

The Quest for Identity: In the Context of Dalit Christian Poetry in Kerala

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Abstract

The contemporary face of literature is a manifestation of the possibilities of polyphony. It becomes more pluralistic and more democratized as it demonstrates the infinite possibility of multiple voices announcing the end of monotheism. In this context, subsequently Dalit literature tremendously emerging and subaltern voices was marked up pragmatically and this ensures the innumerable representation of pluralism. They do not seek to reproduce the vested interests of the elite language. Therefore, words are consciously chosen to maintain the uniqueness of the vernacular. Rejecting the prevailing ranks in literature and thus politicizing its authorities and subverting the system. It tries to reproduce the musicality and expressiveness of the colloquial style. This article aims to explore the identity crisis that faced converted Christians by the study of former author Poykayil Appachan and recent author S. Joseph poems that scrutinize the bleak realities of marginalized lives in each period and attempts to describe the social and political transformation of those works as Dalit Christian social reformers.

Key words: Dalit Christian literature, Literary Translation, Quest for Identity, Possibilities of polyphony

Emergence of Dalit Christian Voices

The innovative perspective that emerges from the experience of the marginalized makes the new poems unique. There the poet does not have to equate traditional models. Cultural outpouring through literature reflects the societal face that influenced life and way of living in the era. Not every word comes in vain; it must have a hidden socio-political motive behind every utterance. Experiences of those excluded from society are expressed through language, it also serves as a social and cultural self-declaration of marginalisation. Dalit literature has played a pivotal role in Malayalam literature in recent decades because these people can see the world in its reality and express life without distortions as they do not have to equate any restraint. They do not have to reproduce the elite literary concepts that exist as a linguistic expression of the life quests of an oppressed people.

The famous writers Poykayil John and S. Joseph who represent two eras in which they took up their service for the heft of Dalit Christians and spoke out against the immorality of prejudice prevailing in the society, especially for the Dalits who converted to Christianity.

And analyzes the uplifting efforts of a particular backward community and evaluates the ideas in these poems to examine the history of the stigma and exclusion they face and to mark the need for social reform within society.

Cultural Background

In the Introduction of Pulayathara by Paul Chirakote, Catherine Thankamma point out that discrimination faced the converted Christians. Dalit who converted from Dalit or working class are disregard by upper class community. Only Syrian Christians who originated from landlords such as Brahmins or high caste can only get the privileges. 'Many Dalits converted to Christianity as this ensured food, shelter, and education. But the trauma of untouchability and the exploitation of Dalits still continues. However, Syrian Christians resented the conversion of Dalit and tribes, and this led to the emergence of two distinct groups –the Syrian Christians, who called themselves upper-caste ancient Christians and the newly converted Dalit Christians, referred to as avasa Christyanikal or puthu Christyanikal (Newly coming Christians). It is ironic that even a monotheistic religion such as Christianity, which promised brotherhood, becomes mired in the stifling hold of caste.'

The aristocracy and other government organizations enslave the oppressed in the name of caste and other with the intention of creating a slave class to work hard for them. The Dalits were undeniably isolated. There was no one to protect them or raise awareness about their rights. They were given all the despicable jobs such as toilet cleaning, cattle shed cleaning etc. It is as part of the social renaissance of Christian missionaries that Dalits become self-aware of their plight. The activities of the missionaries helped to uplift them financially and educationally. Although aimed at conversion, the missionaries educated them. There have been fewer social reformers in the past who have taken advantage of this opportunity to excel academically. They tried to utilize the knowledge they had acquired for the betterment of their community.

Relevance of Translation

Translations are essential for local forms to gain global relevance. It will provide an opportunity to discuss the vibrations of a vernacular subject globally and make the world as a family. Vernacular terms and expressions are important in the reading of Dalit literary works. Dalit literature also requires in depth reading. It has a bitter manifestation of the realities in life. It is important to have a reading experience that transforms personal into social. It also plays a crucial role in translation also. Translation plays a crucial role in attributing the uniqueness and importance of a literary movement in Dalit literature as the vernacular is more important in literary works. Subaltern language is the language of a struggle. It is a comprehensive blend of tribal language, specific language of local backward class language. These poems reveal cultural, economic and political inequalities along with the identity of a particular region. The glossary of vocabulary is unable to express and translate the unique vernacular experience. Dalit language translation is facing this inadequacy of such type of language. However, translation provided an opportunity to discuss globally the cultural crises of particular human beings living in dark places, and to share their experiences in world language within existing limitations.

