

INDIAN DALIT LITERATURE: QUEST FOR IDENTITY TO SOCIAL EQUALITY

¹Dr. Pavan Mandavkar
Principal, Indira Mahavidyalaya,
Kalamb, Dist. Yavatmal, Maharashtra, India 445 401
E-mail: pavanmandavkar@hotmail.com

Abstract

India is one of the fastest growing countries in the world; yet it is notorious for its rigid caste system. This paper examines the history of suppression, condition of the suppressed and origin of Dalit writings. It includes the study of movement and scope of Dalit Literature. It is widely believed that all Dalit literary creations have its root in the Ambedkarite thoughts. The paper also dissects the stark realities of Dalit and their commendable attempts to upraise socially. This literature show dramatic accounts of social-political experiences of Dalit community in the caste based society of India. It traces the conditions of the Indian social factors that surround the Dalits and their interactions with Dalits as well as non-Dalits. It explores how Dalit community struggled for equality and liberty. Due to strong Dalit movements as well as hammering on upper caste society, Government and thinkers through Dalit literature, a positive approach towards equality upcoming in social life of Dalit community now days. Discrimination on the basis of caste and gender are banned by law. This is a journey of oppressed from quest for identity to social equality through their literature.

Keywords: Dalit, castes, untouchables, oppressed, autobiographies

Introduction

In sixty's decade new literary movement burst on the Indian Literature scene, especially in Marathi language, named *Dalit literature*. It was accompanied by an oppressed group who called themselves Dalit Panthers. This movement has spread to all over India. The poets and writers of the movement used the word '*Dalit*' which replaced the descriptive name of *Untouchable* or *Harijan*. Although it seemed new to the English speaking world in the 1970s, Dalit literature began to appear in early sixties as part of the movement led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891–1956), undisputed leader of Untouchables. The magazines of Dr. Ambedkar like *Janata*, *Prabuddha Bharat*, *Muknayak* published some stories and poems of untouchables during the 1940s and 1950s most importantly the short stories of Marathi writer Bandhu Madhav with focusing real life of oppressed. Then this theme followed by others.

Dalit literature is creative and intellectual literary expression which transforms the social realities into various literary genres. It was a offshoot of Indian literature and represented an emerging trend in the Indian literary scene. Dalit Literature is primarily a social and human document, which deals with the people who had been socially and economically exploited in India for hundreds of years. But there is a good sign of social equality slowly entering in India. Credit goes to all activists and to Dalit literature.

Objective and Significance of the study: To elaborate the real life of dalit community through their literature and positive steps towards equality, the research entitled '*Indian Dalit Literature: Quest for Identity to Social Equality*' which also analyses the journey of oppressed or untouchables in India from socio-economic-political exploitations to developments. Academicians and researchers should know this creative literary force of the untouchables, who have been deprived of identity and equality.

Interdisciplinary relevance: The importance relevance of this subject is not only in Language and literature but also in History, Sociology, Geography, Psychology, Philosophy, Anthropology etc. This type of literature is found in African-American writing or in other word what is called as 'Black writing', Palestinian literature etc.

Methodology: The researcher has adopted observation and survey, sample collection, analytical, descriptive and comparative methodology for this paper, reliance has been placed on books, journals, and online database.

History of Castes and Classism in India

It is often remarked that South Asia has a genius for assimilating foreign influences without losing its essential character. Nowhere is this resilience demonstrated more clearly than in the way the Dravidian languages have absorbed what, by any count, must be regarded as massive Indo-Aryan influence and yet retained their essential Dravidian character. Indo-Aryanization of Dravidian languages must have started more than about 3,500 years ago. The presence of linguistic features of possibly Dravidian origin in the Rig Veda

suggests Aryan contact with the Dravidian-speaking peoples as several hundred years before the composition of the Rig Veda. The Aryans invaded India and implemented the new law of 'Varna' resulted in four classes - Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. The basic definition and explanation given that the people engaged in the field of education are Brahmin, fighters on battle field are Kshatriya, businessmen are Vaishya and other workers are Shudras. This classification was made on the basis of skill, ability or capacity of workers, resulted in different castes as per their occupation. But after thousands of year the reality became tragic with meaning that the class and caste of father or paternal family has been given to their children without examining occupation, skill or ability to do that work.

It is blamed that this system was introduced to protect from miscegenation particularly the indigenous aborigines. The fourth class Shudras were thrown out of society and then called untouchables. Several invaded administration did not consider their welfare.

