

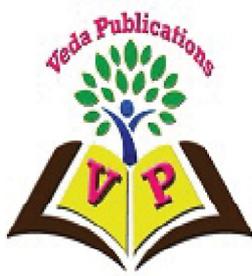


VOICE OF THE MARGINALISED SECTIONS IN POST COLONIAL INDIAN LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

In the present global research scenario, subaltern theme has become so prominent that it is regularly used in various disciplines such as history, sociology, psychology anthropology and literature. The word 'subaltern' is German word which means 'inferior rank' or 'secondary importance. The genealogical study of 'subaltern' refers to three outstanding thinkers. They are: Antonio Gramsci, Ranjit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorthy Spivak. The concept of 'subaltern' is also defined by Julian Wolfreys, "It contains the groups that are marginalized, oppressed and exploited on the cultural, political, social and religious grounds". Thus Subaltern literature reflects various themes such as oppression, marginalization, Gender discrimination, subjugation of lower and working classes, disregarded women, neglected sections of society. Deprived classes etc. the context of globalization, 'Third World' countries are encountering the state of poverty and oppression. Subaltern literature is one of the subdivisions of post colonialism. 'Post-colonial' lays down conjectures in philosophy and literature that wrestles with the legacy of colonial rule. Post-colonial literature is a stems from postmodern literature concerned with the political and cultural autonomy of the people who were subdued in colonial domains.



The word 'subaltern' is drawn from the Late Latin 'subalternus'. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary denotes that the word, subaltern, as noun means any officer in the British army who is 'lower in rank' than a captain. Its adjectival form denotes 'of inferior rank'. But Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci for the first time used it outside the non-military sense. In Latin 'sub' means 'under' and 'alter' means other. So literally it denotes to any person or group of inferior. According to some thinkers, perhaps he used the term as a synonym for proletariat. Literally, he refers to any person or group of inferior rank and station, whether because of race, class, gender, ethnicity or religion. Gramsci's explanation of the oppression of the bucolic peasantry in Southern Italy depicts the persisted oppression of the rural peasantry, the working class, and the untouchables in post-Independent Indian society.

INTRODUCTION

Subaltern is the term that refers to the inferior rank or person from the below strata of society. Antonio Gramsci first used the word subaltern in the essay 'On the Margins of History' that can be associated with the people of those group in the society who are the subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes. Subaltern classes may include the people who have denied access to hegemonic power come under this category like farmers, workers or woman. Gramsci claims that the history of the subaltern classes is as complex as the history of the dominant classes, although the history of the latter is usually accepted as official history. The history of subaltern group is generally fragmented and episodic, since they are always subject to the activities of the ruling class, even when they rebel. They have less access to the authorities of social, cultural, and political institutions as they have no power to represent.

Foucault stated that History ceases to be the forte of those who exercise power. So History will be the tool in the hands of elite and they projected their own perception while writing History. History written till now is one-sided, partial and biased. This kind of history is not able to show the true picture of the member of lower strata of society. The ruling class is having the control on these institutions and they

constructed the Other according to their own perception. West, powerful or the elite group cannot create history as they perceive the incidents or the events. History should be unbiased and impartial. True history is not restricted to superior group but it is also related to common people. The victory in any war cannot be assigned only to the king or the leader but it is also the effort of the soldiers who fought in the battlefield or the persons associated to them the contribution of these marginalized group can never be ignored.

THE SUBALTERN IN INDIA

Subaltern studies has drawn in its ambit more significantly political and economic history to understand and expose how the distribution of power and wealth throughout ages supported and promoted the interest of social group having political and economic power. Moreover by circulating the myth of the inferiority of the colonized and getting it re-informed through the education system, the colonizers get it internalized by the natives. Once that is done, this myth acquires a dimension in which the colonized views his status through the mirror of the colonizers. Therefore, it becomes essential for the subaltern studies group to include all the post-colonial intellectuals to recognize how certain social group has the position of advantage and the 'other' has been remained dispossessed. Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, Sumit Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and other contributors to the Subaltern Studies represent their engagement with a new kind of history writing that tries to identify with the 'subaltern' in sociology, history and politics prevailed in India from colonial age to independence and after.