Poykayil Yohannan – As a Social Reformer

Poykayil Yohannan was a social reformer who tried to revive his tribe in the nineteenth century. His writing explores in Kerala Dalit lives. Poykayil Kumara Guru Devan also known as Poykayil Yohanan, alias Poykayil Appachan was the founder of the Prathyaksha Raksha Sabha, which aims to reform social and religious communities. It lucidly presents an overview of the dalit situation of Keralites facing many social evils such as untouchability and slavery. The poems of Poikayil Appachan was an introductory attempt to converted Christian's writings, facilitate with the emergence of Dalit poetry to ensure the secure confidence level in his race. In the song 'Not seen any letter' (Kanunnilloraksharavum) he seeks the history of marginalised lives. He ask why only mainstream history are written why others are suppressed or silenced and how we can emancipate so called others'

No, not a single letter is seen/ On my race/ So many histories are seen
 On so many races/ Scrutinize each one of them
 The whole histories of the world/ Not a single letter is seen/ On my race
 There was no one on this earth/To write the history/ Of my race in the olden days
 What a pity!/ Think of it/ Regret fills within/Let me add something/In my own melody
 The story of/A people who lived in Kerala/Since the ancient times
 And how they became demons/ No shame have I/To say the faults of my caste
 Though all blame me/ A cursed offspring on earth
 How is it possible/ That all blame us/Till the end
 Of earth and sky/ How can God/Who shaped everything
 Allow this to happen/ On earth today? (Translated from Malayalam by Dr Ajay Sekher).

These poems depict the history of slavery and the struggles of the enslaved people against the historical writings of Kerala. Appachan laments that it is not recorded in history not any struggle for employment and political rights for the rights of dalits who converted to Christianity. Appachan's line, "I have not seen a single letter about my race, I have seen the histories of many races," is relevant in that historical context. These songs should be read as an inquiry into the existence of the lost. These songs are invaluable in literature as the history and characters of the lower castes are still not found in traditional histories. Appachan lit the torch of renaissance into the subaltern's subconscious mind at a time when social conditions were being considered even to gain knowledge. He was sharing the hope of liberation from the mire of identity denial. Through dialects and folksong songs, they preserved the cultural heritage of his subjects and applied every line of it like a whip against the traditional elites and try to minimize the aesthetic merits of Dalit literature. He was stepping into the social arena by reacting strongly against the naked caste discrimination that existed in the Christian churches. By abandoning Christianity and declaring that they too have a voice, due to the double persecution that continued even after their conversion. His own worship establishes the Church as the Prathyaksha Raksha Daivasabha. He wrote many songs exposing the chaos in Christianity. His revolution was against the prejudices within the church that spread the message of brotherhood.

Parayanorupalli / Pulayanoru Palli / Fishermannoru Palli

Maraikkanoru Palli/ Appanoru Palli /Makanoru Palli

I do not see any difference between the church and the church.

The missionaries made changes in the dress and lifestyle of those who converted to Christianity with the dream of social prosperity. The main factor that motivated many to convert to Christianity was that they could be exempted from the barbaric laws of the upper caste Hindus if they converted.

Because I was immersed in the blood of Christ

My never ending pulas (impurities) are ending

But the impacts of exploitation continued. The attitude towards the working class, which was at the bottom of the hierarchical system of society, did not change even after the conversion. The anger of the lower castes against being denied entry even in churches can be heard in Appachan's songs.

Alas, how to say pulakkally

Alas, how to say parakkally

By the blood of Christ

All impurities were removed

Appachan also raises his voice against the fact that the society is not ready to change even the nicknames of Pulaya women and Paraya women are called pula Kalli (kalli means Thief) who were considered as inferior in caste.

If you call me pulayan (impure) again,

I will not come to the church again

Pulayan is a group of tribals in Kerala who work in the field and Pula means field. But with the advent of the caste system, the stigma attached to the working people increased and society changed beyond recognition of them as human beings. Many converted as a release from this condition. But despite being baptized in the blood of Jesus, their miserable condition did not change.

