



DALIT LITERATURE: A GENRE OF 'HUMANIZATION'

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ABSTRACT

From a literary and sociological point of view Dalit literature is overlooked and disregarded by the Indian mainstream writers as though it does not have any function, role and responsibility in creation of knowledge, culture and history of a particular section of the society. Furthermore, it's form, content and language has been called into question, into debate and into argument by the many extremists' writers who always have held and advocated the literature of fantasy, illusion, romanticism and spiritualism and therefore termed Dalit literature as insignificant and trivial. Unlike the mainstream literature, Dalit literature has taken an extreme step and a different path in documenting and narrating the hard realities of Dalit identity and Dalit culture and has emphasized and advocated the phenomenon called 'Humanism' which is considered as the spirit and breathes of Dalit literature by practicing and adopting a new form of writings. The paper aims to present critical study how Dalit literature can and could transform and humanize the lives of upper caste communities.

Keywords: *Dalit literature, Mainstream literature, Humanization, Hindu caste, Society, India.*



"Literature is the humanization of the whole world"[1] said, Goethe. If literature means humanization, Dalit literature, has contributed and has been contributing significantly for the humanization of the Indian societies. Their mission was not just the humanization, but elevation of animosity to humanity. It is the Dalit writers and activists from the inspiration of Dr B.R Ambedkar and Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, the first humanists who worked assiduously for the cause that have stirred up Dalit writers and activists to work rigorously towards the humanity and morality. If Dalit writing and movement are considered the two sides of the same coin, then, it is the Dalit consciousness that have integrated both to transport Dalits into higher realms of consciousness. The influence of Dr B.R Ambedkar and Mahatma Phule on Dalit writers and activists has been profound. Essentially, the spirit and voice of Dr B.R Ambedkar and Mahatma Phule have been great impact on the lives of Dalit communities who have seen them as the first humanists who cared and concerned for the underprivileged, disadvantaged and marginalized. While the voice of upper caste men is that of politics of disintegration, discrimination, and exploitation. The very fact of the birth of Dalit literature in India conforms the creation of a new society (humanization). In the discriminated, exploited and marginalized soil of India, every aspect of Dalit life is dealt with from the background of writing and activism with the spirit of Dalit consciousness. This can also be seen in Dr B.R Ambedkar and Mahatma Phule.

To consider and mull the precise mission and vision of Dalit literature towards the definition of 'Humanization' is all around clarified with the strong and substantial view focuses from a few dalit writers have a place with Dalit literature. Dalit literature can be surely knew and got a handle on by the words Baburao Ramji Bagul, a Marathi dalit writer and pioneer of modern literature in Marathi, who broadly composes the embodiment and soul of what Dalit literature has the part towards the meaning of 'Humanization':

Dalit Sahitya is not a literature of vengeance. Dalit sahitya is not a literature which spreads the hatred. Dalit sahitya first promotes man's greatness and man's

freedom and for that reason it is not an historic necessity.... Anguish, waiting, pronouncements of sorrow alone do not define Dalit literature. We want literature heroically full of life for the creation of a (new) society[2].

Towards the definition of Humanization Dr. Amarnath Prasad has well spoken about it. He is an outstanding editorial manager and writer of more than twelve standard books of Indian writings in English speaks out in *Dalit Literature: A Critical Exploration* (2007):

Dalits are getting education. They come forward with their power of pen. They have started to write their sufferings, in their own tongues, first in regional languages, then in international language. In various literary forms they used their hands. Their protest is not the revenge on the particular caste or section, but their fury is the strong demand of their existence as human beings and fellow citizens of Republic of India.[3]

Victor Hugo, a French novelist, poet, playwright and historian once said "No power on earth can stop an idea whose time has come".[4] Perhaps it is most relevant and befitting expression. It seems that the emergence of Dalit literature as a major literary movement in India happens to be one such idea. Let the whole India hear it loud and clear. Dalit literature is now quite wide awake about its mission and vision of prevailing and overcoming the hurdle of caste.

The above remarks and comments made by the dalit ideologues on Dalit literature that implies it has got a sole responsibility of humanizing and transforming the Indian society with its writing and movement by its Dalit consciousness. The spirit and breath of Dalit literature is to propagate the philosophical message of Dr B.R Ambedkar's dictum liberty, equality and fraternity which are inherent elements of humanization.

