

The Study of Themes in Dalit Literature

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Abstract

Deprivation of education and education as the only source of emancipation, poverty and hunger due to illiteracy and ignorance, dalit's strong belief in equality, fraternity and brotherhood, importance of self-respect, identity and assertion for it and Dr. Ambedkar as the main inspiration for writings are observed common themes in dalit literature. These themes have made dalit literature as 'literature for life's sake'.

Keyword – Dalit, Literature, Education

Introduction:

Literature was the monopoly of some communities who had only the right to education, read and write. It was produced by those people who were from the established and upper caste communities who considered literature as a means of entertainment and amusement. It had descriptions of fun, beauty, glorification of wealth and deities, caste superiority complex, mostly upper caste life style, family complex conditions, rivalry and revenge. It had this kind of descriptions of society. It could not deal with (with some exceptions) real social problems and issue and they remained unheard, hidden, voiceless and unrepresented. It had not place to represent the conditions and realities of tribal, dalits, nomadic and downtrodden communities because the mainstream literature had considered representing it as unworthy or absurd. But vacuum and lacunas of this literature could be challenged by the newly educated people from these communities by taking the benefits of right to education offered by the Constitution of India. They realized their conditions and thought to bring their reality in the light so that society can realize that these communities are living in neglected and darkest reality. After 1960, it was firstly attempted by dalits to write on their experiences through autobiographies, poetry and short stories and this literature emerged as 'Dalit Literature'. It brought tremendous upheavals in literary world because it dealt with issues, problems and themes which were absent in so called mainstream literature. Dalit literature discussed various issues and themes and this paper attempt to explore and study the themes in it.

Themes in Dalit Literature:

Dalit Literature (autobiographies, poetry and short stories) has been written keeping in mind to explain the sorrows and painful realities of dalits who lived traumatized life under the influences of caste superiority complex. Dalit literature discussed a life which had no place in so called literature and it also attempted to root out from the negative identity assumed about dalits. It has focused on various themes and they can be discussed as follows;

1. Caste System and Discrimination:

Dalit writers have faced caste system and caste discrimination from their childhood. Their parents faced severe casteism in the villages that they lived very timid life as fate. They faced cruelty and inhuman behaviour and treatments by the so called upper caste people though they worked in their farms as the laborers. They underwent very inhuman treatments that a man cannot behave even with animals. Omprakash Valmiki says about untouchability in his autobiography '*Joothan: A Dalit's Life*' that "Untouchability was so rampant that while it was considered all right to touch dogs and cats or crows and buffaloes, if one happened to touch a Chuhra, one got contaminated or polluted. The Chuhras were not seen as human. They were simply things for use. Their utility lasted until the work was done. Use them and then throw them away." (2) The writers experienced that they used to be known by their caste names only. It used to be a system of the villages that upper caste people call them by their castes only and it used to be only for humiliations. They have not only recalled these casteist experiences in their autobiographies, but they realized to the world that how one community treats to another community just because of the caste superiority and inferiority complexes. One caste considers superior to another caste and it continued even today but its nature has been changed. They dared to speak against this notorious or demonic social system which was glorified in the mainstream literature. Dalit writers cursed caste system that because of it their many generations have been deprived of everything that guarantees a happy and decent life.

They have not only described or discussed casteism of upper caste people or communities but they have experienced it in dalit communities also. There is caste system among the dalit communities that they also consider one dalit community superior to other dalit community. They also have criticized this system that dalits also have been following upper and lower caste sensibilities. Sharankumar Limbale narrates casteism prevalent in dalit communities in '*The Outcaste: Akkarmashi*' that his grandmother had shouted when he played with his friend from Mang community "...why do you play with that boy? Is there no one else in the whole village to play with? Don't give him water in that vessel. If he touches it, he'll defile it. Go away" (Limbale 20). This indicates that how casteism is prevalent in the society and dalit literature does not hesitate to discuss it openly.

2. Poverty and Hunger:

Dalit literature discusses poverty and hunger prevalent in all dalit communities. Dalits being landless and without education lived with dire poverty and hunger was also as a fate in their life. It used to be very impossible to dalits to manage daily two time meal anyhow. It discussed that dalits spent their generations by living only managing two time meal every day. They had no any kind of profession and there was not any chance to work on daily wages or with scanty wages. Though dalits worked hard, they used to not get proper food. It is very pathetic when we read Limbale's autobiography that his mother and grandmother had to struggle hard for food. He reminds the incidence that "During the harvest, when cattle grazed in the fields, they passed undigested grains of jowar in their dung. The grains were yellow and swollen. Santamai picked up such lumps of dung and the way home washed the dung in the river water, collecting

only the clean grains” (10). It is absolutely unbelievable that dalits had to live in/with such kind of conditions and its discussion was absent in mainstream literature. This is one of the themes in dalit literature.