Dalit

Etymologically, the word 'Dalit' is derived from Sanskrit word 'Dalita', means 'oppressed'. In Indian socio-cultural context they were untouchables and the below Brahmin, Kshatriya, and Vaishya. The untouchables were referred as 'Chandala' or 'Avarna' in ancient period. The words 'Untouchable' or 'Harijan', used by Narasimha Mehta and Mahatma Gandhi during 20th century. The word 'Exterior Castes' used by the famous historian J.H. Hutton at international level for these untouchables. 'Harijan' means 'people of God'. The official term used for this community is Scheduled Caste. Since few decades Shudras are known as Dalit. Dalit, a word that refers 'ground' collects under its umbrella numerous groups that move at the margins. This is a self chosen word derived from the Sanskrit and Marathi word for ground down, broken, that is oppressed. It is used to indicate that untouchability is imposed by others, not a result of inherent pollution. It is also used to be inclusive of all the deprived and oppressed of India.

Dalit Literature Movement

Suppressed class movement started in India in the year 1958 by the thinkers as Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar and earlier inspired by Mahatma Jyotiba Phule. This got the spark from the Black Movement of contemporary America. As obvious from the meaning Dalit literature is the writing about and of Dalits or oppressed. This literature echoes the agony of the experiences of untouchables. It portrays the caste humiliation, injustice, atrocities, and discriminations perpetrated by the upper caste people. It expresses the political consciousness that focused on the struggle for self-respect and dignity for the community. This Literature might include writings about the exploitation of nature and environment, the racial discrimination of Afro Americans in America, the women subordination, the rights of homosexuals, the negligence of old age people. The word 'Dalit' has a large periphery and it speaks about every type of domination that any group faces. It has the healing power to cure the traumas of the past.

The British Indian Empire gave some reform schemes to the historically disadvantaged men and women. They passed the 'Government of India Act 1935' and identified the untouchables as Depressed Class or the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The act also provided some welfare schemes to bring out development of Dalits. Even though Dalits were considered as impure and unskilled, they began to articulate their dignity and identity in speeches and writings. This movement produced research articles, poems, drama, short stories, novels and other forms of mass media about the exploited social life. Foreign writers, non-Dalits and Dalits were aware of the impact of caste system in South Asia.

One of the first Dalit writers was Madara Chennaiah, an eleventh-century cobbler-saint who lived during the reign of Western Chalukyas and who is also regarded by some scholars as the 'Father of Vachana Poetry'. Another poet who finds mention is Dohara Kakkaiah, a Dalit by birth, whose six confessional poems survive, throwing light on those troubled times. Marathi Saint Chokhamela and his wife Soyra Bai also explained the condition of oppressed through their poems (Abhanga) in 13th century. In 1958, the term 'Dalit literature' was used for the first time, when the first conference of *Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangha* (Maharashtra Dalit Literature Society) was held at Mumbai.

Baburao Bagul (1930–2008) was a pioneer of Dalit writings in Marathi. His first collection of stories, *Jevha Mi Jat Chorali* (When I had Concealed My Caste), published in 1963, created a stir in Marathi Literature with its passionate depiction of a cruel society and thus brought in new momentum to Dalit literature. Gradually with other writers like, Namdeo Dhasal (who founded Dalit Panther), Daya Pawar, N.R. Shende strengthened Dalit movement. Gail Omvedt, in her article 'Dalit literature in Maharashtra: Literature of Social and Protest and Revolt in Western India', claimed that, ".....though Dalit literature as 'movement' began only in the late 1960s and early 1970s, one of the most important Dalit writers and a major forerunner of the movement was Annabhau Sathé (1920-1968) He was a writer of diverse forms. His novels and short stories remain avidly read even today, and in fact up to the present no equivalent Dalit novelist has emerged."^[1]

Though clannish elements were visible as early in the 11th century, actual Dalit Movement started in

the sixty's decade in Marathi literature and later on infiltrated to Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, Tamil and Hindi literature. Dalit writers initiated a realistic, experience based and authentic literature which threatened the upper class hegemony in society. The anger, sorrow and the indomitable will and hope of Dalit protagonists were offered in a tongue which was often vulgar. The Dalit writers of different states in India share a collective relationship to a common cause, a common identity and a common political stance.

Inspiration of Dalit Literature

The words – pain, sorrow, resistance, protest, classism, oppressed, suppressed, untouchable found in the literature of different countries. African-American writing or 'Black writing' is written by the writers of African descent in United States. The pioneers of this writing are Phillis Wheatney and Olaudah Equiano, who began their works in late 18th century. It has reached early high points with slave narratives of 19th century. African American Literature created advancing wave-front in the United States of America during the twentieth century as a voice of protest against racial discrimination. Similarly, Dalit literature also documents the socio-cultural and political factors of the exploited mass in India.

