
Dalit Aesthetics and Dalit Consciousness in Dalit Literature

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Abstract

It is very difficult for the writers of upper castes or non-Dalits to express the real life incidences of the marginalized classes that are full of poverty, pain, helplessness, neglect in every aspect of Indian social life, and their struggles to overcome from all these barriers. A few Indian writers like Mulk Raj Anand, and Premchand tried to depict the real life incidences of caste barriers in Indian society from mere sympathetic point of view for the downtrodden or marginalized classes of community. Nevertheless, the upper caste literary artists depict is only a mere sympathy or pity for the downtrodden or marginalized classes of community in their writings. The Dalit Bahujan writers tried to aware the Dalit people about the importance of education in erasing the curse of caste inequalities prevalent in Indian society. Dalit literature became a slogan of revolution and social change in a short span of time. Dalit literature cannot be judged on creating ornaments of any universal artistic values, or producing an imaginary pleasure. Dalit self-narratives are not based on the mainstream literary philosophy of 'Art for Art's sake' but 'Arts for society's sake.' A Dalit writer many times experiences his own personal life full of several inequalities due to caste barriers in Indian society. The major aspect of Dalit Literature is longing for its aesthetic pleasure arousing out of Dalit consciousness and inspiring the Indian Dalit community to share their bitter experiences of life.

Keywords: Marginalized classes, Dalit aesthetics, Dalit Consciousness, Dalit self-narratives, Art for Society's sake, Dalit Bahujan Writers

Objectives:

The present article seeks to indicate how Dalit Literature desires for its aesthetic pleasure arousing out of Dalit consciousness and inspiring the Indian Dalit community to share their bitter experiences of life.

Methodology

The critical essays, journals, and web resources are taken into consideration to write the research article. The standard laid down by the MLA style sheet, Eighth Edition is followed for reference material.

Introduction

There are huge differences between the real-life experiences of Dalit people as portrayed in Dalit literature and fictitious representation portrayed in mainstream literature. Nevertheless, the upper caste literary artists depict is only a mere sympathy or pity for the downtrodden or marginalized classes of community in their writings. It is very difficult for the writers of upper

castes or non-Dalits to express the real life incidences of the marginalized classes that are full of poverty, pain, helplessness, neglection in every aspect of Indian social life, and their struggles to overcome from all these barriers. The colonial Indian writers discussed various issues, facets of human experiences and thoughts in English literature, but never concentrated on the enduring struggles, pains, and sufferings of 'Shudras' (Untouchables), Women and other subjugated classes. Later, in the Post-Colonial Indian era, a few Indian writers like Mulk Raj Anand, and Premchand tried to depict the real life incidences of caste barriers in Indian society from mere sympathetic point of view for the downtrodden or marginalized classes of community. However, one can admit that such depiction of Dalit characters and their disregard in mainstream Indian writings was a radical step towards the erasion of Untouchability from casteist Indian society.

However, in the pre-independent India, the Dalit Bahujan social pioneers and reformers like Jyoti Rao Phule, Savitribai Phule, Muktabai Salve, Pandita Ramabai, Maharshi Dhondu Keshav Karve, Sant Gadge Maharaj and Dr. Ambedkar focused on the unnoticed questions of Dalit people in their writings that were hitherto neglected by the mainstream Indian writers. The main purpose of all these Dalit Bahujan writers was to make aware the Dalit people about the importance of education in erasing the curse of caste inequalities prevalent in Indian society. In the real sense, their literature can be called as the primary Indian Dalit literature that helped in some way to build the Dalit movement aiming to awake and motivate all lower castes people for their self-development.

Indian Dalit literature has been influenced and compared with the Afro-American Black literature; both have similarity in facing the atrocities of casteism and racism, Dalit literature was being promoted by discussing on the Black movement of Slaves and their rebellious literature in America. The Dalit students taking higher education in various colleges were inspired by this movement and started forming Republican student organizations at each college. The regional Marathi literary writers of Maharashtra like Namdeo Dhasal, Raja Dhale, Bhai Sanga, Gangadhar Gade, P.M.Kamble, Gangadhar Pantawane etc played a significant role in establishment of a revolutionary party called Dalit Panther fighting for democratic rights of every Indian citizen. The emergence of the Dalit Panther was an inevitable phenomenon in the backdrop of the fact that many Dalit youth students of Maharashtra concentrated on the revolutionary writings that gave way to their bitter experiences of caste inequalities prevalent in the society. Due to the boundless faith in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's social thoughts, Dalit literature became a slogan of revolution and social change in a short span of time.

Sharankumar Limbale, in his 'Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature' defined "Literature can be studied from an aesthetic perspective, psychological perspective or a sociological perspective."

Dalit Aesthetics in Dalit Literature

The major aspect of Dalit Literature is its aesthetic pleasure of Dalit consciousness arousing out of pain, trauma or bitter experiences of caste faced by the untouchables in their life time, Dalit literature cannot be judged on creating ornaments of any universal artistic values, or producing any imaginary aesthetic pleasure based purely on arbitrary or mythological

mainstream literature either western or Indian but on expressing one's pain, suffering and unanswerable questions of caste atrocities based on writers practical experiences that gives birth to Dalit aesthetics. Their writings are not based on the mainstream literary philosophy of 'Art for Art's sake' but 'Arts for society's sake.'

Sharankumar Limbale answers to P.S.Rege's objection on Dalit writers for not maintaining any artistic yardsticks in their writings. He clarifies in his book 'Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature'

"Art should be considered only as art. Dalit literature, being 'Dalit' cannot demand different aesthetic yardsticks. It will have to be evaluated according to the autonomous and independent standards of art."

