

# Indian Dalit Literature Quest for Identity to Social Equality

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**Abstract –** The paper attempts to trace the impact of Indian Dalit Literature focusing on the question of Identity as well as Equality; cruelties by the subjugated group, exploitation of the untouchables, caste segregation, oppression by the dominant class, suppression of women turn out to be the subjects of this new genre of subaltern literature. The voiceless anger from the deep-rooted souls of the downtrodden weaker minds are clearly depicted in the writings which are articulated as Poems, short stories, novels or essays along with their biographical accounts in many case. Dalit literature being a new dimension is the primary concept the literature of marginality. It can also be termed as the postcolonial nativist movement in creating castes, tribes and the voiceless suppressed by the voiced. Dalit Literature can be termed as the protest literature with lot of frustration, anger, hope, and suppression. The main themes of Dalit writings are social disabilities, caste system, economic inequality, contemporary cruelties and cultural assertion that can be uniquely entitled as the struggle for identity. The writings replicate the resistance, issue of identity, experience of pain and moreover a communal distinctiveness. Dalit Literature today is slowly elevating to the level of conventional literature. The resistance of this kind of literature is confronting from the dominant literary groups and the legitimacy is being granted in the snail pace as a new mode of literary/aesthetic imagination.

**Keywords —** Identity, Equality, Marginality, Resistance, Untouchability, Caste.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW:

Autobiography is a presentation of the wholeness of personal identity in only a particular work and self knowledge is then a primary motive of any autobiography. It explores the intuitive knowledge of some unique experience. However, Indian Dalit autobiographies are quite different from the other autobiographies written by well-known Indians because they present the struggles of a deeply sensitive people belonging to the lowest stratum of the Indian Hindu society. In the proposed research work the selected autobiographies have been taken to study the discourse of resistance. The several critics and research scholars have examined and analyzed the Indian autobiographies focusing the ideologies of the writer and the socio-cultural conditions of the day. However, no serious research work, as far as the present investigator's knowledge is concerned, is done on the autobiographies selected for the study. The literature review of the Dalit Indian autobiographies shows that very few researchers have tried to focus Dalit Indian autobiographies in the light of the theories of the discourse of resistance. The major research work on the Indian Dalit autobiographies is as follows.

- ▶ Aston N.M., 2001, Literature of Marginality: Dalit Literature and African American Literature, ed., Prestige Books, New Delhi
- ▶ Sonkamble Uttam, (2012) In this study, the writer compares three prominent autobiographies, The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs by Urmila Pawar, Untouchables': My Family's Triumphant Journey Out of the Caste System in Modern India by Dr. Narendra Jadhav and Baluta by Daya Pawar
- ▶ Dr. A.P. Pandey's article Dalit Subalternity in Omprakash Valmiki's Autobiography: Joothan (2013) attempts to show that Dalit literature looks at the things from the Dalit's point of view. It aims at creating awareness among Dalits and so-called untouchables to rebel hereto against the oppression and injustice perpetrated on them.

## INTRODUCTION

Dalit is a Sanskrit word which meant downtrodden, oppressive, exploitive or the peripheralistic lives. The term has become an identity to a segregated

class of people like we call Negroes/ Blacks in Afro-America, the Aborigines in Australia and the Maoris in New Zealand. This genre of literature can be a reconstruction of the past. Dalit literature for a long time was ignored and not considered seriously in the mainstream literary genres. The fundamental human values like liberty, fraternity; equality, which can be the key factors of the Dalit literature, was a quest for identity in the society. Dalitness was reputable with different ideology corresponding with Dalit consciousness, Dalit aesthetics, Dalit arts, Dalit revolution and so on. "Conditions are ripe today for the 'outbreak' of dalit Studies. Everywhere it is aborigines/indigenous people who are subjected to the most inhuman kind of oppression and exploitation. The notion of oppressed, indigenous nationalities/minorities and a growing awareness of the racist/castiest core of dominant classes emerge from this panindigenous fact of oppression"

In 1958, the term "Dalit literature" was used at the first conference of *Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangha* (Maharashtra Dalit Literature Society) in Mumbai Baburao Bagul (1930–2008) wrote in Marathi. His first collection of stories, *Jevha Mi Jat Chorali* (English *When I had Concealed My Caste*), published in 1963, depicted a cruel society and thus brought in new momentum to Dalit literature in Marathi; today it is seen by many critics as an epic portraying lives of the Dalits, Notable Dalit authors writing include Arun Kamble, Shantabai Kamble, Raja Dhale, Namdev Dhasal, Annabhau Sathe, Laxman Mane, Mulk Raj Anand, Laxman Gaikwad, Sharankumar Limbale, Bhau Panchbhair, Kishor Shantabai Kale, Narendra Jadhav, and Urmila Pawar.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF DALIT WRITER

One striking features of such writings are they vehemently social critique of varn vyavastha which declared dalits as most inferior and untouchable part of society. In this struggle, critical to remove an evil which is admittedly blot on humanity, autobiographies serves as moral source for dalit movement. They split open the pain and sufferings suffered by dalits under the rigidity of tradition. All such autobiography writers are living in cities and mostly they revisit their villages in autobiographies where they spent their childhood suffering the cruel experiences of untouchability.

Their entire life narrative gains a representative quality and imparts the true feeling of the sting they have suffered. The protagonist of the autobiography is, of course, the writer himself, but his personal experiences, instead of being mystically unique and individualist, encompasses the general condition of the whole Dalit community. They are called by their caste names like bhangi, chamar, chuhara, katik etc and in essence these names stand for their state of untouchability. In colloquial terms, the world turns into an insult. When they go to school, the teachers

and headmasters beat them up and force them to do menial jobs which have been traditionally associated with their caste. In Joothan (leftover), Omprakash Valmiki narrates an incident throwing light on the relationship between an upper caste teacher and a Dalit student.

