

Dalit Consciousness through Literature

Dr.D.Jaisankar

Associate Professor, Department of English, Academy of Maritime Education and Training (Deemed to be University) Kanathur, Chennai – 603112

Abstract- Dalit scholars have been producing Literature since 1990. As Ambedkar's ideology was deeply rooted in Maharashtra, Marathi Dalit writings were translated into English as well as into other Indian languages. The term 'Dalit' got pan-Indian recognition. Taking Ambedkar's wider perspectives on the Dalit question, comparisons were made between Afro-American Literature and Dalit Literature. It emerged as part of the interest on the rise of indigenous cultures across the world. It then gave way to the emergence of Dalit Consciousness through Dalit literature or Indigenous Studies as an academic discipline.

Index Terms- Afro-American Literature, Ambedkar's Ideology, Dalit Consciousness, Indigenous Studies, Perspectives

INTRODUCTION

Dalit literature became popular after the centenary celebration of Ambedkar's birth anniversary in 1991. On the eve of this celebration, government, NGOs and individuals published books pertaining to Dalit issues. Maharashtra had vibrant activism in the literary movement. The sixties saw many new things happening in Marathi literature. For the first time a poet, Narayan Sureve, wrote about the problems of workers. The Little Magazine movement also took root and flourished in this decade. Indian literature made its acquaintance with the Angry Young Men. In Marathi Dalit literature, Anna Bhau Sathe and Shankarrao Kharat were popular during 1960s. Baburao Bagul's short story collection *Jevha Mee Jaat Chorli Hoti* (When I had concealed my caste) made vibrant waves in the Marathi literary world. Some of the admirers said that it was an epic of Dalits while others compared it to the jazz music of the Blacks. Bagul's stories taught Dalit writers to give creative shape to their experiences and feelings. In the seventies, Dalit critics began to theorise on Dalit literature and its role. A number of young writers with full of new awareness started writing for periodicals in the 1970s. Some Dalit writers from

Maharashtra thought that there was no point in merely writing provocative poetry against injustice. The Dalit writers had also become familiar with the Black movement and literature in the USA. The youth Namdeo Dhasal, Arjun Dangle and J.V. Pawar took the initiative and established the political movement called the Dalit Panthers in Bombay in 1972.

FACTS IN THE FICTION

The different nature of Dalit literature justified. Dr. M.N. Wankhade and Baburao were aggressive in their arguments, but their works were frank analysis of society, religions and literature. Muktibodh and Prof. Jadhav demonstrated that they must not lose sight of artistic awareness while rebelling. Critical essays gave a clear idea of theoretical base of Dalit literature. Janardan Waghmare in his essay emphasised the similarity between the Black movement and its literature and the Dalit movement and its literature. The essays in *Poisoned Bread* are acknowledged by Dalit and non-Dalit writers. The Dalit autobiographies conveyed the 'differentness' of Dalit literature. The language, experience and heroes of Dalit literature are totally different from those of mainstream literature. The heroes of Dalit literature struggle for survival in different levels. They are shown confronting limitation, abject poverty, misery and brutality. The Marathi short stories "Gold from the Grave", "Mother" and "Livelihood" depicted a fierce battle for life in an urban slum and a world surviving beyond the so-called 'cultural values'; *The Poisoned Bread*, *The Cull*, *The Refugee*, *Explosion* and *The Storied House* demonstrate the position of the Dalits in rural society and their fight for existence. The story "Promotion" reveals the ambivalent crisis of identity in the Dalit middle class. Sharankumar Limbale's *The Bastard* is the whole saga of Dalit social history. Dalit women participated actively in the Dalit movement. Many

autobiographies by Dalit women were published. Shantabai Kamble and Kunad Pande are notable women for their autobiographies.

In *The Bastard*, a severe jolt is given to values concerning relations between men and women and the family structure. In the Dalit autobiographies, we could see various facets of the Dalit movement; the struggle for survival; the emotional universe of a Dalit's life; the man-woman relationship; an existence crushed under the wheels of village life; the experiencing of humiliations and atrocities; submission and rebellion. Dalit poetry is a flourishing form in Dalit literatures. The entire universe of Dalit feeling seems to have descended into poetic form. Innumerable aspects of individual as well as social experience reveal themselves. Dalit poetry in brief is the impassioned voice of the third generation of the Ambedkarite movement. It can be seen standing up against subjugation, humiliation and atrocities.

