

Dalit Literature: A Social Perspective

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Abstract:

Society decides the nature of literature. Literature is emerged through the social situation. Dalit literature is the product of social condition. Dalit literature emerged as a voice against the so called established discriminative social system. It is the voice of oppressed segment of the Hindu society. Dalit writers write about what they experience, feel and think in the established social environment. The aim of Dalit literature is to expose the evils of caste system and injustice done to them by so called higher castes. It a social commitment. It is a voice against discriminatory social system. It has raised a pen and formed an independent literary movement. Initially it tried to depict suffering; later it raised a voice of rebel and led towards global approach for human freedom and welfare. Now it has moved towards the dream of global welfare of mankind, through the human and social values of freedom, equality, fraternity and just. Dalit writers believe in change. They desire to change the social system of discrimination and oppression. To Dalit writers, literature is an effective instrument for social change.

The voice of oppressed segment of Indian society emerged through a pen in 20th century and formed a separate literary tradition on an Indian literary horizon. It has formed its own identity. It has imprinted the image of 'broken society' and 'awakened society'. It has revolted against the so-called established literature and spread its wing in and outside the nation and is making continental and intercontinental relations. The present paper is a humble attempt to focus upon the social perspective of Dalit literature.

Dalit Literature is an independent literary stream emerged in Indian literary world and has made its own identity. It encompasses the marginal segment of Indian. It deals with the life of all the suffering masses in discriminatory social system. These masses were made to lead dehumanized, degraded lives and were denied the basic fundamental rights by the rigid caste system. This segment of Indian society has been exploiting socially, politically, economically and culturally.

Hindu society remains the caste divided society. The oppressed segment is the discriminated fragment of Indian caste based society. The people of the marginal segment were treated inhumanly as untouchables. Untouchables were the lowest castes in Indian Hindu social system. Caste controls society. Touching to untouchables was polluting, even their shadow was polluting to the upper caste Hindus. Untouchability was the creation of caste system. It was based on the graded social structure according to the Varna system. So untouchable was always at the bottom of Hindu society.

The Hindu scriptures supported graded inequality. From Vedas, Upanishads, Smruties to Puranas, almost all scriptures played dominant role in formation and safeguarding of Graded inequality or Caste system. Consequently **imposing** untouchability on a large segment of Hindu society. Untouchable's past was the tale of permanent servitude. He was an outcaste. His touch was sinful, his sight was sinister and his shadow was contaminating. Through such tragic condition they have been exploiting by the higher castes since centuries.

Dr. Ambedkar has compared the position of untouchables with the slaves in Roman Empire and USA. " 'Once a slave always a slave' was not the fate of the slave

in the Roman Empire and USA. But ‘Once an untouchable always an untouchable’ was the fate of the untouchables in India.”¹ Through this condition they could neither spread their roots in the socio-religious soil of India. Gail Omvedt has cleared that: “Indian Dalits are trapped in a culture which imagines the glorious, Vedic Aryan “Hindu” past in way that excludes them.”²

The clearest definition of Dalit in contemporary usage has been given by Dr. Gangadhar Pantawane. He says:

“To me, Dalit is not a caste. He is a man exploited by the social and economic tradition of this country. He does not believe in God, rebirth, soul, holy books teaching separatism, fate and heaven, because they have made him a slave. He does believe in humanism. Dalit is symbol of change and revolution.”³

However, ‘Dalit’, the term is more synonyms with downtrodden. It is segment of the society that the vast multitude tyrannized over by so called higher castes. They have been left for centuries together with no possibility of having their identity as a social group, though they were native sons of India. Dr. Ambedkar looked towards Untouchables as the children of “Indian Ghetto”.

Dalit Literature emerged through this background. The definition of Dalit Literature consists mainly of the rejection of Varna system, caste system, inhumanly and unjust exploitation, a strong protest against discrimination, revolt against the caste and class based social structure. Laxman Mane wrote: “Dalit literature is not literature of any single caste, not any of single religion, but it is the literature of the people who are suppressed under the Varna system. Dalit literature is the literature of those who are under the curse of religion, race, castes, tribes, class, gender and poverty.”⁴

Dalit literature is neither an ideal representation of life nor an individual commitment but a social commitment. The aim of Dalit literature is to expose the evils of caste system and injustice done to them by the higher castes. It denies the past Hindu cannons. It denies narrow domestic walls of Hindu social order. It has been opening the harsh reality of ‘broken society’. It is the real picture of socially, culturally, morally, politically and economically broken society, where the depressed and oppressed people in the name of Caste and Varna are totally broken. Dr. C. B. Bharati, in the article “The Aesthetics of Dalit Literature” speaks about Dalit aesthetics. According to him, “the aim of Dalit literature is to protest against the established system which is based on injustice and to expose the evil and hypocrisy of the higher castes.”⁵ Namdeo Dhasal speaks in his poetry,