African Americans were prevented from enjoying life because of their race. The Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s-1930s institutionalized the African American literature as a subject of academic inquiry and ensured that the writers and their readers were keenly aware of the circumstances in which they worked. Whether the writers embraced the tradition or resisted its premises, their work extended its contours. *The Continuum Encyclopedia of American Literature* says: ".....the first two centuries of the African Diaspora's sojourn in the U.S. were marked by the dominance of the SLAVE NARRATIVE and African American FOLKLORE, both of which continued to flourish and influence African American literature and politics long after the end of slavery. This does not mean, however, that these two creative forms represented the totality of African American literature."^[2]

Harlem Renaissance was initially started as the 'New Negro Movement.' It created great space for a new Negro culture and music like Jazz, and Blues. It was characterized by an overt racial pride that came to be represented in the idea of the 'New Negro.' Through intellectual writings and creative arts, Negro promoted progressive or social equality in America. Most of the Negro slaves did not even know their biological parents and the date of birth because of illiteracy and blacks as commodity in slave trade. They were not even allowed to read or learn. But blacks orally reported their deprived past through speeches and consequently edited them in the 'creative forms' autobiography and folklore.

Negro slaves narrated, in their autobiographies, the horrors of family separation, the sexual abuse, and the inhuman treatments. These experienced narrations helped the Abolitionists to educate both Black and White people beyond the borders. The Black Panther Movement was started to uplift black people as a legal welfare measure in America. After a few decades, Dalit Panther Movement in India followed the Negroes' and got its intellectual recognition in the life period of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956). He was the first untouchable educated in the United States of America and England. After India's independence (1947), the idea of democracy reached many sections, awakening the masses all over the country. Dalit literature portrayed their society in their regional languages. There were very significant impacts on Dalit Literature by African American Literature, and Dalit writers found a 'parallel phenomenon' in their movements. It could also be noticed that African American literature stands as support and proof as Dalit literature. These oppressed people's writings are creative to elevate themselves from the orthodox and conservative societies.

The term 'resistance' has extensively been drawn in the context of subaltern studies. Etymologically the word owes its genesis to Latin *resistere* meaning 'to take stand'. The term resistance was first applied in relation to literature in Ghassan Kanafani's work on Palestinian literature. This literature is a creative endeavor which registers strong protest against the oppressors.

In this connection it is not perverse to consider Dalit literature as one of the recent forms of resistance literature in India. The spurt in Dalit literature is to expose issues of exploitation, discrimination, malnutrition and growing death rate of the underprivileged sections of India like untouchable, minorities, nomadic tribes and other degraded lives. It came as a move away from the symbolic grand narratives and posed a tremendous challenge to the existing literary conventions. Dalit literature is based on the philosophy of Lord Buddha which followed by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. After the establishment of democracy in India Dr. Ambedkar, an architect of Indian constitution has emerged as the great hero for Dalits. Dr. Ambedkar's ideology has set new culture among Dalits. His message to educate, unite and fight for rights proved the lighthouse to the lost ship of Dalits. With Ambedkar's ideology, Buddha, Kabir, Fule, Periyar Swami and many other local Dalit heroes have given new vision to the oppressed humanity, as a result Dalit culture and life has changed.

Indian Dalit Literature: Quest for Identity to Social Equality

Dalit Literature, which is about the oppressed according to the Indian caste system. People, who are called as Dalits in the Indian society have a history of being lived in subjugation under the high-classes of the Indian society. So they have been a marginalized, downtrodden and subaltern group from centuries. But because

of the efforts of many social reformers like –Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi, this community has also rise and been progressing day-bay-day. Still many problems related to their existence in the present scenario.

By a particular ethnical group Dalit literature introduced with the commencement of Dalit Conferences in sixty's decade. Munshi Premchand, Amrita Nagar, Mannu Bhandari, Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, Salman Rushdie, Malkhan Singh, Jai Prakash Kardam, Suraj Pal Chauhan, Omprakash Valmiki, Vasant Moon, and other writers brought out social purpose and criticism rather than mere entertainment in their writings. Mahaswetha Devi, Basudev Sunani, Bama, Sivakami, Poomani, Marku, Paul Chirakkarode and Arundhati Roy walked after them. It should be viewed with its contemporary context, as it is not a 'recreational' or 'leisure' literature because it advocates rights of the Dalit community and inspires people to rise against oppression.