3. Deprivation of Education and Strong Desire of Education:

Dalit literature has spoken about deprivation of education from dalit communities and it is the root cause of suppressed and oppressed life of dalits. It was imbibed in dalits that education is not their right and they should not even think about it. Due to lack of education, they used to believe in nonsense and absurd things told by the upper caste people because they were living in ignorance and illiteracy. It also has discussed that even if a dalit parents dared to enroll their son or daughter for education, they used to get ostracized from everything in the villages. Sometimes parents denied enrolling their children to schools due to their poverty and working somewhere. If the children dare to study, their poverty stopped their education because they had to work with their parents for the family support.

But it is noteworthy thing that dalit literature also speaks about the struggles and strong desire of taking education by dalit children. They always tried to overcome any kind of difficulties for education. There are all autobiographers who have struggled hard for education but they never left education because they had known that without education they cannot come out from casteism, untouchability and poverty. The most of dalit literature has the strong message of importance of education. It focuses that education is the only source of achieving everything in life.

4. Assertion for Identity:

Assertion of Identity as the human being is one of the important themes in dalit literature. It speaks about identity that dalits are not meaningless entity in the society and they also have their dignity and self-respect. There are autobiographies, poetry and short stories which explore the reality that dalits overcoming every difficulty and adversity and they interpreted that dalits can claim their identity as the respectable human being. The autobiographers tolerated suppression, oppression, subjugated reality and inhuman treatments, but gave voice to their sufferings and conditions to assert their identity. The writers have narrated the protest to cast out their subalternity. They also have exhibited their self-respect by declining and denouncing inhuman and cruel orders of masters from upper caste communities. They spoke against demonic caste system and atrocities and claimed that they cannot tolerate everything because they realized their place in the society. Dalit literature represents the strength for fighting spirit against all odds in society. Dr. Narendra Jadhav has narrated his and his brothers’ struggles with his parents and their life story tells that one can claim identity through the conscious and continuous study and education.

5. Longing for Equality and Fraternity:

Dalit literature does not only discuss casteism or untouchability or deprivations but it gives a message of establishing equality and fraternity in the society. It longs for self-respect and expects that dalits must be treated as equal with other castes. It also expects that there should not be casteism, deprivation and inhuman treatments in the name of the castes. It consciously wants

that caste system must be eradicated from the society and harmony must be maintained. It has interpreted that education must be given equally to all castes and there should not be discriminations in schools and colleges. Dalit writers have narrated their experiences in school and colleges that along with the villagers, teachers also have discriminated dalit students in schools and colleges. They contemplate over this and expect that teachers should spread love and affection about all caste and school atmosphere must be amicable to all. They all have interpreted that equality and fraternity should be established.

6. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar a Role Model:

The real inspiration behind emergence of the dalit literature is Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and his writing and speeches. Dalit writers inspired by Dr. Ambedkar's message about education and they gave priority to education. Dr. Ambedkar had realized the importance and necessity of education for the Dalits. He said, "Education is the cornerstone of progress and upliftment. It leads to increased awareness and social consciousness of the people and provides for more responsible leadership of the nation" (Fernandes 53). He also awakened dalits with the message of "Be Educated, Be Organized and Be Agitated" (Meshram 250). After reading Dr. Ambedkar, dalit writers gave an outlet to their sufferings and they brought forth their reality. The foundation of dalit literature is his philosophy and works that inspired and still inspiring dalits. Dr. Ambedkar is a role model to dalit writers behind writing autobiographies, poetry and short stories and they also have championed and interpreted his message through it.

Conclusion:

Dalit literature has been representing real social issues experienced by dalits. There are several themes which can be studied in dalit literature but among all themes, above mentioned are very significant. Prominently, we can find out the most significant themes such as caste system, untouchability and exploitation in the name of castes in dalit literature because dalit writers experienced its tremendous inhuman nature. Deprivation of education and education as the only source of emancipation, poverty and hunger due to illiteracy and ignorance, dalit's strong belief in equality, fraternity and brotherhood, importance of self-respect, identity and assertion for it and Dr. Ambedkar as the main inspiration for writings are observed common themes in dalit literature. These themes have made dalit literature as 'literature for life's sake'.

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