In a society that ensures the invisibility of the downtrodden nations, whose experiences will literature be a symbol of? Certainly, sharing literature in such societies will be the experience of those at the top, as in any other social and intellectual field. It is from this identity that marginalized communities around the world mark their intellectual convictions. The ideology of subaltern is formed.

These songs are one of the futile declarations of the caste system. Poykayil Appachan is said to have played a historic role in laying the foundations for lower resistance and representation in the movements formed against caste in the history of the Renaissance. He teaches looking to the past should be able to correct the present. The future must be bright. For a society that sees man as human, we can move forward by consolidating all prejudices into a single ideal of humanity.

S. Joseph -A new horizon of contemporary writings

Creating a space for the subaltern representations with language is the feature of Malayalam literature in the modern era. S. Joseph is a poet who has created a parallel path outside the mainstream of Malayalam poetry. Unlike the traditional poetic language, Joseph is a poet who has used language as a realization of experience. So these words are rural and unconventional. His poems are derived from the lives of the marginalized and these languages are relevant to poetry and it reveals not only the language to be learned, but also the aesthetics of the poetic language of Dalit. Those poems show different images of the poetic world from the usual patterns. In it we saw the reality about the irrationality of making

poetry extraordinary in a normal world of man, politics, nature and the universe. So he uses the very normal language of the common man to introduce them. It is these aesthetic interventions and the subtleties of poetry that distinguish S. Joseph poems. These poems were problematic in the politics of blackness. Dalit writers are a direct expression of what life has been like by dismantling the distortions shaped by the literary discourses of the upper class.

‘S Joseph was a forerunner of Dalit poetry in the state; he was able to challenge Brahminical poetic traditions while offering verses that soothed the wounds of the lower caste people. Through his metaphors and images of beauty, he was able to challenge the notion that Dalit writers are only commentators on discrimination.’

Joseph's poems in Malayalam begin to break down the elite language with proper preparation. In his poem 'A Letter to Malayalam Poetry', Joseph writes:

I know your people / Like big buildings
They put you in squares and circles / Locked up
You saw the outside world through a hole.

It is the sigh of the subconscious mind when the poet describes his own experiences. It also includes the history of the existence of one's own race. Poetry was the voice of a people that had been silent until then. The bitterness of reality is conveyed by taking the poem enjoyed in the palaces of the nobles to the hut. These poems remind us that this is not fiction, but real life. He wants the oppressed voice of his people to resonate in words, so that his inner anxieties, which have been silenced for so long, become history.

S. Joseph poems, which creatively articulated the language, living conditions and views of the new masters, were enough to subvert the elite / dominant aesthetics of our public consciousness. It penetrates to the high class lives and interacts with them and symbolizes the diversity of dalit life.

Dalit poets, who have brought innovative perspectives in the form and theme of their poems to illuminate the thoughts of the new age, like to look at the pains of exploited societies and exploited nature in poetry. This poem depicts the conflicts and thoughts of the Dalits which have not been marked till date. Thus, Joseph is one of the foremost figures in Malayalam poetry who honestly portrays Dalit Christians and their environmental sentiments. He wrote not only for man who was denied justice, but also for other things in nature, including soil, human beings, forests, streams, flowers and worms that can find a place in Joseph's world of poetry.

Joseph's poems, which explore the Keralites in the depths of nature and converted Christians, are shown in words and visions from marginalized lives. Blackstone (Kurutha Kallu, Fisherman (Meenkaran), Identity Card (Identity card), If you draw the cry of the copper (Uppante Kooval varachal, With the Moon (Chandranodoppam), and Yellow Flies (Manja Parannal) are six collections of poems. They are fundamentally rewriting the traditional worldview through traditional narrative. It was during this period that language began to become realistic. It can be seen that the integrity and democratization of language stemmed from the conflicts and entanglements of the subconscious of writing.

For example, in his ‘The song of the forest’ is based on real context. The Supreme Court has ordered the expulsion of the adivasis, the real heirs of the forest, from the forest. In

the current situation in Kerala, most of the tribal communities will have to leave the forest accordingly. The smell of the forest has become a part of life and a group of people have to go out. So they suffered a lot. Based on this scenario Joseph write the poem "The song of the forest", a poem that brings to mind Chief Seattle's speech¹.