The influence of the Maharashtra-based Dalit movement and Marathi Dalit writing could be seen in the neighbouring state, Gujarat, which resulted in the rise of significant voices in Dalit Literature. The novels *Bhalbhankhalu* and *Gith* by Dalput Chauhan are notable in Gujarati Dalit literature. *Bhalbhankhalu* deals with the theme of a Dalit admitting his daughter in a primary school in the context of pre-independence period. *Gith* describes the atrocities on Dalits and inter-caste marriages. Harish Mangalam in his short story collection *Talap* (*The Craving*) gave some classics of Dalit stories. Because of the proximity of Dalit writers to neighbouring Hindi-speaking region, the Marathi writers greatly influenced the Hindi Dalit writers.

Sarah Beth in his article "Dalit Autobiographies in Hindi: The transformation of pain into resistance" says that Dalit autobiography transforms an experience of pain into a narrative of resistance. Many Dalit writers of Hindi like other Dalit writers started their literary carriers by writing their autobiographies.

DALIT LITERATURE FROM THE SOUTH

The anti-Brahmin campaign spearheaded by Dravidian parties had effect and consequently the Dravidian parties captured political power. The anti-brahmin slogan and the anti-Hindi agitation by the Dravidian parties subsumed caste identity within

linguistic identity. Dalit writers started recording their experiential reality in autobiographies and fictions in the 1980s and 1990s and Dalit literature found a place in Tamil Nadu. Sivakami, a Dalit IAS woman official, wrote her first novel *Pazhaiyana Kazhidalum* (1989), which criticises the manipulative, corrupted Dalit leaders, and emphasised a need for organised educated and ideologically committed Dalit youth to counter the empowered caste Hindu politicians. Her second novel *Aanandayee* (1992) details upper caste oppression and patriarchal oppression. Bama's *Karukku* (1992) was also published in the same year. It explains how Dalits are exploited by state machinery like police, upper caste and the Church. Bama's *Sangathi* (1994) discusses the dual oppression of caste and gender to a Dalit woman. The short stories played a vibrant role in Dalit literature. Ambimani's short story collections *Nokkadu* (1993), *Tettam* (2001) and *Oorchoru* (2003); Edyavendan's collections *Nandanar Theru* (1991) *Vadhai Paudum Vazhvy* (1994), and *Tai Mann* (1996). Imayam's *Mann Baram* (2004), *Video Mariammam* (2008), *Kolaicheval* (2014) *Saavu Soru* (2014) and his novels *Koveru Kazhudaigal* (2013), *Arumugam* (2007) and *Sedal* (2012) made contribution in the discourse of Dalit literature in Tamil Nadu. Cho. Dharman's novel *Thoorvai* (1995) *Koogai* (2005), his non-fiction *Villicai Vendar Pichakkutti* (2002), and his short story collections *Eeram*, *Sogavanam*, *Vankumaran* are noteworthy in Tamil Dalit writings.

Kalyana Rao's novel *Antarani Vasantham* (2000) is a landmark in projecting Dalit perspectives in cultural history. This novel is considered as a source book for Dalit struggle, culture, philosophy, life style, history and politics in Andhra Pradesh. Padunekkina Pata (1996), an anthology of Telugu Dalit poetry, claimed that Ambedkarism is the only ideology for the liberation of Dalits. Nagappagari Sundar Raju's *Chandala Chatimpu*, *Madigodu* (The stories of Madiga's life) and *Yendluri Sudhakar's Mallemoggala Godugu* (The Umbrella of Jasmine) are significant Telugu literary works.

In Karnataka "Dalit youth writers Association" and Dalit Sangharsha Samiti under the leadership of the prominent writer B. Krishnappa was formed in the 1970s. Devanooru Mahadeva and Siddalingaiah are considered the pioneers of Karnataka Dalit literature. Hemmanthaiah, Subbu Holeyar, Lakkur C. Anand,

V.M. Manjunath, D. Saraswathi are popular for their poetry and stories with Dalit perspectives.

