

**DALIT'S VOICE: A VOICE FROM THE MARGIN**Dasari. Praveen<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr.B. Raju<sup>2</sup><sup>1\*</sup>(Senior Lecturer in English, Andhra Loyola College., Vijayawada-8)<sup>2</sup>(Senior Lecturer in English, Andhra Loyola College, Vijayawada-8)**ABSTRACT**

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Dalit literature has deeply influenced contemporary psycho-socio-philosophic musings. It excels in ideology critique and discerns the role of ideology in integrating individuals into existing social order. This literature reflects Dalit experience, sensibility and identity primarily from Dalit point of view. It reflects not only the history of Dalit but also its persistent legacy in the present. Dalit literature provides the deep structure of literary representations and this deep structure serves to organize the particularities of circumstance and individual identity. This protest literature mirrors the stark realities of Dalits and helps regulate the complex cognitive machinery through which the underprivileged and deprived human segment negotiates their social and cultural evo-/revo(lution).

**Keywords:** *Dalit literature, Dalit History, Dalit Experience, Identity Crisis, Marginalized Voice*

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*"In the beginning there was no centre.  
In the beginning there was no margin.  
In the beginning there was no margin, for there was  
no centre.  
If there was no margin, how did centre come into  
existence?  
Then what existed before margin and centre?  
There must have been something, for there can never  
be nothing"- Rig Veda*

The deliberations pertaining to margin and centre attained significance in the light of the ugly

social reality which marked polarization of certain social forces that constructed social structures in different ways under different labels in such a way as would bring them in the centre of these structures and serve their ends. The individuals or the groups were marginalized either in the name of religion, race, region, community, cast, gender, nationality or even ideology. But this relationship between the centre and margin was temporary and short lived. The centre can subdue and suppress the marginalized voices, but can never silence them forever. Once they find their true voice, they cease to be marginalized.



Often a question is raised whether the marginalized can speak. It is a fact that the marginalized cannot remain mute for long time. They have to speak and find an outlet for their tears and fears, anguish and anger and thus, register their existence. The question of their identity has assumed different dimensions amongst the creative writers. According to Dennis Wrong the term 'identity crises' have become the 'semantic beacons of our time' for they communicate verbally the discontent prevalent in our modern life and society. The question of identity and identity crisis plagues modern man in his quest to carve out niche for himself in this world. But the same question assumes a much crucial and gigantic proportion for an individual for whom identity becomes a struggle to survive with dignity and equality. The marginalized, the subaltern, the dalit, call him whatever you may, one thing remains constant and that is his daily struggle for existence as the repressed, downtrodden and exploited section of society. Discriminated on account of various factors the Dalits are the victims of various structures that construct society like economic, social, gender based, cultural, etc. Long suppressed into submission and silence the marginalized or dalits have emerged out of the shadows of centuries of subjugation. Inspired by revolutionary social activists they have now given a voice to their identity through a literature of their own. In fact dalit is not a caste, it is a constructed identity which is a comprehensive term comprising of not only the scheduled castes, tribes and other backward classes but also takes into its purview any person, group or community that finds itself shoved to the periphery like women for instance. In other words: "Dalit" implies those who have been broken and ground down by those above them in the social hierarchy in a deliberate and active way. There is in the word itself an inherent denial of pollution, karma, and justified caste hierarchy" (Zelliot 267).

Dalit Literature is the forum and the medium of expression of the experience of the communities that have been excommunicated, marginalized, exploited and humiliated for ages in the Indian caste ridden Hindu Society. The term *Dalit* literally means the downtrodden socially and economically depressed and underprivileged in gaining secure

reimbursement in the society. Gandhi called them *Harijanas*, the children of God, the high caste Hindu called them Untouchables. Dalit literature reflects Dalit experience and sensibility, attempting to define and assert Dalit identity from primarily Dalit point of view. In many ways, it is a protest literature which faithfully mirrors the stark realities of the Dalit situation and becomes an important weapon to strengthen threw Dalit political and social movement. The Dalit author Sharan kumar Limbale calls it "the burning cry of untouchable against the injustices of thousands of years".

