



## DALIT LITERATURE: A BRIEF STUDY OF MARATHI DALIT AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

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### Abstract

Dalit literature is about the dalit the broken class under caste system forms an important and separate part of literature, Dalit literature has developed hand in hand with the Dalit movement. In the early 1970's. The Dalit panthers emerged in Maharashtra as a part of the countrywide wave of radical politics. Depend on the teaching of both Marx and Ambedkar and drawing inspiration from the Black Panther Movement in the USA young Dalit writers including Namdeo Dhasal, Arjun Dangle, and J V Pawar took the initiative in trying to build up a grand war against the Varna-jati system. The Dalit literature appeared in Hindi, Marathi, and Kannada, Tamil language from first to last the poems, short stories, and most importantly Marathi Dalit autobiographies. Dalit literature is a new phenomenon in the modern era of literature where the tormenting experience of Dalit untouchables writers were exposed to present the contemporary social mental condition before Dalit and non-Dalit readers, This paper gives overview of Dalit literature and Marathi Dalit autobiographies and importance .Dalit works emerged in the contemporary period as a revolt or protest against the oppressive traditional bonds.

**Key words:** Dalit Literature, Autobiographies, Dalit Writers, Caste Exploitation.

### Introduction

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 society and culture from this below subaltern historical approach has set in motion a process for the true discovery of India.

Dalit literature is today emerging as a powerful tool in the hands of Dalits in their struggle for human rights and assertion. This literature claims identify that is distinct from mainstream literature. Since the late 1960's and 70's, there was a surge in Dalit literature, as large numbers of Dalit writers

came forth to produce literary works of varied nature, scorching life experience is the price of Dalit literature. Anguish and revolt is the distinctive feature of this literature. When the anguish leads to revolt, then the will to negate is born. Dalit literature has nurtured this will be shaped out of the philosophies of three great human Buddha, Kabirnanda, Phule, but altogether new and self-sufficient. Ambedkar's philosophy is at the root of this literature.

Dalit literary tradition emerged primarily from cultural conflict. It challenged the Hindu hegemony of mainstream literature. This literary tradition had a distinct anti-caste message. It embodied the Dalit's search for culture of their own and developed a

counter-culture parallel to the 'Great Tradition' without being co-opted into the Sanskrit tradition. The literary movement created Dalit folklore with the assertion that they have had a culture of their own and that they do have one which is not any way inferior to any other tradition of India. Dalit literary movements were direct references although in passing.

In the words of Sharan Kumar Limbale, the noted Marathi Dalit Writer and activist, Dalit literature means "Writing about Dalits by Dalits by Dalit writers with a Dalit consciousness" The form of Dalit literature is inherent in its Dalit-ness and its purpose is obvious. To inform Dalit society of its slavery and narrate its pains and sufferings, rejection, experience, Dalit consciousness, commitment of the Dalit writers and an uncouth impolite language that is the spoken language of the Dalits.

Arjun Dangle another noted Marathi Dalit writer noted "Dalit literature is marked by revolt and negativism since it is closely associated with the hopes for freedom by a group of people who, as untouchables are victims of social, economic and cultural inequality"

Dalit literature has developed hand in hand with the Dalit movement. In the early 1970's. The Dalit Panthers emerged in Maharashtra as a part of the countrywide wave of radical politics. Depend on the teaching of both Marx and Ambedkar and drawing inspiration from the Black Panther Movement in the USA young Dalit writers including Namdeo Dhasal, Arjun Dangle, and J V Pawar took the initiative in trying to build up a grand war against the Varna-jati system. Their tools were both political and cultural. However, the long-lasting impact of the Panthers in the field of Dalit culture was perhaps more than in the field of politics. Through their efforts were emerged altogether new genre of protest literature. Dalit associated with and inspired by the movement articulated their interests through a wide range of creations stories, novels, music, and drama. It would not be an overstatement to say that since the 70's Marathi Literature virtually underwent a revolution forceful writings came from poets like Daya Pawar, Waman Nimbalkar, Arjun Dangle and J V Pawar's also short story writers like Taranchandra

Khandekar, Yogiraj Waghmare. Avinash Dolas, Yogeindra Meshram, and others.