*I Abuse you, I abuse your scripture
I abuse your culture
Abuse your heresy
All that I would not have to speak
But my hands have been awakened.....
In the hour of wet naval.*

According to V. S. Khandekar, a Dnyanpeeth Award Winner in Marathi Literature, “Anna Bhau Sathe is the serious writer in his nature. He has suffered more. He has seen the cruel truth of life not behind the seven curtains but directly, face to face...”⁶ He also added that, “White collared writers like me experience the external world through the widows of my house or by putting an easy chair in the gallery. The writing of Anna Bhau is not like this.”⁷

In the introduction to Namdeo Dhasal’s ‘*Golpitha*’, the Marathi dramatist Vijay Tendulkar writes, “In the calculations of the white collar workers, “No man’s land”

begins at the border of their world, and it is here that the world, and it is here the world of Namdeo Dhasal's poetry of Bombay begins. Mercy, grace, peace do not touch *Golpitha*; Dhasal says here all seasons are pitiless, here all seasons have a contrary heart."⁸ Dalit literature is a social portrait. "The frustration, humiliation, suppression, anguish and revolt felt by this ill-starred, marginalized section of Indian society constitute the dialogistic of Dalit literature."⁹

In '*Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit literature*' Sharankumar Limbale tries to show the uniqueness of Dalit literature in form, function and purpose. Its aim is not to teach or preach. It derives its strength through the depiction of hard reality of the experience of life in discriminatory social system. So the basis for aesthetics of Dalit literature is pain, agony and torture. The aim of Dalit literature is to expose the evils of caste system an injustice done to them by higher caste. Dalit writers write what they see, experience, feel and think in the social environment.

Dalit Literature is the literature of 'Invisible man' living outside the '*gavkus*' and in search of new democratic society of liberty, equality and brotherhood. It has brought the 'Invisible man' front world. A writer of Dalit literature discloses his whimper to the world. He tries to find out his own roots and identity. By putting a man at the center of literature, Dalit literature passions for dignity and freedom of man. Emancipation from slaver is its chief objective. What he sees, experiences and suffers, Dalit writer portrays in his literature. It is the literature of life. It believes in change. Change is the universal truth for him. He desires in the change of social system. It desires for social transformation. It dreams to reconstruct society on the base of liberty, equality, fraternity and justice.

On the other hand, Dalit literature does not only portray the discriminative social picture but it desires to change the system. It is the humble approach of Dalit writers to transform the social system in equality. It does not only blame the discriminative established social system but it hope to establish new social order. According to Baburao Bagul, "Dalit literature is not a Literature of vengeance. Dalit literature is not a literature which spreads hatred. Dalit Literature first promotes man's greatness and man's freedom and for that reason it is an historic necessity."¹⁰ Arjun Dangale also writes, "Dalit literature is not simply literature, it is associated with a movement to bring about changes. It represents the hopes and ambitions of a new society and new people"¹¹

The ideology of these writers about literature is coherent with its birth. It has been considered as an effective instrument for a social change. There is not expectation of aesthetic pleasure from them which they have not experienced in their life in oppressed social system. They believe in humanism. It is like this:

"I do not worship words,
I sing hymn of man
Where there is no sun in their village
I offer them light in their hands."¹²

In the beginning, Dalit literature was speaking about suffering. It portrayed the picture of exploitation. Then it began to demand the human rights for the deprived. Now they are asking for their share in the wealth of nation. Waman Kardak rightly says,

"Tell us where are Birla-Tata
Tell us of wealth store
Where is our share?"¹³

Now Dalit literature has moved towards the dream of global welfare of mankind, through the human and social values of freedom, equality, fraternity and just. Dalit literature articulates these values. Waman Kardak speaks:

“O man! Let me sing your song
The song of your welfare
Your enigma of appetite should crumple
One’s laughing and one’s weeping
Such world should not spare here”¹⁴

Today’s Dalit literature rejects the degraded Hindu social set-up. The writers of Dalit literature relentlessly expose the inhumanities and prejudices of caste system and instill a new social and cultural consciousness based on the humanitarian and democratic principles : liberty, equality and fraternity. Dalit literature is a journey from individual identity to group identity, self-justification to self-affirmation.

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