

RESEARCH ARTICLE



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2636 (Print):2321-3108 (online)

Exploring Indianness in Regional Writings: A Select Study of Dalit Texts

Dr. Vinod Kumar

Associate Professor of English

Government Post Graduate College Ambala Cantt. (Haryana)

Email vinod.k.gahlawat@gmail.com

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.12.4.49](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.12.4.49)



Article info

Article Received: 25/09/2024
Article Accepted: 17/10/2024
Published online: 28/10/2024

Abstract

The present paper explores that critiquing caste biases against Dalits never gets at ease in the upper castes' narrative socio-literary traditions in the languages of global importance like English or the Indigenous literary meta-narrative practices, especially Sanskrit. However, the gradual arrival of Dalit Writings primarily focused on the new circumstances of the indigenous people. It gave a central place to their contents and contexts in the literary discourse of Dalit writings. Therefore, the present paper discerns how indigenous people's issues remained unaddressed in meta-narrative literary traditions for a long time in India.

Keywords: Critiquing, traditions, indigenous, discourse.

Socio-Cultural Background

An ideal social institution nurtures harmonious social relationships among the members and socializes their emotional sensibilities in the specific institutional values of present and past over a geographical stretch. A social institution is a group of like-minded people who have a common minimum program to live together with safety and security within and outside of the social group. The socialization process involves the wholeness of all social groups and plays a nucleus role in ascertaining their respective identities in the larger framework of society. The smooth process of social transition not only shows its dynamic features but also keeps up the vibrancy of the cardinal values of society. Moreover, a

vibrant social institution always respects the dissent and individual liberty of its members in incorporating the socio-cultural changes under the existing circumstances. A social institution is "a complex of positions, roles, norms, and values lodged in particular types of social structures and organizing relatively stable patterns of human activity concerning fundamental problems in producing life-sustaining resources, in reproducing individuals, and in sustaining viable societal structures within a given environment" (Peters, ix). Whenever social institutions try to impose cultural restrictions over personal liberty it gets opposed in different modes at the individual level. Furthermore, group-level opposition against rigidity brings rapture in any social

organization to seek justification for their genuine reasons like fraternity, equality, and liberty. World history is replete with instances of revolutions initiated at an individual level (due to personal relationships) and community (for community reasons like in the French Revolution). The dissents or revolutions within the social group oppose the social restrictions and bring new cultural denominators to society. Hence, the social transition remains subjected to the intensity level of the individual or community level opposition against cultural stereotypes. But a vibrant society always follows less rigidity of outworn practices and more rationality in continuing social practices. Hence, the smooth incorporation of new and desirable practices maintains social values.

Cantering of Indianness in Dalit Writings

The long history of movements that opposed the Brahmanic narrative of the caste system, yet the religious sanctity, keeps these laws alive and evolves with time. The *Lokayatas/charvahakas* in the sixth century BC challenged the Brahmanic caste rules and advocated materialistic philosophy for untouchables so that they came out of caste exploitation. The *Lokayatas* oppose caste-prejudiced laws against untouchables in Hinduism. The Shamanic reforms (approximately in the 6th century BC) preach equality of humanity to give rise to many other social reforming movements in contemporary times. Buddhism opposes Brahminic orthodoxy to counteract the Hindu religious tyranny, slavery, and inequality against untouchables. The Sufi Saints and Mahatmas bring reforms to Hinduism before the Christian missionary movements in India. The Adi Dharma movements in the 1920s put counteraction against caste practices and spread social awareness among untouchables in religious preaching against Hindu orthodoxy. In a big movement, on 6th December 1956, the lakhs of untouchables embraced Buddhism in Nagpur. In contemporary circumstances, Dalits' exploitation in religious domains continues yet no recent mass shifting of Dalits eventually has

