

Dalit Literature: A Saga of Resistance

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Abstract

The narrative of resistance found in Dalit literature is directed against the dominance of Brahmanic literature, which presents a limited, skewed, and prejudiced picture of reality. The pretense of being omniscient and all-encompassing while presenting a narrow, one sided, twisted and biased view of reality. The society is changing. So it is obvious that the role of literature and expression must be changed accordingly. In an effort to create a contemporary, democratic, and secular Indian identity, the Dalit movement opposes the anti-caste movement. The first Dalit literary work appeared in the Indian state of Maharashtra in 1958. After independence, the phrase 'Dalit,' which means "downtrodden, subjugated, or broken," was used. In the 1930s, it was employed as a translation of "depressed classes" into Hindi and Marathi. The word typically used was "Untouchable" or "Shudra" Dalit, we can say, is not a caste but an image of change that can bring revolution in the society. It includes Schedule tribes, impoverished peasants, women (who are viewed as less valuable than men), and anyone else who is being abused politically or financially in the name of religion.

Keywords: Dalit literature, anti-caste movement, secular Indian identity, Maharashtra, post-Independence.

Introduction

Writers use Literature as a defense against hypocrisy and rigid socio-political conventions. Protest has been present in literature, since it is predicated on the idea that politics and artistic expression are closely associated. Indeed this protest symbolizes the changing attitudes to socio-political situations, priorities and concerns of writers with changing times from the past to present. (Singh 187) It is clear that writing and expression must adapt to the ways in which society is developing. It is a

time-taking process that will progress over time. As a result, it is critical that we alter our approach to Dalit writing.

SK Kaul writes in the following words,

“Today, the Dalits in the country had reached a stage where they are no longer willing to fight for their cause with weapons. Now they are fighting through books.” (qtd. Singh 188)

The earlier decades have seen a significant shift in Dalit consciousness. Dalits melancholy awareness is evolving. It is substituted with self-assure in all areas. Dalits, who were hitherto essentially invisible in sociopolitical sphere are currently present everywhere. They are contributing to society in many ways. The evolving role of Dalits must therefore be included in our literature.

The most important point in this study is that, despite being outlawed in 1949 by the Indian constitution, the practice of causing social infirmities and incapacity is still much prevalent in India. They have experienced mistreatment from those in higher castes thus far. Animals receive better treatment than Dalits do. Nonetheless, the Bhraminical classes used religious sanctions to justify this injustice; nonetheless, individuals like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar were instrumental in relieving these individuals of their suffering. In many domains and among his contemporaries, he was a colonist. He is notable for having never wavered in his pursuit of justice, equity, and the truth. He believed that lower caste individuals and untouchables should have their own voting systems. Additionally, he was in favour of Dalits and other religious communities having reservations. Ambedkar began looking for ways to communicate with the public and educate them about the negative effects of pervasive societal problems. He launched a newspaper titled ‘Mooknayaka’ (leader of the silent). In modern times, because of the patrimony of Mahatma Phule and Babarao Ambedkar, Dalit literature gained momentum in Maharashtra, where writers addressed Dalit themes in their works. This sparked a new trend and revolution in Dalit writing, inspiring numerous Dalits to publish works in Marathi, Hindi, and Punjabi.

Dr. Ambedkar’s Philosophy of Life and Sacrifice

B.R. Ambedkar wrote the book ‘Who Were the Shudras?’ The book was dedicated to Mahatma Jyotiba Phule (1827-1890). As Ambedkar believes in Mahatma Jyotiba Phule in the following words:

“the Greatest Shudra of Modern India who made the lower classes of Hindus conscious of their slavery to the higher classes and who preached the gospel that for India social democracy was more vital than independence from foreign rule”

Ambedkar claims in this book that the Shudras were once Aryans belonging to the Kshatriya caste. Ambedkar goes on to argue that the Brahmins are to blame for the degeneration of the Shudras. Relationships have also been formed between the widespread acceptance of Mahars as outcasts and untouchables in Hinduism due to their embrace of Buddhist traditions. Dr. Ambedkar is the best model in India for many Dalits. His philosophy of life, sacrifice, and devotion to bringing about a revolutionary transformation in the lives of the society's poor. He made significant efforts to provide Dalits with political and social liberty. Members of the Scheduled Castes, however, continue to confront caste stereotypes and biases. Untouchables are underpaid for their labor and so compelled to live under pressure. Their nutrition is poor; their clothes are scarce and seldom clean; their homes are small, frail, and unhealthy; and they are hopelessly in debt. Poverty and debt bind you to and rely on the village strong man of the moment. Social isolation and marginalization are frequent in both rural and cities and news reports concerning crimes against Dalits appear on a regular basis. This study come across many instances in which social distance and segregation translate into active discrimination in access to government services and employment.

