
DALIT AUTOBIOGRAPHY: NATURE AND SCOPE

Anushri Sharma¹, Dr.Tushti Sharma²¹Research Scholar, ²Supervisor^{1,2}Malwanchal UniversityIndore, Madhya Pradesh

ABSTRACT

Indian Dalit literature, which can be traced back to a corpus of writings from Maharashtra in the 1960s, refers to literature of the oppressed, usually associated with a diverse group of people historically considered the lowest among the Indian population and known as “untouchables.” While Dalit literature developed in response to concerns specific to Indian social and cultural history, over the last 20 years Dalit literature has got itself a spot in the World Republic of Letters through translations into English. In an era when issues relating to human rights have been under critical focus, literary depictions of the experiences of marginalized groups have acquired great significance. The recent spurt in Dalit literature in India is an attempt to bring to the forefront the experiences of discrimination, violence and poverty of the Dalit. Expression of these experiences have long been silenced, often with religious and social sanction and relegated to the margins as non-literary. More recent is the trend to deny their existence altogether.

Key words : Dalit, silenced, social

INTRODUCTION

Dalit literature is a collective term in India. Dalit literature is not one, but many almost all the major languages and literatures in India have their past and present of Dalit literary culture have given peculiar forms to Dalit literature in India. Numerous bakti cultures in different parts of India during the medieval period enabled Dalits to give vent to their suffering and to protest against the tyranny of the unjust socio-religious orders. But it is the modern India Dalit consciousness discover that the last tradition of medieval Dalit literature battle cry during the past independence period. The past is being researched and linked to the aspirations of modern Dalit creativity. Dalit literature is not only a literature of protest and rejection, but also a literature of reconstruction of the past. Dalit consciousness has inspired intellectuals to probe the entire Indian history and culture from below; this subaltern historical approach has set in motion a process for the true discovery of India. Western orientation is laid to rest and a new image of Bharat is being built up by the scholars inspired by Dalit word-view.

Dalit literature is based on the fundamental human values. It believes that man is measure of all things including arts, literature and culture. Dalit literature subscribes to secular values like individuality, liberty, equality, and fraternity etc, but at the same time does not rule out religion. Religion should provide ethical base to human behavior in social system. Religion should be a principle and not a law. This approach underlined Dr. Ambedkar neatly strikes the balance between modern secular values and the individuality, religious faith.

On vast landscape of India, there lived the people of various castes, communities and religions. Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, Islam and Christian had seen dominant sects made their essence clear with the religion. Among them most of communities were tried their best to bring the social change in the society, but they become failure. Due to this, various ways of thinking took place on Indian canvas. One group demanded to have changes in religion and still remained firm to keep the religion as it is. Other group demanded to have changes in the way of life. It gave importance to cultural change in Nineteenth and Twentieth century. As a result of this, society makes two groups such as the exploiter and exploited. Sociologically, the neglected class doesn't belong to any caste or community those who are ignored, they are *Dalit*.

The literary phenomenon to which we now call *Dalit* literature in India emerged in the 1960s. The primary motive of *Dalit* literature is the liberation of *Dalits* in India. The aim of *Dalit* literature is protest against the established system which is based on injustice and exposes the evil and hypocrisy of the upper caste. *Dalit* literature is based on *annubhava* (experience) rather than *anumana* (speculation). Therefore, the authenticity and liveliness is the essential feature of *Dalit* literature.

Autobiography, as a genre of literature, is a metaphor of self and journeys of authors own life and achievement. It is a very influential genre through which *Dalit* writers have portrayed a realistic picture of the *Dalit* world. It is the recent development emerged after post-independence in India, which is the most important tool of *Dalit* literature. It is not just a remembering of past, but a shaping and structuring of them in such a way as to help understand one's life. Thus, *Dalit* Writing is essentially expression of the reality of human life and a great piece of literature depicts that reality with communicable lucid language facilitating narrative with reader's aesthetic and literary sense.

Autobiography is a very influential genre through which *Dalit* writers have portrayed a realistic picture of the *Dalit* world. The *Dalit* autobiographies were first written in the 1930s. Regarding to the origin of the *Dalit* autobiography, Ravikumar, in the Introduction of *Dalit* Autobiography *The Scar*, remarks:

At the national level, Ambedkar and Rettaimalai Srinivasan are the precursors of the *Dalit* autobiographical form as per research indicators at present.