The Left ideology is dominated in Kerala and so the workers claimed their rights. However, discrimination based on caste is prevalent in this region too. In Malayalam literature, the social commitment and the political function of art is being discussed. The Marxian stream of writing was prevalent from 1940s onwards. The class analysis of social conflict was common in Malayalam fictions. The works envisioned an egalitarian society. The short fiction of P.A. Uthaman Chavoli presented the plurality of Dalithood, the unknown terrains of Dalit experience such as social conflicts, like in the Dalit colonies and households. C. Ayyappan wrote short stories with Dalit perspectives. He presented counter-narratives of mainstream to emphasis Dalit identity. T. K. C. Vaduthalai's story "Achante Venlenja Inna" explains the subculture of postcolonial reality with a Dalit perspective. Like Marxism, Dalit literature serves as a powerful reforming element in Kerala.

DALIT CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH DALIT LITERATURE

A recovery of this history during the Dalit uprising that took place in the 1990s created a debate within the Dalit movements about their entry into mainstream electoral politics. Ilaiah (1998) says that In the process of labour Dalithahujans engage in a constant intercourse with the land. Their thorough understanding of land and its productivity, its colour and combination, is solely responsible for increase in productivity. The recovery of this history, which includes the intellectual history, political history, literary history, created a pressure and made a demand in the media to focus on the Dalit question. According to Arjun Dangle, Dalit literature is not simply literature but it is associated with a movement to bring about change.

Autobiographical narratives have been used as a form of political assertion. The popular autobiography in Hindi like Joothan (1997) by Omprakash Valmiki and Teraskrit (2002) by Surajpal Chauhan, serve a very different purpose than those of famous celebrities or historical personalities. Omvedt (1995) says that the sensibility which equates Indian tradition with Hinduism as Aryan heritage of Indian civilisation. The agenda of Dalit autobiography is not

in individualism but links the individual to the entire Dalit community and questions the Indian culture. This is a way of gaining power and support in a group struggle against oppression. Most of the Dalit autobiographers succeeded in life after their education and settled in towns and cities and part of middle class. By writing the autobiographies they connect themselves with their community. Though scholars in the field of Dalit Studies assume the history of Dalit literature from the South as a by-product or a continuation of Ambedkarite movement in the North, intellectuals in the Southern states have traced back to their own history of Dalit literature. Ravikumar (2009) says that the Dalit perspective on caste, communalism, culture, media, education, censorship and literature is ignored in the mainstream. This has resulted in the two major collections of Dalit literature – one is a two volume anthology published by Penguin and Harper Collins with Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu as editors, and the other is the four independent volumes (Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada) of Dalit writings published by Oxford University Press with individual editors for each volume.

CONCLUSION

The leaders of the Dalit Panthers were all writers. Namdeo Dhasal is a Padma Shri award winner. His collection of poems titled Golpitha is remarkable. He utilized the power of literature to raise voice against atrocities on Dalits. Thus, a wave of writing describing Dalit experience in provocative language swept Marathi literature. This was probably the first time in India that creative writers became politically active, and formed an organisation. Associating with movements, Dalit literature brought change. Dalit intellectuals produced literature with consciousness. The readers became aware of their rights and Dalit consciousness was prevalent among mass due to Dalit literature.

REFERENCES

- [1] Dangle, Arjun, ed. *Poisoned Bread*. Bombay: Orient Longman, 1994.
- [2] Ilaiah, Kanha. "Why I am Not a Hindu." *Subject to Change: Teaching Literature in the Nineties*. Ed. Susie Tharu. London: Sangam Books, 1998.

- [3] Jadhav, Narendra. *Outcaste: A Memoir*. New Delhi: Viking Penguin India, 2003.
- [4] Kshirsagar, R. K. *Dalit Movement in India and Its Leaders (1857-1956)*. New Delhi: M. D. Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1994.
- [5] Omvedt, Gail. *Dalit Visions: The Anti-Caste Movement and the Construction of India Identity*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 1995.
- [6] Ravikumar. *Venormous Touch: Notes on Caste, Culture and Politics*. Trans. R. Azhagarasan. Kolkatta: Samya, 2009.