

Reflection of the Dalit sufferings in the works of Harish Mangalam

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ABSTRACT

The word 'Dalit' means Crushed 'Oppressed' or 'exploited'. Caste system in India created discrimination and suffering among the low caste people. Manusmriti categorized the four main castes Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Caste is different from class. It is not based on economic condition but on birth or parentage. The Dalit movement started in Maharashtra during 13th and 14th century. Chokhamela was Mahar saint who wrote Abhangas. His poems do not Express protest but equality of all human beings. Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar was the true champion of Dalit movement. He was the great intellectual who rebelled against the evils of the caste system in Hinduism. He criticized ancient Hindu scriptures that glorified caste system. Dalit literature in India has been profoundly influenced by Ambedkar's anti-caste views. Dalit literature is a true literature that presents human inequalities and injustice. Dalit literature originated mainly in Maharashtra, In Gujarat also, Dalits suffered a lot. Gujarati Dalit poetry has also carved its place in Gujarati literature. However, Gujarati fiction has reflected the sufferings of the Dalit vividly and realistically. Harish Mangalam is a prolific Gujarati writer who has penned many books of poetry, fiction and criticism. His novels 'Tirad' and 'Aganjil' present rebellious spirit of Dalits who raised their voice against injustice and inequality. Aganjil conveys the message of Dr Ambedkar that education is the true key of emancipation from all kinds of discrimination.

Keywords: Dalit, crushed, exploited, caste system, Inequality, origin of Dalit Literature, the role of Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar, Marathi Dalit literature, Gujarati Dalit Literature, the novels of Harish Mangalam.

The word 'Dalit' refers to the oppressed castes of India who were treated as untouchables in India for centuries. The word 'Dalit' means 'broken', 'Crushed', 'oppressed' or exploited. If you look at the history of mankind, we find that the victorious and the strong have always exploited the defeated and the weak. The entire history of mankind is full of exploitation of the weak by the strong and the powerful. In many countries of the world, such exploitative system existed in one or the other forms. Feudal society in India created Rigid caste system called Varna Vyavastha

Caste system in India is based on birth and parentage. Four fold caste system (Chaturvarna) existed right from the Vedic period. In Yajurveda, a hymn says: Brahmins were born from the mouth of Brahma, Kshatriyas from arms, the Vaishyas from the thighs and Shudras from the feet of Brahma. This means that the Shudras were the lowest. Manu, the staunch supporter of Varnashrama codified the system in his book 'Manusmriti'. Even Mahatma Gandhi supported Varnashrama with its undistorted forms. He said that Varnashrama satisfied the religious, social and economic needs of the community. However, the Dalits were treated as untouchables and their social, economic and political conditions were utterly miserable.

The Dalit movement originated in Maharashtra during the Bhakti movement and poets like

Eknath, Tukaram and Chokhamela expressed their protest against the cruel caste system. During the nineteenth century, the Satya Shodhak Samaj was formed in 1873 in Pune by Jyotiba Phule. He propagated education to fight against inequality, untouchability and caste discrimination. He made efforts to eradicate social evils and worked for widow marriage, education of women and removal of Evil customs and superstitions

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was highly educated intellectual who championed for removal of untouchability and equality of all people. He hailed from Mahar caste, the untouchable caste from Maharashtra. He had experienced the sufferings and humiliating conditions of the Dalits. He studied abroad with the help of the Gaekwad of Baroda earning Ph.D, D.S.C. and several other degrees. He was a voracious reader and great scholar. He was influenced by socialist philosophy but criticized the political system of Soviet Union. He was a true democratic who stood for equality, upward mobility and respect for individual dignity. He returned to India in 1923 after studying in the USA and England. He gave a Clarion call to the the Dalits by saying, "Educate, Agitate and Organize."

Dalit literature has been profoundly influenced by Ambedkar's views. Dalitism is the ideological school of thought that challenges caste hierarchy intellectually and rationally. It began in

Maharashtra, the home state of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. In the early 1970's, Dalit Panthers and Dalit literature displayed the new upsurge of militancy and creativity. A conscious movement of Dalit literature took shape during 1960's. In 20th century, Marathi novel and short stories blossomed fully. Dr Ambedkar started a newspaper which published poetry and stories. Namdev ji, Daya Pawar, Waman Nimbalkar, Trymbak Sapkale were major poets. Narayan Surve was influenced by Marxism.

