From Marathi language, Dalit movement spread in Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Hindi, Punjabi, Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Oriya, Rajasthani, etc. Language throughout India in the last decades of the twentieth century. In Karnataka, Dalit assertion started with the 'boosa' remarks by B. Basavalingappa, minister of town administration then on 19 November 1973; in Andhra Pradesh, Dalit movement came in limelight with the Karamchedu massacre of Dalit men and rape of Dalit women in 1985, in Hindi, Dalit literary movement started in the 1970s with the advent of Omprakash Valmiki and Mohan Das Naik's autobiographies. In every state where Dalit literature has emerged, Dalit writers and activists have raised their own organizations like 'Dalit Panthers' and 'Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangh' in Maharashtra, 'Dalit Lekhak Sangh' in New Delhi, Rajasthan Dalit Literary Academy, Dalit Sangharsh Samiti in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha, Dalit Sahitya Vedy in Kerala, Dalit Sahitya Academy, etc. To discuss past, present, and future of the Dalit literature

VI. 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.

Marginalization is a complex phenomenon in the present-day world and a critical concern of national and international communities. Its widespread occurrence is a consequence of several interrelated factors in socio-economic development which gain significance in the era of globalization. Factor of Classism is everywhere in world. African-American literature has some similarity to Dalit literature of India. Suppressed class movement started by the motivation of prominent Dalit leaders. It brought a new momentum to Dalit literature. Rejection and revolt in Dalit literature have been birthed from the womb of Dalits' pain. It is about the oppressed according to the Indian caste system. It forms an important and distinct part of Indian literature.

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