

Writings of Resistance: Dalit Literature

Dr. Milind E. Awad: *Assistant Professor, Centre for English Studies, School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies Jawaharlal Nehru University, Aruna Asaf Ali Marg
New Delhi 110067.*

Abstract:

The emergence of Dalit writings reflects the growing identity, self awareness and consciousness of the Dalit contestation. This arises from the intellectual and cultural heterogeneity therefore Dalit Literature invokes its origin from a revolutionary struggle that came up to bring just equal society. It is important to see that Dalit writer's inspiration is derived by the Dr. Ambedkar's message of 'Unite, Educate and Agitate'. Therefore Dalit literature is not just about the literature, but its correspondence with non-literary activities such as ongoing an social struggle for various demands.

Keywords:

Dalit Literature, Caste, Oppression, Brutal and incivilities.

The entomological meaning of the word 'Dalit' oppressed, broken and downtrodden in Sanskrit. Etymologically, *Dalit* means that which is made *Dal*. According to the Sankrit-English dictionary of Monier Williams, *dal* means: multi-sected, broken into pieces, fractured, violated, destroyed, subdued, and pulverized (Zelliot 56). The word 'Dalits' has come to mean a people subdued, exploited, kept disunited, and powerless. They are the Shudras and among them the Adi-shudras. They are the Dravidas and specifically the Adi-Dravidas. They are called by different names by the dominant such as: 'Avarnas', Out Castes, 'Panchamas', 'Dark-skinned Dasyus', 'Rakshasa', 'Nishidas', and 'Mlechas'. In the strict sense of state recognition, Dalits today mean the Scheduled Castes (the ex-untouchables) of our country (Pallath, "The Cultural Aspects of People Oriented Social Action").

Dalit Literary movement galvanized during the 1960-70's onwards came into existence in 1958 at the first Dalit Literature Conference, Mumbai. 'Dalit' word is first used by Jyotirao Phule who was known as one of the leading public thinker of the 19th century who provided a systematic caste critique. Early Modern Indian literature establishes a genre of Dalit writings which led the powerful critique of weapon of literacy for the Dalits in the society. This literary movement raised the concern of inclusive dialogue on nation building through Dalit literary movement.

Dalit writings, reflects and articulate their socio-cultural, historical exclusion of their humiliated past and stigma. Dalit Literature provides the caste critique as well as a critique of caste patriarchy. It is important to recognize that corpus of Dalit literature produced by Dalit men as well as Dalit women equally. I argue that Dalit literature is synchronization of hateful past and intersection of stigmatized social identities. In the initial form of Dalit literary movement is dominated by narratives of self memories and testimonials. The emergence of Dalit Literature

emerges in the forms of autobiographies, biographies, novels, poems. Therefore Dalit literature is one of the important additions in the larger domain of modern Indian writings in English.

Dalit writing brings fresh perspectives towards the caste society which is about the memories of hatred, trauma and denial of basic civil rights. This literary movement raises the concern of social change and deploys the systematic understating of brutality of caste oppression and structural composition of untochability in caste society. According to Babaurao Bagul the philosophy of Dalit literature is to bring 'total revolution'. Dalit literature focuses on the Dalit masses for intellectual and cultural assertion, protest against the stigmatized morally and culturally humiliated Dalit present and aspire for cultural, social and political mobilization. Dalit Literature functions as the reflecting phenomenon of the Dalit Present.

I argue that Dalit Literature has created new literary genres which have contributed to extend the mainstream canon of various vernacular literary tradition and mainstream modern Indian writings. It is Important to understand the social significance of Dalit literature which raises the concern of liberal individualism, aspiration of modern liberal values in response to rigid caste society and unequal treatment to human beings based on the caste identity. Dalit literature has significantly contributed to the Indian pedagogy and other institutional establishment because the writings of hunger, caste brutalities, denial of basic civic amities were never the concern of mainstream literature and pedagogies. Sharmila Rege writes that "the understanding of cast as an ideological system based on an irreconcilable opposition of the principles of purity and pollution of caste" has been described as 'top down' view of caste system. The established Meta narratives and mainstream ideas has been historically dominated by the disciplinary know ledges, mainstream academic curriculum and other official forms of knowledge production. It is significant to Writings of Dalits represents the repression of the former 'excommunicated' castes

and women which transfer them to the realm of private and cultural domain for the making of history. Therefore one can see the ignorance of hierarchical divisions which has been maintenance the power over the lower castes and women which are economically, socially, academically, and epistemologically excluded from the mainstream.

The significant aspect of Dalit literature is that the Dalit individual's struggles are reflected remembered and produced in Dalit writings. This writing acts as a witness, evidence and emerges as a powerful statement for the Dalit intellectual and cultural assertion and Dalit emancipation. Dalit Literature demonstrates the authentic Dalit expression about the various existing structures of the class, caste and gender. It is important to understand that suppression, subjugation and exclusion become the concern of Dalit literature. Therefore, the content of Dalit writings is the actual mapping of physical life word of Dalit lives. The intellectual source of Dalit writings is actual physical conditions which are recorded and circulated thorough the memory of oppressed subject. The ideological concern of Dalit writings is to make aware of their lives and create the dignified social-cultural identity in terms of cultivation of conscious cultural and intellectual politics.

