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THE ‘DALIT WOMEN’ –‘TRIPLY BURDENED’- WASTED TEARS, YEARS, & LIVES

Dr. Hyacinth Pink

Professor & Head

Kumara Guru College of Technology, Chinnavedampatti, Sarvanampatti, Coimbatore
A 39, Betsy Villa , Parsn Palm Legend , Ondipudhur , Coimbatore -641016,India

“Mahatmaji, I have no Country” B. R. Ambedkar

Abstract

The introductory part of the paper seeks to revisit and redefine the term ‘Dalit.’ The paper seeks to articulate that ‘Dalitism’ is a not just a caste issue, its more than a caste issue. It stands for all those who are unjustly treated, exploited, or oppressed under a discriminatory social system. A similarity is drawn between ‘The Blacks’ in America and ‘The Dalit’ in India. The terrible and pathetic Plight of the Dalit s in general, and more especially the Dalit woman who is seen as triply burdened with caste , class ,and gender, creating a literature, in its ramifications, involvements and limitations and highlights the special niche it has created for itself in mainstream literature.

Key words: Dalit Woman, triply burdened, Caste, Class, Gender, Exploitation, Humiliation, Socially discriminated, Outcaste – Absence with a Presence

Introduction

The Romans have their Slaves, the Spartans their Relots, the British their Villains, the Americans their Blacks, the Germans their Jews, and the Hindus their Dalits (Untouchables); but none of them have been called upon to face a fate, worse than the fate of the Dalits. So ‘Dalits; stands for all those who are “oppressed” and “exploited politically, economically, physically in the name of an outcaste” .Women down the ages have been one of the worst victims, exploited. Hence ‘Dalitism’ is a not just a caste issue, its more than a caste issue.¹It stands for all those who are unjustly treated, exploited, or oppressed under a discriminatory social system.

Janardhan Wagmare (1978)in his book: *Dalit Literature and Negro Literature* finds it difficult not to identify a certain analogy between the Blacks in America and the Dalits in India. Brought to America in chains, the Black American is in search of a “promised land” in search of

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freedom and prosperity. Stripped of his African heritage and forced into slavery and poverty, fragmented from his African consciousness, curious about the land of his origins, the Black American is known to have asked: "What is Africa to me?" Correspondingly the Dalit in India has never been allowed to become a "citizen," a successor of India's rich socio-cultural inheritance. Both the Blacks and Dalits have remained outside the mainstream of their respective cultures- excommunicated and exiled. And therefore the Dalit is also tempted to ask himself: "What is India to me?"²(p.179).And this plight forced Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, the Dalit leader, reportedly to tell Mahatma Gandhi: "Mahatma, I have no Country"³

In both these Black and Dalit societies enslavement was justified and sustained on the basis of religion. The doctrines of Christianity were used to keep the slave in his proper place, with white preachers warning slaves that their "bodies were not their own, they are at the disposal of those you belong to" and forced them to voice a body of songs celebrating all cardinal virtues of Christianity: "patience, forbearance, love, faith and hope of compensation in the next world."⁴ (Styron 1967:97). And a blues singer of yesteryears has plaintively asked: "what did I do to be so black and blue?" Likewise the agony of the Dalits according to Saint Chokha Mela, a 12th century Dalit ascetic, springs out of

the inability to worship God face to face because of the stigma of 'untouchability' Saint Chokha Mela lodges his protest with God, not with man.

"Low is my state Lord

How may I serve thee, unclean and untouchable as I am?

How should I greet thee?

I am in despair, lord

I know not how to serve you,"⁵(Kharat 1978-88)

The Objective:

This paper titled *The Dalit Women -Triply Burdened Wasted Tears, Years & Lives* aims

i) to destroy this caste system, not just the abolition of untouchability.

(ii) to illuminate the historical and sociological aspects of 'Casteism' and 'Sexism'; and

(iii) to demonstrate how these two social paradigms of Dalit existence get fictionalized in Dalit Writings.