In the 1970s other Marathi *Dalit* writers began to write their autobiographies. Since then, *Dalit* autobiographies are being written by the *Dalits* throughout the country.

PURPOSE OF THE DALIT AUTOBIOGRAPHY:

Dalit autobiography is the recent development emerged in post-independence in India, which is the most important tool of *Dalit* literature. *Dalit* writers describe *Dalit* autobiographies as narratives of pain. It is pain which strings one narrative event to the next, and it is pain that binds individual *Dalits* together into an imagined community of fellow sufferers. It transforms an experience of pain into a narrative of resistance. It is a kind of subjective narration by a *Dalit* writer in which more importance is given to the social life than the writer himself, but common social life is analyzed through the writer. It provides as a weapon for creating a social change and awareness in an unequal society. Regarding to the purpose of *Dalit* autobiography, Arvind Malagatti said:

The main purpose of the *Dalit* autobiographies is the emancipation of the oppressed and exploited people, as *Dalit* literature is one of the integral parts of the *Dalit* movement. *Dalit* literature is not a recent one but it has been there for centuries. Since the *Dalits* were not recognized, their writings were relegated to the background.

Gradually, in the twentieth century it came into public arena, and in the post independent India it gained great momentum. At present, it is one of the most discussed subjects at national and international level.

DEVELOPMENT OF DALIT AUTOBIOGRAPHY:

The first *Dalit* autobiography in Marathi Literature was *Things I Never Imagined* published by Balasaheb Suryawanshi in 1975, which represents not only Mahar community but also nomadic, tribal and criminal communities. He was a Christian *Dalit*, who brought out the problems of Christian *Dalits*. It deals with heart rending poverty, inequality and suppression. Such background was the roots cause of *Dalit* autobiography in India. Contemporary, such issues have been raised by P.E. Sonkale in his articles and published in the magazine of Milind College, Auragabad. Later on, these articles have made book entitled as *Aathwaninche Pakshi* in 1969. It deals with the miseries and sorrows of his whole life and his unpredictable struggle to seek education. It goes every layer of society and creating awareness among *Dalits*.

Before him, Daya Pawar published his autobiography *Balute* in 1978. Daya Pawar depicted the story

of a low caste child who through hard work obtained education and became a successful person. Daya Pawar received Ford Foundation Scholarship, for *Balute* and NFDC produced a film *Atyachar* on *Balute*. *Balute* is published in Hindi, Marathi, Gujarati, and Kannad and in foreign languages such as Japanese, German. Along with the Mahar community, the Tribal and the Nomadic communities also published autobiographies. In December 1980, Laxman Mane came with *Upara- An Outsider*, who depicted the life style, customs and traditions of the Kaikadi community. It is very difficult to say whether Mane's goal has been achieved or not but it is important that this autobiography has succeeded in underscoring the problems of Kaikadi community. It received the Shaitya Academy Award and published this autobiography in English.

Uttam Tupe through his autobiography *Katyaverchi Pote* displayed the sorrows and sufferings of Matang community that earns their livelihood by skinning dead animals and begging in villages. In the same year, Shankarrao Kharat published *Taral Antarat*. Shankararo Kharat described the customs and traditions of Yeskar community– Mahar subcaste. He described his struggle for education. He graduated in law and became the Vice-Chancellor of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad. Nansaheb Jhodge, published his autobiography in 1982 entitled *Phanjar - Pricking Thorn*. In 1983 Dadasaheb More published *Gabal*. Through this autobiography, More has depicted the problems of nomadic tribe – Pingla Joshi who earn their livelihood wandering from village to village.

Women writers also came forward with their life stories. They published autobiographies describing their sorrows and sufferings. Very low treatment was given to the women in Mahar and Nomadic Communities. In 1983, Mukta Sarvagond through her autobiography *Mitlelei Kavade - Closed Doors* disclosed the plight of the *Dalit* women to the world. Sarvagond raised voice against the people of her own community and also of those who are availing the facilities of being *Dalit* for filling their houses and she attacked the pretence of *Dalit* leaders. She also pictured the exploitation of common *Dalits* at the hands of their own community members. In 1981, Kumud Pawade published her autobiography entitled *Antasphot*. Shantabai Kamble and Baby Kamble came with their autobiographies in 1986.

