

EGRESSION OF DALIT LITERATURE AS A VEHEMENT VEHICLE OF DALIT AWARENESS AND REVIVIFICATION

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ABSTRACT:

Like blacks of Africa and America, Dalits of India are also the meek sections of the society. It is been documented that Dalits in Indian society even today fell short of development in different areas whether social, political, economic or educational as are enjoyed by the other community people. It is because of the exaltation of caste ideologies that has resulted in the backwardness of Dalits in India. Lack of education and proper cognizance is the major cause of their exploitation, oppression and discrimination. Had they suitably stuck to edification, they would have easily become aware of their problems and would have easily overcome them. For the resurrection of their lost consciousness and awareness regarding their glitches, Dalit literature came in to being. In this paper endeavours are taken to expose the egression of Dalit literature in diverse languages and genres like poetry, short stories, autobiographies and novel. Besides that the indispensable contribution of celebrated personalities is explored who bestowed the development of Dalit literature. Dalit literature relies on the freedom and restoration of Dalits from the vociferous shackles of caste hierarchy and ideologies.

Key Words: *Dalit, Oppression, Discrimination, Dalit Literature, Dalit Consciousness and Resurgence.*

One of the striking prospect regarding social, economic and political relations circumambulate around the issues of inequality, untouchability and inequality which wholly and solely rely on class, gender and race. The controversies and strife of Indian socio- economic order remained almost constant even after 68 years of Independence. This much time is more than enough for the society to realize their flaws and mistakes that are predominant in the society that has completely shattered the social order. But even at the onset of modern age or 21st century, Indian society has not succeeded yet to resolve its contradictions and errors. Despite the endeavours taken by the Post- Independent Indian state towards the goal of equality, liberty, harmony and justice, the concept of discrimination and disharmony and inequality has not been diminished yet. In reality the socio- economic

discrimination is still the pivot of Indian social order. The extreme tyranny and oppression on Dalits has now remained undefined and elusive. These marginalised sections of Indian society are not allowed to billow socially, politically, educationally and economically. All such opportunities are only offered to a particular section of society. Dalits constitute more than 16% of the total Indian population. In order to maintain the political power in Independent India, Dalits generated a revolt against the Brahmanical order and dominance; but still could not get their social rights and thus remained suppressed and oppressed. The reason of their suppression is that almost all the higher positions are occupied by the upper class tyrants. Whenever they raised their slogans against the dominant castes, there was no one to hear them. Dalits are those people who are subservient in all social, political, economic and educational aspects which covers the main reason of their humiliation, discrimination, dehumanization and oppression by the upper castes. In Hindi and Marathi translations the word Dalit is used for 'depressed classes', to whom the Britishers gave the name of 'Schedule Castes'. In 1970, the term Dalit was resurrected by 'Dalit Panthers', which include peasants, poor, tribes, women and all that are being humiliated or victimized socially, politically, economically and educationally. The term 'Dalit' is not a caste but a symbol of change and revolution. The endeavour of Dalit literature is to emancipate Dalits from social tyranny, discrimination and injustice and also focuses upon the social harmony. The philosophy of social harmony and equality is shown as: "those who eat goats, fowl and tiny fish: such they call caste people. Those who eat the sacred cow that showers frothing milk to Shiva: such, they call outcastes" (Jena, *Emerging Issues* 3). James Massey has beautifully defined Dalit as:

The present usage of the term dalit goes back to nineteenth century when a Marathi social reformer and revolutionary Mahatma Jotirao Phule used it to describe the outcastes and untouchables as the oppressed, downtrodden, destroyed and broken victims of the Indian-ridden society (Dalits in India 15).

Dalits are the downtrodden sections of Indian society. Thus for the well-being of Dalits, a genre of Literature came in to existence that explores the miserable plight of a particular section of people namely 'Dalits', in terms of societal, political, ethnic and economic aspects are termed as Dalit Literature. Dalit Literature or Literature about Dalits probes the abject and downtrodden panorama of these people who are entangled in hierarchical system and constitutes a vital part of Literature. The term Dalit Literature came in to use in the first Dalit Sahitya Sammelan held at Mumbai on 8th March 1958. Dalit literature is a manner expressing, realising and existence of one's identity or self. It uncovers the reality of Dalits who are subjected to humiliation, and suppression. It depicts the harsh truth of Dalit life and reinforced the Dalit movement. Thus the essence of Dalit literature is embedded in the life of people who are crushed, humiliated, suppressed and dehumanised. The

