
PROBLEMS AND ISSUES OF DALIT WOMEN REFLECTED IN DALIT AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

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Abstract: The dalit literature is one of the dynamic branches of Marathi literature. There are many trends in the Marathi literature after 1960; they are rural, tribal (Adivasi) and dalit. The important aspect of dalit literature is, it emerged from the dalit socio-cultural and political movement. This movement was inspired by the thoughts of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. We can say that he is the energy of dalit literature. In this paper an honest attempt is made to highlight the problems and issues of dalit women in the selected autobiographies. These autobiographies are mainly women's writing. This shows the realistic condition of dalit women. The dalit women are the double marginalized section of society. Compared to higher caste women, dalit women are the real epitome of suffering class. The power of speech and writing came to them because of the education. The actual transformation took place in the lives of thousands of women in 19th century. Because in this century the first school for women established by the social reformer Mahatma Phule. There are genre like poetry, novel, drama and autobiography the dalit writers selected the autobiographies and made it most popular than other forms. The reason could be different but it seems to be clear that it is one of the easiest forms of expression and impression.

Keywords: Dalit literature, Marathi literature, impact of Dr. Babasaheb, mbedkar and his thought, Empowerment of the dalit women.

Introduction: Today, the women enjoy the freedom of education, thought and individual's freedom at large extent. Unfortunately this freedom has yet to reach to some areas of Indian Territory. There are certain groups and communities where women are still crushed under the male dominance. The dalits are one of them who either because of their illiteracy or social ignorance is under the dominance of the high caste as well as their own male counterpart. After the freedom struggle it was supposed to improve the condition of women but we could not reach the goals of all round development of Indian society. There are many reasons for this failure but basically we can say that this is the result of our social structure. The Indian society is full of heterogenic conditions so it is quite difficult to apply a new philosophy. The European feminism is not applicable to the Indian society because we have many marginalized sections and dalit women are one of the marginalized sections of our country. While talking about the dalit woman in India we should not forget that she is marginalized in a marginalized section of Indian society. Firstly, all the dalits are under the marginalized section and the secondly, the dalit women are the doubly marginalized as compared to the dalit men. First of all they are *women* and then they are the *dalit women*. It is clear cut that their problems and issues are quite different than the higher caste and higher class women. We should not use the same parameter for the dalit woman. The present paper is an honest attempt to show the problems and issues of dalit women reflected in the selected autobiographies of Marathi dalit literature.

As we know that the change in the Indian life took place in the 19th century, because in this age the social reformer like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Mahatma Phule started their work of social change. Even the first school for women was established by Phule in 1848. This was a turning point in the lives of many dalits as well as women in general. Dalit women were far away from the

education. In 1950 education was made compulsory for all by the Indian constitution. After the *Mahaparinirvana* of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, the dalit activists of Ambedkar emerged as the writer. A few of them were women. But most of the women writer emerged after 1980. In Marathi literature the new trends like rural, dalit and tribal came as a mere reaction to the so called established literature. On the other hand, the dalit literature emerged from the dalit socio-cultural and political movement. It was the movement of the downtrodden for the equality, freedom and brotherhood. Compared to other forms of literature, the dalit autobiographies are well accepted and known as a famous mode of expression. It is not for entertainment but it is the picture of suffering, exploitation, humiliation, insult and rejection of the upper caste. The dalit autobiographies or *Atmkathans* are the real picture of dalit women. Dr Manohar Jadhav says, "in Indian society there are the suppressed and downtrodden that are not considered as humans, leading their life in miserable conditions, even rejected by the so called high caste, the life of dalits are not the subject of their dreams." It shows that the lives of dalits are not the topics of the established literature. On the one hand we have women's empowerment and on the other we do not treat all the women equally. The selected autobiographies reflect the social system, company of husband, family life, family struggle, pains, suffering and identity quest. Dr. Prakash Kumbhar in his book entitled *Dalit Sahitya: Kahee Vichar Ani Disha* says, "The Indian society is full of problems, such as casteism, superstitions, unawareness, and orthodoxy. Dalit autobiographies focus on the life experiences and life philosophy. In fact it also highlights personal life, ways of life, women life, educational life, economical life, social and religious rites and rituals. So the dalit autobiographies are the best document on dalit life". The first dalit autobiography is by a women, named

Shantabai Kamble entitled as *Majaya Jalmachi Chitterkatha*; the story of my life. The first *Atmakathan* is *Aantsphot*, an inner blast by Prof. Kumud Pavade. Regarding the dalit *Aatmakaathan* the famous critic and dalit writer Dr. Gangadhar Pantawane and Prof. Chandrakumar Nalage said, "Dalit *Atmakathan* has given the new subject for the dalit literature. These are not born to entertain, or to show the romantic mood. It shows the burning issues of women in real manner by describing the fact and truth." Dalit women's *Atmakathan* do not expect the social support and sympathy. It is the realization of their self, through their life, and experiences.

Umesh Shirsat in his article entitled as women life in dalit autobiographies states, "there were new trends in Marathi literature as dalit and rural after 1960. They have their separate identity. Marathi dalit literature is inspired by the thought of Dr. Ambedkar and he is energy of the dalit literature. Compared to story, novel, and poetry, the autobiography is more powerful form of expression and mode of impression. The social, political, cultural and economical exploitation made them dumb and mute. But the dalit autobiographies have changed the way of Marathi dalit literature. Suffered people got a mode of expression where they narrate their wounds, insults, and their living, their experiences frankly"

The time, in which it was socially and financially impossible for women to take education, Shantabai wrote her autobiography *Majya Jalmachi Chitterkatha*. It is not only the story but what experienced in her life as a woman as well as a dalit woman. It is her struggle with the system and the male dominance, treatment given to her as in family. She is teacher but the society looks at her as dalit teacher. Her suffering as woman and dalit simultaneously depicted in the autobiography.

