

Dalit Literature - A Discourse of Human Rights

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Abstract: *The proposed paper reveals the facts about the exploitations of Dalits particularly in Gujarat and the response of the Dalits literature for the human rights and identity of Dalits. The writers and thinkers assert the rights through the medium of novels, dramas, poems and other literary forms to give vent to the historical injustice, atrocities, humiliation and discriminations faced by the Dalits due to caste system. Of course, the Dalit literary moment is a parallel to the social struggle of ex-untouchable (Dalits) against the caste based oppression, suppression and depression of the Dalits in India. Here a critical analysis of the liberation movement is offered.*

Keywords: Literature Human Rights Caste, Dalits, Gujarat

I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization has affected the entire human race at unprecedented scale. It has paved the way for the condition of one civilization and many cultures but the challenge remains; how to create an order where the politics of inclusion would become the rule (Zartman, 2011). When one talks about any section/segment of a society for example if talk about Dalits and Dalit literature then naturally there come the question of caste in mind. In the same way, when we talk about feminists' literature then there comes the question of gender discrimination and gender biases and gender beliefs. So is the case with the Marxist literature, where class is in question.

The questions of caste, gender or class discrimination or disparity directly involve the violation of human rights. Caste system out rightly negates the human rights of Dalits even after 75 years of independence in India, the caste based oppression, depression and suppression have not ended. As a system of social, economic and religious governance, caste is founded on the principles of graded hierarchy, graded inequality and perpetual slavery for some sections in society.

Of course it is most irrational system which still operates with vigor particularly in almost villages of India. Hardly there have taken any noteworthy changes in frustrating situation of the Dalits who live in remote villages. The data show the disturbing fact that caste and gender biases are not only present, but have survived by adapting to new socio-economic realities taking new insidious forms (Shah et al., 2010). The main stream literature and writers hardly have written about the Dalits issues neither they are really concerned for the liberation and rights of the Dalits even in the era of globalization. Despite numerous laws and legal measures, the problem of untouchability, atrocity, humiliation and marginalization of Dalits have continued in India.

1.1 Human Rights and Dalits

Right signifies, in the most general terms, a legally actionable claim that an individual holds against the state and society (Noonan, 2006). It is said that rights confer power which addresses the control that individuals, communities and nations may exercise over material, human intellectual and financial resources. Language of human rights has emerged as a common language of emancipation (Das, 2013). Plato first made a systematic attempt to protect the citizens of ancient Greece in his grand scheme of justice (Assadi, 2011). In modern India, Mahatma Phule for the first time fought for the human rights of Dalits and vigorously opposed the caste system and created agitation among the Shudras (OBC), women and ati-sudras (ex-untouchables) who were victims of pernicious caste system. His wife, Mai Savitribai Phule began the first school for women education in India. They both paved the road for liberation movement of ex-untouchables and women which was carried by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar.

II. LITERATURE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Literature in general is not primarily concerned with questions of empirical fact but with questions of value, questions that lie outside the realm of reason (Gandhi, 1984). This research paper aims at discovering the vast virgin territory of

Dalit writings in particular in Gujarat which falls as a counter discourse in Gujarati writings (Sarangi, 2011). AshinDasgupta points out that literature reserves the right to enter into the heart of an event (Chatterjee, 2014). It is able to offer rare insights into the lives of people which are beyond the reach of dry as dust historians. It expresses contemporary social reality. Furthered, it is true that social problems are omnipresent (Hjelm, 2011), but there will hardly be any country where the social problems get worse and become a social stigma for some sections of society as it has done in India. Dalit literature reflects the irrational reality of Indian society which is shame for India in era of globalisation.

Thus the Dalit literature is a mirror which reflect the worst reality of Indian society. It replicates contemporary mundane events in artistic manner (C.Jagannath, 2010). Of course, some people do not agree with the belief that literature depicts society and says that literature narrates beauty and not social life and social reality. They have the opinion that literature is a narration of fiction and not a documentation of a society. But it may be called that the traditional literature has its drawbacks as it could not show the relationship between literature, society (Joshi, 2012) and human rights. Literature can be effective only when it mirrors life as it is (Jain, 2011). Thinking from this perspective, the Dalit literature fills up the gap in Indian literature. According to Matthew Arnold, literature is a criticism of life (Hudson, 2006). It may be in the form of an essay, a story or even a poem, but it must seek to critically analyse life (Jain, 2011) of a common man in society in given social context. It is no longer a means of entertainment for such/some writers but a means to reflect social reality and provide moral strength for social change, reformations and transformations by appealing the conscious of people. It has aims and aspirations for shaping an egalitarian social order based on humanity. It is impossible to think about Dalit literature without social context. Art for life is central concern of Dalit literature (Sharma, 2013). It is no longer a recital of love affairs or a story of separation of a hero and a heroine, but it ponders over the problems of life of a common man in street and seeks to resolve (Jain, 2011) his/her problems. Literature makes man to go through many experiences and develops man's mind and widens the mental horizons. The real life of human being is little but literature makes it wide and live. Literature is thoughts oriented. It leaves strong impression and develops certain *sanskar* (values) which get fabricated in everyday life and become culture (L. Bensel Meyers, 1999).