Methodology

To concretize this objective the paper is divided into 3 sections.

i) The first section deals briefly with the birth of the caste system in India and its consequence the Dalit perspective.

ii) The second section highlights Caste and Gender discrimination of Dalits;

iii) The third section studies the Dalit Women who are triply burdened by

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Caste, Class, & Gender creating a literature, in its ramifications, involvements and limitations and highlights the special niche it has created for itself in mainstream literature.

5. Literature Review:

There is an abundance of Literature available on the plight of the Dalit and is even being offered as courses under the banner of Inclusive Literature. But my focus and concern will be to highlight that literature which reflects and radiates the savage cruelty to the Dalit woman and to expose how a woman suffers a triple burden of Caste, Class and Gender.

As the very titles reflect, Ambedkar, B.R (2013) '*Caste Quotas and Formal Inclusion in Indian Higher Education*,' Beyond Inclusion: *The Practice of Equal Access in Indian Higher Education*; and Sukuma's '*Quota's Children: The Perils of Getting Educated*.' Beyond Inclusion speak for themselves. Limbale and Sarangi, (2018) *Dalit Voice: Literature and Revolt*, thereby draws out critical intersections between gendered oppression and the oppression of Dalit people. In the same book, B.R. Ambedkar seriously prophesized that in politics we will be recognizing the principle of 'one man one vote' and 'one vote one value'. But ironically in our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of 'one man one value.' Amelia,

Walker (2016), Book Reviews: '*Three titles: Breaking Boundaries; The Transnational Story Hub; Surviving in My World*,' and *Transnational Literature* speaks about the challenges the Dalit has to come to terms with. Janardhan Wagmare (1978) in his book: *Dalit Literature and Negro Literature* finds it difficult not to identify a certain analogy between the Blacks in America and the Dalits in India. Gloria Steinem, (1984) *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellion*, highlights the suffering and humiliation of the Dalits. Ruth Manorama, (1994) "*Dalit Woman. Downtrodden Among the Downtrodden*" in James Massey ed. *Indigenous People: Dalit Issues in Today's Theological Debate* for Promoting Christian Knowledge. Crenshaw, K. (2012) '*Thinking Interjectionally about Women, Race, and Social Control*' establishes certain laws for the protection of Dalits. Deshpande, S. (2013) champions the cause of Dalit's to enter Higher Education in '*Caste Quotas and Formal Inclusion in Indian Higher Education*. Vasant Gaekwad speaks of his image of "uncleanliness" associated with Dalits, which acts as a wall between twice – born and "untouchable."

In addition to the cultural diversity of the Dalit literary voices Limbale and Sarangi's (2018) edited collection represents, the book is also commendable for its representation of female voices – as Indira Nityanandam points out, 'when a

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woman Dalit writes, it is obvious that her voice is that of one marginalised three times over: economically, socially and also gender wise⁶(p.25). Partibha Biswas similarly observes how ‘regulation/repression of female sexuality is central to the institution and perpetuation of caste system’⁷(p.109). A second strength of *Dalit Voice: Literature and Revolt*, then, is that five of the chapters deal explicitly with issues of gender. These include chapters by S. Horizon Prasanna Kumar and Indira Nityanandam, both of whom separately consider the writings of Bama, Faustina Soosairaj. Partibha Biswas, offers a compelling investigation into ‘Caste and Gender Interface’ in the poetry of Meena Kandasamy, and Rajeshwar Mittapalli who addresses difficult issues of violence in Arundati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* and Priyadarshan’s *Aakrosh*. Yet critical analysis of gender needs to consider not only women’s experiences of oppression, but also the complexities of masculinity and its social construction. This is given eloquent treatment in R. Arul’s chapter on “Presence” through “Absence” in J.Sanakya’s “*The Men’s Ghat*” and “*The Echoing Voice is Indeed Yours*”. *Dalit Voice: Literature and Revolt* thereby draws out critical intersections between gendered oppression and the oppression of Dalit people. *Dalit Voice: Literature and Revolt*⁸ can thus be considered an important contribution to intersectional feminist theory and scholarship, defined by

American critical race theorist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw⁹ as attention to the interface between the dynamics that constitute race, gender, and class power, as well as to the way these dynamics converge and rearticulate themselves within institutional settings to manufacture social punishment and human suffering.