Dalit literature originated in Marathi and spread in many languages all over India. There are many Dalit Marathi writers like Bandhu Madhav, Annabhau Sathe, Daya Pawar, P.I. Sonkamble, Shantabai Kamble, Raja Dhale, Namdev Dhasal, Laxman Mane, Laxman Gayakwad, Hari Narake, Sharankumar Limbale, Arun Kamble, Waman Nibalkar, Bhimsen Detha, Bhau Panchbhai, Ambadas Shinde, Murlidhar Bansode, Kishor Shantabai Kale who have contributed a lot to Dalit literature.

Sharankumar Limbale in his one of the seminal essays entitled as *Dalit Literature: Form and Purpose* suggests certain pivotal traits to discern the form of Dalit Literature and has also assayed to explain some of the basic reasons behind this paradigm shift in the literary sphere of Indian literature. He says, "Rejection and revolt in Dalit literature have been birthed from the womb of Dalits pain. They are directed against an inhuman system that was imposed on them. Just as the anguish expressed in Dalit literature is in the nature of a collective social voice, similarly, the rejection and revolt are social and collective... The Dalit consciousness in Dalit literature is the revolutionary mentality connected with struggle. It is a belief in rebellion against the caste system, recognizing the human being as its focus. Dalit consciousness is an important seed for Dalit literature; it is separate and distinct from the consciousness of other writers. Dalit literature is demarcated as unique because of this consciousness."^[3]

Dalit literature is a literature with its prime focus on the social marginalization of the oppressed communities like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and religious minorities. Dalit literature and dalit activism became rampant in Maharashtra and Southern India. Dalit literature –especially- dalit autobiographies differ from other types of literature in expression and purpose. They portray Dalits' devaluations and serve as an 'intellectual propaganda' for creating socio-economic and political awareness. Autobiographies or self referential texts have always been powerful instruments for registering the presence of dalits.

Dalit writers are concerned with the pathetic condition of the Dalits. They help fellow Dalits to be alert and struggle for their rights, which are denied to them by the so-called upper castes. As memories, Dalit autobiographies are sources of Dalits' social reality in contemporary India. These writers picture conditions of the underprivileged and offer dramatic accounts of poverty and survival in general. Yet they get some benefits by Reservation Policy, however, they are forced to stay out of the welfare schemes. These kind of social and legal injustices are also the themes of this literature.

Dalit writers insist on the importance of living conditions and record case by case what they see 'as it existed,' in a dispassionate manner. The authors show life with reality, omitting nothing that is 'ugly or painful, and idealizing nothing.' To the realists, the writer's most important function is to describe as truthfully as possible what is observed through the senses. The upper caste people who have mercilessly been devastating the lives of Dalits and Tribes in India are the critiqued. The desire of authors to document every event and the means, by which they might do so, is an enduringly contentious subject. At present, Dalits considered their literature as a weapon to leverage transformation in the social and political status.

Writings are essentially expression of the reality of human life and great pieces of literature depict that reality with communicable lucid language facilitating narrative with readers' aesthetic and literary sense. As C.T. Indra, in her Introduction to *The Legend of Nandan*, stated, "Although today they are fighting for the restoration of their dignity as human beings, some people belonging to such unprivileged strata have historically believed that it is because of the karma in their previous births that they have been born so. For centuries they have been denied entry into the temple to have darshan of the deity."^[4]

Every phenomenon of people's behavior occurs in the author's social life. An author will responsively convey the social trait or people's behavior which he or she experiences in real life into his or her literary work. In other words, a literary work reflectively brings and provides issue and cultural phenomena or social behavior which happens in the author's real life. Like African American slave narratives, Dalit narratives are the stories of Dalit victims who endured similar exploitation in their own soil. This literature authentically portrays various forms of social and legal injustices. They use an array of incidents related to injustices in order to educate fellow Dalits, but not to celebrate. There is no fictional theme in Dalit literature, and they do not glorify anything about authors' love and romance. Dalits narrate serious matters of basic human rights.

