

**DALIT LITERATURE : A NEW HORIZON**

**Neha Kanaujia**

Assistant Professor  
Government Degree College,  
Jaunpur, (U.P.) 222170

Gone are the days when we used to see the Dalit characters through the eyes of non-Dalit writers where a cringing creature never had a courage to stand upright before his master. But now, for the Dalits in India, a new sun has risen in a new horizon where they are free to fly, soar as high as they wish and this new horizon is named as Dalit literature. This literature truthfully portrays not only their sufferings, their pain and pangs but also their courage and resistance. The following lines by J. V. Pawar from his poem *It's Reddening on the Horizon* bring out the force and vigour of Dalit poetry:

These twisted fists won't loosen now  
The coming revolution won't wait for you.  
We have endured enough; no more endurance now.  
Won't do letting down your blood's call to arms

The lines invoke the Dalit masses and give us a glimpse of Dalit awakening in post-Ambedkarite era. It was a time when many young Dalit men, inspired by the philosophy of Babasaheb or under the impact of his social, literary and political writings, were producing fiery literature and thus causing stir in the minds of Dalits. Dalit literature was emerging as a strong medium of expression and articulation for Dalits .

Babasaheb's ideology, his life and works are the true inspiration for Dalit literature. He published a number of newspapers and magazines. He wrote many books regarding the history of Dalits or Shurdas along with poetry and stories. But chiefly, the newspapers were a channel for communication, their contents spreading awareness, somehow among a people whose literary rate was less than three percent. Ambedkar himself did not produce much creative literature but the trend of revolutionary thinking that he shaped in the mind of the Dalit youth manifested itself in the form of Dalit literature. Some of his serious articles in Marathi were published in his own periodicals like *Mukanayak*, *Bahishkrut Bharat* and *Prabuddha Bharat*. His major writings were available in English. The literature written around 1950 appeared chiefly in *Prabuddha Bharat*, the mouthpiece of Republican Party of India and in the Dalit magazines brought out at the time of Dr. Ambedkar's birth anniversary

Babasaheb's idea about literature was very clear. He accorded the highest place to humanism. Inspired by him, Dalit literature holds the human being to its focal point. He strongly felt that there should be a mass movement against such literature that supported inequality. That was why he not only rejected *Manusmriti* but also publically burned it. According to him every literature must be accountable to society and to humanity. This humanity is the religion of Dalit literature. It encourages human liberation, believes in the greatness of human beings and firmly opposes nations of race, religion and caste. Babasaheb believed that literary writings should be inspired from the greatness of common man:

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Through your literary creations cleanse the stated values of life and culture. Don't have a limited objective. Transform the light of your pen so that the darkness of the villages is removed. Do not forget that in our country the world of the Dalit and the ignored classes is extremely large. Get to know intimately their pain and sorrow, and try through your literature to bring progress in their lives. True humanity resided there. ( *Souvenir* 8)

Dalit writings across the country were an outcome of Marathi Dalit literature which was on its apex during this period. The sixties were an important decade for Marathi literature. The trickle of Dalit writings became a flood. The highly regarded Marathi journal *Marathwada* featured Dalit writing in a 1969 issue. A number of new streams appeared during this period. Narayan Surve's poetry was reflecting the problems of working class. By November 25, 1973 the *Bombay Times of India* released a special issue entirely dedicated to Dalit writings and stories, all translated into English. It was a renaissance period in the history of Dalit literature that witnessed the emergence of Angry Young man in Marathi literature and the flowering of Little Magazine Movement. Anna Bhau Sathe and Shankarrao Kharat had been writing poetry for Dalits but it was Bagul's Collection of short stories that gave momentum to Dalit literature. His stories were filled with a sense of rebellion for an unequal and unjust-social system. His collection of short stories- *Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti* (When I Had Concealed My Caste) took the whole Marathi literary world by storm. It was vehemently criticized by the so called hypocrites of upper castes. The collection gave a strong jolt to Marathi literary world and raised several new questions which contributed to the growth of Dalit literature.

It was a time when Dalit literature began to be written by the Dalit writers but they were unable to free it from the influence of the so called Brahmanical literature by V.S Khandekar and N.S Phadke. It was still being created in the mould of Brahmanical ideology, But gradually there could be noticed some honest efforts from the progressive Dalit writers for a separate Dalit literature which would express pure Dalit consciousness. They began to shape a literature which would be different from the mainstream literature. Anna Bhau Sathe was the lead figure of this movement. Influenced by Marxism and the writings of Maxim Gorky, he portrayed effectively the lives of the Dalits and gave voice to their hopes and aspirations. His Marxist approach, a sense of belonging to his own community as a Dalit as well as to the movement of Babasaheb, and his first hand experience of being a Dalit, enriched his writing and made it appear true to life.

Bagul's writings inspired many writers and he taught them how to combine creativity with thought and how to shape their experiences creatively. It resulted into the third stream of thought which was developed as the Little Magazine Movement by the Angry young man of sixties. A number of Dalit writings were published in the Little Magazines. It was a revolt against the establishment. Baburao Bagul's rebellious poems were published in a little magazine called *Fakta*. But this movement could not last long due to the lack of discipline in its mode of working and a solid conceptual framework that made anything successful. However on the other hand the Little Magazine Movement had some literary advantages. Dalit writers got to learn the ways of how to express themselves boldly. Landmarks like *Kosala* by Balachandra Nemade appeared. Leading writers and poets like Satish Kalasekar, Tulsi Parab and Raja Dhale related their literature to Dalits and the toiling masses.