This research article titled *The Dalit Women -Triply Burdened- Wasted Tears, Years & Lives* deals with the issues of Dalit women being victims of a caste, class and gender consciousness and as a result of this terribly pathetic, unjust, and totally unacceptable system that existed brought about wasted lives of the girl-child and women for no fault of their own.

Discussion and Analysis

The two themes of ‘Casteism’ and ‘Sexism’ are associated and have an equivalent existence. They are mutually interdependent and hence they arise from the same set of circumstances. Gloria Steinem (1984:7) in her *Introduction to Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* explains this connection thus: “Just as male was universal but the female was limited, white was universal but black was limited” depicts this spectacle through the imagery of circles

There are three major circles of reality in Indian society, which reflect degrees of power and powerlessness.

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- i) There is a large circle in which white people, most of them men, experience influence and power.
- ii) Far away from it there is a smaller circle, a narrow space, in which black people, regardless of sex, experience uncertainty, exploitation, and powerlessness.
- iii) Hidden in this second circle is a third, a small, dark enclosure in which black women experience pain, isolation, and vulnerability –the Dalit woman!¹⁰

These are the distinguishing marks of ‘black womanhood’ even in modern India. This imagery captures the omnipresent, all embracing reality of Dalits as a common factor in the lives of all blacks, irrespective of sex. Codes of social and psychological praxis as laid down by the dominant upper castes are forcibly thrust upon the Dalit, more specifically the Dalit woman. Thus began the oppressive story of Dalit discrimination in India. Anita Horsy (1981) in “*Conditions of Schedule Castes and Tribes*” observes the Dalits were ghettoized, presented and viciously outlawed from all avenues of decency-hope, progress and livelihood. Dalitism (a form of racism) as such a life – threatening, non-nurturing force exists even today, thus becoming the forum for all types of discussion¹¹. (Horsy, p.24)

This problem indispensably a problem of privilege and suppression is one

appropriate not only to India, but likewise in Australia, America, Britain, and a multitude of contexts in which certain members of the population enjoy access to opportunities, freedoms and comforts that certain (‘other’) members of the population do not. It is still an emotional issue and exists in a very subtle way, though technically it was supposed to have been outlawed four decades ago. But even today and even in educated circles there are people who are being constantly disgraced and deprived of their fundamental birthright as human beings, courtesy the abominable and loathsome caste system, which controls the lifestyle of the Indians and Hindus throughout the world. This Indian Apartheid is worse than the American or African Apartheid.¹²

In an article titled “*Caste Violence against India’s “Untouchables”*”, The Human Rights Watch¹³ has registered the cruelties and atrocities committed on the Dalits.

- i) Dalit’s are victimized against, denied access to land, forced to work in undignified conditions, and regularly maltreated at the hands of the police and of higher-caste groups that enjoy the state's protection.
- ii) The Dalit’s were ghettoized and savagely outlawed from all walks of decency, hope,

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- advancement and living. ‘Dalit’s’ (a form of racism) as such an intimidating, non - fostering evil force exists even today, thus becoming the debate for all types of conversation
- iii) In what has been called India’s “hidden apartheid,” entire villages in many Indian states remain completely isolated by caste. National lawmakers serve only to mask the social realities of discrimination and violence faced by those living below the “pollution line.”
- iv) “Untouchables” are not supposed to cross the line dividing their part of the village from that occupied by higher castes.
- v) They are not permitted to drink water from the same wells, nor visit the same temples, drink from the same cups in tea stalls, or claim land that was rightfully theirs.
- vi) Dalit children are recurrently made to sit in the back of classrooms and communities as a whole are made to do demeaning rituals in the name of caste.
- vii) Most Dalits except those who fortunately benefited from India’s policy of quotas in education and government jobs, the vast majority of them continue to live in extreme poverty.
- viii) Except for a small minority, Dalits are downgraded to the most menial of tasks, as manual scavengers, removers of human waste and dead animals, leather workers, street sweepers, and cobblers.
- ix) Dalit children make up the majority of those sold into bondage to pay off debts to upper-caste creditors. Dalit men, women, and children numbering in the tens of millions work as agricultural laborers”¹⁴