Maharashtra, the dalit movement was already strong and its reflections can be noticed in the autobiography of Marathi dalit writers. The same holds true for Tamil literature where Karukku by Bama is considered a watershed.

Dalit writers have not only criticised the brahmanical system for all the problems of dalits, but also have lashed out at the superstitions and inequality within the dalit community. In Tiriskrat and Apne-Apne Pinjarey, the writers have given the account of other side of reality too in which dalits are also divided according to caste hierarchy. Jatavs see themselves as superior to chamars. In Apne-Apne Pinjarey, Mohandas Namisray writes: That time during marriage ceremonies in our caste (jatav), no balmiki could dare to sit with us and have food. There was a clear lack of mutuality and equal relationship among various dalit castes. Even they had jealousy and hate for each other. And to seek the remedy for this ill, a noted writer Ramanika Gupta has said, Dalits should become a community rather than a social group, which is fractured into several castes.

Though not all but few autobiographies have touched upon the issue of women among dalits. They are unequal partners and are further down the ladder of caste and sub-caste. They bear the burden of patriarchy, as well as low caste. Aesthetics have also been debated among dalit writers and demanded different parameters of aesthetics to judge the dalit writings. Theirs argument is that since dalits don't have access to education and high literature, so unlike dwij writers they portray reality which torments them and live like a beastly creature.

These autobiographies are replete with filthy abuses because the writers have been abused several times over for intimidation. They cannot write poetically about the beauty of nature and neither can they depict stories of romantic love in their writing because the basic struggle of survival and dignity are foremost for them. Only hope for them is in the big cities, where castes are on the wane, but as autobiographies reveal in cities also they are looked down upon caste-Hindus. And they live under constant fear of being caught Dalit writing draws its ideological strength from Ambedkar's struggle. And their basic philosophy is that the true picture of a dalits pain and anguish can only be captured by a dalit. Which is why writers have taken to writing autobiography for they see it as the most potent weapon. Therefore, unlike

other fictional writings, autobiographies have flourished most among the dalits.

## CONCEPT OF MARGINALITY

The margins nation displace the centre; the people of the periphery return rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis". Homi Bhabha says 'Marginality' is a historically specific social construct marked by contingency mainly because it is discursive formation. The dialectics creates discursive openings for marginalized voices by questioning and displacing the location of power. In India, the subaltern voices within the mainstream nationalism began to be heard much before the colonization. 1930s onwards, voices from repressed community in India, the untouchable castes, Dalits, began to get increasingly audible Dalit creative and polemical writing which attempts in such writings to deconstruct the nation as conceived within the parameters of the Hindu nationalism of the nineteenth century provide rich angles of comparison with similar ideological forays made by the Aborigines of Australia through their creative writings. Such literature functions as a potent subalternist mode and becomes a significant discursive site of resistance to elitist historiography, colonial and national Dalit Women Poets are struggling to justify with their own identities in their poems, mainstream poets are talking about love, patriarchy, equality, beauty, religion, myths and legends, social class, heritage, consciousness, position, children, food, economy, etc. Dalit poets concern is more liberal and autobiographical compared to the other modern poets. Their poetry is their past and present and future hence it is rebellious as well as reflective in nature. Savitribai Phule is guiding the women of her time to work. She further adds that everything will be lost if we are not educated and it is education which gives us the wisdom and make us human. So, she says to her fellow sisters not to sit idle; get education so that they can end the misery of oppressed and forsaken. Poisoned Bread published in 1992 is one of the first anthologies in Indian Dalit Writing from Marathi Language. The voice of the Marathi speaking people were silenced for centuries until Jyoti Ram phule and Ambedkar stated their revolutionary works. Mahar was the main community in these regions who are the witnesses of the painful degradation during the colonial rule and specified them as untouchables. Alienation both social and psychic is an overarching thematic concern in this anthology. The readings reflect many of the theoretical and philosophical concerns of the Dalit Panther Movement. Arjun Dangle asserts this literature can bring about a revolution through materialistic approach through his collection of poetry, autobiographies, essays and this signifies the seminal moments of writing. Dr. Jyoti Lanjewar's poem Caves gives the rebellious tone against the social inequalities of dominant society. She expressed that she had been silent all these days and was listening the voice of right and wrong.

But, now she got the truth behind her communities existing status. She asks the simple question to the culture which was responsible for holding backward classes on such a filthy place. After examining such pitiful condition of her community she says this land was never mother to us. "Which never gave us even the life of cats and dogs? I hold their unpardonable sins as witness and turn here and now, a rebel"

## CONCLUSION

Dalit literature that commenced as a protest literature has mellowed to incorporate the human race and the aesthetic justice. It is a new significant identity. Dalitness in the literature is no more a monotype. Also we understand this literature subscribe to secular values like individuality, liberty, equality and fraternity. The most existing feature considered to be the recent trend in the field of Dalit literature is that the rising significance of woman poets, novelist and autobiography writers among the Dalits. Yet, the inadequate entity for the Dalit Literature is that till today it has not been recognized as a meta narrative national / universal literature. Thus Dalit literature can be observed as a literature of Marginality. Inspired by the Ambedkarite philosophy the literature makes it its guiding force. Morality and religions therefore are not mere matters of likes and dislikes. Sharan Limbale a prominent Dalit writer sets a trend for formation of Dalit aesthetics: author's experience be authentic; those experiences be generalized; those experiences should not be just region specific; text should instill inspiration for egalitarian social system. Finally the literature manifests the expression of prime values of independence, justice, equality, and fraternity humanizing its own literary space. The reading makes us agitated and leads to a social transformation and commonality towards the establishment of a non-repressive society.

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