

TRACING THE VOICE OF DALIT THROUGH DALIT LITERATURE – A BRIEF STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Dalit Literature is an attempt to express unheard, unspoken voices. Dalit Literature forms an important and distinct part of the Indian literature. It is the literature about the Dalits, their sufferings, anguish, experiences and consciousness. It presents dalit's struggle in society for liberty, honor, security and freedom from the powerful elements of the society. The term "Dalit" refers to the people who are crushed, split and grounded into dust by those who are in power and enjoying the life. In order to understand the plight of Dalit and the need for recognizing their voice, it is important to understand the term 'Dalit'. The term 'Dalit' is explained by many thinkers and writers based on the idea of oppression. Tracing the Dalit's voice in the history of Indian society not only do the task of giving them some visibility, but it also helps in tracking the outline and progresses for social change within the society. Dalit's presence, voice and narratives, as part of the Indian society and of various historical movements, largely went unnoticed or undocumented.

Key words: Dalit, subaltern, oppressed, insecurity, marginal, victim, sexploitation, struggle.

Introduction

This paper deals with the issues of the voice of marginalized through dalits literature. 'Dalit' means nominated name for a group of communities in India who were historically considered to be very unskilled in Indian society, such as shoe makers, butchers, sweepers, waste and animal corpse disposers, manual scavengers etc. Dalits are considered to be an oppressed

people in Indian caste under the Indian caste system. Dalit literature appears in the 1960s, beginning with the Marathi language, and soon appeared in Hindi, Telugu, Kannada and Tamil languages. Their writing reflects Dalit experience primarily from Dalit point of view who have been excommunicated, marginalized, exploited and disgraced for ages in the Indian caste ridden Hindu Society. It mirrors not only the history of Dalit but also the challenging tradition in the present world.

The marginalized, the subaltern, the dalit, call them whatever you may but one thing remains stable and that is their daily struggle for survival as the reserved, oppressed and exploited in the society. Discriminated by multiple factors like economic, social, gender based, cultural, Dalits became the victims of society. The individuals or the groups were subjugated either in the name of religion, race, region, color, community, cast, gender, nationality or even ideology. But this relationship between the centre and margin was not permanent and they were short lived. The centre can control and suppress the marginalized voices, but cannot make them silence forever. If they began to find their true voice, there comes an end to be marginalized or oppressed.

This paper tries to trace the voice of dalits through dalit literature. In 1970s the 'Dalit Panthers' restored the term and extended its reference to include scheduled tribes, poor peasants, women and all those who are exploited politically, economically and also in the name of religion etc. Dalit have the continuous struggle and dominated throughout their life. Still they fight to assert and confirm their identity. Even dalit men become the victims of the caste oppression whereas dalit women are the victims of both caste and class oppression. Dalit women find themselves as the victims of double oppression including sexexploitation by the upper caste men as well as by the men of their own community. The biggest handicap of dalit women is their lack of

education. Dalits writing comes from these margins of the caste code read out for many centuries. Dalits use their voice to expose the violence faced by the dalits itself. Marginal representation of the lower-caste writers and their life-experiences result in the psychological partition and the anger that flames within them as a reaction of these intolerances.

Dalit literature represents the harsh experiences of marginalized dalit people and it is mainly based on dalit consciousness. It also documents the socio-cultural and political factors of the exploited victims in India. Today, Dalit literature has taken a significant form from of variety of languages such as Marathi, Kannada, Tamil, Hindi, Telugu, Malayalam and so on in India as well as in foreign countries. A large number of Indian texts are also available in English translations and got a wider range of audience. Liberation and independence for dalits is the chief motive of Dalit literature. Dalit literature is the voice of subaltern community seeking justice in the name of caste from the centuries.

Dalit Literature is a literature of confrontation which spot lights on the subjugation and marginalization of oppressed communities like Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and other backward castes. Caste system is one of the harsh realities faced by dalits particularly in India. It is the voice of the victims who challenge the inflexibility of caste system and demands equality. It also represents the bitter experiences of Dalits and how they are struggling to survive everyday in the midst of society. In the words of G.A. Ghanshyam, "Dalit Literature is basically the literature written by Dalits in which they have expressed their pain and anguish". (92)

Writers from different caste backgrounds are coming forward to contribute themselves in this budding genre of literature. As a revelation for dalits, Dalit Literature found a voice through Dr. Ambedkar. He stimulated and motivated the creative instinct of the dalit to voice the emancipator spirit through Dalit literature. Baba Sahab Ambedkar, Mahatma Phuleh as brought

forward the issues of Dalits through their works and writings. They started a new trend in literature especially for dalits. It was inspired by many Dalit writers and they come forward with their writings about marginalized.

Dalit autobiographies became a clear evidence of how dalit writers understand the situation of marginalization. Those autobiographies stressed on several issues like autobiographical expression as a source of truth, reading personality development, historical investigation, study of psychological development, reading genders and reading of subaltern experiences. The arrival of dalit autobiography provides a new aspect in autobiographies. Most of them have been using their writings as weapons for their social injustice, pursuit of identity and struggle against different forms of oppression.

Munshi Premchand, Amrita Nagar, Mannu Bhandari, MulkRaj Anand, Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, Malkhan Singh, Jai Prakash Kardam, Suraj Pal Chauhan, Omprakash Valmiki, Vasant Moon, and many other writers brought out social purpose and criticism in their writings. Writers like Mahaswetha Devi, Basudev Sunani, Bama, Sivakami, Poomani, Marku, Paul Chirakkarode and Arundhati Roy walked after them to create a strong foundation for dalit writings. They declare that it is essential to have Dalit identity to be a Dalit writer. They believe that Dalit literature is 'lived literature'.

