

Dalit Literature

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Abstract

Dalit, meaning "oppressed" in Sanskrit and "broken/scattered" in Hindi, is a term mostly used for the castes in India that have been subjected to untouchability. Dalits were excluded from the four-fold Varna System of Hinduism and were seen as forming a fifth Varna, also known by the name of Panchama. Namdeo Dhasal who founded Dalit Panther has paved the way to Dalit writings. It was a very powerful weapon for strengthening the Dalit movement. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, who had successfully campaigned against caste-discrimination and was a strong advocate of Dalit rights. Under the norms of the caste system, Dalits were denied the pen. Before the advent of Dalit literature in India, much of Dalit history was oral in nature. Their lives were not available to them in written form, and even when available, it was a depiction by those who had no experiential connection with Dalits.

Keywords: Untouchability, Panchama, Dalit, Oppressed, Varna System.

The paper strives to examine the role of the marginal writings, bonding the Dalit identity among the various writers across different Indian languages and regions. The paper also examines the foundational legacy of the humiliation, entrenched in the socio-cultural metaphors, icons of marginalization, and the symbols of Dalit subordination,

Dalit writing, embraces the social-cultural functionality of the changing metaphors of 'Caste' in Contemporary India. Caste has continued to slip the collective nationalist(s) memory, where writing from the margins seems to convince the global consequences for all the marginalized

groups, around the world, contesting and resisting the varied strategies of domination and discrimination, through the medium of writing across the various disciplines of social sciences.

Dalit writing embraces the complexity of the sociology of cultures, even sub-cultural and regional variants dealing with the legacy of Pain and Humiliation, reconsidered for the readily experiences since scores of centuries. It traces the development of the extraordinary repertoire of stereotypical Caste-idioms across various regional and linguistic Regions, Caste-symbols, and Casteist gestures of verbal and physical denigration of the Dalits over centuries. Dalit writing restructures the mainstream sociological and cultural aesthetics, exploring the contractedness of the negated ‘self’ of a lived social community.

It was Dr BR Ambedkar who stressed on literary assertion as a means to struggle against the caste system. Thus began the ceaseless movement of literary assertion by Dalits, who went on to write powerful stories about their lives. It marked a resurrection of their experiential world, which had been appropriated by the pens of Savarnas. Poems, stories, novels, biographies, autobiographies produced by Dalits established a new body of literature in which, for the first time, the downtrodden took Centre stage. People who had been denied what humanity considers the ‘basics’, started to transform the lives of others like them, through the written word. As this movement of literary assertion by Dalits grew stronger, the unseen side of India — the side that is brutal and inhumane — became visible to the world.

There is no doubt that Namdev Dhasal has a lion contribution in Dalit Literature, but the authors like Baburao Bagul, Dagdu Maruti Pawar, Om Prakash Walmiki, Suraj Pal Chauhan, Kitti Padma Rao and V.T.Rajshekhar also contributed a lot and attracted the readers and writers from the non-Dalit category. Readers gradually understood that Dalit literature is based on the facts and hence, it's not only to show the exploitation and injustice But the sensitivity in literature.

Maharashtra was at the forefront of this revolution that has, over the last six decades, helped transform the worldview about Dalit lives. Almost all of the writers who shaped the early theoretical discourse of Dalit literature were from Maharashtra and in this series, we revisit the lives and works of 10 distinguished Dalit writers from the state — and their impact on the literary world. In this fourth column, we look at the literary legacy of Namdeo Dhasal.

Perhaps, no poet in history has bestowed as much faith and trust in the power of verse than Namdeo Dhasal. His poems are powerful songs of rebellion as much as a theory of liberation from the mental slavery imposed by caste. Namdeo Dhasal does not need any introduction when we discuss literature, at least in Maharashtra. Hailing from a village called Pur near Pune, Dhasal’s family migrated to (then) Bombay when he was in Class Five. The time was the early 1950s. In the city of dreams and dread, the Dhasal family landed in Dhor Chawl, a residential

locality predominantly populated with 'untouchables'. Located in Central Bombay, Dhor Chawl became the Dhasals' abode; it had some of the city's oldest slums in its proximity, as also the infamous red light district of Kamathipura. It was perhaps the most wretched area within the city. It was around this period that the underworld was taking root in Mumbai, and such localities became its birthplace. Dhasal is the only person to emerge from this wretched landscape as a poet

"I boozed. I visited brothels. I went to mujra dancing women's establishments and to houses of ordinary prostitutes. The whole ambience and the ethos of it was the revelation of a tremendous form of life. It was life! Then I threw all rulebooks out. No longer the rules of prosody for me. My poetry was as free as I was. I wrote what I felt like writing and how I felt like writing. I had found my weapons and I sharpened them. Nothing was going to stop me now. I went on writing, unshackled and liberated."

Dhasal wrote nine anthologies of poems and several prose writings, including one novel. All his poetry collections are significant contributions to the history of literature in India. But the most celebrated among his works was Golpitha — his first poetry collection published in 1971. Golpitha was the symbol of an inhumane reality transformed through poetic imagination. Otherwise untouched by the eyes and imagination of Brahmin Marathi writers in Maharashtra, Dhasal told through his poems of life that can be found at any level. Golpitha broke the perceptions through which poetry in Maharashtra was seen and practiced. It provided Dalits the confidence with which they can now explore the language for their struggle, without being burdened by norms and oppressive tradition. With the arrival of Golpitha, Dalits in Maharashtra not only got their language but also the theory for their experiences by which they can now tell the world that they are the creators of their lives. Since then, Dhasal has inspired many poets. His influence on the form of poetry that is being practiced in Maharashtra continues till today. Perhaps no other poet in the history of Maharashtra has wielded as much influence as Dhasal. His vision about life, his struggle, and his poetry were the factors that prevented his influence from waning in the public imagination. We find his clarity of action in his poems as well as his politics. And to know him more closely, we must reflect upon his words: "Once you develop a taste for knowledge, you begin to grow fast. If you do not have a vision, you become a problem unto yourself. I never became a problem to myself. I became a socialist; but as soon as I saw the hollowness of it, I turned to communism. However, whatever I did, my foundation was Ambedkar's vision."