Annabhau Sathe, Baburao Bagul, Keshav Meshram, Shankar Rao Kharat. N.R.Shethe were major Dalit writers. Dalit Women also contributed to Marathi Dalit literature through several landmark autobiographies. They depict sufferings of Dalit women in pregnant Manner.

Gujarati is one of the most advanced states in India. It is the land of Mahatma Gandhi who struggled all his life for eradication of untouchability. However, it is still plagued by inequality, caste politics and atrocities. It is the source of disgrace to the developed states like Gujarat.

Looking back into the past, we find that untouchables had to perform society's unclean work. It involved physical contact with carcasses of Dead animals, blood, excrement and other bodily defilements. They were supposed to cremate the Dead, tan hides of Dead animals, clean latrines and clean gutters and human wastes

The Dalits had no rights to property. They had to eat the flesh of Dead animals, leftovers thrown away by higher castes. They could not draw water from the common well. They were prohibited from entering temples and other public places used by the higher castes. They were barred from the right to education. They had to perform all kinds of menial jobs for the higher caste people. As they had no rights to property and land ownership, they had no sources of economic mobility. They suffered from social exclusion and economic discrimination for centuries. The imperialists, the landlords and Bourgeois leadership also defended caste system because it helped them in supporting their exploitative nature.

In 1947, India became free and the constitution of India made provisions for equality in laws to eradicate the evil of untouchability. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar strived to gain rights for the untouchables. He asked them to stop doing polluted jobs and fight for equal rights. He demanded separate electorates for the depressed castes. Eleanor Zelliot in her book 'From

Untouchables to Dalit: Essays on Ambedkar Movement' has summed up the guidelines for the upliftment of the untouchables:

1. Revolt against inhuman system of untouchability.
2. United efforts to pressurize the government to remove untouchability and provide equal status and opportunities.
3. Realization of their sufferings and inhuman treatment by the upper caste people.
4. Importance of education and political participation as the means to equality.
5. The role of economic, social and educational development of the untouchables for radical change in the lives of the Dalits.

In 1950, the constitution of India mandated reservation for the scheduled castes paving way for the economic and social development of the oppressed classes. The population of the Dalits (Scheduled castes) in Gujarat is 40,74,447 according to 2011 Census. In spite of the fact that the Dalits in Gujarat have made remarkable progress, they still suffer from hierarchical social structure. Hinduism is the dominant religion in the state practiced by around 80% of population. The dominant Hindu castes in Gujarat are Brahmins, Patels, Darbars, Lohanas, Ahirs, Mers etc. The scheduled castes are around 7.1% of total population of the state. They are made up of Vankars, Chamars, Mahavanshis, Senva, Turi, Barots, Dangasiya, Nadiyas, Hadis and Valmikis.

It is a matter of disgrace and shame that Dalits still suffer from insults, humiliation, physical injury by the higher caste people. Dalit women and girls often become victim of the molestation and rapes. Dalitis are often forced to leave their land, houses or places of residence. They are intimidated with an intention to humiliate them. Recently, such shameful incidents have taken place in Gujarat in the name of religion or service to cows (Gouseva). Majority of the Dalits were landless labourers constituting around 78% of the Dalit population.

Dalit literature today is understood as the literature produced by the Dalit consciousness. It is the literature of rebellion against inhuman treatment meted out to the Dalits. It expresses the collective flights of the untouchables. Arjun Dangale in his book 'Dalit Literature: Past, Present and Future' highlights distinct traits of the Dalit literature such as aggressive language used by them against their exploiters in and oppressors, portrayal of the Dalit life and expression of the Dalit consciousness etc. Gujarati Dalit literature was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi in the initial

stage. However, it was influenced by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's revolutionary ideology during the year 1975. In the early Gujarati Dalit literature, non- Dalit writers voiced the feelings of the oppressed classes. They were influenced by the Gandhian ideology and Gandhiji's concern for the untouchables. Dr. Pratik Parmar, in his book 'Samprat Dalit Sahitya Pravah' writes that Gujarati Dalit literature started around 1975 in Gujarati literature. This stream became stronger and more vibrant after 1980. The causes that strengthened it are Anti- reservation, Anti- roaster agitation, communalism, conversion, Ranmalpur massacre, Golana killings etc.

