

“Mapping Dalit Consciousness: Transformation from ‘being’ to ‘becoming’”

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ABSTRACT

Dalit literature is an important stream of Indian literature and its structure is an integral contribution of Dr. B.R Ambedkar's vision and thoughts. The suffering of the oppressed and humiliated class and also the paths to emerge from this evil has been depicted in this. The main principles of Ambedkar's theory are elimination of caste, eradication of exploitation and equal status for Dalits. Dalit literature rejects the age old Indian tradition based on caste and class with its religious beliefs, while the non-Dalit held the opinion that tradition cannot be rejected out rightly. The Dalit writers believed that the term tradition has been used as a safeguard by a certain class for their vested interests. Dalit movement is a powerful action in the contemporary literary field which changes the face of the society and eliminates the subjugation of the so called depressed class. This paper aims in analyzing Dalit writings as a new genre of literature which act as a mouthpiece of the oppressed classes.

Keywords: Dalit literature, caste, untouchability, hegemony

Introduction

Dalit literature has established itself as a separate category of writing in many of the Indian languages. The word 'Dalit' hails from Sanskrit, meaning, crushed, suppressed, ground or broken to pieces. Dalit literature is the protest against all forms of exploitation based on race, caste, class and occupation. It is not only a literature of protest and rejection, but also a literature of reconstruction of the past. Dalit literature is an important stream of Indian literature and its structure is an integral contribution of Dr. B.R Ambedkar's vision and thoughts. The suffering of the oppressed and humiliated class and also the paths to emerge from this evil has been depicted in this. The main principles of Ambedkar's theory are elimination of caste, eradication of exploitation and equal status for Dalits. Dalit literature portrays issues like untouchability, poverty, social discrimination and powerlessness in common language. According to Sharankumar Limbale, "Dalit literature is precisely that literature which artistically portrays the sorrows, tribulations, slavery, degradation, ridicule and poverty endured by Dalits. This literature is but a lofty image of grief". Though written in different languages, in different cultural and geographical backgrounds, Dalit literature portrays universal themes such as injustice, oppression and exploitation.

Aim and significance of Dalit Literature

The purpose of Dalit literature is to make people aware of the caste biases, through which they are suffering and make them aware of the rights provided by the constitution. The aim of Dalit literature is to raise the voice against exploitation and discrimination and to fight to get

identity and self respect. It represents the pain and anguish of the exploited people. It questions the exclusion from the mainstream of society and culture and promotes equality and human dignity. Anger, sorrow, shame and indomitable hope are part of Dalit literature. When Dr Ambedkar started organizing the Dalit movement, many songs, scriptures, drama and autobiographies emerged with the same. There is no doubt that this literature is a rising field of study, because the record of pains of Dalit in the literature is opening new areas of exploration and research. Dalit literature entirely differs from mainstream literature in many ways. It has an authenticity, a fiery strength and a sense of social mission. It calls for a change in the society towards certain issues concerning individual relationship, social organization and caste based discrimination. As Baburao Bagul points out, “the established literature of India is Hindu literature. But it is Dalit literature which has the revolutionary power to accept new science and technology and bring about a total transformation”. Dalit writers are severely critical of the silence of the mainstream literature about the surrounding social realities. Even when higher caste writers have voiced concerns about Dalit communities, that are seen as condescending in nature and aimed at blunting resistance and amalgamating Dalits in mainstream society.

The social revolt started by Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Mahatma Gandhi and other reformers was later developed into a movement by Ambedkar, which brought an eminent development in the field of Dalit revolution. Munshi Premchand favored Dalit literature to stir up the Dalit consciousness in the society. His works portrayed the realistic picture of Dalits in the social framework and criticized the upper class in the social hierarchy who continue to exploit the downtrodden class in the name of caste and class. Other prominent writers whose powerful

writings laid the foundations of Dalit literature are Arjun Dangle, Baburao Bagul, Vijay Tendulkar etc. Autobiography has been a favourite genre of Dalit writers. In other words, the quest for identity is a basic dynamism of Dalit culture. All different genres, whether it is poetry or short stories or novels or critical prose pieces all carries a confessional mode by author themselves. Dalit literature rejects the age old Indian tradition based on caste and class with its religious beliefs, while the non-Dalit held the opinion that tradition cannot be rejected outrightly. The Dalit writers believed that the term tradition has been used as a safeguard by a certain class for their vested interests. In this regard Arjun Dangle opines, “The established class always tries to establish a convenient tradition that doesn’t damage its vested interests”. Now it has reached a stage where Dalit literature is obviously moving beyond anger and resentment and is not just conjoined to castigating the ‘other’ but exploring and emboldening to attain empowerment.

Dalits form an important part of the society. But right from ancient period they have been subjugated under the pretext of subordinate, inferior cog of this prestigious Hindu society. Dalit literature is an outburst of the burning flame of exploited people from many centuries. The suppressed anger erupts through self-narratives of Dalit literature. Dalits no more remained to be helpless; they are equally stronger like other sections of the society. Their creativity shapes themselves into the pinnacle of the so called rich society. Dalit movement is a powerful action in the contemporary literary field which changes the face of the society and eliminates the subjugation of the so called depressed class. Dalit literature has contributed at a large scale to the society and thus the significance of this study. First and foremost, it effectively threatened the Brahmanic hegemony from literature. Secondly, it concertized Dalit mass for assertion, protest

and mobilization. Third is stirred up thinking in Dalit intellectuals and catalyzed creation of organic intellectuals of Dalits. Fourth, given that the level of literacy been particularly low among Dalits, the emergence of Dalit literature where both the writers and readers are mostly Dalits, is itself an evidence of a profound change taking place in Indian society. The peculiarity of Dalit literature that it is based on experiences rather than speculations made it a distinct branch of literature.

Objectives of Dalit Literature

1. To study the Dalit literature as a new dimension in literature as something newer than used up.
2. To study the rise, growth and development of Dalit literature with its consequences on society.
3. To evaluate Dalit literature with other kinds of literature such as African-American literature, British literature.
4. To analyse the social condition of Dalit in India and their present status.
5. To study the different genres of Dalit literature.
6. To compare the status of Dalit women with African -American women by citing examples of their literary creations.

Conclusion

Lack of effective legal rights, social exclusion and social, economic and cultural exploitation has kept the Dalits at subordinate living conditions for centuries. The exposure of urban environment and migration in some cases has resulted in the upliftment and occupational hike of the Dalits. The interdisciplinary role of Dalit literature need to be explored broadly as its relevance is not only in language and literature, but also in history, sociology, geography, philosophy, anthropology etc. The study of Dalits and their literature is now an established field of research within South Asian studies and many significant publications have arisen from across disciplines. Today Dalit literature includes not only the writings about Indian suppressed people but also other groups throughout the world that are relegated to a secondary position by the privileged classes. The elements of Dalit subalternity raising their voice through the literary metropolis to the upper caste have made Dalit consciousness more poignant.

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