The emergence of Dalit writings reflects the growing identity, self awareness and consciousness of the Dalit contestation. This arises from the intellectual and cultural heterogeneity therefore Dalit Literature invokes its origin from a revolutionary struggle that came up to bring just equal society. It is important to see that Dalit writer's inspiration is derived by the Dr. Ambedkar's message of 'Unite, Educate and Agitate'. Therefore Dalit literature is not just about the literature, but its correspondence with non-literary activities such as ongoing an social struggle for various demands.

The moral-ethical dimension of Dalit writings are inspired by the Ambedkar's life and philosophy. Dr. Ambedkar preferred Buddhism, which he named *Navayana* and elaborated three principles of religion *Prajna* (understanding against superstition and supernaturalism), *Karama* (love) and *Samata* (equality). The formulation of religion based on equality, liberty and fraternity creates the society based on the solidarity of the whole society and equality among all. Dalit literature manifested the expressions of being marginalized, which brought an understanding and critique of the women that contributed a lot to Dalit writings. The memories collaborated on the issue of memories of food and hunger, memories of education and a struggler, memories of denial of basic civil rights and brutalities. These memories are unpacking the vicious circle of caste victimization.

Eleanor Zelliot opined that Ambedkar's works traces the importance of gender issues, his insistence on the participation of women in the movement and encouraging the Dalit women to come to the forefront. Their writings bring forth the woman and the caste question which it's important to understand that the personal narratives become the political statement for the community; therefore the personal narrative becomes the political statement on behalf of inner self and authentic victimhood of being a Dalit life.

Dalit Literature acquaints people with the caste system and the exploited sentiments of oppressed and economically, socially and culturally victimized people because of the rigid cultural composition. In the name of religion and caste. (Dangle 265) The non- Dalit writer does not consider themselves as Dalits because they feel that to do so even they would be no less than the Dalits. As a result Dalit literature is left in the hands of very few and even the expansion of art faces a debacle. The argument lies between the non –Dalit writer and the Dalit writers as –

The non-Dalit writes questions- “Why should we call ourselves Dalits?” while the dilemma lies- “Is Dalit literature the literature only for those who are born Dalits? (Dangle 264-5)

This debate always remains as to who can be called a Dalit writer- one who belongs to the Dalit community and shares his experience or one who writes about the life of Dalits not being a Dalit himself. Unlike the non-Dalits, Dalit writers attempt to be true to their lived experiences and are honestly translated without euphemism. They use strong, brutal and crude language to express their life springing from poverty, ignorance and violence. The difference between the works of the two kinds of agency/ writers is not only about the caste or social identity, but, also their subjective experiences and the objectively produced subjective experience where there is possibility of denial of agency in the formulation of the subjective experience. Mahatma Phule rightly opined about the non-Dalit writers in the Sahitya Sammelan- “The feeling expressed in our meetings and books do not appear in books written by them or in their meetings. How will people with their heads in the clouds, understand what adversities and troubles we have faced?” (Dangle 241)

It is event to witness that there is constant contestation and debate in the literary criticism as to who can be a Dalit writer-the one who belongs to the Dalit community or the non-Dalit who writes about the life of Dalits. This conflict gives rise to different analogies given by both the Dalit as well as non-Dalit writers. Many non-Dalit writers are criticized by the Dalit writers for their superficiality of feelings, experiences and interests. (Kumar 147) The use of aggressive, crude and reactionary language is a reflection of their actual material and physical life. The portrayal of emotions, strongly intensified memories is the reflection of lived and immediate social reality of excluded life, therefore one cannot disassociate the subjective experience from the objective condition of the subject. Progressive writers like Premchand, Mulk Raj Anand and

R.K. Naryanan and other Indian English and Hindi writers have tried to portray the emotions and sentiments of the excluded life's or Dalits but they had to face the criticism based on the issue of agency or their social identities. As we can witness that the literary corpus is produced by many non- Dalits to write for the Dalits but there is constant hesitation by the Dalit writers based on the issue of the experienced owned by the Dalit are different than non-Dalits.

Dalit writers argue that only a Dalit by birth can produce authentic Dalit writings because of their lived and authentic experience. Their anger, struggle, reaction is the intensified because it is personal narratives which are different than non-Dalit writers. Dalit literature creates a counter canonical literary and public culture at large and aspires for contested reformative identity for their emancipatory cultural and intellectual mobilization. It is important to see that Dalit writers create greater affinity towards the philosophical, practical and personal aspect of ant-caste, anti-class and caste patriarchy ideologue such as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Mahatma Phule and other revolutionary public thinker.

References:

Dangle, Arjun. *Poisoned Bread: translation from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*. Orient Longman. Hyderabad, 1994. Print. (Essays and Speeches Pg 223-323)

Pallath, J.J., "The Cultural Aspects of People Oriented Social Action" June 2022

<http://campaigns.ahrchk.net/jjpallath/mainfile.php/work/39/?print=yes>>

Guru, Gopal. Sarukkai, Sundar. *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory*. Oxford University Press. New Delhi, 2012. Print.

Kumar, Raj. *Dalit Personal Narratives: Reading Caste, Nation and Identity*. Orient Black Swan. Hyderabad, 2010. Print.

Rege, Sharmila. Writing Caste/ Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonios. "Debating the consumption of Dalit Autobiographies". A Zubaan Original. Web. <www.zubaanbooks.com.>

Zelliot, Eleanor. From Untouchable to Dalit (Essay on the Abedkar Movement). New Delhi. Manohar Publications. 1992. Print.