Dalit women face the triple burden of caste, class, and gender. Dalit girls have been forced to become prostitutes for upper-caste patrons and village priests. Sexual abuse and other forms of violence against women are used by landlords and the police to perpetrate political “lessons” and crush dissent within the community Like other Indian women whose relatives are sought by the police, Dalit women have also been arrested and tortured in custody as a means of punishing their male relatives who are hiding from the authorities.

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Singularly positioned at the bottom of India's caste, class, and gender hierarchies, largely uneducated and consistently paid less than their male counterparts, Dalit women make up the majority of landless laborers and scavengers, as well as a significant percentage of the women forced into prostitution in rural areas or sold into urban brothels.¹⁵ As such, they come into greater contact with landlords and enforcement agencies than their upper-caste counterparts. Their subordinate position is exploited by those in power who carry out their attacks with exemption. Sexual abuse and other forms of violence against Dalit women as tools by landlords and the police to inflict political "lessons" and crush dissent and labor movements within Dalit communities have been documented.

Like other Indian women whose relatives are sought by the police, Dalit women have also been arrested and raped in custody as a means of punishing their male relatives who are hiding from the police. As very young women, they are forced into prostitution in temples under the Devadasi system as explained by Ruth Manorama, (1994) head of the newly constituted National Federation for Dalit Women in *Dalit Women: Downtrodden among the Downtrodden*. The stark institution of Dalit women is well illustrated in the institution of Devadasis. Couples desirous of a male heir often pledge their youngest girl-child

to Lord Khandoba. She is then introduced to lifelong bondage, acting as the village whore. Married to Khandoba, she is not permitted to marry a man, but the men of the village have free access to her body. According to a Tamil Nadu State Government Official, the raping of Dalit women exposes the hypocrisy of the caste system as "no one practices untouchability when it comes to sex."¹⁶ This system was perpetuated chiefly to provide an outlet for the repressed sexual urges of the higher castes, while preserving the so called "purity" of the higher caste woman.

In "*Double Jeopardy: To be Black and Female*" Frances Beal, demonstrates how the Dalit woman face the triple burden of caste, class and gender. They are double outsiders and twice oppressed. "To be a Dalit and a woman is to be a double outsider, to be twice oppressed, to be more than invisible."¹⁷ assert Beal. Slavery and exploitation begin early in the lives of Dalit women. Female children are told early in life that they are dispossessed, the throwaways of society. As they grow up they are made to believe that their touch is vile, they are unclean and undesirable; even their shadow is a pollutant; the only place for them is beyond the limits of the village, and their only possible occupation, the removal of human excreta. Hindu society with the view of keeping in eternal bondage and slavery portrays the Dalit woman as untouchable, polluted and unclean. This

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image of the Dalit woman was kept alive and reinforced by literature. As early as 1888, Shankarao Kharat in his book *Dalit Sahita* refers to a young untouchable girl-child who asks her mother why her “shadow” has polluted an upper caste gentleman. The mother in a poem titled “*The First Question of a Low Born Child*” answers: “We are low child, they are high born and we must stay apart.”¹⁸ This kind of image building has been going on for centuries to keep Dalit woman in eternal bondage and slavery.