In the Post-Ambedkar period, Dalit women used literature as a weapon to counter the mainstream feminist writing that include the genres, like poetry, short story, essay, novel and autobiography. Baby

Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* is groundbreaking autobiography of Dalit woman. Her narratives were serialized in 1982 as *Jina Amucha* in the magazine 'Stree'. Maya Pandit, Professor and Teacher-Educator at the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, translated *Jina Amucha* from Marathi to English. She also wrote a detailed introduction and an interview of Baby Kamble. *The Prisons We Broke* portrays the struggle of Mahar people with Brahmin and other upper caste men and women. Like other Dalit students of the past, Kamble was humiliated, harassed, and discriminated against by not only her classmates but by her teachers also. Though Baby Kamble dropped her study after fourth standard, she was a victim the evil practice of 'child- marriage'. She recorded her life experiences in scrap papers and kept them in her petty shop. An America-born researcher and sociologist, Maxine Berntson visited the Dalit settlement Phaltan in 1982. She accidentally met Baby Kamble in her slum. Maxine Berntson collected Kamble's writings and she also took efforts to serialize them as *Jina Amucha* in the women magazine 'Stree', and its English translation *The Prisons We Broke* came out in 1986. It is the relic of Dalit women oppression. She also faced atrocities from her husband Kondiba Kamble. Vrushali Nagarale, in her article *Discourse analysis of African-American and Dalit Women's Selected Works/biographies: A Comparative Study* says that "*The Prison We Broke* talks more about Dalits' blind beliefs and superstitions. Both men and women possessed the evil spirit and considered it as the curse of God and Goddesses."^[5] As Janhavi Acharekar stated in his review 'Liberation Narrative on the autobiography: Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*' that "the autobiography *The Prisons We Broke* transcends the boundaries of personal narrative. It also gives sociological, historical and political record. It magnifies Dalit feminist critique, and protests against religions as a whole."^[6]

Joothan: An Untouchable's Life is a famous autobiography of Omprakash Valmiki. In 1993, it was originally published as an essay 'Ex Dalit ki Atmakatha' in a book *Harijan se Dalit*. Arun Prabha Mukherjee, Professor of English, York University, Toronto, translated *Joothan* into English during 1997-2002. *Joothan* means 'polluted' food that associated with animals. It portrays the struggle between Chuhra (Dalits) and upper caste Tagas of Barla. Mukherjee says, "It was speaking of my corner of India, in my first language, Hindi, in a way that no other text had ever spoken to me."^[7] *Joothan* encapsulates the pain of poverty, humiliation, and the atrocities on Dalits.

Siddalingaiah's *Ooru Keri: An Autobiography* is almost reminiscent of distorting the hunger and humiliations of Dalits in Karnataka. It came out as an article in the Kannada magazine 'Rujuvatu', and the English translation by Dr. D.R. Nagaraj came out in the magazine section of 'Deccan Herald' during 1995. With five parts of nostalgic memories, *Ooru Keri* was again translated by S.R. Ramakrishna, Founder and Editor, The Music Magazine, in 2003 and was published as book.

Ooru Keri portrays poverty and anxiety of Dalits in Karnataka state. Siddalingaiah's family belongs to farm labourers and gets low-income, and sometimes nothing. In spite of his abject poverty, Siddalingaiah attended free night-school. He began to realize self-respect and dignity from his teachers at the school. He reveals the experiences which juxtapose ordinary day-to-day struggles like caste discrimination, poverty, and identity.

Siddalingaiah is a popular Dalit poet, folklorist and writer. He is the founder of Dalit Sangarsha Samhiti (DSS) and former member of the Karnataka Legislative Council. Siddalingaiah is an exemplary public intellectual. He received his Doctor of Philosophy degree from Bangalore University.

Another autobiography *Growing up Untouchable in India* came out in Marathi as 'Vasti'. It is by Vasant Moon. Dr. Gail Omvedt, an American and Professor of B.R. Ambedkar Chair on Social Change and Development, has translated *Growing up Untouchable in India* into English. *Growing up Untouchable in India* has an "Introduction" by Eleanor Zelliot, Laird Bell, Professor of History, Emerita Carleton College.

Growing up Untouchable in India portrays Mahars as victims of poverty, caste, and atrocities, social and legal injustices in Nagpur. Vasant Moon's destitute mother Purnabai worked as maid-servant in the houses of Europeans to bring out Vasant and her daughter Malti in the neighborhoods of Nagpur. Vasant portrays struggles between Mahars (Dalits) and upper castes. Vasant faced social boycott, caste discriminations, and assaults by upper caste people. During 1930s, Ambedkar emerged to voice for Dalits. Since boyhood, Vasant associated with Dalit movement Samata Sainik Dal, and understood the importance social welfare. He worked for his people throughout his life.