In the vast majority of the writings of the Dalit Panthers, the economic marginalization of the Dalit was vividly depicted. The link between caste humiliation and stark poverty and the agony it generates reached out to touch the hearts of the readers. In the writings, social awareness reached high points as the social content remain uppermost. The contrast between class existence of the upper caste exploiter and the low caste is sharply depicted in the many of the writings.

In the Dalit panther's writings, there was a passionate demand for human rights. They visualized another existence in the future. A redeemed another existence, where their rights would assured. But, that future, however, would have to be snatched not begged. The passionate call of Baburao Bagal in his poem "You who have made the mistake".

A glowing future was dreamt by the panthers yet, the contours of the future were hazy, the path uncertain, perhaps on this alone they were nearer the utopian socialists, then the Marxist, perhaps too, this had been the reason for disorientation of many panthers, leader and the disintegration of a movement that otherwise had an enormous potential .

It is the credit of panthers that the assimilation of the two ideologies, Marxism and Ambedkarism was attempted for the first in the country. Essentially it remained an emotional and a poetic negation of the status quo, craving for the broad revolutionary change and on ideological plane inevitably reflected an amalgam of Ambedkar and Marx. Much of Dalit literature that emerged elsewhere across the country over the years was inspired by the panther's movement and Marathi Dalit literature.

#### **The Influence on Dalit Literature in Bengal:**

Bengal society has traditionally been marked by Brahminical dominance in social, economic, cultural, political fields. Here casteism has been somewhat subtle in comparison to that in other regions of the country. Yet its presence can hardly

be denied on close personal it will be seen that as in many other fields, the literary field in Bengal has been entirely dominated by caste Hindus, Almost all prominent authors be they fiction or non-fiction writers have come from the upper caste just as presentation language and overall perception have been govern by Hindu upper-caste elite ethos. The Dalit was seldom the author and his story was hardly depicted from his angle. His depiction was infrequent and when at all it come it was from a paternalistic angle, that was a reality in pre-partition Bengal and is still so in West Bengal.

From the 1990's however assertion of Dalit writers has significantly increased. This has come with the rapid expansion of Dalit literary works in different fields –nonfiction writing, novels short stories, poetry, drama include Kapil Mullick, Krishna Thakur, Jatin Bala, Manohar Mouli, Biswas, Nakul Mullick, Manoranjan, Byapari, Kalyani Thankur Charal to name a few Dalit magazines have rapidly multiplying in numbers and providing platform for the Dalit writers . All most all-district in west Bengal having a sizable Dalit population are found there under efforts of local Dalit individuals, important Dalit Kantho, Jagaran, Aikatan Gabeshna Patrika, and Nikhil Bharat.

Dalit literature is a new phenomenon in the modern era of literature where the tormenting experience of Dalit untouchables writers were exposed to present the contemporary social mental condition before Dalit and non-Dalit readers, Mulk Raj Anand was the first to insulate Dalit literature through his novels like 'Untouchable' 'Coolie' in English and there are simultaneously translated in different language. The style of Dalit literature covers a wide range of literary genres, this Dalit literature is made popular in Marathi by Maharashtra. Dalit poets, writers it solely aims at generating awareness of Dalits about their social situation in the society to all conscious readers.

There is plenty of Dalit poetry, Dalit Folk Poetry, Dalit Short Stories expressing the violent lashing experiences the generation of Dalit works emerged in the contemporary period as a revolt or protest against the oppressive traditional bonds.

#### **Dalit Autobiographies in Marathi:**

There had been a good number of Dalit autobiographies in Marathi. They become an inspiration and model for many Dalit writers in other states across India due to their collective consciousness and authenticity to depict Dalit in India. Many of the autobiographies got translated into various regional languages as well as into English, French German, Spanish Korean, Russian Language predominately the Dalit autobiographies described memories of hateful past and basic change due to Ambedkar movement. The first generation educated Dalits got inspired by Dr .B R Ambedkar writings and speeches took the responsibility on their shoulders to create an awareness of their community history and wages a war on caste system sanctioned by Hindu religion their literary practices which upheld the tradition where their voice and in their writing.