Within the women's movement, Dalit issues have not been taken seriously. Within the Dalit movement, women have been ignored. Caste, class, and gender need to be looked at together. Dalit women have contributed to this discourse. Women's labour is already cases documented by India's National Commission for Women, by local and national non-governmental women's rights organizations, and by the press, reveals a pattern of impunity in attacks on women consistent with our findings. In all cases of attacks on women documented in this report, the accused state and private actors escaped punishment; in most cases, attacks were neither investigated nor prosecuted. Until recently, the plight of Dalit women has also been neglected by various political movements. As explained by Ruth Manorama, head of the newly constituted National Federation for Dalit Women: ¹⁹

Other activists echo the notion that women are hit the hardest in everyday life and during caste clashes. One activist told Human Rights Watch, Sexual violence is linked to debt bondage in rural areas.”²⁰ Another commented on the need to give priority to women's cases:

Making women eat human defecation, parading them naked, gang rapes, these are women-specific crimes. Gang rapes are mostly of Dalit women. These cases should be given top priority, requiring immediate action and immediate punishment.²¹

It is this pathetic plight of the Dalits that elicits spondaic attention to the new literature called ‘Dalit literature.’ With the emergence of Dr.B. R.Ambedkar on the Indian socio-political scenario, as the champion of the Dalit cause, in the early part of the 20th century, a new dawn and a hope for a better tomorrow, stirred them to action on many fronts. They rallied under Ambedkar's leadership with ease, Ambedkar being one of their own kind who had similar experiences and who had suffered disabilities. The new name ‘Dalit’ (meaning “the oppressed”) marking their awareness and social consolidation gained currency and their protest movements found voices of assertion and outcry in writings now collectively called ‘Dalit literature.’

Dalit Literature: The books written by Dalit authors studies Dalit Literature in its

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consequences, engrossments and restrictions and the special position it should occupy in India. Some writes include women in Hindu society under the Dalit category; but this paper would confine itself to the books dealing with and for the woman specifically and who have been triply marginalized under the caste, class and gender system. According to Jugal Kishore Mishra in his book, *A Critical Study of Dalit Literature in India* defines: "Dalit Literature is, in fact, writings about Dalit's. Dalit (Oppressed. Broken or frozen) is not a new word. 'Dalit is not a caste. It is a symbol of change and revolution.'" Young Dalits who dared to challenge the social order did so in the form of writing and challenged the plight of these Dalit's. Poems, short stories, novels and autobiographies written by Dalit writers provided useful discernments on the question of Dalit identity.²²

In Dalit literature, oppression based on caste, class and gender comes in for heavy prosecution. Some of the very popular themes of Dalit literature can be easily identified as experiences of exploitation, deprivation, pain, anger and humiliation.

Arabian Dangers' writings speaks volumes on these themes. In a story entitled "*Maherca Parawas*" (The Journey Home) Dongre graphically presents the discrimination of Dalit women and the cruelty of the social system. In this story,

Manjula, a Dalit woman, travels along with her infant. Tired, she stops to drink water from a wayside well. Even as she draws water from a wayside well she prays for forgiveness .as the well belonged to a higher castes and her action would ostensibly pollute it.The watchman notices her 'crime' and mercilessly beats her to death. The Little baby cries until it dies.²³

In another story *Sood (Revenge)* Bagul protests against the treatment of Dalit Girls by the males of the dominant castes as sex objects. In *Sood*, Janaki is shown as returning home with groceries and a tin of flour bought with the money she earned as a grass she is in a hurry to go home to feed her tuberculosis father and hungry younger siblings. On the way she meets a group of high caste boys and before she can retrace her steps to save the flour and her own chastity, they surround her. The teenagers begin teasing her and at the end of this encounter, Janaki is covered with flour and sweat. Her blouse is torn open, her breasts raw and tingling with pain from what is tantamount to gang rape. Yet there is no authority to which she may appeal, for she is but the lowest of the low.²⁴

Sood also depicts the terrifying rage of a woman forced into prostitution. Janaki is the daughter of a Devadasi. She asks Janaki: "Can a prostitute's daughter hope for honor, respectability, social acceptance?" She is told that respectability is the proud possession of the rich .The mother tries to initiate her into the

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profession but she thinks it is much better to die with the knife (Jambia) piercing her heart. Janaki's mother in law and husband sell her to Rasool their creditor, who in turn sends her to a brothel from where she finally escapes. She loathes her female body so she offers it to the river Ganga. Thus begins a terrible quest. With shaven head and a three pronged axe in hand, Janaki, dressed as a young ascetic, in ochre robes sets out in search of a guru. She wants to escape from her female body. Will I never be free?

