

The Meaning of Dalit and its True Perceptions by Indian Society and Dalit Writers through Translations: An Analytical Study

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Abstract: *Any literature is the product of times. It is about people, their experiences, their Joys, sorrows, thoughts, actions, emotions or feelings. It is also about the society of which it is an integral part. Though society is an amalgamation of diverse sections, castes, creeds, religions, and their love to read and enjoy literature produced by writers belonging to any class, caste, religion etcetera. Its appealing value and universal character is one the main reasons for their acceptance. Thus we have British Literature, American Literature, African Literature, and Indian Literature.*

At the same time they also have feminine literature and Dalit literature. The former being confined to literature produced by women writers championing the cause of women. So Dalit Literature is about Dalits written by Dalits championing the cause of Dalits in any human society. This paper seeks to probe into the meaning of word "Dalit" and its true perceptions by Indian society and by Dalit writers whose works are available in English.

Keywords: *Dalit, Down Trodden, Dalit Moment, Social Status, Dalit Poetry, Dalit Novels, Dalit Short Stories.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the post globalization scenario, the human rights have become a serious topic for perennial debate among social scientists, scholars, philosophers, intellectuals, statesmen, when the issue of human rights is a focal point literary works about socially backward, marginalized, down trodden and oppressed classes have automatically acquired a great deal of significance. In recent times, Dalit literatures in India are on the rise to focus experiences of discrimination, violence and poverty of Dalits. Till now all their experiences without being highlighted were silenced often with social and religious sanction and they were dubbed as non-literary and unfit for reading.

However diverse forms of Dalit literature like poems and novels, short stories, biographies, autobiographies, have appeared on the literary scene to rectify their negative trend by examining the merits of Dalit culture.

The word "Dalit" literally means "oppressed". It is used as a synonym for "untouchable". It also refers to casteless sections of India. Dalit is also called out caste. It is a self designation for a group of people traditionally regarded as untouchables. Dalits are mixed population of various caste groups living not only all over India, South Asia but all over the world.

There are several different names used to define their group like "Ash Prash" meaning "untouchables". Harijans meaning children of God, Dalits meaning Broken People.

Etymologically speaking, the word "Dalit" comes from the Sanskrit word Dalit which means "down trodden", "Suppressed", "crushed", or "broken to pieces". It was first used by Jyothi Rao Phule, the champion of backward classes and other oppressed classes of Maharashtra in the 19th century. In the context of the oppression faced by the untouchable caste of the twice born Hindus. Mahatma Gandhi employed the word "Harijans", which means the children of Hari or Vishnu to identify them as children of God.

Manu's the Chief famous Hindu scripture "Manusmriti" describes the varna of caste system of Indian society based on the occupation. It comprises five kinds of people of the society born out of the body of Lord Vishnu. According to this mythological interpretation, Brahmin was born out of head, Kshatriya was born out of arms, Vysya was born out of waist and Sudra was born out of feet. There is another section called Panchamas (or) avarnas to which the fifth section of society, Dalits, has become a part of Varna Dharma.

Dalits are destined to undertake inferior activities such as leather work, butchering, and waste. Dalits work as labourers cleaning streets, latrines, and night soil. Engaged in these activities they were considered to be pollutants and this pollution was considered epidemic. Resultantly Dalits were commonly separated and forced to live in outskirts of villages. Thus they were banned from total participation in social Hindu life.

2. DALIT MOVEMENTS IN INDIA AND ABROAD

Several movements by Dalit leaders both in abroad and in India were carried out by Martin Luther King in America and Nelson Mandela in South Africa whose sacrifices and contribution have become a major source of inspiration for the peoples of globe.

Lord Gouthama Buddha who preached the abolition of untouchability was one of the earliest Dalit reformers. Subsequently during the medieval period the Bhakthi Movement actively engaged in the participation and emancipation of Dalit. Saint Kabir, Mahanu Bhava Seat, Varkavi sect in Maharashtra condemned the word untouchability and accepted Dalits as brothers in Maharashtra, an important state in the reformation of Dalit or in the transformation of untouchable to touchable.

Mahatma Jyoti Rao Phule, Rajashri Sahoo Maharaj, V.R. Shinde, and Baba Saheb Ambedkar were the prominent social reformers of Maharashtra

In 1950 Ambedkar embarrassed Buddhism and converted thousands of Dalits to Buddhism. In West Bengal Chaitanya Prabhu started a movement called Namoi Indias Movement. It changed the attitude of the people towards Dalits thus Dalit reform movements were started in India right from the days of Buddha.

3. DALIT LITERATURE IN INDIA

In recent times Dalit literature has become a new genre. The writers of Dalit literature have started depicting the tormenting experiences of Dalits exposed to present the contemporary social, political, economic, educational and mental conditions of Dalits before Dalit and non-Dalit readers.

Mulkraj Anand was the first writer to touch upon this genre of Dalit literature in his novels like Coolie and Untouchable in English. They are simultaneously translated into different regional and world languages. The Dalit literature is made popular in Marathi by Maharashtra Dalit Poetry. It mainly aims at creating awareness of Dalits about their social conditions in the society to all conscious readers.

Thus we have a great deal of Dalit poetry in which we find the poet's expressing the violent lashing experiences of poet's life effectively. Narayan survey was one of the most Dalit popular poets in the early Dalit literature.