Mohan Parmar summed up the major characteristics of the Gujarati Dalit literature as follows:

- (i) Portrayal of Dalit life and the sufferings.
- (ii) Expression of the Dalit sensibility and Dalit consciousness.
- (iii) Realistic picture of the Dalit life as experienced by Dalit writers.
- (iv) Rejection of caste system and caste discrimination in a strong vehement Manner.

Gujarati Dalit novel sprang during the last two decades of 20th century. Gujarati Dalit novels became a strong vehicle of expression of socio-economic and psychological sufferings of the Dalits in Gujarat. Earlier, Non dalit writers like Ishwar petlikar, Ramachandra Patel, Pinakin Dave, SnehRashmi and Raghuvir Chaudhari etc. wrote novels that presented the Dalit themes with major Dalit characters. Here, there is a place for social reform and removal of caste prejudice from Hindu society. Chinu Modi's novel 'kalo Angrez (black Englishman) portrays the exploitation of the Dalits by the upper caste Hindus who are worse than the British colonizers

'Angadiyat' by Joseph Macwan is the milestone in Gujarati Dalit fiction as it is written by a Dalit writer depicting the plights of the Dalits in Kheda district of Gujarat. It symbolizes the self esteem and valor of the oppressed classes who strive to maintain dignity and human values in spite of utterly miserable socio economic conditions. Dalpat Chauhan, Mohan Parmar and Harish Mangalam are other major Dalit novelists whose contribution to Dalit literature is remarkable.

This paper will now focus on Harish Mangalam's novels 'Tirad'(crack) and 'Aganjai'(Flame of fires) is the expression of emerging Dalit consciousness. Harish Mangalam was born in a small village Falu in North Gujarat on February 15, 1952. He studied

and obtained the degrees of B.A. and L.L.B. He worked as an additional Collector in Gujarat state. Presently, he has retired from his job and devotes his time and energy to promotion and propaganda of the Dalit Literature. He is the secretary of the Gujarati Dalit Sahitya Academy and edits a magazine titled 'Hayati.'

Harish Mangalam started writing in 1965 and 1981 onwards, he has carved a niche as a great Dalit poet, novelist and critic. He has also presented scholarly papers and delivered speeches on Dalit literature at several Universities and institutes including 'Indian Institute of Advanced Studies' in Shimla.

Harish Magalam's major works as follows :

1. Prakamp (poetry,1991)
2. Talap (collection of short stories,2001)
3. Tirad (novel,1992)
4. Chowki (novel,1992)
5. Aganjai (novel,20008)
6. Samvitti (crticisism,1987)
7. Vidit (crticisism,1989)
8. Panchha (crticisism,2000)
9. Ekvachan (crticisism,2001)
10. Pratihwani (crticisism,2006)

Harish Mangalam has received several awards for his contribution to Dalit literature. As a poet, he showed his fiery, dauntless spirit. He had seen poverty and social discrimination suffered by the Dalits in his childhood and youth. He inherited the rebellious spirit from his father who was a fearless man with profound faith in human dignity. Harish Mangalam also decided to rise above social discrimination through education and upward mobility. He held a reputed post of additional Collector in Gujarat Administrative Service. The anti reservation stir in 1980's made him focus on Dalit-Centred literature. His collection of poems 'Prakamp'(tremor) displays his vehement revolutionary spirit. In one of his poems, he gives a Clarion call for privilege as human beings for the Dalits.

Give us,
give us our right
give it back to us.
give us the touch of
a creeper on cactiifence,
only one touch.

Harish Mangalam's novel 'Tirad'(crack) was published in 1992. It is a short novel which opens with the fight between to Patel brothers-Baldev and Bhago. A poor Dalit Labourer tries to separate the two fighting brothers. Bhago hits Soma, the Dalit labourer with a spade on his back making

him invalid for his entire life. He becomes bedridden for the rest of his life. He develops some incurable ailment that results in his Death at last. Joiti is Soma's wife who suffers humiliation and exploitation as a Dalit widow. The author describes Soma's approaching death vividly. Darkness prevails the entire Dalit Colony. A crow flaps restlessly and a cat crosses the paths now and then. The crow and the cat are the images of tragic approaching death of Soma. Joiti's helplessness is portrayed through image of coiling Python round the trunk of a tree.

