



Dalit Literature – The voice of the oppressed

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Abstract:

The two social movements which emerged simultaneously in 1980's in Andhra Pradesh are – the Feminist movement and the Dalit movement. It can be said that these movements emerged due to the failure of progressive and revolutionary movements in accommodating their voices and recognizing the plurality of Indian society. These two movements have influenced the literary scene of Andhra Pradesh and vice-versa. While the Feminist poetry brought out the voices of women writers on their identity issues, the Dalit poetry ventilated the voice of the Dalit writers, the writers from the oppressed downtrodden communities like SCs and STs.

Keywords: Dalit movement, Human rights, social transformation

Introduction

Literary depictions of the experiences of marginalized groups have acquired great significance since an era when issues relating to human rights have been under critical focus. More recent is the trend to deny their existence altogether. Dalit is not a caste but a realization and is related to the experiences, joys and sorrows and struggles of those in the lowest strata of society. 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 growing corpus of Dalit texts, poems, novels and autobiographies, however, seek to rectify this phenomenon by examining the nuances of Dalit culture. Dalit literature is one of the most important literary movements to emerge in post-independence India.

Dalit Literature – Indian Scenario:

Dalit Literature is the literature which is concerned with the socially

underprivileged, and which asserts the socio-political stature of the downtrodden and the oppressed. Though the novels of Mulk Raj Anand like 'Untouchable' were the first literary works to touch upon the plight of the outcast, the Dalit movement, in its present form, was started in literature by Marathi, Gujarati and Kannada writers under the leadership of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. It is a literature of militant protest against upper caste literature upholding Brahmanical values.

Main features of Dalit Literature:

Dalit literature is a new literary norm with an evident disregard for form, content and style, and a vibrant expression of the newly awakened sensibilities which distinguishes it from the mainstream literary traditions. Other main features are as follows:

- (i) It is a literature of protest against all forms of exploitation based on class, race, caste or occupation. It primarily focuses on fundamental human rights and human values;



- (ii) It rejects both the Western and Eastern theoretical conceptions like Freud's Psychoanalysis, Barthe's Structuralism and Derrida's Deconstruction together with the Indian theories of Rasa and Dhvani. It attempts to develop Dalit aesthetics;
- (iii) It questions and de-constructs the very foundations of Indian Mythology. In their search for alternatives, Dalit writers have rediscovered the low caste poets of the Bhakti movement. Even they found relevance in Buddhism;
- (iv) The Dalit writers consider the legendary figure Ekalavya as their forefather and Shambooka- another Dalit in Ramayana who was killed by Rama at the behest of Vasishta, is worshipped by them;
- (v) Authenticity and liveliness are hallmarks of Dalit literature. The Dalit writers express their experiences in stark realistic manner by using their native speech. Their language as well as images comes from their experiences instead of their observation of life. Dalit literature gives genuine descriptions of untouchability and poverty in a coarse day-to-day spoken language;
- (vi) The Dalit literature imbibes "Dalit Consciousness", a consciousness of their own slavery, an understanding of their experiences of exclusion, subjugation, dispossession and oppression down the ages;
- (vii) Shame, anger, sorrow and indomitable hope are the stuff of Dalit literature. Because of the anger against the age-old oppression, the expressions of the Dalit writers have

become sharp. It is more seen in poetry than in any other genre;

- (viii) The Dalit writers found inspiration in the movement of blacks in the distant lands of North America and Africa;
- (ix) The Dalit writers reflect the anguish of a community, and demand the shaping of a just and realistic future for the underprivileged and the outcast in society.

The important writers of Dalit literature in India are: Mahasweta Devi, Namdeo Dhasal, Daya Pawar, Arjun Dangle, Sachi Rautray, Rabi Singh, Basudev Sunani, Bama, Abhimani, Poomani, Imayam, Perumal Murugan, Palamalai, Yendluri Sudhakar, and others.

Dalit Literature in Telugu: Dalit literature in Telugu finds its roots in the heart rendering poetry of Gurram Jashua. He marked a new beginning in the Telugu literature with his well-known poetic creation 'Gabbilam'. Kusuma Dharmanna and Boyi Bheemanna also belong to the first generation of writers who produced literature with Dalit consciousness. However, the Dalit literary movement in Telugu gained momentum in 1980's after the Karamchedu and Tsundururu (Chundururu) incidents where in the Dalits were massacred by the upper caste people. From this period, Dalit's protest and an alternative vision started reflecting in Telugu literature. Writers of the Dandora movement, for example, who belong to the Madiga caste, have begun adding the caste name to their surnames, a practice hitherto followed only by the upper castes.

Famous Telugu Dalit writers of the second generation include: Kolakaluri



Enoch, Siva Sagar, Gaddar, Boya Jangaiah, Chilukuri Devaputra, Kathi Padmarao, Bojja Tharakam, Endluri Sudhakar, Vemula Yellaiah, G. Kalayana Rao, Satish Chandar, Madduri Nageshbabu, Kalekuri Prasad, Gogu Shyamala, Jupaka Subhadra, Jajula Gowri, MM Vinodini, Sujatha Gidla, Thullimalli Wilson Sudhakar, Challapalli Swarupa Rani, Sikhamani, etc.

The stream of Dalit literature has now become very wide by accommodating the most oppressed Dalit communities like 'Rellis', who have been fighting for their rights within the oppressed. The first anthology of poems in 'Relli' language, "Dalithullo Dalithulu" was penned by Mangalagiri Adithya Prasad.

Role of Dalit Literature in Social Transformation in Andhra Pradesh:

Compared to any other literary movement in the last century, Dalit literary movement is said to have brought a sea change in the content and form of Telugu literature. It has also been acting as a vehicle for achieving social transformation. The rich and vibrant Dalit literature includes varied forms such as poetry, lyrics, stories, dramas, literary essays, etc. The Dalit literature wishes to change the world by bringing the humanity to the forefront.

The following are the visible results and transformations brought by the Dalit literature, in the area of literature in specific, and in the society in general:

(i) First and foremost, it effectively threatened the Brahmanic supremacy from literature;

(ii) It stimulated Dalit masses for assertion, protest and mobilization;

(iii) It stirred up thinking in Dalit intellectuals and catalyzed creation of organic intellectuals of Dalits;

(iv) It is highlighting the atrocities on the Dalits through different forms, thus enlivening the issue until the sufferers meet the justice;

(v) It brought in a new set of Dalit aesthetics, in opposition to the age old, traditional poetics;

(vi) It has motivated many poor Dalits for pursuing higher studies and opting better careers;

These days, the Dalit literature is playing influential role in laying the theoretical ground for welfare schemes and protection measures, by bringing different issues for discussion in the literary forums. Thus, it is enabling the policy makers to create required statutory acts. One of such examples is the recently drafted SC-Sub Plan expenditure scheme which aims at spending the funds allocated for upliftment of the SCs, exclusively for them. Dalit Literature is the best example to show that the literature's primary purpose is social transformation.

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