Language is a code then literature is a code within a code. Messages in literary texts are not straight forward; they are wrapped up in figurative language and things like setting, characterizations and plot etc and thus appeal directly to the heart (L. Bensel Meyers, 1999). Educating people through literature is a great way to bring changes in faiths, values and belief system. Exposure to literature has made the black and Dalits to shine in the modern world (Bojan, 2010). A great book is born of the brain and heart of its author; s/he put herself/himself into the pages (Hudson, 2006) of book. Sciences help us to understand how the physical world works, but science cannot always explain the subtle nuances of social interactions of human beings and human rights. The study of literature combines the analytical methods of the humanities with the emotional expressiveness of the fine arts. Literature speaks to us on an emotional as well as an intellectual level expressing deep anguish and appeal directly the inner recesses of people.

III. DALIT LITERATURE AND RIGHTS

The dalit literature is a literary product of social movement around the latter part of the 20th century in support of the human rights of the millions who were stamped as untouchables, unseeable and unapproachable in the caste system of Hindu. The very fact that Dalits have started writing speaks of some fundamental social change that has taken place in India during the post-independence era (Korde., 2011). The roots of Dalit literature are in Dalit life experiences. So, Dalit literature is a child of specific social situations (Korde., 2011). The sociology of life believes that creation or inspirations etc. which seem deep matter are nothing but a social produce. Society and literature are closely related. Literature origins as per the social situation of given time (Joshi, 2012). Human beings' humanistic characteristics are built in society. In society only s/he gets humanitarian values. His individuality is shaped through socialization in society. Dalit Literature is intimately related to social reality. It is not merely an imagination or entertainment oriented but a sociological engagement (Bhatt, 2011) which reflects the harsh social reality (Dangle, 2009). To study Dalit literature and its role merely from literary or an academic point of view fails to present a complete picture and perspective and cannot offer insight. It must be assessed in sociological framework and context (Malhotra., 2010).

Examination of past records reveal that nobody took troubles to put on the paper the pangs of the Dalits in true sense (Kannan, 2012). Even the so called canonized Indian writing in English neglected Dr Ambedkar and hailed Gandhi as the hero and savior god of untouchables. Many books in different languages depict Gandhi as the one and only defenders of the rights of the untouchables (Assadi 2011) but the fact is that Gandhi had not played the role of an honest enemy with the untouchables during the Poona pact and Dr. Ambedkar himself has stated this fact. He projected himself as a man who works for eradicating untouchability but in real sense his efforts were not genuine neither rational. Thus the history of untouchables in India is being destroyed or fabricated by false narration (Ramkumar 2011). Even the original revolutionary history of dalit is not included in the standard textbooks. Even the dalit studies as a discipline is given token importance in main street educational institution. True account of Dalit movement is given by thinkers like Gail Ombvedt who treats dalit movement as a broader anti-caste movement and suggest that this moment should be seen as anti-systematic rather than only a reformist in nature (Kanon 2012).

3.1 Emergence of Dalit Literary Movement in Gujarat

The roots of dalit literature lie in the lived experiences of depression, deprivations and discriminations with the Dalits. Thus dalit literature differs from mainstream literature in content and form also. It is not merely imagination not written for sake of near entertainment. It is a social engagement (Bhatt, 2011) which reflects the harsh social reality (Dangle 2009) and social order and relative deprivation of the Dalits. Dalit literature must be assessed from sociological framework and in social economic context (Malhotra 2010). Looking at the literature merely from the literary and academic perspective may mislead the audience and cannot give a perfect picture. It is intimately related with today's social reality present in society. Dalit writers are in true sense sentinels of humanity who vehemently protest against injustice and atrocities. A great social responsibility lies on the shoulders of these writers. The energetic and vitriolic attack of Kabir and Raidas on the anti-humanitarian social religious beliefs were so much profound that even today in era globalization such spirit rarely found in modern poetry. Kabir, Ravidas and other revolutionary persons like Akho, Mira Narsi Mehta in Gujarat also wrote for welfare of the masses. They all were forerunners and fountain head of dalit literature in Gujarat.

In Gujarat, Akho, Narshi Mehta etc. tried to bring back the lost humanity and sanity of the hypocrites of the so called higher castes. Akho is considered as a Kabir of Gujarat. He was a difficult poet who wrote for rational culture and criticized false religious beliefs and hypocrisy prevalent in a society. (Trivedi B. B 2008).

IV. CONCLUSION

Literature reminds us that we are human beings.

- (Sullivan 2004: 225-26)

In the sublime literary creations, one listens the voice of human heart. Such creations compels one to think about humanity and teach how to abstain from committing sins against humanity. In other words such works inculcate the higher values in entire human race and make people fully cultured. In India, the caste system has killed concern for Dalits and made (the majority) of the main stream authors emotionally blunt and bankrupt to understand the pangs and pains of Dalits. The tears of the poor Dalits could not touch their hearts. Worst thing is that the caste biases and irrationality have been so much heavy on head of all so called higher castes that the advancement of science and technology could not have unloaded them. The data analysis show that caste has survived in an era of globalization. Mainstream historiography has done nothing to incorporate the dalit perspectives while writings of history. The history of literature is a chart of people's conscience. All traditions of history writing have neglected the Dalits as subjects since centuries in India and particularly in Gujarat. Thus this paper is extremely important for sake of knowledge and voice of the reality of this nation.

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