His famous poem was Vidhya Rath. At the same time we have other poets like Keshav Meshram's "Utkhasian" which means excavation, "Dayapawar" whose poem "Kondwade" which means subbozating enclosure, Nandedo Dhyal whose poem "Galpitha" which means the red light Jone and Triyambak Satkal whose poem "Surang" which means Dyanamete are popular contributions in Dalit poetry. The new generation of Dalit poetry emerged in the contemporary period as a revolt or protest against the traditional oppression.

We also have Dalit folk poetry. Practiced for propagating Dalit sensibility. Woman Dade Kardak Bheem Rao Kardak, Vittol Uma were the famous Dalit folk poets. The folk poetry includes ballads, which inspired the common people of Dalit community.

4. DALIT SHORT STORIES

Dalit writers also exploited short stories and novels to express Dalit sensibility suitably. The short stories like “Fakira”, Anna Bahu Sathi, “Davindi”, Sankar Rao Kharat.

“Jerah Mi Jaat Charli Hoti” which means “when I robbed a caste” are good examples of short stories.

5. DALIT PLAYS

Though drama is not as popular as other genres of Dalit literature, some of the Dalit play wrights have made significant contribution to develop Dalit drama. Thus M.V. Chhries’ yug Yatra, Gangedhar Pantawane’ Mruthyala, Mask, Datta Bhagat; /wata oakwata, B.C. Shinde’ Udavst (destroyed), Ramnath Chavan’ Bamanwada (Brahmin lane) are some of the good examples Dalit plays.

6. DALIT NOVELS

Mulkraj Anand’s Novels “untouchable” and “Coolie” form into an important contribution to the body of Dalit literature. The theme of untouchable is the evil of untouchability in India. Anand depicts the experiences of an 18 year old Dalit boy in the course of a single day in a town called “Buland Shahi”.

A Dalit boy’s name was “Bakha”. He works curiously and laboriously keeping the public latrines of the town clean. It exposes the dalit boy to the content of the caste Hindu and renders him an untouchable. In this novel Anand expresses his sympathy with the Dalits in India. He wrote this to awaken the consciences of the upper caste in India.

“Coolie” is a much longer novel than untouchable. The novel takes us from place to place beginning with a village and ending at the famous hill resort of Simla. The Hero in the novel is also a Dalit boy called “Munoo” who goes through a series of experiences most of which are one of the depressing and disgusting kind.

Anand in this novel brings us into contact with diverse segments of Indian society. The evil in this novel reflects itself in the forms of selfishness, greed, and cruelty with the poverty as the root of all evils. Munoo’s misfortune in Bombay constitutes the most important part of the novel. Anand gives an account of life on the pavements or in the slums and its picture in the prostitute’s quarters, its communal disturbances, and its labour troubles.

Bama is a Dalit woman writer. She made a significant contribution towards the development of Dalit literature. She writes about her experiences tracing them within the contact that depicts her personal and professional life. Her identity as a Dalit, her marginalized position in the society in further increased by such aspects as her gender, class, and religion and location. She explores the multiple structures of oppression that operate in the liver of Dalits and move specifically in the lives of Dalit women of Tamil Nadu.

In her novel “Karukku” Bama depicts that a girl child in Dalit community is taken as a potential source of cheap, unpaid labour. She is surrogate mother. To her siblings, there by coming to the rescue of her mother who can take up her heavy work load at the farm outside and leave the domestic responsibilities to her daughter. A Dalit girls responsibilities mostly include fetching firewood, cooking, feeding, washing taking care of younger siblings (or) even older brother. They also include waking at the four in the afternoons in return for a couple of handful of grams or peas, running errands, working at factories (or) at farms during the period of sowing or harvesting and handing over the wages to a bullying brother (or) a drunk father. This is a true profile of a Dalit girl child aged between 4 and 14.

7. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The meaning and concept of the ward “Dalit” has been invoked for centuries in one form or the other in all societies and in all nations across the globe. The word “Dalit” carries diverse meanings as explained above. In Hindu scriptures “Dalit” was used under the name of Chandala in the sense of Dalit. During the interaction between Adi Sankarcharya and a chandala the word was explained in spite of which Sankaracharya had shown deep sympathy towards the chandala

who was treated with all kindness and respect. In America “The America Panthers” was an organization, social and political in nature that fought for equal rights of Negroes in America. It has inspired the Dalits in Maharashtra to start a similar organization in the name of Block Panthers. Some more organizations like republican party of India, Indian Panthers Party, All India Scheduled Caste Federation, Mala Mahanadu, Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi followed the suit. All these organizations are intended to champion the cause of the Dalits. The works and speeches of great social reformers, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, B.R. Ambedkar and Jyothi Rao Phule continued to inspire the Dalits in modern world.

The word Dalit has undergone a great deal of change in its meaning, scope, and application in as much as it is no longer a ward which carried the meaning earlier times such as untouchable, Harijan, Down Trodden. In the present context the word “Dalit” connotes any person subjected to exploitation, squalour, poverty, discrimination in any form that appears in society.

8. CONCLUSION

In conclusion the meaning of Dalit and Dalit literature conveys a message about his/her community, but not individuality, about his/her revolt, but not passivity, about his/her progress but not regression. The message is conveyed to the whole world about the social, political, economic and educational status. This message is conveyed by highlighting by exploitative, desperate, and embarrassed sections endowed with grief showing how they continue to be suppressed and enslaved. A Dalit in India can stand in comparison with a Dalit in Africa or America concerning his/her mutation. The writers of Dalit literature questioned religion and identity throughout their works. The Dalit literature achieved a strong foundation in the mid 20th century, its framework having been established in the only 19th century. The present day Dalit writer hence made their literary foundation strong with an ideology of their own and also publishing various National and International Journals.

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