After Soma's death, Joiti has to work in Baldev's farm as a Farm as a laborer. Baldev is an impotent man but he tries to molest her. People are unaware of Baldev's unmanliness and they all think that Baldev and Joiti have illicit, adulteress relationship. Joiti's inlaws decide to send her to her parents' home. Joiti was already pregnant by her dead husband Soma but people think that she carried an illegitimate child of Baldev in her womb. Joiti had to undergo humiliation and insults by the people from all sides. Baldev marries a girl called Rukhi but he fails to satisfy her sexually. Medical reports finally prove that he was impotent and infertile. At the end, Joiti's Innocence and purity of character proved. The author portrays the picture of Dalit woman's sufferings who suffers humiliation by upper caste people as well as her own people. The author displays the reality that a Dalit woman is doubly subjugated and humiliated both as a member of an oppressed class and as a woman in patriarchal society.

Harish Mangalam's another short novel titled 'Chowki' was also published in 1992. It is a story of an upper caste man who pretended to protect and help the Dalits but in fact, he made sexual advances towards Dalit Women. He claimed to be a Protector of the lower caste people but he was a mean minded exploiter. He behaved like a watchman and guard but in reality he was a lewd man who always tried to exploit delete women sexually

Harish Mangalam's 'Agnal'(the flame of Fire) was published in 2007. It was dedicated by the author to his father who lived fearlessly for truth. In the preface to the novel, he writes that he had undergone the sufferings and humiliations as a Dalit child in his childhood. The fire of these insults continued to burn in his heart all the time. This novel is the expression of his rebellion and wrath against caste discrimination. The author says," If you do not raise your voice against injustice how can you achieve anything?"

In India, caste system have played havoc with all human values. Though we are a democratic country, inequality and exploitation of the oppressed classes continue to prevail in our society. In this novel, Haribha is the rebellious Dalit character. He decides to fight against injustice and inequality in the society dauntlessly. His son Veeru inherits this rebellious spirit from his father. Haribha is the character based on Harish Mangalam's father and Veeru represents his own indomitable spirit.

Haribha refuses to send any of his family members as a farm labourers. He tells the Patels that he is a Weaver and he is proud of his skill and artistry. During the British rule in India, demand for hand-woven cloth increased and mill cloth from Dublin increased. Haribha allowed his sons to work in the textile mills in Ahmedabad. Haribhai was a staunch critic of superstitions. He was an atheist who refused to accept the existence of god, He believes that in Godless universe, one must be brave and fight against all odds. Survival required struggle and therefore the idea of God makes one weak and helpless. Like a warrior, he fights against injustice all his life.

Veeru, Haribha's youngest son follows his father's rebellious ideology and struggles to educate himself to prove that all people are equal in the eyes of law and nature. As a student, he experiences humiliations by his classmates and teachers. Even in independent India, equality still remained an illusion. He thought that in the universe, all elements of nature were free but only human beings were in chains created by human nature. When electrification program took place, Dalit Colony was deprived of this facility. Dalits tried to persuade the sarpanch of the village to cover the Dalit Colony in electrification drive but they did not heed their pleas. Veeru took the lead and found a committee called 'Injustice Removal Committee'. They complained to the Taluka Development Officer and soon the Dalit Colony was covered in electrification program.

Veeru and his friends insisted that all the Dalit boys and girls should be educated. They believed that the better future for Dalits lay in education and urban life. It was necessary for them to leave villages and settle in the cities for social, educational and economic progress. It is a literary work with a profound commitment to Dalit upliftment. It gives the message of Unity, self respect and efforts for spread of education among the oppressed classes. The author believes strongly that education is the key to socio-economic development of society in general.

Harish Mangalam believes that the literature is not just the literature of a community but of all oppressed end exploited. Dalit literature will continue to be relevant all issues of inequality and injustice are completely resolved.

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The gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without trials.

~ Chinese Proverb