

DALIT WRITINGS IN INDIA- A NEW PROTOTYPE

Dr. B. Sreenivasulu

Lecturer in English, V.R.S. Degree College, V.N. Palli, YSR Dist, A.P. India,

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ABSTRACT: Literature has the power and ability to construct and protect the cultural space of various communities. It also plays a vital role in providing more opportunities for self realization of any community by providing necessary information about the cultural, history and customary practices. The greater tradition could be visualized, imagined and witnessed through an effective literary presentation. This leads to the self realization of one's cultural identity which will make the individual to hold the culture and other identity at the top. It is being adopted as a strategy for social change and social movements by the people in power, since literature possesses a greater value in the political dynamics of any state. Dalit literature not only subverts the old canons but also believes in creating new ones. It seeks to reject those conventions and cultural norms which not only marginalised the dalit voice and the voice of other oppressed communities including women. It attempts to create a new paradigm, a new set of value adding up to the contemporary cultural scenario. The event of dalit literature could be understood as a part of the mass culture which marks the postmodernist phase all over the world. It reveals the collective consciousness of community whose voice had remained suppressed through the annals of history. Therefore, Dalit text always draws on the archetypal pattern exploring the sources of Indian history. The paper traces the origin, rise and the circumstances leading to the highest progression of dalit literature in India.

Key Words:

Literature has the power and ability to construct and protect the cultural space of various communities. It also plays a vital role in providing more opportunities for self realization of any community by providing necessary information about the cultural, history and customary practices. The greater tradition could be visualized, imagined and witnessed through an effective literary presentation. This leads to the self realization of one's cultural identity which will make the individual to hold the culture and other identity at the top. It is being adopted as a strategy for social change and social movements by the people in power, since literature possesses a greater value in the political dynamics of any state.

These days discussions are going on the problems of marginalised groups of people all over the world-their social, ethnic, economic and cultural problems. Marginality with all its aspects is indeed a major problem to be reckoned within the world. By and large, most of the marginalised groups, if not all, constitute minorities-religious, ethnic, linguistic or otherwise in different countries. They have sub-cultures in this mainstream cultures or religions. Invariably, they are impoverished people constituting of minority groups. They suffer from economic, social or political impoverishment and find themselves estranged from this mainstream. Their marginality may vary in its degree, extent or intensity. Most countries and cultures have empowered groups at one pole and impoverished groups at the other and between the two, the people having graded power and poverty. The empowered people enjoy greater degree of freedom, social status and security of life. The impoverished people are not free from fear, insecurity and injustice. The form and nature of marginality depends upon the degree of impoverishment-economic, social or cultural. Marginality based upon caste, creed, religion or race is a kind of disability or affliction.

The causes and circumstances leading to the age-old existence of oppression and despair of the lives of the marginalised class of nation's vast majority of people can be enumerated thus:

1. The self down-gradation of these people since ages, suppressing even the slightest protest against injustice that sought to find a voice.
2. The conditions of abject poverty, unhealthy and insanitary conditions in which these people had been sheltered, but they held a belief that they were accursed to live such lives.
3. Even the minimum rights as human beings denied to them, rendering them incapable of seeing the light of freedom and comfortable living, thanks to the age-old ideology taught to them by the upper castes in India and the white race in other countries, that they were fated to be hewers of wood and drawers of water-mere slaves!
4. The portals of education were never opened for them to taste the power of freedom.