In fact, the era of Humanization begins with the advent of Dr B.R Ambedkar into the dark Indian society. We know that Dr B.R Ambedkar envisioned a casteless and classless society in which he advocated ardently the egalitarian and democratic principles such as fraternity, equality and liberty. The primary vision and mission of Dr B.R Ambedkar is to see that



Indian society be humanized with the eradication of caste from the minds of people. Tracing and investigating Dr. B.R Ambedkar's writings give a vivid picture that he had written with a purpose of humanizing the entire society of India which is full of caste practices. His works like *Mukanayak*, *Bahishkrut Bharat* and *Prabuddha Bharat* are written neither for revenge taking nor for protesting but to highlight the cause for discrimination of Dalits and to bring change in the wretched mentality of caste Hindus.

"Know Truth as Truth and Untruth as Untruth"[5] — Buddha. What the quotation speaks about realistically? What it denotes literally? It denotes that do not misrepresent or distort the facts or fabricate the truth. So if you do not misrepresent and twist the truth definitely you will be set free from the clutches of evils. But if you twist truth as untruth definitely, it is not going to spare you out. You will fall in the trap of snare. Let us see it in the light of Dr B.R Ambedkar. What is his perception of truth? What is his experiment of truth? What did he believe in?

If we trace the history of Dalit ideologues like Gautama Buddha, Mahatma Phule and Dr B.R Ambedkar how they perceived the truth as truth? What inspired them to see truth as truth and Untruth as Untruth? The very answer lies in the perceptibility of truth as truth advents from the lineage of Buddha, thereby the trio have seen the ongoing inequalities, discrimination, violence, oppression on the line of created and twisted (un)truth by the high caste community leaders like Gandhi and Nehru who gave a kind of utopian world vision to the marginalized and oppressed Dalits and subalterns. Gandhi and Nehru sidelined and bypassed the truth of the Indian social condition prevailed at that time. The duos have not taken up the truth which is prevailing at that time. What was truth during the time of Gandhi and Nehru? It was of the practice of untouchability, the practice of caste discrimination, the practice of gender discrimination. If they envisioned India to be freed from White rule of British, they would have also envisioned India to be freed from Black rule of Brahmanism. They have accomplished and succeeded in getting political power, social power and economic power from British to invest in the hands of Brahmins but they have failed to bring equality, fraternity and

liberty to the Dalits and subalterns. So, they failed in seeing truth as truth and untruth as untruth. What about the trio of Dalits experience with truth? The trio Gautama Buddha, Mahatma Phule and Dr. B.R Ambedkar have had constantly engaged with the truth of Indian society which was facing severe caste practices and discrimination. They are in touch with the truth; they knew how to see truth as truth. It is there experience with their selves and with Dalits and subalterns has set them to see truth as truth and untruth as untruth. As Arjun Dangle argues in his *Poisoned Bread*:

Gautam Buddha and Phule revolted against the unjust class structure and while it is true their teachings and ideas are inspiring even today, a historical and objective examination of the situation reveals that it was Dr B.R Ambedkar who was the enabling factor in Dalit literature because of his ideas, outlook towards life and his struggle to achieve what he felt just. Through his struggle against untouchability and socio-economic inequality, he liberated the Dalits in India from mental slavery and abject wretchedness, thus giving them a new self-respect.[6]

Before I defend my arguments with regards to humanization of Indian dark society, I would like to introduce the meaning of the concept that we are talking about. What do we mean by the term 'Humanization'? First let us look for the general meaning of the word. The word denotes that it is the process of becoming human. What does it mean the process of becoming human? Here the process of becoming human does not relate to the historical evolution of man how man has evolved from primitive age to the modern age but it has to be noted that it refers to the transformation of one's mind perspective and attitude that one holds of beliefs, practices, customs and traditions within the created and fabricated world. In other words, it is becoming human means embracing and accepting the beliefs, practices, customs and traditions of the marginalized, the oppressed, and the disadvantaged and under privileged entities as one and the same without causing any amount of damage.