Will I forever remain a woman? Will the lust in the eyes of men continue always to strip me bare? These are the questions she poses. Janaki has heard of miraculous transformations. In the stories told by her father there were instances of women who jump into miraculous lakes and turned into men. "Will I not find a Yogi, an ascetic, somewhere in the Himalayas who will make this body male"? ²⁵ she wonders. Thus in Janaki's story, the total hopelessness of Dalit female existence with its horrible degradation is brought home to us in the image of the prostitute who is out to destroy her femaleness, the root cause of her tragedy.

Sharadabai Chavan's "*Bhandwalshahi*" (Capitalism) recounts the mental torture of a husband, Ganapati, whose wife Gajara, is seduced by a factory owner ²⁶. More pathetic is the plight of Gajara herself, caught as she is in this vortex of lust – she can and does remain

faithful to her husband in spirit, but the "system" ruins family relationships. It is with great difficulty that the Dalit woman tries to retain wifely virtues.

Anna Bhau Sathe's *Dole* (The Eyes) woman protagonist, Geeta, is a beautiful woman, and whose beauty lies in her eyes. This causes her husband great concern and suspicion. When Geeta realizes that the true cause of her husband suspicion is her eyes, she puts out her own eyes ²⁷. Certainly this story has a nightmarish quality about it which is one of the greatest characteristics of Dalit Literature, where events and circumstances are extraordinary and nightmarish even when true to life and experience –based.

If Dalit woman's helplessness and oppression are so poignantly expressed in the images of the *devadasies* and prostitutes, the strength and endurance of womanhood find expression in the images of Motherhood in Dalit Literature. The Dalit Literature sees the mother image as central to the expressions of protest. The mother becomes a symbol not just of pain, powerlessness and immense patience, but also of resistance and protest against oppression. Bhimsen Dethe expresses his admiration for his mother thus:

O My Mother with dustpan and broom

You hurriedly entered the village, and sweep it mirror clean

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Your perspiring helter-skelter hurry,
on the dusty way back “beyond the village”
Drags back a body full of dirt.²⁸

It is ironical that the one who keeps the village mirror clean and gathers dirt on the dusty way back home is in turn branded ‘unclean’ and ‘untouchable. ‘All Dalit writers have written with great respect for the Mother .She emerges as the personification of Love. Though exceedingly poor she somehow keeps the kitchen fires burning. She is often depicted as constantly roaming on foot, gathering firewood. The fisherwoman in Bagul’s *Bhook*(Hunger)gathers together her failing strength in a final effort to catch the fish to feed her starving children .This heroic effort ends with her death. The Mother Concept occupies such an important place in the Dalit psyche that the Dalit’s anger and pain is addressed to the mother:

O My Mother don’t laugh
borrowed laughter

I prefer your tears with which you
ignite another Hiroshima.

O my Mother don’t give me the gift
of the dustpan and the broom, Mother,

The label of voile sweeper.

If there is anything you want to give
me, anything at all

Give me an axe in these hands, I
want to crack open the sky.²⁹

The most powerful images of motherhood are to be found in the Dalit Autobiography. and in the works of Madhav Kondwilkar, is of a woman who undergoes immeasurable privation and pain, but is still able to endure. The Mothers patient endurance of her travails and the fact that in her “prime” she has become “weak, naïve/a tethered cow” nurtures the sons of “this age’s rebellion.” 31the son “in his twenties “and “stumbling fumbling” articulates the pain thus:

Mother, today, your son...

Whom you fed grains of rice while
your own stomach pinched,

Whom you nurtured making a
lamp of your eyes and a cradle of your
arms,

Whom you protected in the stress
of life as one protects a sore on the palm of
the hand,

Mother, he, your favourite, has
rebelled against this culture, this tradition,
this custom, this
thought...

Mother, your woman’s life story
lives in a house in my heart.

