
VOICE OF MELANCHOLY: A STUDY IN THE PROSPECTIVE OF DALIT LITERATURE

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Abstract: Indian writing in English has already established itself in the galaxy of the world literature. It is recognized all over the world because of its originality, merit and grandeur. It can better be admired in the words of Whitman "I am large, I contain multitudes". Literature as a mirror of the society reflects the sorrows and happiness, unreal and real, frustrations and hopes of human predicament. Indeed, the writers of Indian writings in English speak the truth candidly and show their concern for the underprivileged section of India's population. The socio-economic concern of these writers gives birth to Dalit literature. Poems, short stories, novels and autobiographies written by Dalit writers provide useful insights on the question of Dalit identity. These creative artists thus highlight the issues of Dalits and thereby become the voice of the voiceless. Government agencies have also formed regulatory bodies to protect the dignity of the Dalits by sensitizing people against evils of discrimination. My study is a humble attempt to capture the socio cultural aspect of how Dalits and marginalised communities are ill-treated by privileged class.

Keywords: etymologically, marginalized, predicament, socio-cultural, cross-road

Introduction: 'Dalit' etymologically means the underprivileged or the oppressed and Dalit literature therefore deals with the lives of the oppressed and neglected people of the world. Dalits not only indicates the scheduled tribe and scheduled cast people but also the socially and economically backward people and minorities. Indeed, the liberation of the Dalits is perhaps the prime concern of the Dalit writers. Dronacharya's refusal to accept Ekalavya as his disciple is a bright example of caste discrimination between the Kshtryas and the Dalits. Dronacharya's demand of Eklavya's right thumb as 'Gurudakshina' is nothing but nepotism and domination of privileged few over the underprivileged. The 12th century Dalit saint Kalavve challenged the upper castes in the following words:

Those who eat goats, fowl and tiny fish
Such, they call caste people
Those who eat the sacred cow
That showers frothing milk for Shiva
Such, they call out castes.

Dalit literature is experience based. That is why authenticity and liveliness have become hallmarks of Dalit literature. Anger, sorrow, suffering and indomitable hope are the stuff of Dalit literature. Protest against the age-old oppression and disapproval of the established system really sharpen the language of the writer which are manifested in different literary form.

The main aim of the Dalit literature is described by Bandhumadev in article 'Prabhudha Bharat' (Feb. 25, 1958) is that "just as the Russian writers helped the Revolution by spreading Lenin's revolutionary ideas through their works. Our writers should spread Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy to the villages" (*Dangle* 242). Bollywood's celebrated movie *Lagaan* though themes with cricket raises the voice against untouchability

too. Bhuban, the hero, persuades the other players of his cricket team and includes Kachra who comes from dalit community in the playing eleven.

Dalits are illtreated in many ways, "Even as late as the early part of the twentieth century, the untouchables had no access to public facilities such as wells, rivers, roads, schools, markets, temples and so on. Another practice was the compulsion to tie a broom behind so that their foot prints would be erased before others set their eyes on them" (*Dalit Literature: A Perspective from Below*). But to keep these social evils and dogmas away and to restore humanism the writers have used the sentinel of their conscience.

Saratchandra Chattopadhyaya is one of the exponents of Dalit literature depicts his protest against the Brahminical oppression over minority through his protagonist Mahesh. Similarly Tagore's *Chandalika* is a protest against casteism in Indian society. The theme of *Chandalika* centers round Prokiti (Chadalika), a low caste girl, who for that reason is thoroughly despised by her neighbours so much that even hawkers in the street would not sell their goods to her. She broods over her destiny and curses her mother for bringing her into this world. While in this mood, she goes to fetch water from the well and meets Ananda, a disciple of Buddha. Thirsty and exhausted, Ananda begs for drink of water. Prokiti informs him that she is an untouchable. Ananda replies that all human beings are equal, drinks water, and blesses her and departs. The incident changes prokiti's entire outlook on life. She begins to live for the day when Ananda would appear before her again. The play ends with Ananda pronouncing his blessings on her.