Bama's *Karukku* (2000) is the most popular Dalit woman autobiography in Tamil. It is a life-story of a Dalit woman, rather the author herself considers *Karukku* the story of Dalit mass. Lakshmi Holmstrom [Founder-Trustee, South Asian Diaspora Literature and Arts Archive] translated *Karukku* into English and gave elaborate introduction to Dalit culture and writings. Bama was a converted Catholic and found her origin that her discrimination is based on her birth as a Dalit. On the other hand, as a Dalit woman, she struggled in churches, schools, and society. To work collectively for survival is the requirement for Dalit's existence. So Dalit women also work either as a laborer or as a sweeper. While doing their allotted job they remain in pitiable condition. There they frequently become victims of injustice when they are at their work. "A Dalit woman suffers a double curse, curse of being a woman, curse of being a Dalit in her own house, a woman is like an ox

... tied to the yoke.....In this patriarchal high caste society life of woman is curse.”^[8]

Dalit poets and poetesses have created poems on this aspect. Suffering silently was the past matter for Dalit woman. To raise voice against injustice becomes now reality. They do not bear all injustice now, strongly they protest. Centuries old disgust towards Dalits is slowly disappearing from Indian society. Dalit writers have strongly opposed untouchability and they have tried to convince the orthodox upper castes that when we live together, then why not live with human feeling, brotherhood? Jai Prakash Kardam's story —*The Housing Society* presents this truth. It is a story of Vijay Mahato. He is the deputy secretary in the railway ministry, in Delhi. He has reached at his fifty but still he does not have his own house to live due to family responsibilities like;—Water and electricity bills, house rent, children's school fees and other expenses. Addition to these expenses he has to send some amount to his parents in village. When he finds the advertisement in the news paper regarding the housing society, he tries to get the membership of the society to book the flat. But he couldn't get the membership because of his lower caste. Vijay decides, “I will do legal action against them. I will challenge them in the court. This time I will not remain silent. I'll see how on the base of caste they refuse to give me membership.”^[9]

A sense of happiness is found in upper caste people's writings, whereas, each Dalit autobiography is recorded a life that experienced caste atrocities and discriminations that also continue beyond the death of the autobiographer. Dalit's experienced narratives are very distinct and vary from the non-Dalit narratives in number of ways. The upper caste people's autobiographies end with body unsettled emotions whereas, Dalit autobiography ends with uncertain future of author.

Most of the writers, researchers, critics, and reviewers considered that Dalit writings are the testimonies of caste oppressions and exploitations in the recent years. These are considered as an epic of the Dalits' sufferings that have been narrated with various existing references. All the authors depicted their deprived conditions of food, shelter, settlement, and culture within and around the Indian society. Christophe Jaffrelot suggests that “Not only have their (Dalit's) books attracted a mass audience, but they are profoundly impacting the political landscape.”^[10] Jaffrelot points out the popular politician Ms. Mayawati. She was a Dalit Chief Minister of India's most populous state, Uttar Pradesh and the leader of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). He also says that Dalit literature has helped to bring a new recognition to Dalits' social and political problems.

Earlier discriminations on the basis of caste and gender were prevalent. Dalits were not allowed to entertain temples, tea shops, schools, and in upper caste settlements. In spite of these deprivation and exploitation, Dalits attempt to claim their rights in education and employment. However, they are often encountering strong resistance from the upper caste people, resulting in inhuman assault, torture, rapes, massacres and other forms of atrocities. Though the socio-economic life of the Dalits is improving, the levels of humiliation and discrimination on Dalits have been accounted in the literature. The caste animosity throughout the narrations is heart breaking. They made deep impact on the lives of the authors. It is the actual behavior towards members of another group and involves excluding or restricting members of one group from opportunities that are available to other groups. Indeed, all these authors advocated education and self-reliance. As Bheemaiah, in the article ‘Dialectics of Caste Culture: A Social Crisis in Indian Nation’, says, “Caste is not physical monster. It is more of a psychological phenomenon. Every Indian is imbued with belief in fate and implanted with caste consciousness.”^[11]

The history of human civilization, culture, progress tells that, in major parts of the world, one —the powered class had remained at the centre and remaining major humanity remained at the periphery. On the base of physical and mental hard work of the peripheral class, the powered class had enjoyed the fruits and tried always to remain at the centre for long. All resources or sources to be at the centre were with the powered class. So the people of this class, without considering egalitarian ideology either on the base of religion or rational preferred their prosperity first, not of other humanity. So the peripheral humanity was remained unnoticed, in wretched condition. They were remained nothing but the tools in the hands of the powered class.