The first well known dalit writer is the 13<sup>th</sup> century untouchable Bhakti poet of Maharashtra, Chokkamela. The origin of dalit literature in the contemporary usage of the term, which is largely written and published in regional Indian languages, are in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In modern times, because of the legacy of Mahatma Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar, dalit literature got impetus in Maharashtra and Ambedkarist thought is still the lifeblood of much dalit literature. Although most of the pioneering works have been produced in Maharashtra and the adjacent Gujarat, Dalit literature has today taken substantial shape in a variety of Indian languages such as Kannada, Tamil, Hindi and Malayalam. A large number of these texts are also available in English translations for a wider range of audience.

Some of the widely read writers of Dalit literature available in English translation include Laxman Gaekwad's *The Branded*, Bama's *Karukku* and *Sangati*, Narendra Jhadav's *Untouchables: My family's Triumphant Journey Out of the Caste System in Modern India*, Joseph Macwan's *The Stepchild* and so on. The identity of a Dalit writer is a highly debated one. Some Dalit critics like Limbale argue that dalit literature is the exclusive forte of writers who are by birth dalits and that upper caste writers like Mahasweeta Devi (*Breast Stories*), Sara Joseph (*Thaikulam*), Kumaran Asan (*Chandrabhikshuki*), Mulkraj Anand(*Untouchable*) and Premchand (*Kafan*), though chronicles of the dalit experience, cannot be categorized as dalit writers as they never undergo the trials and tribulations of dalit existence.



As Limbale has put it, dalit literature is “Purposive, revolutionary, liberational and transformatory”. Its central purpose is the realization of the full humanity of the dalit. It asserts the dalit’s agency, selfhood and history. Dalits are no longer the inconsequential figures in the meta-narratives of *Chaturvarnya* but actors the *Lakshmanrekha* of caste and challenge the vaunted purity of the *Savarna* discourse. This is a deconstructive enterprise that forces the *Savarna* world to negotiate the realities fore-grounded in dalit literature.

Literature pertaining to this specified group of people in society is referred to as Dalit literature which is in fact an attempt to liberate the suppressed voice of the downtrodden, the Dalits. Dalit literature is basically the literature written by Dalits in which they have expressed their pain and anguish. The non-Dalit writers as mentioned already who write about Dalits couldn’t come under the category of Dalit writers because they don’t represent the true Dalit Consciousness.

Dalit literature is not a novel concept of this modern era but owes a long history. There are numerous theories about the origin of Dalit Literature. Buddha in 6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C; the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> century writings of Vachana, Chennaiah or Kalavve in Kannada; Chokhamela in 14<sup>th</sup> AD, Mahatma Phule between (1828-90) and Prof. S.M. Mat (1886-1957), are hailed as its originators. These great men were deeply concerned about the plight of the untouchables and fought against all the unjust divisions in society. A huge mass of literature is created in the light of their teachings and visions.

Inspired by the writings of the Bhakti movement Dalit literature was also influenced by the works of Afro-American writers. They found a resonance of their urge for self assertion in the leading visionary of the movement, Dr. Ambedkar, who inspired and motivated the creative instinct of the people to voice the emancipator spirit through Dalit literature. And so rejoicing the century’s old social prejudices and practice of caste, Dalit Literature found a voice. Life is a continuous struggle and the subjugated, the Dalits have undertaken one fight more; a fight to affirm and assert their identity.

The sincere efforts of Dalit writings and their literature brings to our focus the fact that it is essentially the literature of the downtrodden and suppressed folk of society which doesn’t require sympathy or empathy but the right to live with dignity and equality like human beings. Written mostly in the autobiographical mode Dalit literature is truly the maps the Dalit spirit; the human spirit of endurance and courage at its core.

To conclude in the words of Brecht’s Mother Courage, ‘The poor need courage’: the life of the people left neglected and made to suffer by society need courage to survive, to endure, to fight the daily fight of survival. And the assertion of the Dalit consciousness through literature is one fight more to make the society aware of its hidden, dark truths that need to be confronted in order to change and transform into a better and equalitarian tomorrow and will perhaps lead to the conviction that

‘In the end there will be no margin,

In the end there will be no centre,

In the end there will be no play,

In the end there will be a free play of playlessness

Without margin.....

Without centre.....’

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