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## A BRIEF STUDY OF DALIT LITERATURE AFTER 1960'S



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Dalit literature is always marked by revolt and negativism, as it intimately linked with hopes for freedom of a group of people who, as “untouchables” are unfortunate bunches of social, economic and cultural inequality. In 12<sup>th</sup> century the Dalit poet, **Kalavve** challenged the upper castes in the following words.

*“ Those who eat goats, fowls and tiny fish :*

*Such they all out caste people.*

*Those who eat the scared cow*

*That showers frothing milk for shiva :*

Dalits are the people, who are looked down upon even by other workers. In Marathi the word Dalit is used for ‘the spurned’ : the term was first expression which now includes Harijans (Mahars), Mangs, Mallas, Chambhars and pulayas. The Dalits were treated worse than animals till the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Their presence was usually banned from upper class society. The caste system with a history of more than 3000 years in India, is a shameful social segregation which works on the principal of purity. Purity is rich and white. Impurity is poor and dark. Hidden powers of wealth can be easily traced in every feudal Brahmanical concept. Economic division is reflected in social classification. Dr Ambedkar says that “the caste system came into being long after the different races of India had mingled”.<sup>1</sup> Caste system is a socio cultural menace of Hinduism. The traditional Hindu society has four caste groups: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and shudras. The shudras occupy the lowest position in this abhorrent social order. Untouchability was formally outlawed by the constitution of India in 1950. But in practice, the Dalits still suffer social economic exclusion and dis-

crimination; physical and mental torture. Their attempts to assert their rights are often met with strong resistance even today.

Dalit literary movement is not only a liberal movement but is also a logo of change and revolution where the primary aim is liberation of Dalits. Dalits literary movement thus has a long history which unfolds the secret struggle against castism. There are numerous theories about the origin of Dalit Literature. Buddha (6<sup>th</sup> B.C) Chokhamela (14<sup>th</sup> AD) Mahatma Phule (1828 - 90) are hailed as its originators by various activists and ideological groups. These great men were deeply concerned about the plights of the untouchables. A huge mass of literature is created in the light of their teachings and vision but it was Dr. Ambedkar, a great modern visionary renaissance leader, the architect of the Constitution of India and ardent critic of caste system who demolished the myth of caste hierarchy. He inspired and initiated the creative minds of Indian to enforce the socio-cultural upsurge for the total upliftment of Dalits.

The Dalit youths gained motivations from the Black Movement of the far land of North America. Their literature “Black Panther” then became the role model for them. Although started in an unorganized way, Dalit literary movement gained pace with the active support of B.R. Ambedkar. Under his leadership Dalit literature had sought new avenues of liberation, which later turned into an integral part of the Dalit theology. Together with serving in the literary section, the movement is also a social and cultural movement that portrays the dreams and ambitions, as well as the

angst and affection of thousands of Dalits. Many Dalit writers, comprising Omprakash Valmiki, M.D. Naimishray and Bandhumadav took active participation and endeavor to be part of the Dalit literary movement, identifying themselves with pride as being 'Dalit'. While the Dalit movement has emerged in response to Dalit oppression, much continues to be fulfilled.

Dalit authors are able to show not only the hostile circumstances in which Dalits live but also their struggle for emancipation from caste. Religion has role-played a decisive part in the writings of Dalits. Baburao Bagul was one of the main exponents of Dalit literature in Maharashtra. He has made a valuable contribution to Indian literature as a progressive writer and architect of Dalit literature. His writings ushered an era of revolutionary writing in Marathi Literature

In 1963, Bagul published his first collection of stories "*Jeva me Jaat Chorli Hoti*" (When I robbed my caste). These stories broke all the norms of conventional story writing in Marathi and altered the face of short story writing. While speaking on this publication he said that although he inherited his caste by virtue of his birth at the time of writing he felt one with all the downtrodden of the world and then allowed him to express their miseries, frustrations and struggle in his stories. Another collection of his stories "*Maran Swast Hot ahe*" was published in 1996. Rather than evoking repulsion against the inhumanity, lawlessness and cruelty that his characters reflected, he was amazingly successful in inciting sympathy towards them among the readers. His volatile words speak of destroying the present system and show his extreme hatred for the system which is based on 'Manusmriti'. In one of his poem he says-

*If you are born here  
You will have to become Ambedkar  
Revolutionary Ambedkar  
The sworn enemy of Manu.*

*The Prisons We Broke* is the first work in Dalit literature written by a woman Baby Kamble. The book deals with two major problems of the society: (1) the oppression and exploitation of the Dalit by the upper class and (2) the discrimination towards women in a patriarchal society. In the memoir she tells us about

the life in her village, called Vergaon. In her memory the Maharwadas never had a prosperous life. On one side ignorance and lack of reasoning ruled them, on the other side, the Maharwadas life was dominated by poverty and epidemics. Death rate was high because of ceaseless starvation and lack of medical facilities for the fatal epidemics moreover superstitions adorned their blindness.