primary aim of Dalit literature is the manumission of Dalit in India. It portrays the lower class life struggling for their rights, freedom and dignity. Initially it was their powerlessness to let the world know about their humiliations and penury so that they could have expressed their pathetic conditions which were unfamiliar to the world and readers as well. The commencing of Dalit literature is traced back to the Ambedkar's struggles for Dalit liberation in early 19th century. Apart from B.R. Ambedkar there are some legendary figures that also fought for Dalit cause. They are Mahatma Jotirao Phule, Cokhamela and others. According to Dalit Historians, the history of Dalit Literature is associated with the first Dalit literary conference in 1958. Debates regarding Dalit literature were undertaken and a resolution was passed. The resolution stated: "that the literature written by the Dalits and that written by others about the Dalits in Marathi be accepted as a separate entity known as 'Dalit literature' and realizing its cultural importance, universities, and literary organisations should give it its proper place" (Dangale, *Poisoned Bread* 242). Thus according to Dangale: "Dalit Literature is not simply literature, it is associated with a movement to bring about change. It represents the hopes and ambitions of a new society and new people" (*Poisoned Bread* 266).

The term 'Dalit literature', became common in 20th century when a conference of Maharashtra named 'Dalit Sahitya Sangha' was held in 1958 at Mumbai. This movement was led by Phule and Ambedkar. The harmony of B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Jotirao Phule provide a new cue to Dalit Literature in Maharashtra. Various steps were taken for the ethical upliftment of Dalits. Besides that the Dalits got inspiration from the endeavours taken by Blacks in North America. Dalit literature not only enjoys the contribution of Ambedkar but also basks the contribution of Lord Buddha, Karl Marx and Black literature. The contribution of Lord Buddha, Karl Marx and Black literature is immense towards the devolvement of Dalit Literature in India.

Gautam Buddha was the first person who went against Hindu Varna system. His indulgence derogated the potency of Varna, caste and religious concepts. Human life was embedded with miseries and disappointments. Despite of that Lord Buddha attempted to find out the causes and remediation of these social evils. Lord Buddha was a social reformer not a philosopher, who focused upon untouchability and tried to incorporated moral principles in the society. He realised that man's status in society is not worth than an animal. Buddha, a philanthropist laid emphasis upon the brotherhood and legacy of all people. He treated all mankind as one and put them on the same scale. His ideas have completely resurrected the lives of Dalits in India, who were only treated as bores.

The opponent of capitalist system, Karl Marx was a great intellectual and a philosopher of nineteenth century. Marx propounded the Hegel's belief of 'dialectical progress' that hold the idea that until and unless the

old traditions, rules and beliefs are not destroyed there will be no progress. Marxism completely rejects the merciless tyranny of annihilation the poor and unprivileged in the society and thus raises its voice for the welfare and emancipation of exploited masses. The purpose of Marxism is: “the creation of a society that is exploitation-free and classless” (Limbale, *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature* 61). In order to impart social change he desired to develop new society based on equality. His philosophy has no place of God and religion in it. His philosophy evokes our thoughts and is also responsible for emergence of Dalit literature.

Black literature is a genre in literature that explores the plight and heart moving condition of Blacks in America and Africa. The common evil committed by African- Americans is Slavery and Racial Discrimination. Racism, a social and psychological restriction has completely excavated black masses from the white communities. The brutal subjugation of slavery towards the blacks realized their tyranny based on racism. John Arthur says: “Racism is usually a form of prejudice in just that sense: it is an attitude that is grounded in the beliefs formed on insufficient evidence, or beliefs that are held too firmly without adequate regard for other information that may call these beliefs into question” (*Race, Equality* 35). Although the African- Americans survived from the evil practices of slavery but they expresses their humiliation and sufferings in the form of oral methods and discourses for total liberation. The impact of African- American literature was immense and Dalit writers found same resemblance in their movements. The writings of these humiliated people were based lift themselves from orthodox, stubborn and conservative societies. Like African- American serf narratives, Dalit narratives are the tales of Dalit victims who receive common exploitation on their own land. These narratives awaken the intellect of people and prepared them for a big rebellion against cast system. These narratives also contributed to the development of Dalit literature. Dalit literature emerged historically due to abject humiliation faced by the lower class. Dalit literature is the portrayal of bitterness and anguish of lower castes against the upper class. In general Dalit literature refers to the writings of Dalits on their experiences. It is mandatory to understand Dalit literature in the spheres of Dalit perspective and Dalit imaginativeness. Dalit perspective is the examination of sorrows and sufferings of Dalits. Dalit sensitiveness is properly contemplated by the person, who possesses Dalit creativeness. A writer who only possesses only Dalit perspective is directed for a limited transformation. Whereas, a writer holds Dalit imaginativeness is aimed and aspired for total transformation and restoration. Dalit literature is experience based where the works written by the writers have themselves faced the suppression and humiliation at the hands of dominant classes. The subjugation of Dalit communities appears in all the spheres of life like physically, emotionally, educationally, socially and religiously. This elusive dehumanization generates anger among them, which make them more steadfast in terms of attainment of their

rights. The writers passionately move forward to repair and transform society from the curse of caste system: “Even the Sun needs to be changed” (Jena, *Emerging Issues* 21).

