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Aesthetics in Dalit Literature

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with the Aesthetics in Dalit Literature. In this paper Dalit Literature is discussed in an attempt to show that Aesthetics in Dalit literature lies in the factor that it considers man as its centre of narration and analysis, aspiring for equality, justice, solidarity for whole humanity and depicts trauma, exploitation and suppression of community in very creative and lucid expressive ways, most of the literature is written by Dalit who themselves are sufferers of atrocities of casts system. Dalit literature is considered as political literature as Dalit itself is political identity representing the very denial of caste system. Dalit literature has immensely contributed towards the development and preservation of the Indian culture as there are several cultural traditions which are known by names of Dalit authors and artists, e.g movements by Ravidas and Keshvnaarain in UP; Satnami movement in Chattisgarh and movement of Phule in Maharashtra. As a continuance of this it is also shown that Dalit literature introduces a new world of experience in literature, widens the range of expression, and exploits the potentiality of the language of the outcasts and underprivileged.

Keywords: aesthetics, dalit literature, untouchables, Dr. B R Ambedkar

1. Introduction

One of the most significant features of the post – modernist era was the emergence of writings of the outcasts, as a major literary force. The term 'Dalit Literature'- came into use officially in 1958 at the first conference on Dalit Literature in Mumbai. The Dalits, once known as "Untouchables", have from time immemorial been socially and economically oppressed, culturally subjugated and politically marginalized. However, in recent times they have begun to assert themselves and have launched movements aimed at ushering in a new social order based on the principles of equality and liberty. Even though many Dalit have, as a consequence, reached positions of power and prominence, particularly in the political arena, the vast majority of them continues to suffer discrimination, poverty and humiliation and is often targets of inhuman atrocities. The Dalit movements in India have occupied significant place in the history of social movements as well as in the discourse of social sciences. These movements have undergone several phases, particularly during the twentieth century, right from its struggles for recognition, mobilization, co-option, power sharing to cultural and literary assertions as well as identity assertions through variety of methods and strategies, which cover effectively every aspect of human life.

The Dalit movement was started in literature by Marathi, Gujrati and Kannada writers under the leadership of Dr. B R Ambedkar. It came into limelight because of progressive literature moving nearer to the downtrodden. It is a literature of militant protest against upper caste literature upholding Brahmanical values. Marathi poets, Namdev Dhasal or Narayan Surve, or novelists like Daya Pawar, or Laxman Gaikwad, reflect in their writings the anguish of a community, and demand the shaping of a just and realistic future for the underprivileged and the outcast in society. Mahadev Devanur (Kannada) and Joseph Macwan (Gujrati), in their novels, deal with the experience of violence, protest and exploitation. It challenges the tone and context of existing literary canons and decentralizes the whole process of a literary movement. It creates an alternative aesthetics and extends the linguistic possibilities of literature.

1.1 Literary expression among Dalits

Dalit for a long time was disregarded and not taken seriously in the literary circles. The publication of translations from modern Marathi literature entitled Poisoned Bread edited by Arjun Dangle with prefatory note by Gail had already sparked debates in the literary circles.

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Under the impulsion of such academics as Arun Prabha Mukharjee (York University, Toronto) who translated Om Parkash Valmiki's *Joothan* (1997) into English in 2003 and wrote an introduction to it, the initial reluctance to accept new literary genres by the dominant literary discourses, has, over time, given way to wider acceptance and circulation of Dalit literature in and outside India. The recent volume on Dalit writings "No Alphabet in Sight" edited by Susie Tharu and K Satyanarayana, opened a new debate on the long history of Dalit literature and its current prominence in the contemporary scene of literature and politics. It also shows how Dalit literature moves beyond the usual discourses of literary modernity. Dalit literature is powerful medium of expression that keeps Dalit movement sustaining and provides an untiring zeal. Dalit literature – short stories, novels, critical essays, autobiographies, plays etc. provides critical insight to the question of Dalit identity. Emerging as a social stream in the literary landscape, it tends to cover a wide range of ideas and insight governing the social mind set of Dalits. It also contains critical evaluation of the prevailing social and cultural practices.

The literary expression of political consciousness and movements among or for the Dalits in North India is the new emerging trend. Though, we find instances of such protest expressions even during the colonial period, it is a recent phenomenon in this region that has established Hindi Dalit Literature as the protest literature that contributes to the movement and the cause. The Hindi Dalit Literature is not a 'leisure' or 'elitist' literature but literature of the people, oppressed and marginalized. This trend has served enormously to the cause and also is able to widen its constituency in different regards; political and intellectual as well as local, regional, national and global. It is important to reiterate that the cultural and literary identities crystallize with on-going political mobilization and sometimes, play the role of lighthouse and torchbearers in the course of movements for empowerment. This is precisely the task that Hindi Dalit Literature is performing in this region.

Dalit literature is literary expression of political consciousness among Dalits. It primarily narrates first hand experience of community: aiming to make aware multiple oppressions and also trying protest against domination of the upper casts in Indian society. Writings of Dalit writers such as Namdev Dhasal, Daya Pawar, Prahlad Chandvarkar, Tryambak Sapke, Arjun Dangle, Prakash Jadhar and Shiva Ingole captured the problems, pain and torture faced by and experienced by community more authentically. Their writings are not only interpreted as piece of artistic work but more as representatives of that time and situations faced by that community.

2. Conclusion

Dalit aesthetics draws its inspiration by the Ambedkarite philosophy and Dalit literature makes it its guiding force. Sharan Limbale sets the following tests for formation of Dalit aesthetics: author's experience be authentic; those experiences be generalized; those experiences should not be just region specific; text should instill inspiration for egalitarian social system.

Dalit literature manifests expression of cardinal values of independence, justice, equality, and fraternity. It depicts real picture of community, its trauma and its struggle for social change. Hindi Dalit literature is also cultivating its own literary space with high level of thinking which processes the sense of freedom essence of realistic aesthetics, constructive

soul and highlights the ground realities of Dalit community. Its reading makes us restless and leads to social change and solidarity towards the establishment of an egalitarian society. Thus Dalit literature is a journey from main stream to marginal literature from grand narrative to little narrative, from individual identity to group identity and from self justification to self affirmation.

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