Prof. Kumud Pavade's *Aantsphot* is the best example of the woman who is caught in the trap. It is a story of an educated woman, but hurdled by the society. It is not like birth, childhood, youth, marriage, and job, instead of it. It is the life of a dalit woman who was badly treated by the society. It is a picture of dalit society and dalit woman. Even she described the effort to learn and teach Sanskrit.

Marankalha is an autobiography of a woman belongs to the Gopal community one of the untouchables in Maharashtra. She directly confesses that her father has given chance to learn. Though, their family migrates from one place to another. She was left in the village to continue the education. She was brought up by her grandmother. While taking education the entire community was against to their house. But she was firm in decision she continues her studies. Her house was banned, they did not care, face the society. She does not move from her aim. It is a story of a tribal community woman who is like a dalit. Janabai is representative of her community.

Mukta Sarvagod's *Mitleli Kavade* describes the dalit movement. She was brought up in a family which was truly devoted to the Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and his

philosophy. She works as an activist and follower of Ambedkar. She thinks, social work is not the part time work but it is a fulltime opportunity. How the so called society treats the dalit woman even she is in the politics. Some of them look at her as Congress party agent. This autobiography describes the life of *Mahar* community and their socio-cultural and economic life very minutely. She very sensitively tells the pathetic condition of a dalit woman. How she was tortured by the society is the main theme of her autobiography.

Bebitai Kamble in her autobiography entitled as *Jeen Amuch* in 11 chapters, describes the life of *Mahar* community who strongly opposes the Hindu tradition. She does not tell the story of her suffering but the society and the movement on Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's philosophy. This titled is suggested by the great Marathi Sahitya Akademy award winner poet, V.V. Shirwadkar. Bebitai devotes her entire life for the dalit movement especially, Babasaheb Ambedkar's movement. When she works as social activist she has not the personal life. She faces insults, opposes, and criticism by the society. It is the mixing of good and bad experiences.

Women expression in dalit autobiography is a noteworthy for the researcher like me because it does not mean for only entertainment. It is an appeal to the social system to change the frame work. It is voice of the suppressed class women which was buried for the ages. Even we can say that it is a protest of the double marginalized group, who is struggling for the quest for the identity.

This paper is quite incomplete if I do not take the reference of Daya Pawar's *Balut*, a very noteworthy document in the dalit literature and an autobiography of writer. In his autobiography he also describes the picture of his mother who faces many insults and brings him up.

The dalit women in their autobiographies are the epitome of the society who suffers and does not expect the sympathy. In Marathi literature dalit women's autobiographies were published after 1980. Shantabai Kamble's *Majaya Jalmachi Chitterkatha* first published in the Purva a magazine, in 1986 it was published in the book format. Mukta Sarvagod's *Mitleli Kavade* and Bebitai Kamble's *Jeen Amuchi* published in the year 1983. Prof. Kumud Pavade's *Aantsphot* published in the year 1981 and remaining were published after that. Shantabai Danis *Ratradin Amha* is the only autobiography belongs to the Gopal community. All other autobiographies belong to the *Mahar* community later on who mostly converted to the Buddhism.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and his movement affected to *Mahar* caste in large extent. The result we see that 1956 most of them adopted Buddhism and the real transformation began in the field of literature, education and society. In the field of literature men as well women worked together. Dr. Ambedkar in his book, *Writing and Speech*, clearly stated various way and solutions. Hindu women's progress and decline is the best essay on the empowerment of women, says Dr. Prakash Kharat.

Further Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in his speech at Nagpur in Vidrabh Sahitya Sangh appeals to the men of letters," I want to tell the creative writers that they should try to show the human values, don't be the narrow minded, make it more expandable, don't remain in the narrow domestic walls, don't limit your pen around your problems, try to reach the your eyes to the villages and its people, where dalit and untouchable live and that is the larger world than yours." Dalit autobiographies are the real expression of the feeling and experiences. These women are the converted Buddhist before were known as Mahars. They were inspired by the call of Dr .Ambedkars trio Educate, Unite and Agitate. They followed this message and try to express their voices. This is the specialty of these autobiographies where the suppressed voice comes as a force. Dalits and the dalit women is also victim of this unjust system.

Following are the observations of dalit women autobiographies:

- 1) The path shown to the dalit women by Mahatma Phule and Savitribai who established the ever school for them in the country. Further, Ambedkar and Shahu Maharaja continued the same herculean task.
- 2) In Marathi literature dalit autobiographies have given a new dimension and new subject for the discussion.

- 3) It does not tell the story of life but shows the inner feeling of the dalit woman.
- 4) It also highlights the socio-cultural and economic condition of dalit community.
- 5) It is a protest literature who is ready for the social change.
- 6) It is a picture of the reformation and transformation in the life.
- 7) It highlights the exploitation of dalit men and women at physical, mental economical cultural level.

Conclusion: The present paper is one of the efforts to show the sorrows of the dalit community and with special reference to the dalit women, who is the victim of the varna system. Five varna is nothing but a ladder where there is no values to the untouchables and the depressed class. The conditions of dalit women are worse than the animals because they can drink the water of lake and wells but a dalit woman cannot fetch it. If she dares it will be polluted. So the Marathi dalit literature is one of the dynamic branches of literature. But the dalit women and their autobiographies are the heart of dalit literature. If we try to remove these autobiographies we will not find any worth to study. So the present study only highlights the problems of dalit women in autobiographies. Which the popular form of expression even we can say that it is monologue of an individual.

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