Since ancient era, India has remained multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-faith nation. Earlier the saints from the upper castes and from Dalit castes – preaching remained major force to face their all obstacles. Due to extreme and cruel caste-based discriminations in Hindu religion, many Dalit men and women have changed their religion to Christianity and Buddhism for their liberation. Those who have changed their religion also face such discrimination in new faith. In spite of deprivation, many of Dalits have received opportunities to get good education and jobs. For example some Dalit women work as nurses in hospitals and clinics run by Christian missionary.

During their reign British Government offered basic advantages like education, employment, and franchise. In addition to political identity, the Dalit discourses highlight caste based problems in the national and international forums. The writers and researchers were brought out to understand the social discrimination and debated on the issues. Dalit literature has been producing new forms of intellectual representation in various languages. It voices social and political consciousness and monitors the Dalits' welfare.

Dalit caste organizations like ‘Dalit Panthers of India’ in Maharashtra, ‘Dalit Mahasabha’ in Andhra Pradesh, ‘Dalit Sangharsha Samiti’ in Karnataka, and ‘Arundhatiyyar’ in Tamil Nadu were formed in response to

mainstream atrocities. They demand for equitable shares in opportunities and reservation. Most of the activists are good writers as well.

Dalits have been largely investigated as subjects of political participation in their struggle against all forms of caste-related discrimination. In the past few decades Dalit movements have increasingly entered and engaged with political institutions by forging parties, contesting elections and holding representatives to account. Whilst Dalit parties are increasingly prominent in Indian politics, the Dalit struggle extends well beyond the formal processes of interest mediation. Dalit movements have mobilized extra-institutionally to challenge the everyday processes and practices of caste both directly and using symbolic means. Moreover, Dalits have had to find new and more nuanced means of challenging the social order - staking a visible claim to public space through the erection of Ambedkar statues and the construction of monumental buildings suggesting a 'Dalit architectural style', have been significant means of doing this. Alongside these direct challenges are campaigns that adopt a cultural emphasis and stress. Dalit literature is booming at present and translations of regional literatures are increasingly making this work available to a wider audience. All these activities resulted slightly in positive approach of minds towards social equality in India.

Conclusion

Marginalization is a complex phenomenon in the present-day world and a critical concern of national and international communities. Its widespread occurrence is a consequence of several interrelated factors in socio-economic development which gain significance in the era of globalization. Factor of Classism is everywhere in world. African-American literature has some similarity to Dalit literature of India. Suppressed class movement started by the motivation of prominent Dalit leaders. It brought a new momentum to Dalit literature. Rejection and revolt in Dalit literature have been birthed from the womb of Dalits' pain. It is about the oppressed according to the Indian caste system. It forms an important and distinct part of Indian literature.

The earliest records of Indian civilization are preserved in Aryan or Hindu scriptures. The early Indian society was constructed around Varnashrama Dharma, a labor based division of castes in India that inevitably brought racial prejudices. The Brahmins were the topmost and the Shudras were destined to serve the three upper ladders, namely Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. They remain the 'untouchables' in society. They have been accepted as Scheduled Castes in the Indian constitution. Efforts by Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar have brought uplift in their social status. They also encouraged education of the Dalits that ultimately lead to a new writing. These people, who are called as Dalits in the Indian society have a history of being lived in subjugation under the high-classes. So they have been a marginalized, downtrodden and subaltern group from centuries.

The contributions of Dalit writers have been emerging everyday to enrich Dalit literature as well as Indian literature in recent years. Critics and reviewers have showed interests in this literature at national and international level. John C.B. Webster, Josiane Racine, Jean-Luc Racine, Dr. Gail Omvedt, Eleanor Zelliot, Christophe Jaffrelot and many Indian researchers have been making significant contributions on Dalit lives in their recent writings. The significances of Dalit identity in the caste hegemonic society are brought out in the Dalit literature. Besides, Dalits understand their identity by reading the works of Rabinthranath Tagore, Jyotibqa Fule, M.K. Gandhi, Dr. Ambedkar, Premchand, Mulk Raj Anand, Vijay Tendulkar in religion and education. Dalit men and women actively participated in Ambedkar's ideology and considered as 'God of Dalits'.

The highest purpose of Dalit writing is not beauty of craft, but authenticity of experience. Most significant attribute that the Dalit literature displays is its Dalit consciousness. It is a belief in rebellion against the caste system, recognizing the human being as its focus. Ambedkarite thought is the inspiration for this consciousness. Sometimes Dalit literature has been criticized as being propagandist. It has been alleged that this literature lacks artistic finesse. It has been charged further, that their writing expresses the frenzy of a movement and does not possess neutrality and objectivity. Today Dalit Literature includes not only the writings about Indian suppressed people but also other groups throughout the world that are relegated to a secondary position by the privileged classes.