Dalit writers occupy a unique position in the history of Indian literature. The 17th century and 18th century witnessed a generation of dalit writings were influenced by Marxist ideology. It was marked by experimental narrative structure concerning ethical and social-cultural issues influenced Tamil culture. They handled the themes like social disabilities, caste system, sexploitation, economic inequality, contemporary cruelties and cultural assertions which can be uniquely entitled as the struggle for their identity. These dalit writings depicts the resistance,

issue of identity, experience of pain and moreover a communal distinctiveness. Representation of dalits in dalit literature has often reminds a sensitive issue in the society.

The first Dalit novel *Pazhiyana Kazhidalum* is written in Tamil by P.Sivakami, a Dalit woman writer published in 1989. The novel discussed the issue of Dalit leadership and point out drawback inborn in an unoriginal representation. Dalit leaders oppose against corruption and controlling politics prevailing amongst empowered, upper caste politicians. The novel advocates the requirement for an organized, educated, Dalit youth who stands united for the empowerment of Dalits by ideological commitment and genuineness of action. Such a leadership consists of young men and women; they are expected as the novelist's vision to dalit conflict and assuring social justice.

The first dalit autobiography *Karukku* in Tamil, written by Bama a dalit writer was published in 1992. It was cordially acknowledged by many readers and critics. It discusses the dalits oppression at the hands of state panchayat, upper castes and at the church. Bama too highlights the voice of dalit woman who is victimized by dalit man at home. The patriarchal system in the name of caste domination is a harsher and excessive suppression of dalit woman is depicted as shown in the work of Sivakami.

Another work *Joothan: An Untouchable's Life* published in 1993 is a famous autobiography of Omprakash Valmiki. Originally, it was published as an essay 'Ek Dalit ki Atmakatha' in a book Harijan se Dalit. Mukherjee, Professor of English in York University, Toronto translated Joothan into English during 1997-2002. Jootha means 'polluted' food that associated with animals. It portrays the struggle between Chuhra (Dalits) and upper caste Tagas of Barla. It encapsulates the pain of poverty, degradation, and the slaughter on Dalits.

Siddalingaiah's *Ooru Keri* portrays poverty and anxiety of Dalit's voice for liberation from subjugation in Karnataka state. Siddalingaiah's family belongs to farm laborers, they get low-income for their hard work and sometimes nothing. In spite of his poverty, Siddalingaiah attended free night-school to study. Then he started to realize self-respect and dignity from his teachers at the school. He reveals his experiences openly which juxtapose all the struggles of Dalit like caste discrimination, oppression, poverty, and identity.

Majority of Dalit writers believe that only they can voice their agony and sufferings in an accurate manner as they come across in their life and it can also be said that only a woman can predict the real life of a woman. It appears necessary to have voice of a woman to speak about woman. But, in the catalog of Dalit literature, the previous concept that only woman writer able to portray sufferings of a woman in an exact manner becomes false. Prejudices on the basis of caste can be found when a woman writes for a woman. This condition can be said that Dalit woman becomes more victimized in the writings of upper caste woman writer. These arguments challenged the ideologies of upper caste man, woman and even Dalit man.

Most of the writers, researchers, critics, and reviewers considered that Dalit writings are the testimonies of caste dominations and exploitations. Day by day Dalit literature as well as Indian literature is enriched by the contributions of Dalit writers in recent years. Critics and reviewers national and international level have shown interest in this emerging literature. John C.B. Webster, Josiane Racine, Jean-Luc Racine, Dr. Gail Omvedt, Eleanor Zelliot, Christophe Jaffrelot and many Indian researchers have contributed on Dalit lives through their valuable writings in present years.

Through the voice of the writers, significance of Dalit identity in the patriarchal society is brought out in the Dalit literature. Dalits and other readers realized the identity of Dalit by

reading the works of Rabindranath Tagore, Jyotibqa Fule, M.K. Gandhi, Dr. Ambedkar, Premchand, Mulk Raj Anand, and Vijay Tendulkar and through religion and education. Today dalit literature includes not only the writings about Indian suppressed people but also other groups the marginalized throughout the world. Sometimes Dalit literature has been criticized as being propagandist and demoted to a secondary position by the honored classes.

In India, the subaltern voices have started to hear much before the colonization within the mainstream nationalism. 1930s onwards the voices from marginalized community, the untouchable castes, dalits get increasingly audible by creative and polemical writing. The voice of the Marathi speaking people were silenced for centuries until Jyoti Ram phule and Ambedkar has contributed their revolutionary works. Dalits have raised their voices through personal narratives with the inspiration of Dr. B. R. Ambedkarite ideologies. Dalit men and women enthusiastically involved themselves in Ambedkar's ideology and they considered him as 'God of Dalits'. In present position, Dalitness was trustworthy with different ideologies subsequent with Dalit consciousness, Dalit aesthetics, Dalit arts, Dalit revolution and so on.

Conclusion

The study of dalits and dalit literature is an established field of research within South Asian Studies and many significant publications have arisen from multiple disciplines. The journey of dalits is from quest for identity to social equality is still going on but has positive signs and effects are clearly visible through their voices in India. With the influence of various Western literature, writers, and politicians, these dalit writers recorded their experienced life stories in order to make awareness and raise their voice for emancipation from subjugation among fellow-dalits. They are triggering opportunities for further research on dalit writings for younger generation.

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