Literature, in the first place, cannot be inhabited by Hindus because, due to prejudices held by not just caste Hindus, but also Muslims, Christians, and the majority of Sikhs, they were unable to attend school and colleges for several years. As a result, illiteracy becomes a major stumbling obstacle in their interaction with literature. The Dalit writer must take the nobility of such great people and write in response to their reactions, anticipating scenarios in which their work would be heard as much as read. Amartya Sen in book *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, mentioned the same as follows:

“identity-based thinking, as it is in the case of Dalits, can be subject to ‘brutal manipulations’. If dalit identity has its limitations and luxuries, provides comforts to its community, it also invites violence and terror

from aggressive opponent groups that have a different identity and set of competing interests”.

The Dalit writing especially poems, short stories, novels, and autobiographies provided useful distinctions on the issue of Dalit specificity. Now, the subaltern communities have found a new moniker by banding together under the banner of 'Dalit is Dignified, rejecting the Hindu social order's subhuman position. Dalit writing, as today's most potent form of literary expression, has earned a distinguished place in Indian English literature. It emphasizes writing with Dalit characters or portrayals of Dalit life and experiences. It criticizes popular literary theories and upper caste beliefs while exploring the invisible twilight zones of ignored topics, influenced by post-modern literary trends. The literature is mostly anti-exploitation and used writing as a kind of propaganda for the movement.

Dalit poetry has gained popularity, primarily through poetry readings and alternative media such as small journals, posters, billboards, and creative collectives. Other Indian states' birds of a feather were inspired by the liberated spirit, straight, strong, poetic, and moving pictures. Great poets such as Narayan Survey, Namdeo Dhasal, Daya Pawar, Arun Kamble, Limbale Saran Kumar, Arun Dangle, and many others created groundbreaking Indian poetry in the 1960s and 1970s. It depicts the life and problems of the lower layers, or castes. The significance of Dalit poetry in modern Indian poetry cannot be overstated. The birth of distinct Dalit poetry, literary engagement, and the formation of 'texte of resistance' and 'protest' literature not only reflected changing consciousness, but also symbolised the intensity of the Dalit fight for dignity and social justice. In postcolonial India, movements have the potential to consolidate myriad socio-cultural and ecological issues. Still, it's great and powerful even though some of its leaders were abducted at the power games of the ruling parties of the political class in India. Dalit poetry tends to invoke symbolic figures such as Shambuk, Eklavya, Buddha and of course Ambedkar, and to address broad themes of sociopolitical freedom, appealing to the revolutionary spirit of the reader (or hearer) to rise, Dalit short fiction reflects the reality of Dalit life in caste society. The scale of its subjects is less grand, often focusing on the struggles of the Dalit 'everyman', fighting for survival and respect in a casteist society, rural and urban.

Joothan by Omprakash Valmiki is one such work of Dalit literature, first published in Hindi in 1997. It's written from the personal experiences of dalit who rises to prominence from his marginalized presence. Today, Omprakash Valmiki's voice is recognized as an empowered writer who works on behalf of Dalits. Born into a miserably destitute family in North India, the lowest caste in Indian culture, an illiterate Untouchable clan, he relates the torments of the Dalits, who have no right to strive for education or sustenance. He outlines how these individuals are subjected to institutionalized slavery. It is a narrative about growing up 'untouchable' outside of a typical Uttar Pradesh village in the 1950s. *Joothan* is a unique narrative of a rare Indian journey, one that carried a youngster from severely impoverished socioeconomic surroundings to renown as an author. In a middle-class urban home, 'Joothan' literally means crumbs of food left on a plate, headed for the garbage or the family cat. It is related to the word 'jootha,' which meaning filthy, and such scraps are only considered 'joothan' if someone else consumes them. India's untouchables have been forced to accept and eat 'joothan' for their subsistence for centuries. *Joothan* begins with a lengthy account of the Chuhra community's deplorable living conditions, where poverty ruled supreme. The curse of that residence was a lack of civic amenities and inadequate sanitation facilities. Animals such as pigs and humans began sharing the same dwelling space since there was nowhere else to go. The writer spent his infancy here, and it had a formative influence on his character, since he desired to be free of it at any costs. The phrase encapsulates the community's sorrow, humiliation, and poverty, which has existed at the bottom of India's social pyramid for millennia. *Joothan*, as a testament of the Dalits' long-silenced and denied sufferings, is not only a contribution to the archives of Dalit history, but also a manifesto for the revolutionary change of society and human consciousness. To make any progress, the government must take a stand and implement the existing anti-caste discrimination laws. Dalits must also be given equity and proportional representation in society, government, and all state organs, with special care given to Dalit women. According to Omprakash Valmiki, perhaps the most well-known scion of the Hindi Dalit literary sphere following the English translation and publication of his autobiography *Joothan* in 2003, Dalit consciousness is essential in opposing the upper castes' cultural inheritance, the notion that culture is a hereditary right for them that