occurred except for instances of certain individuals and families. As Dalits continue to be second to all *Varnas* in Hindu religious Scriptures and Shastras the present Hindu society too places them in peripheral positions, especially in religious affairs. To begin with, Marathi Regional Writings in Maharashtra, the term gets impetus from the other regional languages, giving rise to the Dalit movement in literature. The use of 'Dalit' in their writings assimilates them with the suffering and oppression meted to them in the Hindu social order. The etymological meaning of 'Dalit' denotes the crushed ones. The common suffering of untouchables (and Dalits) consolidates them for comradeship to stand for each other instead of being in graded inequality. Their assimilation deconstructs the edifice of the Hindu social structure and puts forth a collective effort to oppose Brahmanic hegemony. The socio-cultural issues of Dalits found literary space in the Panthers movement of the young writers in Maharashtra who not only showed the way to protest against the prison of social indignation but also found self-esteem through literary manifestation. In South India, the literary movement of Dalits described the socio-cultural oppression in the authentic experiences in Dalit autobiographies and fiction in the 1980s and 1990s. Sivkani, a Dalit IAS female officer wrote her first novel *Pazhairyana Kazhidulun* (1989) and *Aanandayee* (1992) gives details of upper caste oppression and gender discrimination in society. Bama's in *Karukku* (1992) and in *Sangathi* (1994) discuss the dual oppression of caste and gender. Writers like Ambimani, Edyavendam, Dalit thinkers, and academicians give impetus and vitality to the Dalit protests through their socio-cultural activism. The movement emerged from Marathi literature, spread to Tamil and the other parts of South India to the Tribal belt in North-East of India leaving no area untouched by their literary expositions. Dalits pass through various stages of nomenclature changes under the shifting paradigms of socio-cultural and political fields yet there happened no substantial development

in their socio-economic development except in the provisions of SC reservations to some extent. Dalits' subjugation continues despite constitutional provisions to stop their exploitation throughout Indian society. Their multilayering oppression not only includes their socio-economic aspects but also religio-political and literary domains under subtle discriminatory caste practices. Despite a political change in the governing system, the caste practices not only continue to discriminate against Untouchables but also oppose the implementation of SC's corrective provisions under subtle practices. The traditional Hindu society is predominantly based on a caste system wherein untouchables are placed on the margins of the social structure. Ambedkar describes, "Caste is a highly organized social grouping ...an involuntary grouping. There is no Hindu without, cannot escape caste and being bounded by caste from birth to death he becomes subject to social regulations and traditions of the caste over which he has no control" (vol.3 145).

All socio-cultural narratives of Hindu society are bound to the in-principled Hindu caste specifications wherein untouchables get an unjust description of their socio-cultural world. Hindu culture is based on the privileges of occupations and social status for the upper castes and prohibitions for untouchables. So the composition of this society rests on Dalits' socio-cultural subjugation in the Hindu society. Aloysius says, "The hierarchy of different spheres of social relations tends to coincide- the religious hierarchy of purity and pollution... in public life... determined by birth, legitimized and sanctified by the dominant Brahmanic religio-cultural symbol and belief" (28). Hence, different socio-cultural organizations like Yogan South Indian, Jat Pat Todak Mandal, Maruvar Mehtar Sudhar Subha, People's Education Society, Adi Dharam Mandal, Adi Dravida Mahajan Sabha, Adi Hind Mahasabha, Adi Hindu Social Service League, and All India Depressed Classes League greatly influence

Dalit assimilation in Indian society. Other organizations like All India Sudra Mahasabha, Bahujan Shikshar Sangh, Buddhist Society of India, and Dalit Seva Ashram played a crucial role in bringing the socio-cultural assimilations of Dalits into Hindu society in earlier times. At present, various Dalits organizations like Valmiki Sabha, and Chamar Mahasabha and in-service Dalit employees' associations like Ambedkar Professor Association Haryana play a remarkable role to foster Dalits' assimilation in mainstream socio-cultural discourses of India. But the Hindu prohibitory caste codes (against Dalits) not only keep them indulged in internal bickering that stops their social consolidation but also weaken their political stand even in recent times in India.