Undoubtedly Dalit literature's social role and responsibility is bigger than any other factor, a literature is supposed to achieve. Dalit literature is primarily a literature of social cause.

Literary aesthetics is not its priority. Its origin had a specific purpose- a purpose to reveal the lives and struggle of a people who could never find a place in the corpus of mainstream literature. It is a literature of emancipation, written for the liberation of those who have been the victim of an exploitative social system. Established literature never found this deprived class worthy of literary depiction. It seemed as the filth of their lives would make their literature filthy. It is this feeling of disgust and negligence in every walk of life for Dalits that made their literature more revolting and rebellious in nature. Arjun Dangle, the Marathi Dalit writer, editor and activist says, " Dalit literature is marked by revolt and negativism since it is closely associated with the hopes for freedom by a group of people who, as untouchables, are victims of social economic and cultural inequality." Dalit writers assert that their literature conveys the life that they have lived, experienced and seen. Since the experience contained in Dalit literature is articulated out of a desire for freedom its character is collective rather than individual. It is this experience that has inspired Dalit writers to write. By the 1970s, a sufficient corpus of Dalit literature had developed so that, according to Dangle thinking Dalit critics began to theorize on Dalit literature and its role. "Dalit literature is not simply literature... Dalit literature is associated with a movement to bring about change... At the very first glance, it will be strongly evident that there is no established critical theory or point of view behind them (i.e Dalit writings); instead, there is new thinking and a new point of view"(Dangle vii-viii).

So for Dalit writers the concept of Art for Life's sake comes first and Art for Arts' sake, later. Dalit writer writes out of social responsibility their writings express the emotion and commitment of an activist. Dalit writers are activist-artist who write while engaged in movements. They regard their literature to be a movement. Their commitment is to the Dalits and the exploited classes.

Dalit literature originated as a means of assertion for those who had been silence for centuries. This deprived class wrote a particular literature which was concerned only with their pain and pangs, with their miseries and sufferings and that too in their own language-be it unrefined, uncultured, unpolished or rude but it was something that belonged to them. Dalit literature had its own specific purpose. It was not meant to be written for entertainment and it should not be read to derive pleasure only though its literary value cannot be denied but different parameters should be applied to judge the literary worth of Dalit literature.

Non-Dalit writers never focused on the problems of the Dalits in their writings. They always presented the Dalit characters as the underdogs of the society who did not possess any identity of their own. That was what which made the Dalits to pen down their actual position in the society. Dalit literature had, in its centre, human values and human rights, the trails and travails of a deprived section of the society. Since the upper caste hegemonic literature was unable to portray the accurate picture of the Dalits and didn't have their questions, their anguish, and their experiences, they formed their own separate literature which was later recognized as Dalit literature. It was a historical beginning. The upper caste left no stone unturned to discourage the Dalit writers but they baffled their efforts. They struggled a lot to establish Dalit literature as a separate canon of writing and after many controversies regarding its objectives and functions, Dalit literature came into existence.

Maharashtra was the land of social transformation and Dalit literature in Marathi was flourishing rapidly, Dalit women writers were also writing in abundance and this gave a force and vehemence to Dalit literary movement all over the country. Very soon, their female

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counterparts from the other parts of India reverberated too. Bama from Tamilnadu is regarded as a strong and veteran Dalit woman writer. Voices from North India can also be heard now. Rajat Rani Meenu, Rajni Tilak, Susheela Tankbhaure and Aneeta Bharti produce their literature in Hindi.

Dalit woman has always been thrown into the most neglected corners of our society and very less has been written about her. Leaving a few exceptions even the writers from her own community had not paid much attention to her. They were not able to break the framework of woman set by the upper caste male writers. They would either make her an object of worship or present her as oppressed soul. She was always portrayed in a typed image and nobody bothered to explore the uniqueness of her character until she herself took the pen in her hand.

Mina Gajbhiye, a very young Dalit poet organized the first Women's literary conference in Maharashtra as Women's Dialogue. Urmila Pawar has also mentioned in her memoir that how these women's organization shaped her literary career. She has spoken about one such literary effort named 'Samvadini' which was established by the active efforts of Hira Bansode and her other activist friends. This wind of change was flowing from Maharashtra, the centre of Ambedkarite movement. The increasing number of Dalit women poets was encouraging. This new Dalit woman was rebellious and forceful.

Hira Bansode who was a clerk in railway was a feminist as well as a staunch Ambedkarite. Meena Gajbhiye and Jyoti Lanjewar composed some very moving poems. Anuradha Gaurav and Meena Londe wrote in *Asmitadarsh*, one of the most prestigious Dalit magazines. Kumud Pawde, who took a completely different course by studying Sanskrit, once regarded as a language of God, was a great scholar and authored her autobiography *Antasphot* (Inner Burst) in Marathi. Baby Kamble was the first Dalit woman to write an autobiography. Shantabai Dhanaji Dani, Shantabai Krishnaji Kamble, and Mukta Sarvagod were her contemporary. Adding to this list of names, there are many other Dalit writers from Maharashtra naming Sugandha Shende, Surekha Bhagat, Asha Thorat, Urmila Pawar, Aruna Lokhande and Susheela Mool. Mrs. Asha Thorat has been actively engaged in her research on Dalit folk literature. Urmila Pawar today is one of the most recognized voices of Marathi Dalit writing.

The train of names does not end here and there are still many more names who are contributing to expand the horizon of Dalit literature. There have been discussions both in favour of and against Dalit literature. But the significance of Dalit literature in the larger canvas of Indian literature is clear. Whatever the status is, the journey is still on.

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