The adivasis sing the song of the forest/ If they don't sing then who sings?

They love trees/ If they are not to be loved/Whose love can trees understand?

They made a pact with the animals/ Can anyone else sign that agreement?

Here the poet hints that those assigned to sing will sing, regardless of their class consciousness or status quo.

Joseph's poems are an ecosystem rich in soil, humans, forests, streams, insects and birds. This habitat is enriched as you move from the 'black rock' to the 'fisherman'. While 'black stone' remains a symbolic or symbolic word, 'fisherman' is the bloody reality of human existence. These poems always show the unspoken hotspots of the human presence that is evolving with nature. Now the weeds can do something. It is green with sand and it reads 'rippling water' (river) It was this belief in the ripples of writing that created the poet Joseph.

'My Sisters Bible' is an autobiographical text in which one finds the religious thoughts of an average Malayalee carrying a general view of secularism.

These are what my sister's Bible has:/a ration-book come loose,

a loan application form, /a card from the cut-throat money-lender,

the notices of feasts/ in the church and the temple,

a photograph of my brother's child,/ a paper that says how to knit a baby cap,

a hundred-rupee note,/ and S. S. L. C. Book.

'The poet uses the Bible here to describe the hypocrisy and vulgarity of religion. In the poem, the Bible is presented as a symbol of pseudo-secular modernity'. For his sister, the Bible is more of a storage space than a book that should be considered sacred. Here the poet expresses the life problems of those who have to live in insecurity. The poet

The Bible is seen as an agent only by secular influence. The dream of the marginalized can be seen in the poem. Such adaptation may have stemmed from the negative experience of that community. The poem contains the despair of those who dreamed of a renaissance.

In the poem "On the College Wall", Joseph shares his fears about the survival of his race. The poet saw a picture of an endangered fish displayed on the college wall. He shares the fear that his race will one day become a showpiece like this.

While looking on, a thought pops up

Will my race also become such news tomorrow?

As I toddle everyday/When I turn the corner

I weep remembering my race

Facing the threat of extinction (poem Translated by Ajay Sekhar)

Even the tiger is an endangered species and is now a protected species but we are not. Therefore, the poet is concerned that his race is also under threat. He frequently wrote about the fate of the marginalised life in his poems. It was portrayal of the Dalit characters and gratifies the explicit reference to the low-caste identity.

Conclusion

Identity politics has played a crucial role in the discourse of Dalit writing. Even prominent Malayalam dalit poets are often left out of the list of mainstream discourses because he represents the dark side of Black's life. Postcolonial interventions accelerated the growth of the dalit movement. The economically marginalized were ensuring their place in the literary world by seizing the opportunity to express their oppressed voice more intensely. The aim of subaltern literary activities was to provide an opportunity to transform the backward classes from a silent object to a talking subject. Educated Dalits recognise their backward status and try to reform their community. Main ideas dealt with these representations are intensely longed for to get rid of the identity crisis they face and an urge to improve their lives. Using literature as a tool of expression, Dalit writers vividly describes the discontent and despair of the oppressed community. These poems are informing the singers about the scrapping of slavery in Kerala are paramount in this milieu. Increased writings delineating the discrimination of Dalit Christians and the caste based stigma they faced physically, mirroring the hope and pain of Dalit Christians. It exemplifies how the lack people's history is expanded and discusses the plight of a Dalit who faced caste discrimination from whom they converted and from the class they belonged to and from the engagement with a wide range of literary texts in English translation. The poems of Poykayil Appachan and S. Joseph documented the marginalized lives of Dalit Christians those were representatives of two centuries these lines are still relevant because situations are not change today itself

Notes

1. Chief Seattle was a public leader, the chief of the native American (Red Indian) Suquamish and Duwamish tribes. The American city Seattle is named after him. He is especially known for his 'speech', or sometimes referred to as 'letter', delivered in 1854. This speech was a response to the American Government's land treaty to buy the native lands proposed by Issac Stevens, the Governor of Washington Territory. Seattle's speech is regarded as a powerful plea for respect of native American rights and environmental values. Seattle criticized the white people's imperialistic attitude and their way of reckless developments affecting the natural environment.

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