In fact, Dalit writing rose out for affirming and asserting one's identity and culture. It developed out for offering criticalness to the overlooked history, tradition, customs and beliefs. Every one of these things should be found out and reaffirmed and deliver to the fore front of the socio-literary circle. The essential classes of Dalit writing, for example identity and culture, voice and recognition must be found and arranged inside the domain of socio-political and abstract field that makes each dalit author and activist to acculturate the high position groups who are empowering and abetting the range of savagery and separation on the Dalits should be re-confined and re-organized through Dalit account frames.

Dalit literature is the literature of the self and the community. It is the literature of realization, affirmation and assertion of Identity and Culture. It is not only self-realization of the Dalits but also self-realization and humanization of upper caste communities. About Dalit literature, Pramod, K. Nayar says that "It is the reconstruction of the self after the traumatic events".[7] How is and will elite start realizing or humanizing? They start realizing or humanizing only when dalit identity and culture is exposed to them in the form of writing or speaking. This can be done through the literature by writing the poems, short-stories, novels, plays, biography and autobiography, in which contain the phenomenon of oppression, subjugation, discrimination, sufferings and pains of Dalit whose narration contains the phenomenology of the truth, the fact and the reality but not fiction, suspension, mystery, thrilling as English novels do contain.

In fact to supplement with more evidence, Arjun Dangle, a Marathi Dalit writer argues that "Dalit literature looks at reality with open eyes. It views history objectively and from a sociological point of view. It is more parallel to life and this posses a number of problems and the question of 'myths' as stated above whereas mainstream writing cut off from reality".[8] Dalit literature mostly documents the truth about the subordination, oppression, exploitation, discrimination, dissent and protest. This is the truth about Dalit literature. As we find the elements like fairy tales, fantasy, fiction, myth, imagination, mystery, suspension in

mainstream literature, we never trace such elements being applied in Dalit literature. Dalit literature's form and content are taken from the sufferings and pains of individual self as well as community.

However, Dalit writing when all is said in done and specific can acquire change the mindset of tip top individuals who have a negative recognition about Dalit's character and culture. They have a wrong thought that Dalits are inadequate in specific spaces of writing, music and expressions. Despite the fact that the Dalit writing is composed for communicating one's despondency, torment, enduring and anguish, it affects the lives of world class individuals which can go about as a weapon of changing the lives of first class culture. Prof. K. Purushotham, a Telugu Dalit writer and critic unveils the errand of Dalit men and women so as to transform the society into a casteless society. He remarks "The real heinous thing, which is in their minds, let's be united my Dalits, let's cleanse the shit of their minds, let's transform them into humans. Let's unveil a new human of togetherness".[9] Such errand of change of society into castelessness is conceivable just to dalit men and women as they are the most noticeably bad casualties of standing separation and it is they who know how to function towards the demolition of caste and gender.

Baburao Bagul characterizes the nature and part of dalit writing in light of the fact that dalit writing appeared from one specific segments of the general public who were and have been segregated, misused and embarrassed for a long time. He guarantees professedly that dalit writing is made to address the anguish, outcry, segregation, abuse and embarrassment confronted by the Dalits from tip top area of the general public to retouch the methods for taking a gander at the truth of Indian culture. Arjun Dangle, the author of *Poisoned Bread* (1992) has spoken about Dalit literature towards the definition of humanization such as, "Dalit literature is not simply literature; it is associated with a movement to bring about change. It represents the hopes and ambitions of a new society and new people".[10] Arjun Dangle makes it clear that Dalit literature is created with a purpose of bringing change in the society which has fully neglected one sections of society called Dalits. He strongly remarks that Dalit



literature is the one which nourishes the hopes and ambitions of Dalits in creating a new society.

