

## A critical discourse on Dalit Literature and Literary Theory

Gokul Hanumantrao Norwase

Assistant Professor Department of English

Shankarrao Patil Mahavidyalaya, Bhoom Dist. Osmanabad. 413504 (Maharashtra)

According to the hymn in India, Brahmins were born from the mouth of Brahma, Kshatriyas were born from his shoulder, Vaishyas from his thighs, while the Shudras were born from his feet. Therefore, the Brahmins are considered as most superior, while the Shudras are at the lowest position in hierarchy. Shudras were considered to be the untouchables and were named as "Dalit" by Mahatma Jyotiba Phule. The term Dalit became the new identity of the oppressed and depressed social class in India. Dalit Literature can be considered as the literary compositions that are based on the caste system in India and explains the oppression and pain experienced by Dalits and therefore by considering this fact into consideration it would not be wrong to state that, in spite of having history of Dalit literature which can be traced back to centuries, dalit literature was not given its due place in the field of literary production in India, which is also influenced by caste nuances.

Caste system has been very significant problem in the Indian history. Due to the significant belief in the religious scripture, Dalits were considered to be the lowest caste and untouchables and mainly the inferior class of the society. They were denied their basic rights and were only assigned to inferior activities in the economic system, such as doing leather work, cleaning streets, removing the carcasses of dead animal and most of all were not allowed to get education. The civilized Hindu society segregated and prohibited such people from social activities and mainstream traditions.

Due to the caste system, Dalits were denied education and basic amenities and their history was mainly oral. Due to the restriction of education, Dalits do not have a written history. It was Dr. Bheem Rao Ambedkar stressed on the literary assertion to explain the world regarding the struggle of Dalits against caste system. Therefore, Dalit literature developed as a movement of the Dalits who started writing powerful stories regarding their experience. Therefore, the poems, stories, biographies, novels, autobiographies, which were written by Dalit writers took the form of a new body of literature, which was called as "Dalit Literature".

Dalit Literature is mainly considered as the Post-Independence literary phenomenon. The emergence of Dalit literature is mainly associated with the causes and effect of the very long struggle and oppression. Dalit Literature can be defined as "one which acquaints people with the caste system and untouchability in India. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary". The Dalit literature firstly evolved in Marathi language and was developed as the form of social awareness. Some of the early authors of Dalit literature from Maharashtra are "Anna Bhau Sathé, Shankarrao Kharat, Baburao Bagul, Namdeo Dhasal, Raja Dhale, Daya Pawar, Waman Nimbalkar, Arjun Dangale, Yogiraj Waghmare".

Therefore, this new body of literature, took the form of the movement and the revolution that displayed the unseen reality of India, which was brutal inhuman and Maharashtra was at the forefront of this revolution, as most of the early Dalit writers, who were responsible for shaping the theoretical discourse of literature were from Maharashtra. When the Dalit Literature firstly appeared, it was rejected as the form of literature, because of the lack of theory in literature. Therefore, the Dalit authors focused on theorising the literature and developing a Dalit literary theory. Baburao Bagul's work, *Dalit Sahityache Krantivigyan* (that could be translated as 'Revolutionary Science of Dalit Literature') was the first and most significant attempt made by the author to develop the Dalit literary theory.

According to the study of Jalote (n.d.) Dalit literary theory have the similarity with the subaltern literatures of Africa American literature. This theory can also be considered as indigenous and deeply rooted in the history, culture and politics of Dalits. Therefore, the theory gave a significant direction to Dalit Literature. Dalit literary theory was further broadened by Sharankumar Limbale through his autobiographical book autobiographical book, "Akkarmashi". The development of the literary theory is associated with the development of the literary objects in literature. Limbale's theoretical formulation is mainly based on the ignorance of Brahminical agency, which also resulted in gaining the attention of the world-wide scholars. Dalit writers started writing about their identity, humanity and reclaiming their personhood. The Dalit writers started exploring the various genres and also the work of Limbale in his various books displayed a theoretical approach to explain the position, history and political status of Dalits. He also took reference from the Marxist, Black and Russian literature in order to illustrate the trajectories of Dalit experience.

The main theoretical aspects of the Dalit literature include, explanation of suffering, displaying rejection and rebellion, developing social commitment, denying God and soul, focusing on self-realization, advocating independence, equality and rights and opposing Brahminism and varna system. The Dalit literary theories are based on the various ideologies which also based on self-image and self-esteem. The literary



theory developed through the political consciousness of the Dalits and also worked as the functional catalyst. The literary theory of the Dalit literature is about shaping the identity of Dalits. Therefore, the question of identity is central to Dalit literature and Dalit literary theory, which enforces the dignified human life and equality and based their visionary transformation of the society towards forming the egalitarian social system.

In addition to built an identity, Dalit literature is also based on making an effort to gain international attention and to highlight the caste-based discrimination in international forums. Therefore, the development of the Dalit literary theory can be considered to be based on Racism and classicism that had been used by the authors to explain the oppression and traumatic condition of the African-Americans. Such examples have been used by the Dalit writers, which had resulted in ceasing the consideration towards Dalit as human beings. Therefore, it can also be said that Dalit literary theory has made the Dalit literature to be inevitable till the existence of discrimination and exploitation in the society. Therefore, some authors have also stated that Dalit literature has commenced as the literature associated with protest that focuses to incorporate a human race and to promote aesthetic justice. Dalit literature is not monotype, but theory literary theory it has evolved to promote secular values of liberty, equality, individuality and fraternity.

Dalit writers have used the Dalit literary criticism as the theoretical tool. Dalit 'Chetna' or Dalit consciousness, which has also become the emerging theory of the Dalit aesthetics. Therefore, the theory is based on the consciousness that has also worked as a revolutionary mentality connected with the oppression and struggle of Dalits. Dalit consciousness is unique, separate and different from the consciousness of other writers and this is the reason that Dalit literature is demarcated as unique because of this consciousness. Lambale has also stated that Dalit consciousness or Dalit Chetna is the most essential attribute of Dalit literature. One major aspect of Dalit Chetna is the inclusion of the Buddha's rationality with this consciousness, which rejects the concept of God and soul and thus, rejects the hypocrisy created by Hindu culture and laws. This theory also promotes the development of caste-less and class-less society and displays the rejection of superiority, supremacy and feudalism.

While focussing on evolution and development of Dalit Literature and Dalit literary theory it can be concluded that Dalit literature has developed from the experience and struggle of the Dalits and Dalit writers; and scholars have focused on developing Dalit Consciousness. Dalit consciousness is also called as Dalit Chetna that enforces the consciousness of Dalit writers towards equality, equal treatment, and rejecting discrimination and inequality based on caste or class. The emergence and development of Dalit literature has been very significant for getting the attention of world towards the assertion of human dignity and justice.

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