Dalit poets through their poetry mesmerized and provided aesthetic delight to the readers. Aesthetics means incorporation of such themes and elements in poetry that soothes the reader blissfully. Dalit writers eluded themselves from the incorporation of romantic themes and fantasy in their poetry. Their extreme craving is to insist upon the equality, brotherhood, liberty and human compassion. They are in a voyage to search new aesthetics that is free from the bondages of religion, ethics and hierarchy. Dalit poetry oftenly received contradictions from the higher castes. This indicates that Dalit poetry has something mesmerizing in it that drew the upper castes jealous. The dominant castes treat their poetry rotten and violent because Dalit poets depicted their oppression and dehumanizing approaches towards them. It is evident from the history of literature that every genre in literature is the outcome of its aesthetics. But an authentic and genuine literature is always appealing, if it delineates the horrifying reality of life. Their poetry also incorporates lofty thoughts of freedom, equality and justice. The aesthetics of Dalit poetry rely on the blending of themes of love and natural beauty on one hand and oppression, subjugation and torture on the other hand. They hardly enjoy the life of love and beauty because they are totally labyrinthined in the arena of upper class hegemony. Dalit poetry expresses Dalit aspirations that are grounded on universal brotherhood and harmony. Despite of such abject humiliation, Dalit poets are still able to generate aesthetic pleasure in their poetry. Through their poetry they elevate the consciousness of Dalit masses to fight for their rights and get the justified status in the society of hegemonies. Thus Dalit poetry succeeded in highlighted the issues of Dalits through their vehement language and also immensely contributed for the evolution of Dalit Literature. The idea of brotherhood and philanthropy is magnificently expressed as:

*Let us farewell to arms, hold a round table conference. No country have we. No field to plough, no home to stay. From the age of Aryavart till today, Not a blade of grass. Are you ready to pull down walls you've built? Like sugar in the milk are we willing to merge. Would you endure if your Drupadi Garlands are Galiya in swayamvar? Come, let us take turns in disposing the dead cattle. Do you agree? ... Let us say farewell to arms, plough the country's rich soil together, will you give us our share of the harvest? (Jena, *Emerging Issues* 31).*

It is oftenly stated that the beginning of Dalit literature is rooted in medieval Bhakti literature for two reasons. Firstly, the majority of Bhakti saint- poets belonged to lower castes. Secondly, they maintained the corroding attack on dominant Hindu practices. The extreme hatred against Brahmanical orthodoxy is visible on

the pages of lower caste Bhakti writings. Despite of their long and pathetic endurance, they are not being considered as Dalit poets because they did not succeed in exploring literature except the literature of Hinduism. Since Bhakti poets generate a serious protest against upper castes but in reality they could not disrupt their hegemony. The Bhakti poets who revolutionise the Dalit masses were Ravidas, Namdev, Tukaram, Eknath, Chokhamela, and Kabir:

The Bhakti poets always questions the orthodox and repressive Brahmanical understanding of Hinduism and as such made it possible for the lower castes and women to give a form to their religious aspirations, emphasising devotion and love, not knowledge as a means of salvation. Another is the acceptance of all castes and women into the fold of the saints; in some areas, in some areas, the songs of Muslim saints are also included in the stories and the canon and the vernacular as the medium used by the Bhakts; in Marathi and Hindi, the songs are among the first vernacular literature of the idea (Zelliot, From Untouchable 14).