Resistance in Regional Dalit Writings

Dalit writers dissect the sacredness of religious sanction to the caste system, which turns their lives full of suffering and, hence get analyzed in a humanistic perspective. The survival zeal of untouchables (despite inhuman tortures) leads to portray Dalit resistance and critically analyses caste prejudices against them in the Hindu society. The foregrounding of Dalit literature becomes evident, "It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (Lorde 99). Therefore, Life Writings and Dalit Autobiographies describe Dalit sensibilities to the innermost aspect of their life in Indian society. Alexander Pope said, 'Proper study of mankind is a man.' In the theoretical aspect, all kinds of literature is the study of mankind's relationship with the cultural environment, hence one gets institutionalized in the religio-political ecology of his/her society. Without much literary experiment to suit their readership, Dalit writers also express their sufferings in their lingua-franca. They describe how Dalits get marginalized due to caste biases in the religio-political spheres of Indian society.

Dalit writers express the sufferings of the deprived people through different literary genres but their life writings in regional languages as well as in the English language have extended the literary pursuit of their deliberation for the global readership. A little drifting from the literary standards particularly in literary aestheticism, Dalit life writings are swaying in an emotional outburst that touches the marginalized sections in the dominant social system as well as in mainstream writings. The Oxford Centre for Life Writings defines,

Life-writing involves, and goes beyond, biography. It encompasses everything from the complete life to the day-in-the-life, from the fictional to the factional. It embraces the lives of objects and institutions as well as the lives of individuals, families and groups...includes biography, autobiography, memoirs, letters, diaries, journals, anthropological data, oral testimony, eye-witness accounts, biopics, plays and musical performances, obituaries, scandal sheets, and gossip columns, blogs, and social media such as Tweets and Instagram stories... literary or historical... can involve philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, ethnographers and anthropologists.

Dalit autobiographies are distinct in approach that focuses on describing the exploitation of Dalits in the Hindu social system and establishes that the oppressive politics of the upper castes remain the same despite regional variation of the caste equations against untouchables. Dalit autobiographies put forth the community experience actualized by the Dalit writers who portray subtle caste practices against Dalits. Hazari's *Untouchables: The Autobiography of an Indian Outcaste* (1950) is the first Dalit autobiography. In comparison to the first known Indian autobiography- *Aamar Jiban* published in 1876 and written in Bengali by Rassundari Devi, the first Dalit autobiography comes out after a long gap. Daya Pawar's *Baluthe* (1978) describes the great achievement of the untouchables which was translated into foreign and other regional languages.

Dadasaheb More's *Gobal* (1983) describes the problems of the nomadic tribe-Pingla Joshi who earn their livelihood wandering from one village to the other. On the other hand, Luxman Mane's *Uppara* (1984) describes customs, and problems of the Kaikadi community translated in English as *Upara* in 1997. Atmaram Rathod's *Tanda* (1989) describes the issues of the Banjara community who live on the periphery of the village and earn their livelihood by odd jobs like cattle tending. Mohandas Namishray's *Apne Apne Pinjare* (1996) and Omprakash Valmiki's *Jhoothan*, (1997) typically characterize the Dalit communities in the regional caste oppositions. Om Prakash Valmiki's *Jhoothan*, (1997) has also got published in English with the original name *Jhoothan* retained. The realistic portrayal of Dalits' miseries in the autobiography by the writer was translated into the English language under the same title and published in 2003. Kishore Kale's *Against All Odds* (2000) describes the Kolhati tribal community in which women earn a livelihood by dancing while the men enjoy the earnings from these Tamasha dancers. Saran Kumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* in Marathi (1984) is translated as *An Outcaste: A Memoir* in English (2003). Vasant Moon's *Vasti* (1995) has been translated into *Growing Up Untouchable in India* (2003). Uttam Tape's *Katyaverchi Pote* (2001) describes the Matang community who earn their livelihood by skinning dead animals. Siddalinaiah's autobiography titled *Ooru Kaeri* (2006) describes the writer's bitter experience of caste oppression in Kannada society in the state of Karnataka. Shankarrao Kharat's *Taral Ataral* (2015) describes the Yeskar Community-a sub-caste of Mahar and, Mukta Sarvagond in *Closed Doors* (2016) raises her voice against caste pretentious leaders where the upper castes use Dalits as scapegoats., Balwant Singh's *An Untouchable in the I.A.S.*(1997) D.R.Jatava's *A Silent Soldier: An Autobiography* (2000), in addition to Shyamlal Jaidia's *Untold Story of a Bhangi Vice-Chancellor*(2001) are some of the recent autobiographies are all written in English. D.P. Das's *The Untouchable Story* (1985) is an oral narrated autobiography is written by