Gopinath Mohanty's *Paraja* is remarkable for its portrayal of tribal life in Odisha. People of these primitive communities have been exploited by money

– lenders and government officials. They have felt in their body and bone that exploitation is as old as the hills and forests surrounding them. Yet they celebrate the joys of life; they drink, and dance and sing. They find joy in nature, in buds and flowers, in green leaves, in the chirping of birds, in the swift – flowing streams and in the mist covered hills. In his portrayal of tribal life, Gopinath invites comparison with the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe. Sukru Jani and his elder son Mandia, strong and hardworking and eager to improve their lot with whatever betterment of living the deeps of Koraput jungle can offer, encounter devastating obstructions, man – ordained not God, nor nature ordained. They are two vile and vicious outsiders – the forest guard and the Sahukar, Ramchandra Bisoi. Sukrujani, the Paraja patriarch lands up irredeemably in the coils of the usurer. The plights of two young sisters Jhili and Billi are quite moving. The novel *Paraja* communicates the agony of the tribals, the marginalized people all over the world. Gopinath Mohanty's protagonists are also quintessentially men and women waging a heroic but futile war against a hostile universe.

Mulk Raj Anand's novels are infused with a progressive humanitarianism. He is a fervent ideologist and overt sociologist. The novels of Anand bring back to our memory the realistic pictures of early 19th century society. His novels are a reaction against the socio – politico – economic injustice that had engulfed the people of his time. He, as a socialist, reacts to this situation with an unprecedented vehemence. There is no question that Mulk Raj Anand has fashioned with *Untouchable* a novel that articulates the abuses of an exploited class through sheer sympathy in the traditionalist manner of the realist novel. He is, indeed, the “fiery voice of those people who form the Untouchable caste. Yet if the goal of the writer, as Anand himself states, is to transform “words into prophecy”, then the reader's struggle for meaning in the closing scenes of the novel become problematic. Anand proceeds to address this question through the dramatization of Bakha, the novel's central character. Having said this – and taking into account Anand's notion of the novel as prophesy A.M. Stracuzzi agrees that the author has failed to fully answer the question he has set before him. In fact, by posing such a question, the possibility of an altruistic solution becomes blurred. Furthermore, the three “ prophecies” posited by the novel – the rhetoric of the Christian Missionary, Mahatma Gandhi and the poet Iqbal Nath Sarshar –

fail to present a prescription for freedom accessible to the untouchable community. Bakha's work must be appreciated with the slogan “Shrameba Jayate”.

Kiran Desai is another noted name in Dalit literature. Her *Inheritance of Loss* deals with rigid class system. Sai, seventeen year old lives with a judge, his dog and his cook. It is a turbulent time, filled with dissatisfaction among the population of Indian Nepalese who want to separate and have their own country. Sai falls in love with her tutor, whose name is Gyan, and throughout the story they fight to accept the natural love they have created. Their love is doomed from the beginning because he is an ethnic Nepali, and she is an upper-class western educated Indian girl. Jemubhai Patel is biased against the downtrodden class of society. Jemubhai misbehaves with the cook even though he is sincere and loyal.

Gandhi also became the victim of untouchability. Louis Fischer writes:

... Then the two of them boarded a train for the city of Patna in Bihar. There Shukla led him to the house of a lawyer named Rajendra Prasad who later became President of the Congress party and of India.... they (servants) let him stay on the grounds with his companion Gandhi. Gandhi was not permitted to draw water from the well lest some drops from his bucket pollute the entire source, how did they know that he was not an untouchable? (*Flamingo*, P.47)

Thus, this ill feeling towards the dalits and segregating them from the mainstream for the vested interest of a powerful segment is really a matter of great concern.

Conclusion: Indian writings in English are thus pregnant with human emotion. The writers are therefore apprehensive about the lives of the marginalized segment of the society. The dominance of the oppressor over the oppressed is still prominent in many countries. But the oppressed known as dalits are slowly raising their voice against the unjust rules and socio-economic discrimination of the society. The Dalit literature voices the socio-economic and cultural degeneration and protests against all sorts of prejudice. I hope Dalit literature will undoubtedly open up the eyes of the neglected and destabilized class to wage a war against all evils. This literature will also strengthen them mentally to confront with the plights and predicaments, sorrows and sufferings, pains and penalties in the cross-road of their life. Dalit literature thus serves as a guideline for the last child of the street to join the main stream of the society.

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