Dalit literature profusely emerged through Dalit autobiographies that are written by Dalit writers. Autobiography is the mode of writing that explores the writers' personal life. The term 'Autobiography' was first used by Southey in 1809. Autobiography not only covers writers' incidents but also his experiences. Autobiography is the respectable and autonomous mode of expression and tale the society to which the writer belongs. Post Independent Indian writings are embedded with many Dalit autobiographies such as Laxman Mane's *Upura*, P.V. Sonkambale's *Athvaniche Pakshi*, Daya Pawar's *Baluta* and so on. On the other hand Dalit women are one step ahead in presenting their autobiographies in the form of their miseries, humiliation and oppression. They are Baby Kamble's *Jina Anucha*, Urmila Pawar's *Aaydan*, Shantabai Kamble's *MajayaJalmachi Chittarkatha* etc. Dalit autobiography an indefensible part of Dalit literature egressed recently in post- Independent India. Dalit autobiographies express the hidden pain and anguish of Dalit writers. It is the pain that holds one narrative event to another. It is the pain that is responsible for Dalit harmony. Dalit autobiographies adopt the writers' subjective approach of narration where much importance is given to societal life not the writer himself. This approach became the weapon of transformation and consciousness of lowly classes in the society of atrocities. The main purpose of the Dalit autobiographies is the emancipation of the oppressed and exploited people; as Dalit literature is one of the integral parts of the Dalit movement. Dalit literature is not a recent one but it has been there for centuries. The Dalit were not recognised and their writings were relegated to the background. Dalit autobiography flourished gradually. Presently it has become the most important issue to chat on. The characteristics and features of Dalit autobiography are immense and significantly important for arousing consciousness among Dalit masses. Dalit narratives focus upon the harmony of individual with family, society

and community. Individual identity is of prime importance. Dalit autobiographies realise the Dalit masses about their humiliation and coax them to fight for their rights against the dominant class. Dalit autobiographies act as a medium for rectification of social and political institutions of upper classes in India. Dalit writings depict the actual truth of human existence. These discourses provide the readers aesthetic delight and literary sense by the usage of suitable words, style and coherent language.

Dalit writings especially short stories generated in them the consciousness; gave them a huge momentum and valour to face the painful and miserable experiences of their lives. Dalit consciousness got its pace after the development of 'Dalit Panthers Manifesto' (1973) in Bombay. The panthers criticized Gandhi for upholding 'class rule'. Their detestation is shown as: "Merely to pressure the unity of the Independence struggle, he flirted with problems of Dalits, of untouchability and of the people and that is why Babasaheb Ambedkar called him, time and again: 'the enemy of the people', the villain of the nation" (Satyanarayana, *The Exercise*, 13). Almost all the Dalit panthers were leading writers. They give a new impetus to Marathi literature and uplifted new thoughts among the people. Their manner of representation of oppression, suppression and candid caste discrimination in the coeval world was unlike anything that had been penned before. Their struggle for freedom, self-respect and equality gave them a new drift to enjoy their own domestic life. The Dalit panther manifesto was: "Who are Dalits? All schedule castes and schedule tribes, neo Buddhists, labourers, landless and destitute peasants, women and all those who have been exploited politically and economically and in the name of religion are Dalits" (Murugkar, *Dalit Panther*, 4).

Dalit literature also emerged as a vehement thrust through different languages in India. Dalit Literature emerged as a supreme voice in Maharashtra. Marathi language played an indispensable role in the development of Dalit literature. It is the greatness of Marathi Dalit literature that even after the sixty eight years of Independence, Dalit literature is receiving a humble and respectable treatment. Dalit literature principally arose as a result of Dalit movement in 1960s as: "... though Dalit literature as a movement began only in the late 1960s, one of the most important Dalit writers and a major forerunner of the movement was Annabhau Sathé" (Omvedt, *Untouchable to Dalit*, 78).

In Maharashtra, Dalit literature emerged as a prominent voice in 1960s in the hands of eminent Marathi writers like Baburao Bagul, Bandhu Madhav and Shankarrao Kharat etc., who came forward with the Little Magazine movement. Some other renowned poets like Narayan, Daya Pawar, Arjun Dangale and Arun Kamble inspired the Dalit masses with their spirit and brilliant style. They realistically uncovered the miseries of Dalits. The burning desire of these writers is expressed as: "That some were high while others were low? well, all right,

then this city deserved burying--- why they call it the machine age ? seems like the Stone Age in the twentieth century” (Jina, *Emerging Issues*, 46). Their hatred and agony is against the hegemony of upper classes. They are completely fed up with the hierarchical system and Hindu notions. Their disillusionment and detest is expressed as: “If a religion can’t tolerate one human being treating another simply as a human being, what’s the use of such an inhumane religion” (Jina, *Emerging Issues*, 46). Dalit literature is mainly written and published in regional Indian languages. Narayan Surve wrote heart touching poems based on the young lads working desperately and working mothers worried about their children’s education. His poems are the depiction of humiliation and sufferings of Dalit masses of Bombay. The Little magazine movement launched by Daya Pawar, Nandedo Dhasal and Narayan Surve has given a new tone, thrust and power to Marathi poetry and also became an important weapon for Dalit expression in Marathi literature.