Dr. Sharankumar Limbale, a Dalit author explained that autobiography was the struggle story of the educated untouchable protagonist against his humiliated and stigmatized lower caste identity in the caste-ridden society of the upper caste people. The Hindu religious ritual, caste-ridden poverty, hunger, superstitious illiteracy addiction, etc. Besides the Dalit autobiography also described the prosperity of the upper caste as well as poverty of the untouchables due to religious interference in their life Dr. Sharankumar Limbale also further explained that the woman Dalit autobiographies Dalit with their exploitation at class, caste and gender level. The Dalit woman was sexually assaulted by the Hindu upper caste men as well as their poor Dalit women were subordinated by their Dalit men, more ever the Dalit autobiography the Dalit autobiographies used to be divided into two parts. In the first part, the Hindu religious caste system was categorically exposed during the childhood experience of the protagonist in the village however in the second part with the inspiration of Dr. B R Ambedkar.

Dr. B R Ambedkar autobiographical letters "Waiting for Visa" (1951), Twenty pages autobiographical life story of Dr. B R Ambedkar were considered as the first attempt of Dalit autobiographical notes. However, the autobiographies in its complete form emerged after

the 1970's. Which were intensely personal as well as representing the Dalit community,

Dagdu Maruti Pawar (1935) popularly known as Daya Pawar, a Mahar traced the framework of the autobiography in the diary of Kalappa Yashwant Dhale who had written it during the period 1911-28. Pawar thoroughly understood the framework i.e. the caste-based exploitation and its resistance through education in this diary and also wrote his autobiography *Baluta* (The Share in the Balutedari system 1978) with the same structure which as the first full-fledged Dalit autobiography. He exposed how caste system discrimination and economic exploitation was being systematically practiced against his community in the rural locality of the village Dhanegaon. He graphically depicted how the untouchable communities were cruelly pushed to do menial occupations by the caste Hindu religion was mainly responsible for the historical discrimination of untouchable in Indian.

Madhav Kondwilkar, a cobbler in his autobiography *Mukaam Post Devache Gothane* (At post-Devache Gothane 1979) depicted hoe caste discrimination was being practiced among the untouchables, He felt that it was happening because of the dominant presence of Brahminical Hindu world view penetrated all walks of lives in India. He has dominated how he was discriminated, he was a good working teacher working in upper-caste locality by the student's headmaster and fellow teachers.

P E Sonamble, a Mahar in his autobiography *Athwanichepakshi* (The Bird of Memory 1979) described agonies of an untouchable besides being an orphan child. Son Kamble was humiliated by the Hindu religious structure, where his caste identity prevented him from changing his occupation, resulting in his economy rigidity.

UttamTupe through his autobiography *Katyawarchi pot* (stomach on Thorns 1981) displayed the sorrows and sufferings of the Matanga community that earn their livelihood by skinning dead animals and begging in the village.

In the same year Shankarao Kharat (1921-2001) a Mahar in his autobiography *Taral. Antaral*

(from Yeskar duty to space in the sky 1981) described the story of the Untouchables. It was his journey from a child of an Untouchable Rama Taral (The Mahar of official servant of the village) He described his struggle for education. He graduated in law and become the Vice-Chancellor of Dr. B R Babasahe Ambedkar Marathwada University.

Sharankumar Limbale, a well-known Dalit activist writer, critic is one of the most renowned Dalit writers in India. He has completed MA (Marathi) in 1990 and Ph.D. in Marathi in 1996 from Shivaji University, Kolhapur. He is a good academician as a writer and occupied too many position till today. He is known poetry, Short Stories Particularly for his masterpiece, autobiography *Akkarmashi* (1984) which is first written in Marathi and translated in Hindi Tamil, Kannada Punjabi, Malayalam languages. It is the first Dalit autobiography which is translated into English by Santosh Bhoomkar, Oxford University Press with the title *The Outcaste* (2003).

Sharankumar Limbale explained that the Dalit autobiography was the struggle story of the educated untouchable protagonist against his humiliated and stigmatized lower caste-ridden society of the upper caste people. The Hindu People religious caste system used to make him to suffer a lot to his subordination for religious rituals caste-ridden poverty, hunger, superstition, illiteracy addiction, etc.

Besides the Dalit autobiography also described the prosperity of the upper caste as well as the poverty of the untouchables due to the religious interference in their life.