VOICE OF THE VOICELESS: SUBALTERN

Marginalisation is when a person is pushed to the edge of society. This is a potential effect of discrimination because a person is made to stand out therefore feel like all alone and marginalized from the rest of society. In an era when issues relating to human rights have been under critical focus, literary depictions of the experiences of marginalized groups have acquired great significance. Literature as a mode of discursive articulation always endeavours to give voice to the marginal and it gives birth to the concept

of Fourth World Literature. Marginalization is a process of domination and subordination. All the movements of the marginalised and the literature produced by them are mutually supportive as they reflect the fourth world discourse, the discourse of the internally colonised people even in postcolonial countries (Dasan:16). It sensitizes us to the condition of the oppressed and the one who exists on the margin. The voice of the marginalized is mostly muted. Subjection and subjugation for generations turns an individual's existence into an everlasting hell. Thus, subaltern literature, unlike Marxist literature, does not talk about the class struggle but the struggle between castes, seen from the point of view of the lower caste, the minority, the marginal, the subaltern. The entire ideology of subaltern literature revolves around this. The term 'subaltern' and 'Dalit' are used as synonyms in general by many scholars and theologians in their recent writings but Dalit is the term much popularized in the Indian context by social activists of several Dalit movements of recent past. According to Babasahab Ambedkar, Dalithood is a kind of condition that characterizes the exploitation, suppression and marginalization of Dalit people by the social, economic, cultural and political domination of the upper castes' brahmanical ideolog. This started a new trend in Dalit writing and inspired many Dalits to come forward with their literary works in Indian languages. 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 are no more remained to be helpless they are equally stronger with other people of the society.

Often a question is raised whether the marginalized can speak. It is a fact that the marginalized cannot remain mute for long, they have to speak and find an outlet for their tears and fears, anguish and anger thus, register their existence. The marginalized subaltern never gets the centre stage. Where all action is shown in progress they remain "invisible" as always. 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. The voices resisting exploitation are fully aware of their own strength and dignity. Dalit writing is characterised by a new level of

subaltern pride, militancy, creativity and above all, the use of the pen as a weapon. Dalit literature gives a message about their community not individuality, about revolt not passivity, about progress not backwardness. Furthermore, authentic subaltern literature can be written by those who have suffered the marginalisation. Eleanor Zelliot has rightly said, 'Those in the Dalit School would say: Only Dalit can write it because only they have experienced the social as well as the economic problems of the lowest of castes. And when educated and no longer poor, they not only remember their childhood, they also suffer from the idea of pollution which remain strong in the Hindu mind and they identify with their village brothers and sisters when they claim their full human rights,'(1992) Only ash knows the experience of burning. It can be studied by all but created only by the subaltern class itself. No longer in need of outside representation; the memorable characters of this literature have now found the voice to express themselves. Dalit writers have learnt to assert their identity in a voice of their own. That is why writers have taken to writing autobiographies, for they see it as the most potent weapon. The growing corpus of Dalit texts, poems, novels and autobiographies, however, seek to rectify this phenomenon by examining the nuances of Dalit culture. Gayarti C Spivak, in her widely recognized essay *Can the subaltern speak?* states that it is impossible for the subaltern to speak without appropriating the dominant language or mode of representation and notes that any attempt to recover the voices, perspectives and subjectivities of the socially outcaste is heavily compromised. But here of course, the subaltern speak and write. M.F.Jilthe has rightly said 'the voiceless found a voice here; the wordless found a word here'. The voice of Dalits here is important in opening up new avenues for reading and interpreting texts. There is speaking and writing always and everywhere and even more where there is resistance to exploitation and oppression. We also have Frantz Fanon and of course, Homi Bhabha who argue in favour of the pathos of 'cultural confusion'. Attempts have been made to deal with the questions of marginalised identities through Dalit literature in India.