*"The suffering of my community has always been more important than my own individual suffering. I have identified myself completely with my people and therefore, Jina Amucha was the autobiography of my own community"*<sup>41</sup>

*The Prisons We Broke* transcends the boundaries of personal narrative and at once become a sociological treatise, a historical and political record a feminist critique, a protest against Hinduism and the Sordid Memoir of a cursed community.

Another Dalit writer Namdeo Dhasal emerged on to the Maharashtra Dalit literacy scene in early 70s. Born in 1949, in Mahar Cast, Dahasal is the only Dalit poet to have received a lifetime achievement award from Sahitya Akadami. Dhasal is a potent voice of Dalit protest who feels close relation between literature and politics. His collection *Golpitha* (name of a red light district in Mumbai) depicts the tough life of a Dalit and is marked with 'raw energy exuded by each of its words entirely unfamiliar to the established literary circle of its time'. In *Golpitha* Dhasal, taking artistic liberty with free verse lashes out against the system, using the words that had never been printed. Dilip Chitre, renowned awarded critic, poet and translator has translated Dhasal's poems in English, entitled *Namdeo Dhasal : Poet of the underground*: in this book Chitre says

*"Namdeo's Universe is untouchable too. It is loathsome and nauseating universe, a journey into it is a journey from the sacred into the profane. Or if we were to see it in purely secular and material terms, it is a journey from the clean to the dirty, from the sanitized to the unsanitary, from healthy to the diseased."*<sup>2</sup>

Some Dalit writers tried to look at their pasts with a kind of detached look that is now definitely overcome. They consider as having to put it on record as a document for the history of their society and man-

kind in general. Times have changed to such an extent that one may be unable to imagine that such atrocities could have happened at all. One may even be prompted for various reasons to deny that they ever happened. Authors therefore make an effort to give a precise testimony and show in details how they have been oppressed. Their testimonies are valuable sources of social history. The writings have something of an autopsy. One of the most typical example in this respect is Shankarrao Kharat, former vice-chancellor of Marathwada university. The prolific author of a number of short-stories, novels, articles and other essays on Dr. Ambedkar, his conversion, his letters and the history of the Dalit movement and an autobiography *Taral Antaral* (1981). Though it is life story of Kharat, it also is a story of 'The Untouchable'.

Another Dalit writer Sharankumbar Limbale, author of *Akkarmashi (Bastard)* tells us about the plights he suffered being a Dalit. The word refers to the child born from extra-marital relations and is used only as an abuse. As a child, he used to stay in Maharashtra. The people used to tease him by using this derogatory word, which he deliberately chose as a title for his book *Aamcha Baap Aan Amhi* (Our father and us) is an autobiographical account of a Maharashtrian Dalit family's struggle in breaking the logjam of adversities to reach the top of the success ladder, came out in Marathi in 1993 by Dr. Narendra Jadhao. According to the author the book harps on progress through self enlightenment rather than living on props like reservations or ex-gratia considerations. *Aamcha Baap Aan Amhi* is a strong statement for the fundamental right

of every Dalit in India to live like a man . It seeks to promote self respect and dignity among the Dalits. The book symbolizes Dr. Ambedkar's message : *educate, organize and agitate*.

Urmila Pawar's *Aaydan* is another memoir by a Dalit woman describing long journey from Konkan to Mumbai, bringing to fruition the struggle of three generations for a Dalit modernity, about which readers have hitherto heard so little. *Aaydan* is a generic term used for all the things made from Bomboos translated for the first time in English as *The Weaves Of My Life*. *Aaydan* is marked by the honesty of its narration, told with a sense of irony and humor. Urmila looks at herself as a child, daughter, wife and mother as objectively as she does at Harishchandra as a husband. While he chose to remain esconed in convention, she raced ahead.

Thus, Dalit literature in Maharashtra represent oppression, struggles, assertion and quest for identity of the downtrodden community. The literature raises questions against Hindu social discrimination and caste system. The motives of Dalit literature are : the denunciation of an inhuman past and the proclamation of a decisive victory due to Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit movement. This Dalit literature is testimony about the suffering of past as "Pains of death" (life in Death). The writers try to keep record of their agonies and efforts to survive, on the one hand and on the new generation, who tend to return into the fold of a culturally repressive society of the one who has shown humanity the way of justice and love, Ambedkar a god from among men.

## REFERENCE

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