The new category of writing 'Dalit literature' has established itself as a new literary movement in several regions in India in the last four decades. Arjun dangle offers a definition of Dalit literature: "*Dalit literature is one which acquaints people with the caste system and untouchability in India, its appalling nature and its system of exploitation. In other words, Dalit is not a caste but a realization and is related to the experiences, joys and sorrows, and struggles of those in the lowest stratum of society. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary.*"¹ The literal meaning of the word *dalit* - is one who has been trampled under feet or who has been oppressed, exploited, insulted, humiliated and thrown outside the pale of civic society, i.e., turned into an untouchable, riff-raff of the society. All those who are born in the Dalit community will not be considered dalits; we have to stress the category of 'Dalit' as a historical construction. Dalit writing is revolutionary in its aims; the destruction of the caste system and the establishment of equality in the social and political spheres. Dalit critics and writers have raised a number of critical questions about Indian literature and Indian literary history. They identified two of the important functions of Dalit writing. Firstly, Dalit writing attempts to deconstruct 'the dominant, castiest constructions of India identity' and secondly' it constructs a distinct Dalit identity.' Dalit writing presents a dalit centric view of life and constructs Dalit identity in relation to Colonial identity and Indian identity.

Dalit literature not only subverts the old canons but also believes in creating new ones. It seeks to reject those conventions and cultural norms which not only marginalised the dalit voice and the voice of other oppressed communities including women. It attempts to create a new paradigm, a new set of value adding up to the contemporary cultural scenario. The event of dalit literature could be understood as a part of the mass culture which marks the postmodernist phase all over the world. It reveals the collective consciousness of community whose voice had remained suppressed through the annals of history. Therefore, Dalit text always draws on the archetypal pattern exploring the sources of Indian history. It brings out dichotomy which always existed between the 'high' and 'low' cultures and attempts to deconstruct the old cultural narrative which it finds highly biased and partial. It stands for a new ideology which includes all sort of remapping of a social territory which had several lapses before, and needed to be reorganised. Literature of the Dalits represents an alternative culture, refusing to be a subaltern any longer. A dalit text is subversive, but not necessarily intimidating. It relates itself to cultural context and speaks for the revival of sociological approach to literary arts. It opposes the obsessive concern with the formal accomplishment, the linguistic expertise and the modernist tendency to look for the meaning of the text within the text itself. It inaugurates a new era of cultural transformation in the Indian context, and inevitably reaches out to the global phenomenon called postmodernism.

Dalit literature signifies a new dimension of the concept '- of Marginal literature as used in the general literary canon. Dalit literature is typically Indian not only in its roots but also in its purpose and goal. It is addressed to the entire Indian literary tradition and its fulfilment lies in the total transformation of this tradition. Dalit literature is the postcolonial nativistic movement aimed at the cultivation of creative urges of the masses of numerous castes, tribes and communities condemned for centuries to voiceless existence. Dalit literature is the literature of politics and politics is an Integral part of it, though politics could be defined in whatever terms one would like to define it. For, Dalitdom is the product of politicisation, a process that is going on continuously in every organised society. Dalit literature is not only a literature of protest and rejection, but also a literature of reconstruction of the past. Dalit consciousness has inspired intellectuals to probe the entire Indian history and culture from below. This subaltern historical approach has set in motion a process for the true discovery of India. Dalitness in Indian context is not a monotype reality. It is, in fact, a vast plural concept. Dalit unity in India is full of enormous diversity.

Protest against the established unjust social order and rejection of the entire hegemonic tradition done overtly or covertly, was the main thrust of the modern Dalit literatures in initial stages. But things were changing at a rapid speed and since 1980s, we find internal tensions to which creative minds of Dalits are being subjected. One source of tensions seems to be the ideological conflicts and the second source appears to be the realisation of Dalit cause on the part of non-Dalit sections of the society. Protagonists of Dhamma as propounded by Dr. Ambedkar, the torch-bearers of Ambedkarism, the erstwhile leftists and Marxists, the right-wing intellectuals and almost all the political parties came' forward to appropriate Dalit cause for their own ends, programmes and plans. Dalit literature, Dalit consciousness, Dalit aesthetics, Dalit revolution, Dalit arts etc. all such concepts are thrown in the ideological whirligig. Different ideological views established their own literary canon to admit and to evaluate what constitutes Dalitness in literature. This ideological fervour in post-1980s has certainly affected Dalit literary outputs. From the socio-cultural and aesthetic points of view, this post-80s phenomenon needs to be studied seriously and deeply.