In 1987, Laxman Gaikwad published *Uchalya- The Branded*. Laxman Gaikwad brought out problems of the nomadic Community -*Uchalya* who are branded as thieves from their birth. Because of this prejudice they were not able to earn anything and they turned towards thieving. Laxman Gaikwad has given a heartrending description of their poverty, hunger and struggle for education. Laxman received Sahitya Academy Award for his autobiography. This autobiography was published in English. Inspired by Laxman Gaikwad, Atmaram Rathod published *Tanda-* an autobiography of a person who is born in Banjara family and lives out of the town in separate colonies. People from these communities lived together, out of the society and earned livelihood by cattle tending, selling milk and farming.

In 1994, Kishore Kale published *Kolhatyche Por - Against All Odds*. Kolhati is a tribal community. Women from these communities earn their livelihood by dancing in the stage shows and men enjoy their earnings lavishly. Kishore's Mother was a Tamasha dancer. Kishore was an illegitimate child of a Tamasha dancer and had to go through severe problems at various levels. Through his autobiography, Kishore has drawn the picture of the Kolhati community, the sufferings of women in the hands of their fathers and brothers and society as well. Through their writing, *Dalits* are demanding for liberty, honor, security and freedom which are the right of every human being. Recently, Adv. Eknath Awad has published his autobiography etitled as *Jag Badal Ghalun Gav* in 2010, which deals with the life-long experiences of narrator.

FEATURES OF DALIT AUTOBIOGRAPHY:

The essential feature of the *Dalit* autobiographical narratives is that they do not isolate the individual from his whole historical environment, family, community and society at large. Another essential feature of the *Dalit* autobiographical narratives is the oppression, struggles, assertion and quest of identity of the individual who is the subject- matter of the narrative seem never dissociated from the shape that the system of social relation. It is concerned to the pathetic condition of the *Dalits*. The sufferings and humiliations are an integral part of the *Dalit* Autobiography. *Dalit* Autobiography helps the *Dalits* to become aware and struggle for their human rights, which are denied to them by the so-called upper castes. The methods of depiction, sequences of content, and text organization are analyzed to reinforce the *Dalit* authors' exploration of society. *Dalits* autobiography considered as a weapon to leverage transformation in the social and political institutions of India. Thus, *Dalit* Writing is essentially expression of the reality of human life and a great piece of literature depicts that reality with communicable lucid language facilitating narrative with readers' aesthetic and literary sense. Thus, *Dalit* autobiographies authentically portray various forms of social and legal injustices.

CONCLUSION

Dalit autobiographies are the store house of pain and pathos. The select *Dalit* authors penned their soul-numbing survival stories equivalent to American slave narratives. They documented sufferings as it is- the reality. *Dalits*, the caste victims, emerge out of social and legal exploitations, yet they are still undervalued and denied of socializations. The devastated selves consider their autobiographies as agents to bring out positive transition beyond borders in the contemporary Indian *Dalits* lives. Thus, the select *Dalit* autobiographies in India are considered as milestone towards the progressive change in society. The conclusion of this research is to rejection of Hindu culture and to accept Buddhist culture which is based on classless society and equality. *Dalit* autobiographies, in India and abroad, focus on the pathetic and challenging past and their community, which is struggling for present and hopeful future.

REFERENCES

1. Limbale, Sharankumar. *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi*, translated from Marathi by Santosh Bhoomkar, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016
2. Siddalingaiah. *Ooru Keri: An Autobiography*, translated from Kannada by S. R. Ramkrishna, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2016
3. Mane, Laxman. *Upara: An Outsider*, translated from Marathi by A. K. Kamat, New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1997
4. Valmiki, Omprakash. *Joothan: A Dalits Life*, translated from the Hindi by Arunprabha Mukharji, Kolkata: Samaya Publication, 2003
5. Guha, Ranjit. *A Subaltern Studies Reader: 1986-1995*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998
6. Magdum, Ajit B. *Comparative Literature: Dalit Poetry and African Poetry*, Kanpur: Roli Book Distributers, 2018
7. Landage Ramesh and others, *Confluences of Recent Voices Indian English Literature*, Delhi: Manglam Publication, 2013
8. Purushotham, K. *Evolution of Telugu Dalit Literature*, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XLV, No 22, May, 2010