Dr. Narendra Jadhav Dalit scholar and writer in his autobiography '*Amacha Baap Aan Amhi* in Marathi (1993) *Our Father and We*, described how Dama Mahar was inspired by the thoughts speech and messenger of Dr. B R Ambedkar. He had also introduced the humanistic values to his children who in their later life became renowned personalities Damu and his wife Sonu, both of them explored their thought for conversation that they happily participated in. After rejecting the Hindu religious caste identity, the second generation of Damu's

family i.e. Dr. Narendra Jadhav also recorded his experiences regarding his Dalit identity.

Kishor Shanta bai Kale was a Marathi writer and social worker from Maharashtra, in 1994 he wrote his autobiography *Kolhatyacha Por* (A child of Kolhati) it has been translated to English by Sandhya Pandey and titled *Against All Odds*. It focused on agonies of Kolhati women had to dance for their livelihood where they were made keeps by the upper caste men.

Dalit Woman writers wrote their autobiographies in a more assertive and rebellious manner educated Dalit writers wrote about their oppression, agony and protest through thesis writings like male Dalit writers. Dalit woman also raised through their autobiographies their agony Dalit literature poses major challenges to the dominant society Dalit and woman autobiographies displays a tremendous skepticism towards the society. Dalit autobiographies are literary forms of social protest practices. After that there come to flood of Dalit autobiographies due to atrocities of upper caste, the lower caste people were infuriated Dalit started writing their woes.

The Dalit woman autobiographies narrate the double oppression faced by Dalit women as a dalit and as a women. Autobiographies of Dalit women writers address various issues related to subaltern section their protest and agony. The Dalit feminist struggle began the upper caste as impactful of the women's position. From the autobiographies Dalit women a significant contribution of the Dalit literature. They become the tools to understand the consciousness of Dalit women. The writing of Dalit women represent their own experience their burning indignation and protect against the caste and gender discrimination prevalent in the society. Many Dalit women started awakened and giving literary expression to their suffering. The voice of Dalit women is an intense cry for justice. Their autobiographies reflected the burning desire for freedom from the clutches for caste and discrimination. Dalit woman autobiographies deals mainly with the emotional turbulence of women and their relationship in the social setup. Kumad Pawde, a Mahar woman in her surname. Som Kunwar which

reflected her autobiography connection with Hindu religion and tradition.

Another untouchable woman Mukta Sarwagod in her autobiography *Mitaleli Kaawade* (Closed doors 1983) protest against her Hindu religious untouchable caste identity. She argued that the society closed the opportunities of development of the women she rejected the tradition and customs of such identities.

Baby Kamble, a Mahar woman in her autobiography "Jina Amucha" original of Marathi "The Prison We Broke", is a millstone in the history of Dalit writing in Marathi. It is probably the first autobiography of a dalit woman not only in Marathi but in any Indian language. In English Maya Pandit was translated the Jina Amucha as "The Prison We Broke" described the untouchable's subjection in Hindu religious culture and caste.

Shantabai Kamble, a Mahar woman in her autobiography "Mazya Jalmachi Chittar Katha (The Pictorial Story of My life 1990) narrated the story of little Mahar caste girl that how she become a teacher. She had presented the caste discrimination as well as gender-based humiliation in her life. However, she used to get inspiration to fight against all these odd things. It was considered the first published Dalit woman Autobiography in Marathi.

Urmila Pawar is an Indian writer belongs to the Dalit community she writes in Marathi, an Indian language she also identifies as a feminist. Urmila Pawar is a literary personality she was born and brought up in Kokan. According to Dharamarajan her work as a writer reflects her experience of the difficulties of being a woman and Dalit. When she was 12 years old she and her family converted to Buddhism along with other members of their community. The original members of their community. The original title of Urmila Pawar's autobiography is "Aidan" a word from local dialect spoken in the village from the background of her life. In her autobiography *Aidan* (The Weave of my life - 2007) she talks about poverty faced by her family Aidan her autobiography written in Marathi has been translated into English The weave in the metaphor of the writing technique employed by Pawar, the lives of different life of Dalits the man

fold in which caste asserts itself and grinds them down her experience in world terms of education learning live hood and the emergence in individual identity in modern.

All these dalit authors have narrated their life style to give a clear picture to the readers about their terrible condition and their efforts to come out of it. The above autobiographies shown the exploitation it is shown how Dalits were exploited by upper caste People in different ways and in different places Dalits discrimination and suppression in their own way in their respective autobiographies claiming education as an important tool to come out of exploitation.

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