Dalit literature involves the subaltern voice of the woman as well. Dalit women are marginalized in three fold on the basis of caste, class and patriarchy. The plight of the women of these marginalized sections is all the more painful in which they offer an instance of triple marginalization. They are downtrodden among the downtrodden and Dalit of Dalits in Indian society. 'The time has come for Dalit writers not only to lament their subjugation but also to simultaneously celebrate with pride to the dauntless spirit of the Dalit women.' (Archana, 245) In this connection the women writers have given a vent not only to their plight as a second grade citizen in a male dominated society but have also represented the struggle and torment of the other unfortunate brethren. Among the Dalit women writers, Bama is a name that stands out. Her *Karukku* (2000) was not merely the first Dalit autobiography but it has a specific identity having written by a Dalit Christian women. It enjoys the unique recognition of seeing one of the first radical feminist discourse by a Tamil Dalit women. Writers like Arundhati Roy have depicted the inferior and discriminated status of a woman who is denied a life of her own. In her novel *The God of Small Things* Roy depicts the caste ridden Indian society and the subverted position of women. Apart from this, African- American women writers have greatly contributed to the literary scene in America. Nobel prize winning African-American women novelist Toni Morrison chronicled the lives and sufferings of the Black women in her fictional works like *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973) etc. Sufferings, anguish, protest and anger in the lives of African-American Women are effectively chronicled in the works of famous three Black sisters namely Clarence Majore's *Such was the Season* (1987) and *Emergency Exit* (1979), Ismael Read and Al Young's African journal *Quilt*, Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* (1982) is the story of a woman who is constantly raped by her step father and unable to narrate her shameful experience to anyone, write letters addressed to God. All these novels are narratives of resistance of the marginalised women who wage a struggle to seek their identity and their rightful place in a hostile society.

The age old existence of oppression, despair, and suffering is common in the lives of marginalized classes across countries and continents. Speaking

Subalterns examines the literatures of two marginalized groups, African- Americans in the United States and Dalits in India. Dalit literature is quite similar to the literature of blacks in USA or Nigros in Africa. The rights to live as human beings are denied to them. They have been remained powerless and voiceless for many centuries. A close examination of marginalization, suffering, violence and empowerment process reveals that Dalits in India and African-Americans in America have suffered a similar fate over the years. With the rise of marginal discourse, Dalits, Blacks and women have been prominently discussed in literature and it is a real scene that Dalits in India and Blacks in America and elsewhere have been the most exploited, subjugated and oppressed class. It is not difficult to recognize a certain parallel between blacks in America and Dalits in India. Ambedkar, who was actively involved in the national politics of India and drafted the Constitution of independent India, also highlighted the comparison between African-Americans and the Dalits. As a graduate student at Columbia University from 1913 to 1916, Ambedkar witnessed the growing consciousness among the Blacks and their struggle to claim their identity and humanity against the white supremacist oppression. Such first-hand experience helped him to develop a framework for the issue of caste segregation back home" (Kapoor:15). Aston (2001) in his book, *Dalit Literature and African American Literature: Literature of Marginality* explored how Dalit and African American writers have expressed their protest against the established order of society through their writings. History bears a witness to the double-marginalization of these groups on account of class, caste and race. We hear their voices of protest in their literatures focusing on the social, religious, casteist, race and colour oppression in which the Dalits in India and Blacks in Africa and some parts of America eke out their heavy burden of life. Their literature is indeed a creative excavation of their heritage. Influenced by Afro-American struggle for liberation and equality in the white dominated America, Dalits in Maharashtra united themselves to fight against the tyranny of caste/ race. They started Dalit panthers movement in 1972 and decided to spread awareness among the Dalits about their dehumanised experience and the need to

be liberated from the shackles of untouchability. Like Dalit writers in India, African-American writers have given expression in their writings in the United States to protest against the established order of the society that discriminates one man from another based on colour, race, and religion. Both writers feel that their literature has a social function and responsibility. Dalit writers further feel that literature should be a handmaid for social action. However, Dalits in India and their literature have some specific characteristics, which are not found in black or Nigro literature. Blacks and Nigros have faced racial discrimination; they were not untouchables like Dalits in India.

Prof. Gangadhar Pantawane, the editor of *Asmitadarsh* defines Dalit as 'Dalit is not a caste. He is a man exploited by the social and economic tradition of the country. He does not believe in God, rebirth, soul, holy books, teaching separation, fate, and heaven because they have made him a slave. He does believe in humanism. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution.' Dalit intellectuals could not only think it deeply but could also translate the pain of downtroddenness into words. This is known as Dalit literature. It has become a central point of the Indian literature and has encompassed a style and form that possesses a distinct identity. Expression of these experiences have long been silenced, often with religious and social sanction and relegated to the margins as non-literary. Dalit movement' is a powerful action in the present literature which changes the face of the society and it eliminates the subjugation of so called depressed class of the society. So, the basis for aesthetics of Dalit literature is pain, agony and torture. It has grown as a major body of literature from expression of the experience of sufferings of the Dalits to contest the hegemonic cultural discourse and expose its prejudices and to project an alternative aesthetics. Further Dalit literature envisages with identity formation and its assertion to regain the self confidence and self worth of the marginalized sections of our society. The aspect of rebuilding society on values which promote honour and dignity, justice and equality is the foremost agenda. Dalit autobiographies are recollections with a motive and are called as narratives of pain which carry certain historical truth. They serve as moral source for Dalit movement. After