Dalit writings of Karnataka are highly influenced by Ambedkar. An important characteristic of Kannada Dalit literature is the hidden protest against Brahmanism not the Brahmins. This harsh attitude gave birth to hierarchical system where the community belonging to the upper part of the hierarchy are given respect and rights and the community belong to the lower part of hierarchy are totally humiliated and suppressed. The worst reality is that the hierarchical system is also predominant among Shudras, who humiliate other lower castes i.e., Lower caste suppress the lowest sub- caste. Kannada Dalit literature is highly contributed by Siddalingaih. Siddalingaiah’s impact jostles the way for the development of Dalit movement and literature in Karnataka. Siddalingaiah’s contribution highly changed the mind-set of Dalits.

Dalit literature in Utter Pradesh or Hindi Dalit literature emerged in early 1980s. In North India Dalit literature got impetus in the hands of Kabir and Ravidas. The aim of Hindi literature is the arousing of consciousness among Dalits. The dominant themes of Hindi Dalit literature are Dalit awakening in social and political spheres. This awakening in Hindi Dalit literature is known as *Dalit Chetna*. Thus *Dalit Chetna* is the consciousness of Dalits, which is based on their experiences. *Dalit Chetna* is bluntly against the supremacy of upper classes. Due to the hoisting of Dalit consciousness among Dalits, they began to develop their own identities and also fought for their rights.

The contribution of Tamil Dalits writers towards emergence of Dalit literature is very important and immeasurable. Tamil Dalit literature also played an important role to explore the tyrannies of Dalits India. The primary concern of Tamil Dalit literature is the exploration of Dalit women oppression. Many poets, short story writers, novelists have drawn their focus on Dalit women empowerment in India. It witnessed the later start in comparison to other literatures. The first Tamil novel entitled *Pazhiyana Kazhidalum or The Grip of Change*

(1989) was written by a Dalit writer Sivakami. The novel depicts the corruption of Dalit leaders and upper class politicians. The novel also insists upon the awakening of Dalit youth socially, politically and educationally, so that they can they can emancipate their Dalit masses from the tyranny of dominant class. Patriarchy, domestic violence and sexual harassment of Dalit women are the dominant theme of Dalit writings in Tamil. The first autobiography in Tamil Dalit literature appeared in 1992 by Bama. Her modern autobiography *Karukku* (1992) and novel *Sangati: Events* (1994) depicts the plight of Dalit Christians and Dalit women at home and outside. The other writings in Tamil are two collections of Abimani Nokkadu's *Tettam* (2001), *Oorchoru* (2003). Three collections of Edayavendan Nandanar's *Teru* (1991), *Vadai Paudem Vazhvy* (1994) and *Tai Mann* (1996) has significantly contributed to Dalit writings in Tamil and Dalit literature and also have awoken the Dalit masses especially women of her subjugation.

After the successful exploration of Dalit life by the writers in different languages, it also became an important subject for upper class Indian- English writers like Rajoo Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Rohinton Mistry, Arundhati Roy, Manu Joseph and Arvind Adiga to discuss on. The hideous picture of Dalits is also represented by Rohinton Mistry in his novel *A fine Balance* (1955). The novel also explores the struggle of Om and Ishwer for the excavation of caste system in the society. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) depicts the humiliation, suffering and oppression of untouchable Velutha. Manu Joseph's *Serious Men* (2010) is the portrayal of his own experience of life. The novel delineates the Dalit psyche in order to expose the failures of the nation- state. In the novel *The White Tiger* (2008), Arvind Adiga portrays the miseries of a lower class protagonist Balram Halwai, who fights with the world for his sustenance of life. Thus the Dalit literature written by different writers in different languages aims to provide liberty, freedom, identity and dignity to all the Dalits who are downtrodden, trampled, crushed and humiliated by the caste system

CONCLUSION:

From the foregoing analysis it is clear that Dalit literature has successfully emerged through different languages like Marathi, Tamil, Kannada, English and Autobiographies that explored the miserable plight, humiliation, dehumanization, suppression and oppression of the Dalits at the hands of upper class tyrants. Dalit literature aroused consciousness among Dalit masses, which enables them to launch a resistance against the tyranny of upper classes in order to achieve their justified status and dignity which is their birth right because they are humans as other classes of the society. It was the daring of the writers which initially set their pens to write about such an atrocious class, such as Kabir, Lord Buddha, Guru Nanak, Ramdas etc., who initially thrust the Dalit literature through their discourses.

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