

Dalit Literature: A Form of Protest

Shringar Tiwari

Ahmednagar College Ahmednagar, Maharashtra, India

Abstract

The article explores how concepts of purity and pollution, made life a living hell for some people of the same land. The text focuses on this grave problem of religiously sanctioned inequality called the caste system, and justification of the caste system through the belief in Karma and sins of the previous births. The focus of the study is that the caste system denied education to Shudras and Panchamas and this led to anti-caste writing and the only way in which the oppressed could show retaliation against the oppressors. The study also focuses on how it was a psychological liberation for Dalit writers. They were quick to point out that the 2000-year-old history of oppression has not been documented at all: it is a literal holocaust that has slipped by without being put into words! The text discusses how Dalit Literature is a revolt or a form of protest. Marathi Dalit literature is the forerunner of all modern Dalit literature.

KEYWORDS-oppressed, liberation, literature, revolt, culture, protest

Literature represents a language or a people; culture and tradition. But literature is more important than just a historical or cultural artifact. Literature introduces us to new worlds of experience. We learn about books and literature. We enjoy the comedies and the tragedies of poems, stories, and plays; and we may even grow and evolve through literary journey with books. Whatever critical paradigm we use to discuss and analyze literature, there is still an artistic quality to the works. Literature is important to us because it speaks to us, it is universal, and it affects us. Even when it is ugly, literature is beautiful. Literature is reflection of the society. My paper would focus on Dalit Literature. The term 'Dalit Literature'- 'Dalit' meaning oppressed, broken and downtrodden. This word was officially used in 1958 at the first conference on Dalit Literature in Mumbai. The emergence of the Dalit Panthers (a political organization formed in 1972 in Maharashtra) is a significant moment in the history of Dalit literature which was carried forward by various political/ literary movements across India. Dalits are the most economically oppressed, culturally ostracized and politically marginalized people in modern India. The liberation of the Dalits is the only sure way for the liberation of the Indian people.

Meena Kandasamy has rightly said, "Today's Dalit literature that occupies a pride of place is actually born out of heinous system of untouchability and caste discrimination that have been practiced in India for the past millennia. Outside the caste-Hindu chaturvarna – order, came the 'untouchables,' or the Panchamas, who are the present-day Dalits. The concepts of purity and pollution, dreamed to their logical extremes, made life a living hell for some people of the same land. This religiously sanctioned inequality called the caste system, and for ages, they have been peddling a complacent justification of the caste system through the belief in Karma and sins of the previous births. Because the caste system denied education to Shudras and Panchamas, anti-caste writing was a way in which the oppressed were retaliating against the oppressors. It was a psychological

liberation for a people who believed that they were there,' not to break ourselves, but to break the system's. Dalit writers were quick to point out that the 2000 year old history of oppression has not been documented at all: it is a literal holocaust that has slipped by without being put into words!' Marathi Dalit literature is the forerunner of all modern Dalit literature. It was against exploitation, and made use of writing as a method of propaganda for the movement. Tamil literature blossomed only in the early 1990s.

The primary motive of Dalit literature is the liberation of Dalits in particular and the liberation of the oppressed class in general. It is fundamentally a cultural activity coming under the broad movements of Dalit political liberation. It is cultural politics. It takes the form of protest. Some twenty-five years ago, Dalit sahitya, the "literature of the oppressed" emerged on the Indian scene to make a profound difference in the field of Marathi literature and a few years later, to Kannada and Gujarati, the neighboring language as well. In modern times, because of the legacy of Mahatma Phule and Babarao Ambedkar, Dalit literature got impetus in Maharashtra. Some famous names like Baburao Bagul, Bandhu Madhav, and Shankarrao Kharat were already creating Dalit Literature. In its formal form it sprouted out of a progressive movement called Little Magazine which was a kind of rebellious manifestation of the educated youth of those days against establishment. These Dalit youths found inspiration in the distant land of North America; their black literature and Black Panther became role models of sorts of them. This protest gained its first expression in the form of new literature called Dalit Literature. Poems, short stories, novels and autobiographies written by Dalit writers provided useful insights on the question of Dalit identity. Now the subaltern communities found a new name by coming together with the perspective" Dalit is dignified" there by rejecting the sub-human status imposed on them by the Hindu social order. Dalit literature should not be viewed as a mere story of the individual's tragedy. Instead, it should be the story of the Dalit struggle and its relationship with Authority. It is provocative and unpalatable to the champions of the oppressive caste and class system. It should bring about chaos into the hierarchical relationships between the dominant and the dominated. It is singular in concept but plural in practice. The Dalits have a different vocabulary and speech. The Dalit should write as a Dalit. The Dalits writings should be read like the Dalits. It should probe the deep; psychological underworld of the oppressed Dalit literature is people's literature. It is liberation literature like black literature, the feminist literature and the communist – socialist literature. Dalit literature is an integral part of the Dalit culture.