Sharankumar Limbale, a Modern Marathi Dalit writer speaks about the nature and role of dalit literature towards the definition of humanization:

By Dalit literature, I mean writing about Dalits by Dalit writers with a Dalit consciousness. The form of Dalit literature is inherent in its Dalitness, as its purpose is obvious; to inform Dalit society of its slavery, and narrate its pain and suffering to upper caste Hindus.[11]

Limbale in addition states that Dalit literature is precisely that literature which artistically portrays the sorrow, tribulations, slavery, degradation, ridicule and poverty endured by Dalits. This literature is but a lofty image of grief. Every human being must find liberty, honor, security and freedom from intimidation by the powerful elements of society. These values are now being articulated in a particular kind of literature- its name being Dalit literature.[12]

Waman Nimbalkar, a Marathi Dalit Writer defines the underlying principles of what exactly the Dalit literature has got the role to play towards the definition of Humanization? He speaks out allegedly that being a Dalit and to possess Dalit consciousness are two different things. Literature that is created with Dalit consciousness about Dalit life is Dalit literature[13]

Nonetheless, in Dalit literature we examine a distinct kind of literary characteristics and features are being applied in the text that would modify the literary text from other kind of texts. The books written by dalit men and women carry a heavy meaning in each and every word because they come from the depth of their heart and mind. As Bama speaks in her novel *Karukku* (1992) "That book was written as a means of healing my inward wounds".[14] These words tell us that a dalit text is seen as a text of curing and healing of both the individual self as well as collective self. Therefore, a dalit text is seen as a double edged sword which transforms one's soul as well as the larger society through one's writing.

Especially, Dalit women writings as a unique genre (of women contribution to societal transformation) apart from dalit literature have been

gaining attention from various sections of the society. Dalit women writings have an impact on society both at regional, national and international level due to their focus on justice and equality. Kancha Ilaiah is an Indian academic writer and activist for Dalit rights remarks that, "We must construct our narratives and create our own texts. No doubt, these will be a new narratives and new texts. The language of such narratives and texts will be our own and it will naturally, differ from the language of others".[15]

As Sharmila Rege underscores "Dalit narratives perform a double function: they inflict an inferiority complex in the minds of adversaries and brings out guilt in the minds of upper castes by recording social wrongs done by them".[16] A similar kind of expression can be traced from K. Purushottam who quotes a saint poet Potuluri Veerabrahmam's in his "Telugu Dalit Poetry: an Overview" He speaks out:

The time is impending when everyone subordinates you, the fortune of reigning the empires would be ripe, my words are but sure to materialize the same people that scolded you, will be healed of their stupidity, when themselves begin to adulate you.[17]

Though the words might look like a mosaic, archaic and unattractive in the dalit literary texts, they have a kind of electric vibration and energy that makes every reader to be part of the Dalit experience and get humanized. For instance, M S S Pandian in his article "Writing Ordinary Lives" writes about the healing that brings upon the dominant caste groups by dalit texts. His contention is that dominant caste groups will invariably have a notion of unworthiness and unfit, the moment they encounter writings by lower caste groups. He critically observes that both Bama's *Karukku* (1992) and Gunashekar's *Vadu* (2004) bring change in the wretched mentality of crookedness of upper caste people.

We can see this in the words of upper caste boy saying to Gunashekar, the writer himself "Forgive me. I shouted to disrupt your singing. I realized later the melodiousness of your voice. I judged you wrongly on the basis of your caste and without realizing your talent". (Gunashekar as qtd. in Pandian)[18] A similar sort of experience can be traced from the text *Karukku*, "My teachers and the



sisters who taught me praised me. They treated me with affection. I was thrilled. I was asked to teach other children who are not good in studies. Because of my teaching they scored good marks" (Bama as qtd. in Pandian)[19] Here, Bama says that she was treated very badly within the school campus by her teachers and sisters. The moment, they realize that she is a brilliant girl who can teach other boys and girls in the classroom, she was appreciated and praised by her teachers and sisters who were ignorant of her talent and capabilities.

CONCLUSION

Arjun Dangle, a significant Marathi Dalit writer and one of the activists in Dalit panther says in "Past, Present and Future of Dalit Literature" that "The creation of Dalit literature is inevitable, until the structure of society changes and as long as exploitation exists".[20] Since the inception of Dalit literature, it has been working towards its goal, mission and vision of humanizing the Indian societies through its literary forms like poetry, short-stories, novels and public debates and movement. As stated above, Dalit literature is evergreen flourishing literature that voices out perennially for a social change, cultural change, historical change and political change until the Indian upper caste community gets humanized.

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