centuries of silence, when the Dalit writers felt the need to express themselves, they could turn inward and talk about their own experiences. Autobiography thus became a fitting vehicle for this expression. Here, the self becomes the representative of all other Dalits who were crushed down because of their Dalit identity. 'Me-ism' gives way to 'our-ism' and superficial concerns about individual subject usually gives way to the collective subjection of the group. This literature has to shoulder an immense responsibility. It is a purposive, revolutionary, transformational and laboratory literature. It is a literature of commitment and hence has a powerful and pungent language of resistance. Anger, pathos and irony are three largely used devices to recognize this as a literature of protest. Dalit literature is essentially a voice of rebellion that opposes as well as exposes all forms of oppression and exploitation of the weak minority by the stronger majority. It makes its presence felt in the literary galleries. Dalit literary movement is not just a literal movement but it is the logo of social change and revolution where the primary aim is the liberation of Dalits. The protest against the establishment of the Dalits gained the very first expression amidst Dalit literature.

Dalitism corresponds to marginalisation and marginalisation denies basic human rights and social justice. Dalit literary movement not only concentrated on the political matters but also centred on human beings. When the God of the masses denies them the basic human rights, they will obviously turn to other source for justice. Dalit literature is making its presence felt in the literary galleries. Dalit writers of the day are giving a clarion call for a new value system that can keep humanity intact and integrated. The struggle for human dignity and self-respect is the predominant subject in Dalit literature which the primary sources of modernity. The human dignity could not be attained only through fulfillment of social and economic equality. Citizenship is the pre-requisite in democracy for its functioning. It is negated due to its casteist nature in case of Dalits. It can open-up a new globe for those who want to live with freedom and respect. Just as the Russian writers helped the revolution by spreading Lenin's revolutionary ideas, Dalit writers have spread Ambedkar's philosophy to

the villages. Dr. M.N. Wankhede asserts that the pens of Dalit writers are ready as levers to lift the people's democracy out of the mud of anarchy. Dalit writers have learnt to assert their concerns and their identity in a voice of their own.

Dalit literature is the literature produced by Dalit consciousness. According to Omprakash Valmiki (2001) the Dalit *chetna* (consciousness) is a elemental in opposing the cultural inheritance of the upper castes, the notion that culture is a hereditary right for them and one that is denied to the Dalits. He suggests, Dalit *chetna* is deeply concerned with "who am I ?" "what is my identity?" The strength of characters of Dalit authors come from these question. (PP.28-29) Today Dalit writers have their literary foundation with ideology and publish numerous journals. They also have a number of political organizations supporting them. The most prominent of these is the Dalit panthers, which has borrowed much of its ideology from America's Black panthers. The future of Dalit literature is embarked on the present status of Dalit and their sensibility. And certainly new reforming waves are blowing for the radical development in Dalit literature as literature of protest. Thus Dalit literature is a new dimension in the day today and used up literature. Dalit literature has to instill a tone of immediacy, intensity, violence and strong disapproval of casteism through strong language. S.P. Punalekar's views are worth mentioning here, 'Dalit writers themselves are either victims or witness to social inequalities and violence. Some have direct or indirect links with social, political and cultural organisations of Dalits. A few among them are staunch social activists and use literature a vehicle to propagate their views on Dalit identity and the prevailing social consciousness'(1992,p243). Dalit literature wants to stimulate the readers to transform the society. Dalit writers realised that words could create a change more powerfully than weapons could. To conclude, I fully endorse the views of Dr. Vijay Naganawar that as Dalit writers had to write about their lamentable conditions they had not only to speak but also be heard by upper-caste people. As it is a literature of protest against inequality and ill treatment in all spheres of life the problems of Dalits' 'voiced' once gets faded away, so they need to be 'voiced' repeatedly and loudly against

cultural hegemony of the caste Hindus which till now has remained intact(p.32). Dalit literature is the literature produced by Dalit consciousness. It gives voice to the oppressed and marginalised people and empowers them to question and contest existing power structure of society. The future of Dalit literature is bright and certainly new reforming waves are blowing for the radical development in Dalit literature as literature of protest. So, voice of the voiceless is voiced here and that should be heard by society and the mainstream as well.

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