Dalit Literature has number of autobiographies to its credit. Of course it is the only means to convey the suffering they went through. It is also called narrative of pain and certainly it carries certain truth in it. They split open the pain and sufferings suffered by dalits under the rigidity of tradition. Omprakash Valmiki in his autobiography 'Joothan' begins by asserting," Dalit life is excruciatingly painful, charred by experiences. Experiences that did not manage to find room in literary creation. We have grown up in a social order that is extremely cruel, inhuman and compassionless towards Dalits."Sarankumar limbaley's Akkarmasi and Daya Pawar's Baluta were written in Marathi but have been translated in almost all the languages. In an autobiography, it's a normal trend to glorify the 'self' and boast about the extraordinary quality of oneself. But this changes at the hands of a Dalit writer, it's about denial of opportunities, even to live as an ordinary human being. The self becomes the representative of all other Dalits who were crushed

down and kept down because of their identity, Dalit literature is seen as a protest against the establishment as commitment to inculcate new values aiming at new order. It breathes freedom.

The new writers tend to write autobiography rather than poetry, and little has been translated into English. The protagonist be it of a poem or a short story, is usually projected as rebel, standing up against subjugation, humiliation and atrocities' and is also shown at times, as 'singing intoxicatedly of the dawn of a new life.'. 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. When we talk of poetry then the first name that comes in our mind is Namdeo Dhasal. He is a well known representative of Dalit Poetry. There have been women writers in Dalit Sahitya Movement almost from the beginning, their voices now seem stronger and their numbers greater. These women writers do not talk of the plight of dalit women only but they also take into account all women in their vision. Hira Bansode's poem "slave" includes all women in its vision. Another strain in women's poetry(and to some extent in the newer poetry of all Dalits) is a criticism of the Dalits group itself. A poem by Meena Gajbhiye, in a very subtle and eloquent way illustrates this. Her poems focus on women's issues- particularly those dealing women's mental and psychological harassment, repression of their desires, and so on.. Her poem "shanti" (peace) is not directly about women's problem but a poem which refers to women's experience in the context of the Dalit movement. In the story of the birds is embedded the story of a women. A woman may not want to choose between factions or parties, but she feels the pain of division. She is willing to sacrifice for her fellow sufferers and continues to search for peace for all. Marathi Dalit writers are very active but it is very difficult to see Dalit women writer writing in English. Recently, an exciting voice in Indian English poetry is coming in fore front and she is Meena Kandasamy, from Tamilnadu..She is also an active translator. A new voice in the field of Indian English Literature, she is very articulate about the aspirations of the Dalits. Dalit literature is growing in every regional and interregional language in different parts of India now-days. It is fact that it emerged with Ambedkar in the form of songs, ballads, through tamashas and jalsa but in writing it was very small. Dalit literature is successful in regional or national level but on international grounds it fails when compared with Black literature. Dalit literature has yet to grasp the attention of all the classes. Dalit writers talk about their suffering, misery, torture but they should also talk about the achievements and how they have gradually come over their hardship. These writers should also encourage their fellow sufferers by educating them regarding power of knowledge, education and government policies. There has been a drastic change in the mindset of the people and so it's the right time for the Dalits to show their potential to this world. There is much more to be said and written, but Dalit Literature has the dynamics to evolve new forms, new concepts, and new ideas.

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