Dalits are denied. Dalit consciousness is deeply concerned with the question, 'Who am I?' he claims. 'How do I define myself?' These questions are what give Dalit authors their strength of character." In Valmiki's sense of the term, Dalit consciousness is what gives Dalit literature its unique power. There are those, however, like Anita Bharati, who challenge that Dalit 'consciousness' as it has thus far been defined and applied to literature occludes the feminist consciousness of Dalit women, one which frequently finds affinity with the broader Indian feminist movement. Further, as many urban, educated Dalits climb the ladder of social class, they have had to struggle to fit their narratives of modern alienation and crises of identity into the rubric of a literature of oppression that finds its most salient expression in the narratives of atrocity and exploitation in the village. For many Dalit writers today, these are simply no longer their personal experiences.

Dalit literature is a prominent, developing trend in Indian literature. Given its underlying concerns with the place of Dalits in caste-based Hindu society, as well as their battles for dignity, justice, and equality, this literature is by definition antagonistic. With the increasing translation of works by Dalit writers into English from other regional languages, Dalit literature is poised to become a national and international presence while also posing a significant challenge to conventional assumptions of what constitutes literature and how we read it. It has indeed created its own alternative visual by redrawing the map of literature. By exploring a whole new continent of experience that had so far been left to darkness and silence, the sterile complacency of the dominant social groups, and by challenging their set mores and fixed modes of looking at reality, their stale habits of ordering knowledge, beauty and power and their established literary canons, bringing to focus marginalised aspects of experience, vision, language and reality.

In an unrefined day-to-day spoken vernacular, Dalit Literature abounds in genuine portrayals of untouchability. Limbale and other Dalits faced an overwhelming hurdle as young children. Throughout the text, the author has repeatedly emphasized man's basic need. When asked if he was bothered by the prefix 'dalit,' he shrugged his head. "I am proud to be called a Dalit writer." Our literature is a movement, not a type of art. I consider myself to be a movement writer. It is not intended to amuse or entertain. It is a literature of pain and struggle. We'll

lose our identity if we are referred to as just writers,” he said. Limbale is against assessing Dalit literature with the same criteria used for mainstream literature. “The criteria should not be the same as our style, our problems our ideology is different from the mainstream. It can't be judged by a person belonging to a different class.” The English translation of Limbale's work, titled 'The Outcaste' and 'Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature' are considered one of the most important works on Dalit literature. On the progress made in the Dalit movements in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, the author said he was averse to sub-categorising dalits. “Our pains and problems are the same. They compel us to come under the common umbrella of being a Dalit irrespective of whether we are Tamil, Marathi or Punjabi. Language is often a barrier, but our problems help us surmount the hurdle,” he said.

Now, am writing a little about the Hindi Dalit literature, whose narratives exhibit a dominant style of melodramatic realism, often using a sort of exposé storytelling style that at once reveals the insidious exploitation of Dalits while speaking in a highly emotional register. Hindi Dalit literature, in its social-activist role, orients itself towards two specific target audiences: a Dalit audience among whom it intends to foster political consciousness, and a non-Dalit audience for whom it endeavors to reveal the ‘reality’ of caste society. Navaria colorfully compares the realist aesthetic of Dalit literature to the necessity of lancing a cyst on the body of Hindu society; while the material that such a cyst releases may be off-putting, its cathartic release is necessary for the healing of the social body. Recent Dalit short story development examines narratives of alienation, loss, and desire among a young, urban, educated generation of Dalits who must navigate a rupture of family and community as a result of their political awakening. This little poll aptly demonstrates that the principal business of a fiction writer is to challenge social elitism and prejudice, superstitions and untouchability. They appear to be urging a compassionate approach toward the millions of people living in poverty and living lives worse than those of animals.

Conclusion

As a result, it is critical to emphasize that Dalit literature is more than just a collection of various books dealing with similar themes of marginalization and resistance. Rather, it is a real, breathing literary movement determined to become an important part of the area of Indian literature. Dalit writers' primary purpose in defining and

rigorously maintaining the bounds of their own growing literary genre is to exert control over their own representation: in history, literature, and the public imagination.

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