James Freeman. These autobiographies are replete with Dalit literary aesthetics in contrast to conventional autobiographical traits.

Works Cited and Consulted

Ambedkar, B. R. "Writings and speeches (Vol. 1)." *Mumbai: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra* (1989).

Aloysius, G. *Nationalism without a Nation*. Oxford University Press. 1998.

Abraham, Joshil K., and Judith Misrahi-Barak, eds. *Dalit Literatures in India*. Routledge, 2015.

Aggarwal, P.C. *Halfway to Equality*. New Delhi: Manohar Publications. 1983.

Akpan, Otoabasi. *War and Conquest without Weapons*. Adonis & Abbey Publishers Ltd, 2013.

Anand, Mulk Raj. "On the Genesis of Untouchable: A Note by Mulk Raj Anand." *South Asian Review* 32.1 (2011): 133-136.

Anderson, Perry. *The antinomies of antonio gramsci*. Verso, 2020.

Ankur, Dir. Shyam Benagal. Released in 1974.

Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at large: cultural dimensions of globalization*. Vol. 1. U of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Arifi, Ranghrehthian da Itihas in 'Making Sense of Dalit Sikh History' in *Dalit Studies* trans by Raj Kumar Hans.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The empire writes back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*. Routledge, 2003.

Debdulal Banerjee, *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* by Omprakash Valmiki: An Embodiment Of Dalit Resistant Aesthetics, *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL)*, Vol.3.Issue 4.2015, page 312-315

Barthes, Roland. *A Barthes reader*. Random House, 1993.

Berman, Jessica. "Toward a Regional Cosmopolitanism: The Case of Mulk Raj Anand." *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 55.1 (2009): 142-162.

Beteille, Andre. *Caste, class and power: changing patterns of stratification in a Tanjore village*. Oxford University Press, 2012.

Beth, Sarah. "Hindi Dalit autobiography: An exploration of identity." *Modern Asian Studies* (2007): 545-574.

Brige, G.W. *The Chamar*. London. Oxford University Press. 1920.

Brueck, Laura R. *Writing Resistance: The Rhetorical Imagination of Hindi Dalit Literature*. Columbia University Press, 2014.

Chakravarti, Uma. *Gardening Caste; Through a Feminist Lens*. Calcutta: Stree, 2003.

Dharamrajan, Gita and Nandita Aggarwal. *Katha; Prize Stories* vol.9

Fanon, Frantz. *The wretched of the earth*. Grove/Atlantic, Inc., 2007.

Gandhi, Leela, *Postcolonial Theory. A critical Introduction*, Oxford India Paperbacks

Kumar, Raj, *Dalit Personal Narratives, Reading Caste, Nation and Identity* Orient BlackSwan

Kumar, Shiv. *Voices From the Margins, A critical Understanding of Caste and Marginality*. BookAge Publications, 2019.

Shaphered, Kancha Ilaaha : *Buffalo Nationalism. A Critique of Spiritual Nationalism*. Samya.