But which are these artistic yardsticks and who decides it? Such arguments raise many questions that are unanswerable. (Limbale, 106)

Dalit literature is not time bound or based on imagination like traditional mainstream literature but believes on pragmatism. The Dalit writers use multidisciplinary point of views, and techniques to arouse a feeling of Dalit aesthetic pleasure in minds of the readers. The realization of these sufferings resembles some gloomy similarities but on the other hand provides an aesthetic pleasure to the readers.

Arjun Dangle admits:

"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, instead, there is new thinking and a new point of view." (Dangle, Arjun vii-viii)

The Dalit writers and critics strive hard for 'content' and expression of the human values denying the 'form' of mainstream literary writings that gave only artistic pleasure to readers. It is doubtless that there is modification in culture, language or literature as per changing circumstances but human emotions remains universalized. Therefore, the artistic values of upper caste writers and critics based on form of literature are outdated and therefore they need to revise on multiple narrative techniques of criticism.

Arjun Dangle, being a Dalit writer and leader of the Dalit Panther movement shared his experience:

"Dalit is not a caste but a realization and is related to the experiences, joys and sorrows and struggles of the lower stratum 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." (Dangle 264-265)

Dalit consciousness in Dalit Self-narratives

The other aspect of Dalit literature is a 'Protagonist' who is never a particular person but a person challenging the protocol of caste barriers and therefore prepares himself/herself to be a collective voice of all exploited classes of society. Dalit self-narratives are the result of social and political consciousness. All these consciousness comes within the active response of a deprived person that cultivates his cultural values. A Dalit writer many times experiences his

own personal life full of several inequalities due to caste barriers in Indian society. He stimulates his own feelings and experiences in a social context and expresses them through literature. The awareness that is found behind the literature of Dalit writers as a whole is known as Dalit consciousness. Dalit consciousness is a transformational and society-centered one that prioritizes the value of humanity. If the Dalit consciousness behind Dalit literature is subtracted, the existence of Dalit literature comes in danger. Dalit consciousness is transformed into social consciousness in Dalit literature. Overall, the Dalit consciousness is pro-social and therefore it is allied to social consciousness. Thus, it seems that Dalit consciousness, social consciousness and social commitment are related things. Although the 'I' in Dalit self-narratives is at the center, it is also driven by the social consciousness of 'we'.

Arjun Dangle specifies his views on 'Dalit Consciousness'

"Dalit is not a caste but a realization and it is related to the experiences, joys and sorrows and struggles of those who are in the lowest stratum of society. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus finding as revolutionary." (Dangle, 234)

There are numerous heart-touching Dalit self-narratives and autobiographies in regional languages and translations that depict spontaneous examples of caste discrimination and the struggle for equality. Daya Pawar in this autobiography 'Baluta' not only narrates his own personal experiences but also depicts the life of the formerly untouchable Mahar community, who have been neglected for generations, surrounded by ignorance, poverty and slavery, and who live a bitter life. In this, the strength of the suffering mind has come on both the personal and social levels. Although the burning experience of untouchability is more painful than any other pain, the author has overcome it and achieved strength. The thorny journey of the author and his community is described in this self-narrative.

Laxman Mane's 'Upra' is the first attempt to bring the independent, nomadic Kaikadi tribe before the readers in the form of literature. The sufferings of the Kaikadi tribe, who live a life even more difficult than that of the untouchables, can be clearly heard in his Upra. The involvement in Dalit literary movement, and the socialist movement, helped Mane in writing his self-narrative 'Upra'. This autobiography depicts the struggle of the writer that made him to bring about life change, both of his personal and Kaikadi community. The naked form of the life-reality of the Kaikadi community is expressed in this self-narrative. In the selected villages, they provide the villagers the materials like baskets, pots, etc. and in return, prepare ladders and cooked food. They used to go to the hill and collect the food given by the villagers.

Sharankumar Limbale's autobiography, 'Akkarmashi', is a collection of events and experiences from his life, in which he paints a grim picture of how the children of the prostitutes have to face the painful experiences even terrible than casteism in Indian society.

Urmila Pawar's 'The Weave of My Life' and Baby Kamble's 'The Prisons We Broke' both autobiographies portrays the double burdens of exploitation and bitter experiences of a Dalit woman, depicting the juncture of caste and gender discrimination, and their flight towards self-discovery and liberation.

Baby Kamble expressed her anguish in 'The Prisons We Broke',

"I wrote about what my community experiences. The suffering of my people became my own suffering. Their experiences became mine. So, I really find it difficult to think of myself outside of my community." (Kamble 130)

Yashica Dutt's 'Coming Out As Dalit: A Memoir' also depicts the trauma of living with the stamp of untouchability and how her community work of cleaning toilets never leaves her identity even being a reputed and high profile journalist in contemporary Indian caste system.

Conclusion

The reader experiences many common social norms that are exposed by the writer. The Dalit writer not only shares the dark experiences of Indian life, full of caste and religious ladder but also his/her personal experiences in a holistic manner. The personal experiences of the writer become common at all levels and hence provide the Dalit aesthetics to the readers. The concept of 'Touchstone method' as proposed by Victorian critic Mathew Arnold is applicable here. In a country like India, where diversity is seen in every aspects of social life, Dalit literature tries to bring 'similarity in dissimilarity'. The major aspect of Dalit Literature is longing for its aesthetic pleasure arousing out of Dalit consciousness and inspiring the Indian Dalit community to share their bitter experiences of life.

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