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DALIT LITERATURE IN INDIA: ORIGIN AND FEATURES

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ABSTRACT

Dalit literature is characterized by its fundamental criticism of the caste system and all kinds of discrimination and by its call for destroying social hierarchies. It is the literature of social and political commitment that challenges the status quo. It is the literature of questioning the exclusion from the mainstream of society and culture. It is the literature that promotes equality and human dignity. Most Dalit writers also believe that the principal purpose of writing literature is to bring about social change rather than recreation or mere intellectual sophistry.

KEYWORDS:

Dalit literature, Intellectual sophistry.

INTRODUCTION

Dalit meaning oppressed in Sanskrit and broken or scattered in Pakistani Urdu, is the political name of castes in India which are considered and treated as untouchable. Though the name Dalit has been in existence before, it was popularized by the economist and reformer B.R.Ambedkar (1981-1956) in the twentieth century. Dalits were excluded from the four fold varna system and formed the unmentioned fifth varna, they were also called Panchama

Dalits were commonly banned from full participation in Indian social life. They were regregated from the surrounding community, for example, they could not enter a temple or a school and were required to stay outside villages. Other castes took elaborate precautions to prevent incidental contact with them.

Dalit literature is written by the Dalits about their lives. It forms distinct part in Indian literature. It has emerged in 1960's starting with the Marathi language, and soon appeared in Hindi, Kannada, Telugu, Bangla and Tamil language, though narratives such as poems, short stories, and most, autobiographies, which stood out due to their stark portrayal of reality and Dalit political scene.

One of the first Dalit writers was Madara Chennaiah, an 11th century saint and who lived during the reign of western Chalukyas and who is also regarded by some scholars as the "father of Vachana

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poetry". Another poet who finds mention in Dohara Kakkaiyah, a Dalit by birth, whose six confessional poems survive. The origin of Dalit writing can also traced back to Buddhist literature. Dalit Bhakthi poets like Gora, Raidan, Chokha Mela and Karmamela and the Tamil Siddhas, or Chittas of 6th to 13th centuries.

HISTORICAL NOTES:

In 1958, the term Dalit literature was used at the first conference of Maharashtra Dalit Sakitya Sanga in Mumbai. Babirrao Bagul (1930-2008) wrote his Marathi, first collection 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 many critics see it as an epic portraying level of the Dalits, and was later made into a film by actor-director Vinay Apte. Namdeo Dhasal, founder of Dalit Panther, paved way for the strengthening of Dalit movement.

Dalit literature being mainstream in India with the appearance of the English translation of Marathi Dalit writing. An anthology of Dalit literature, edited by Mulk Raj Anand and Eleanor Zelliot, and *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit literature*, originally published in three volumes and later collected in single volume, edited by Arjun Dangle, both published in 1992, were perhaps the first books that popularized the genre throughout India.

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 subhuman status imposed on them by the Hindu Social orders. Dalit literature is experience based. This experience takes precedence over not illusionary or unreal as Hindu metaphysical theory may make one to believe. Thus authenticity and liveliness have become hallmarks of Dalit literature.

Dalit writers sparked their ink in short stories, novels and drama but its richness lies in poetry, autobiographies and biographies with the crying theme of "new pant, new future". Dalit literature find its root in black literature and this is quite true the Pawan's poem "Harlem". Babura Bagul short story "When I had concealed my cave" creates a stir in Dalit literary world. Naryan Surve's poetry is a mixture of Marxism which makes him Angry Young Man of sixties whose world "Fakta" is published in "Little Magazine". His collection of two anthologies "Alsa Ga Mi Bramha" and "Maj he Vidyapeeth" gives a new direction to the dalit literature. A new kind of point of view is seen in "Golpitha" by Namder Dharai, the portrayal of explosive expression of the acute pain of dalits. The autobiographies highlights caste, class and gender bias during the oppression of Dalits and majority of those writings brought a small change in the outlook in the society, though many of the practices still continue in the society today.

DALIT LITERATURE IN TAMIL HISTORY:

Poetry, music, dance, painting sculpture reveal the aesthetic richness of the Dalit tradition. Dalit culture expressed itself through these art forms. All the forms of fine art are prevalent in Dalit culture. Aesthetic study of indigenous literary forms of Dalits seems to be challenging and enriching. "Pallu literature" is identified as the earliest known Dalit literature in Tamil Right from the ancient days the Pallavs are identified mainly with agriculture. They tilled the land and reared crops for rich landlords, when they did not own land; at each stage of their farming, they used to sing some songs to relieve themselves from fatigue. This collection of songs exhibits the richness of Dalit culture, they exploit

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many literary devices each song has its own purpose too, like love, negritude, worshipping God for rain and farming and so on. The Pallu literature is believed to be the earliest documented source for a new genre "Dalit literature" that has later sprouted with a new critical and creative vigour.

Dalit literature is famed as protest literature but it also shows the cultural valued of Dalits. It talks about the art forms and their oppression also. Non-Dalit writers also contributed to Dalit literature. Significant among them is novel Saraswathi Vijayam written by Dilip Menon. The novel highlights the sufferings of Dalits. It criticizes the Brahmin and Hindu caste system. The novel portrays the existential dilemma of the Dalit community in the Hindu society and culture and shows how they at last found deliverance through conversion.

Dalit literature remains at the margin as its challenges mainstream. This literature is more realistic than romantic and is unified in by the portrayal of discrimination and exploitation. Dalit writers are severely critical of the silence of the mainstream literature about surrounding social realities and their romantisation of Indian society and its hierarchies. Even when higher caste writes have voiced concerns about Dalit communities, they are seen as condescending in nature and aimed at blunting Dalit resistance and amalgamating Dalits in mainstream society. Hence, writers like Mulkraj Anand, Sane Guruji, or Sivshankar Pillai who wrote works dominantly highlighting Dalit anguish were not considered representative of genuine Dalit consciousness and purpose. Dalit writers have used such language and slang expressions that are generally considered unacceptable and colloquial by the mainstream writers. Dalit writers have also began to theories and evolve ideas of criticism of literature from Dalit perspectives. Dalit literature reflects both Marxist and Ambedkarite ideological influences in its content.

CONCLUSION:

Overall, one can say that Dalit literature in India has grown both in quantity and quality and made sufficient impact to shake up the mainstream literature. The realities and experiences that have not been reflected in other literatures find a central place in Dalit literature. It has effectively challenged the Brahmanical hegemony in society and literature and empowered the Dalit masses for asserting their rights and for expressing their anguish. In this sense, it has contributed not just to literature but also to identify formation at societal level. Dalit literature has also begun to give space for separate sub-category of women writers from Dalit communities. However, at the same time, the critics believe that in asserting the realities of society Dalit literature has become stereotypical and predictable. Also, it is seen as excluding itself from some of the valuable trends and aesthetic aspects of mainstream literature that deals with more universal human emotions and their creative expression.

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