
Dalit Literature: An Insurrectionary Voice

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Abstract

Dalit literature is a voice of the subjugated laden section of the society. Dalit movement is a struggle that tries to carve the niche for impartiality. No other medium could be more influential than literary works to show the existence of any movement. Dalit literature has played an important role in it. Writers share their own experiences of social and communal iniquity. Their writings were the outburst of their suppressed feelings which continued for ages. This paper aims to present the facts regarding the contemporary province of Dalit literature with precise reference to autobiography of Dr Sharankuma Limbale, feminist writing of Bhama and Dalit writing by non- Dalit writer Mulkraj Anand.

Keywords: Impartiality, Communal, Auto- Narratives, shunned, oddities, elevated

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Dalits have been victimized on the financial, communal and political grounds since time immemorial. They have never been given a chance to amalgamate with the other section of the society, particularly the so-called upper section of the society. Their livelihood has been dependent on mean and disgraceful works and have been referred as the 'untouchables' by the elevated segment. This prejudice was the legacy of Hindu culture and custom. The Dalits have been left to live life as shunned in poor state.

One important section of the population in India is obligatorily being the prey of communal discernment. This caste based variance in society prevails in the basic rights including education, life-style, occupation and socialization and thus the segregation amplifies violence.

According to *Manusmriti*, the society was divided into caste system primarily based on the occupation of the people: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra. The Dalit cast was kept in the fifth *varna*. The Dalits were traditionally engaged in the works and professions socially considered inferior, and hence they were rejected and outcaste by the caste Hindu.

At the time of independence, the Dalits still lingered in the lowest strata of the society. When the constitution was formed in 1950, the Dalits were not given equal rights and dignity. Regardless of the constitution's pledge towards the right of equality, the primitive structure of inequality could not be removed. This was the pivotal point from where the Dalit Movement took off.

The key issue of the Dalit Movement has been the focus on the problem of untouchability. Though there were no evidence when the movement came into existence exactly, the terms Dalit Literature were first coined in 1958 when the first 'Dalit Conference' took place. The victims (or the dalits) propelled the movements for reservations in almost all sectors of public services.

The Dalit Literature is a voice of the subjugated laden section of the society.

The name Dalit came into existence in the nineteenth century, it was the founder of our Indian constitution Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar who first used the term.

The Dalit movement is a struggle that tries to eliminate impartiality of all sorts. No other medium could be more influential than the Dalit literary works to show the existence of any movement. The Dalit literature played an important role in it.

The Dalit Literature is a new genre in the canon of Indian literature, where the Dalit writers share their intolerable and bitter truth experiences and the non-Dalit writers express the trauma of the Dalits they go through. This medium of writing is not only against the biased mentality of the upper caste but also deals with the people whose disposition is maligned towards the weaker section. The style of these writings is traditional but very expressive be it Dalit poetry, folk poetry, novels, short stories and the most effective style of this medium is 'Dalit Auto Narratives'. Writers share their own experiences of social and communal iniquity. Their writings were the outburst of their suppressed feelings, which has come down from generations. The Educated Dalits are spreading awareness and making oppressed acquaint with their rights through their intellectual discourse.

This paper depicts neither prejudice nor is against any set rules of the society but presents the facts regarding the contemporary province of the Dalit literature with precise reference to the autobiography of Dr Sharankuma Limbale, feminist writing Bhama and Dalit writing by non- Dalit writer Mulkraj Anand.

Dr Sharankumar Limbale wrote his autobiography *Akkarmashi* in 1984 in Marathi which was later translated in English with the title *The Outcaste*. Dr Limbale's father belonged to the high caste while the mother was from the untouchable class. Dr Limbale wrote in the Acknowledgement of *The Outcaste*

'My history is my mother's life; at the most my grandmother's. my mother is an untouchable, while my father is a high caste from one of the privileged classes of India. Mother lives in a hut, father lives in a mansion, Father is a land lord; mother, landless. I am an *Akkarmashi* (half-caste). I am condemned, branded illegitimate.'²

Dr Sharankumar lived the life of an oppressed, untouchable *Akkarmashi* (half- caste). He was treated as untouchable by the high class society and he was called and subdued by being addressed as *akkarmashi* by the society.