The real social life is the main source of the author's inspiration in creating a literary work. By doing so, the society will be more concerned with every benefit of the social phenomena. Every author can purposively express his or her response by assembling the message through his or her literary work. What stands out in the end is that, Dalit literature is sublime creation, which bring about lamentable pains and sufferings and the evolution of personal consciousness beyond human understanding.

With the influence of various Western literature, writers, and politicians, these Dalits authors recorded their experienced life stories in order to make awareness among fellow-Dalits. They are triggering opportunities for further research on the Dalit literature for younger generation. They penned their soul-numbing survival stories parallel to American slave narratives. They documented sufferings 'as it is' - the reality. The caste system is depicted as 'mimics' in their literature. Dalits, the caste victims, emerge out of social and legal exploitations, yet they are still sometimes 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.

Dalit Feminism is more than in any other community. Dalit women are doubly victimized, as a Dalit and as a woman. She goes through the state of depression and hopelessness; but sometimes reveals the vigour and courage. The only solution is that the Dalit women has to protest strongly against this double discrimination and to destroy the barriers from coming out of their subdued state in all manner, through pen on paper or a movement on road.

Empowerment through education then struggle for human identity and human dignity this becomes the part of Dalit culture in 21st century. Culture is a changing social phenomenon. Earlier Dalits were the silent sufferers. After getting education, settled down in their life, they raise their voice against injustice to get their human identity. Their struggle is not for creating violence or anarchy but it is the struggle for their acceptance as human beings with human dignity in democratic India. The role of Dalit community focused through Dalit literature, especially by autobiographies and then self stories. Dalit movements and literature resulted Indian constitution made laws for their safety and equality. Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 including reservation policies in education and employment formed. Other caste people came forward to accept them in all sectors including politics. The study of Dalits is by now an established field of research within South Asian Studies and many significant publications have arisen from across disciplines. The journey of Dalits is from quest for identity to social equality is still going on but has positive signs and effects clearly visible throughout India.

References

- [1] Omvedt, Gail, Dalit Literature in Maharashtra: Literature of Social Protest and Revolt in Western India, *South Asian Bulletin* 7, 1987, Print, pp.78.
- [2] Serafin, Steven R. and Bendixen, Alfred, Ed. 'African American Literature', *The Continuum Encyclopedia of American Literature*, New York, The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2003, Print, pp. 15.
- [3] Limbale, Sharankumar, Dalit Literature: Form and Purpose, *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations*, Trans. & Ed. Alok Mukherjee, Delhi, Orient Longman, 2004. Print, pp. 31-32.
- [4] Indra, C.T., Introduction, *The Legend of Nandan*, By Indira Parthasarathy, New Delhi, OUP, 2003, Print, pp. xvi
- [5] Nagarale, Vrushali, Discourse Analysis of African-American and Dalit Women's Selected Works/ Biographies: A Comparative Study, *Indian Stream Research Journal* 1.6, 2011, Web. 8 Oct. 2014, < [http://www.isrj.net/July/2011/English Discourse Analysis. html](http://www.isrj.net/July/2011/English%20Discourse%20Analysis.html) >.
- [6] Acharekar, Janhavi, Liberation Narrative, Rev. of The Prisons We Broke by Baby Kamble, *The Hindu* 2 March 2008, Web. 24 Oct. 2014, <<http://www.hindu.com/lr/2008/03/02/stories/2008030250200500.htm>>.
- [7] Mukherjee, Arun Prabha , Introduction, *Joothan : An Untouchable's Life*, By Omprakash Valmiki. New York: Columbia UP, 2003, Print., pp. x.
- [8] Kumari Naresh, Double Curse, *Journal of Literature & Aesthetics: Special Number on Indian Dalit Literature*, 2009, pp. 207.
- [9] Kardam, Jai Prakash, The Housing Society, *Dalit Asmita*, IIDS Quarterly, Oct-Dec. 2010, pp. 53-58.
- [10] Jaffrelot, Christophe, *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Analysing and Fighting Caste*, New Delhi, Permanent Black, 2005, Print, pp. 4.
- [11] Bheemaiah, J., Dialectics of Caste Culture: A Social Crisis in Indian Nation, Proceedings of 2011 *International Conference on Social Science and Humanity*, Vol.2, Jurong West, IACSIT Press, 2011, pp. 454-58.