Dalit consciousness in the wake of Contemporary Indian reality, results out of the myriad challenges registered through the modules of the contestations, discourses through the writing by margins, such as translations, literary and cultural approaches, involving the various Indian languages, restoring the growth of the awakened Dalit consciousness in the post-

globalized ambience. Dalit writing, embraces the social & cultural functionality of the element of the changing metaphors of ‘Caste’ in Contemporary India. Caste has continued to slip the collective memory where writing from the margins seems to revive the global consequence of all the marginalized groups, around the world, contesting and resisting the varied strategies of domination and discrimination, through the medium of writing(s) spread across the various disciplines of social sciences. Dalit writing embraces the complexity of the sociology of cultures, even sub-cultural and regional variants of the legacy of Pain and Humiliation, reconsidered for the readerly experiences. The next important example of the Dalit writing is by Om Prakash Valmiki, basically a North Indian author, who has discussed the very pathetic situation of Dalit community from Uttar Pradesh.

Joothan: An Untouchable's Life has been taken for the closer textual or the cultural reading of the trauma of Caste reflected on the marginalized groups inside a modernized ambience, relating the constructedness of the “Caste” for the modernized interrogation by the contemporary readers and researchers on Caste and Marginal Writing. Caste unifies & a cultures the invisible pattern offering differing social responses, castrating the very natural identity of the individual, dominated under the presumed socio-cultural obligation, adhering to the norms of the Caste affiliation and its socio-cultural responsibility.

Dalit Writings in the domain of literature, society and culture has appeared as the vibrant field of research for translation into English. Thus, Autobiographical writings, Ambedkarite Modules for Empowerment & Caste-based research with varied interrogatives on the Caste(s) hierarchies, have largely outlived the public scorn and contempt from the sole category of the exclusivist, ‘Caste framework’, for contesting through Marginal Writing, more particularly from the conveyed firsthand, and raw experience of the writers who were, themselves, subjected to humility and painful experiences.

Autobiographical narratives of the first-generation Dalit writers such as in; Hindi, Marathi, Kannada, & Tamil have offered narrative focus of the Dalit perspective which was/is during the independent India. Writing from the margins has also intensified the Dalitized literal bonding among the various writers, spread across various Indian languages and regions. Textual foremost instance is taken from the treatment of Caste and Denial by the famous Indian writer, Omprakash Valmiki, where the legacy of the humiliation among the Dalits in Indian society, entrenched in the socio-cultural metaphors, icons of marginalization, and symbols of Dalit subordination since scores of centuries bestow the diversity of the tradition and cultural lore of the Indian Society. Dalit marginalization remains more or less, in the Upper-Caste psyche, as reflected through the

Dalit writers, like the exploration of the “trauma of Caste”—Bama’s Karukku (2000) in Tamil and in Hindi Tiraskrit (vol. 1, 2002) of Suraj Paul Chauhan and the much elegant Meri Safar aur Meri Manzi (2000) of B. R. Jatav critiques the mainstream dominant literary perspectives conveying the immoral and the unethically distorted legacy of the oppressor’s logic for victimization of the weak and the vulnerable in the name of the ‘Caste’ operating as the authenticated version of Indian society and culture. Overruling the claims for a homogenous structure of the Indian society, gathered through the reflex of the poststructuralists,

Dalits in India remain severed of their normalized social networking and cultural freedom, tracing the legacy of the proverbial invisibility of the Dalitized subjective traditions from the dominant reflex of the Indian culture. Crude and violent was the isolation and separation of the Dalits in the form of Caste-discrimination, as these writers relate—living on the fringe of the socio-cultural margins, as muted subalterns of their location & period. It was the vertical mobility that devoured the legitimated voice of the dominant sections and even absolving the very essence of the Dalitized identity in Indian society and culture.

The most oppressed of all Dalits in Uttar Pradesh- and indeed in India- are the Valmikis or Dalits. The Dalit was described by Manu as ‘descended from Chandala, said to be the off spring of the union of between Shudra male and a Brahmin woman.’ [Magdum: 2009: 11] This community, the victim of the worst social discrimination and injustice, has been immersed in ignorance and caught in the pernicious net of untouchability and rejected despite giving crucially important service to society. Therefore, a community of Dalit mired in filth, poverty, and slavery, it is to be found in all over India. This kind of circumstances makes Dalits culture and literature.

Customs and traditions are attached to people and their culture. But the upper caste people imposed certain intolerable customs on Dalits. The tradition of Salam is one of the big celebrations among Dalit community. It means the newly wedded bride and bride-groom should go to the upper caste people’s street and salute in order to get some gifts or money.

Conclusion

Thus, every community has made its culture on the basis of living and thinking. Dalits’ social thinking and writing emerged out of the authors' social stratifications. Dalits are displaced and remain as fugitives due to caste atrocities like burning huts. In observing these events, the Dalit writers felt to be of as well as for. Their creative writings documented their lives, social and political events which play a key role in the study of literature, and who are sample contemporary documenters of social crises or the social reality.

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