Dr Sharankumar unfolds his story, 'Ithal Kamble toiled on the farm by Hanmanta Limbale, a Patil, who helped him during hard times. But while helping Ithal Kamble, the Patil's intention was quite different.'³

The mala fide intentions of the landlord for Kamble's wife forced her to get separated from her family and live the life of a courtesan of the landlord. Dr Sharankumar carried the burden of this label, of being the child of an illegitimate relationship, all his life. He mentions about being considered an illegitimate child in his book. He claims that, 'I was growing like

Karna in the Mahabharata⁴ (p. 37). The author leads all his life with the identity crisis. His mother was married to Kamble, but she had to leave her husband and two sons. The chief of a village was Dr Sharankumar's father so he was privileged enough to get a chance to go to school but he had always suffered discarded attitude of the world around him and he could never justify his existence and communal identity because of different caste and status of his mother and father. His grandmother lived with a Muslim, so she also could not give her identity as his guardian. When Dr Sharankumar reached the age of marriage, his outcaste identity became a hurdle again. In Dr Sharankumar's autobiography we can observe the oppression of the Dalit class inflicted by prerogative class of the society.

'Woman is the earth, air, sound; woman is the microcosm of the mind, the articulation of space, the knowing in knowledge; the knowledge in fire, movement clear and rapid as the mountain stream; the woman is that which seeks against that which is sought. To Mitra she is Varuna, to Indra she is Agni, to Rama she is Sita, to Krishna she is Radha. Woman is the meaning of the word, the breathe, touch, act; woman, that which reminds man of which he is, reminds herself through him of that which she be. Woman is kingdom, solitude, time; woman is growth, the Gods, inherence; woman is the death, for it is through woman that one is born; woman rules, for it is she, the universe.'⁵

Feminism is about celebrating equal rights of women to men with respect to social, communal positioning. If equal rights are not delivered, we actually deny equal weightage to half of the people of the world. When we consider Dalit feminism, it is doubly oppressed and humiliated section of the society.

In the Dalit society also, there is a gender discrimination as it is in the upper castes. Rather, the Dalit women are more affected and oppressed on the basis of gender and caste system. They are illiterate, unaware and uneducated and highly dependent either on their male counterparts or on very low grade work. . They are sexually assaulted also by the upper caste males. As the modern women are in the effort to establish their independent identity so the Dalit women are struggling. Karukku, a very prominent writing written by Faustina Mary (Bama), one of the first Dalit writers is an example of this struggle. Woman's quest for identity and respect was a key factor in Bama's writing. Women are deprived of the freedom and if she comes out she will be assaulted mentally and physically.

Mulk Raj Anand, the renowned novelist exhibits his in-depth discernment towards the degraded and disgraceful life of the Dalits in India. Mulk Raj Anand is an anglo-Indian novelist and wrote about women, dalit and other social issues.. Mulkraj Anand, in his novel 'Untouchable' tried to change the Indian perspective for the Dalits. He was rather shunned because of the strict laws of the caste system at that time.

'Bhaka', the protagonist in *Untouchable*, is an untouchable and outcast boy. *Untouchable* depicts a day in the life of Bakha, which unmasks coarse reality of the Dalits and their struggle for justice and fight against all odds. Bhaka never likes his work of cleaning toilet . He wanted to study. Bakha always had a substantial longing to study. He often tried to feel like a learned man. He even tried for self-study but his efforts failed. He was ready to employ Babu's son to give him tuitions in the evening. The novel revolves around the innovative idea and fundamental right of education of a dalit (untouchable). The writer paints the character of Baka to function as a work force to continue the message of 'existing peacefully together' by Mahtma Gandhi. Mulk Raj Anand presents some notions and responses to the ill -practice of untouchability.

When the Dalit writers or non-Dalit writers investigate the plight of the Dalits, they indulge themselves in criticizing and condemning the Brahmins and the upper castes and praise Christianity where no caste system is followed. They explain that Christianity brings them into existence without any fear of untouchability, whereas, Bama, the female protagonist of *Karukku*, shows a different side of this reality. After completing her training as a nun, Bama started working in a Christian school where upper caste Christians and the Dalits (converted Christians) studied together,

'... pupils from very wealthy households, people of my community were looking after all the jobs like sweeping the premises, swabbing and washing the classrooms, and cleaning out the lavatories.'⁶

In *Untouchable*, Bhaka was fearful of such unequal treatment. After hearing the words of wisdom of Mahatma Gandhi and his preaching for removing untouchability, Bhaka was so influenced that he started respecting everyone who voices for the upliftment and the rights of his community.

To conclude the Dalit literature is not only a new genre of writing for the sake of reading pleasure but it serves the purpose of revolutionary writing. The Dalit writing is a strong voice for radical transformation in the fundamental rights. Just like other writings of the marginalized and suppressed class i.e. Black literature and feminist writing, the Dalit literature has the capability to raise voice against all the injustice suffered by the downtrodden.

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