Dalit literature is seen, in the main, as protest against the establishment as commitment to inculcating new values aiming at a new order. There are in it a lot of frustration, a lot of anger, and a lot of hope, too. It breathes freedom. The protagonist, be it of a poem or a short story, is usually projected as a rebel 'standing up against subjugation, humiliation and atrocities' and is also shown at times, as 'singing intoxicatedly of the dawn of a new life'. The poets are of course in the vanguard of dalit writing. Poetry comes first, followed by other kinds of writing such as autobiography, drama criticism etc. it is not just modern, but a new kind of writing in terms of experience and sensibility, structure and style. The most notable among the dalit poets are Narayan Surve, namdeo Dhasal, Keshav Meshram, Yashwant Manohar, Raja Dhale, Arjun Dangle, J.v.Pawar, Waman Nimbalkar, Arun Kamble, Prakash Jadhav, etc among men and Mina Gajbhiye, Hira Bhansode, Jyoti lanjewar, Mallika Amar Sheikh, Anuradha Gurav etc. among women. Dalitism essentially refers to conditions of oppression on economic, political, social and cultural lines. Dalitism also embodies different degrees of darkness of destitution and marginalisation. It includes not only marginalised status in the economic sphere but also in cultural, political, religious and social spheres. Dalitism symbolises poverty and marginalisation. It is a well known fact that marginalisation denies basic human rights and social justice. Dalit women are one of the most marginalized segments in Indian society. The condition of Dalit women is more vulnerable than that of non-Dalit women. However, not all Dalit institutions are one, not all female bodies are one. They communicate with each other being caught in a crisscross of intersecting identities. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) rightly states: "legislators, priest, philosophers, writers and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of women is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth."²

Dalit men, even those identified with the movement, do not want to see Dalit women as intellectuals. This happens at a very physical level. To prevent this, one of the strategies that an educated Dalit woman uses is to stay with upper-caste women as Dalit men will not dare behave in the same manner with them. In such a situation where does a Dalit woman belong? It is easy for the historically dominating caste and gender to violate human rights of Dalit women who are at the lowest rung of the hierarchical ladder. The type of violence inflicted on Dalit women is in the form of severest violation of human rights, including molestation and rape by upper caste leaders, landlords and the police even when they demand minimum wages for their labour. Under conditions of grinding poverty and severe exploitation at work place, Dalit women also suffer caste-specific ban on water access from upper caste sources and may be beaten up in their own houses as well.

Ruthless patriarchal system within Dalit communities is one issue which repeatedly appears in Dalit feminist dialogues. However, the views of Dalit male intellectuals on the conciliation between caste and gender are interesting. One view compares patriarchy in Dalits and Caste Hindus and declares that the former is more liberal and democratic. How can any tyrannical and oppressive structure be democratic? At the threshold of 21st century it is absolutely necessary that common people need to be empathized and sensitized about the prevailing atrocious exploitation of Dalit women. There is a strong need to stop the violation of human rights of Dalit women, so that their talent and potential can be used for development of the nation. A nation does not prosper only on fertile soil, dense forests and ever flowing rivers. It is the healthy mindset of the people which makes a nation. A society is made up of both men and women from all segments. If a woman from any section of society is weak and exploited, it is not a healthy society. Only when a society is healthy, the nation prospers.

In conclusion, it may be stated that the concept of Dalit literature constitutes a contribution to aesthetics of literature and opens up an ever-expanding world of Dalitness before creative minds of today and tomorrow. This perception is basically a perception of eternal human sufferings and existentialist predicament. Dalits of today may not remain Dalit tomorrow but their place will be occupied by new Dalits. This perception is tremendously thrilling and has the potentials for building new monuments and mansions of literary creations. Dalit literature as a 'I' literature of marginality is thus destined to become a paradigm of 'I' world literature wherein marginality breeds profound awareness of undying human spirit struggling with inhuman condemnation of man by man.

REFERENCES:

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2. Simone De Beauvoir, **The Second Sex** (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 82.