Mother be the support of my
weapon

O mother of poverty, make me free for the
new world.³⁰

The Mother is thus the persona through
which the ideas of passive resistance,

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militant rebellion as well as just revolution are articulated.

Authenticity and liveliness are the hallmarks of Dalit literature, because it is experienced-based. These writers speak the language of the out-castes and the under-privileged in Indian society. Shame, anger, sorrow and indomitable hope are the stuff Dalit Literature is made up of. Because of the anger against the age-old Oppression, the expression of the Dalit writers has become sharp. These writers make a fervent plea for a complete overhaul of society. As Arjun Dangle, the Marathi Dalit writer put it, "Even the Sun needs to be changed."³¹

Has this contribution of Dalit literature really and pragmatically witnessed a change in the life of the Dalits? Let's take a look.

The current focus in literary, cultural, and historical studies on marginalized or previously silenced discourses generate a significant concern about the critical approaches used to explore these "new" voices observes Pantawane, Gangadhar.(1986)in *"Evolving a New Identity: The Development of a Dalit Culture."*(P. 79-87.)

"Dalitness is essentially a means towards achieving a sense of cultural identity. The inferiority complex based on "to be Dalit" has now disappeared (79). Anger has its essence in the desire for justice for all mankind. Dalitness is a matter

of appreciating the potential of one's total being. Thus individual, culture, social burden and Dalitness cannot be isolated. For this new Dalit individual, social and cultural freedom has come because of his self-elevation and self-identification. Today's Dalit literature rejects the degraded Hindu social set-up. Dalit writers relentlessly expose the inhumanities and prejudices of caste society and instill a new social and cultural consciousness (80)."³³

An important aspect of Dalit literature is self-criticism or self-protest... they do not hesitate to attack inferiority and superiority complexes among themselves (:84). Regardless of the particular writer or literary form, Dalit literature is, ultimately, a declaration of independence. It is impossible to understand the revolutionary quality of Dalit literature without understanding the people to whom it is addressed. It speaks for them and to them (:86).

Conclusion:

The plight of the Dalit woman has come a long way. They are becoming more and more respectable with guaranteed educational concessions, job opportunities and accession of wealth. Never before in the history of independent and democratic India have Dalits, more specifically women occupied so many public offices as today.

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At the outset a Dalit, K.R Narayan, who was also a Vice-President a few years back, became the President of India. The speaker of the Lower House of Parliament of India is also a Dalit. Four Dalits occupy the office of Governor of various States in the country. Above all, two Dalits are Presidents of two national parties of the world's largest democracy, i.e. Bhaujan Samaj Party and Bharathiyar Janata Party respectively. Apart from these offices there are many Dalit Cabinet Ministers at the Centre and State levels.

Further, a few years back, for the first time in the nation's history, a Dalit woman was the Chief Minister of the most populous state of the country. Though there are so many Dalits who are occupying the offices of power in the country-speaker of the lower house of parliament, another the chief justice of the Supreme Court, other Dalit's have occupied the offices of the Governor, Chief Minister and the President of national parties yet there has been no significant change in the wretched condition of the Dalits. Except for a miniscule minority, most of the Dalits are still socially degraded, economically exploited and politically voiceless.

Two simultaneous processes have occurred with the above-mentioned socio-political reality of the Dalits in Indian Society.

- i) There has occurred a substratum among them, which is visible, vocal and assertive. Moreover, it has aroused the consciousness among the Dalits independently and believes that Dalits can achieve their rights through independent self-assertion only.
- ii) The process is the co-option and marginalization of the Dalits by the dominant Castes/Classes/ Parties in the country.

The modus operandi is simple. First co-opt the assertive or potentially assertive Dalits and then marginalize them once they want to do something for their community. Apart from the political parties, the State itself has co-opted many assertive and conscious Dalits in its fold by offering lucrative jobs like the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) or Indian Police Service (IPS) etc. How many educated youths come to serve the community is anybody's guess. Once selected in these services the Dalits, who are usually without any Godfather, put their all efforts for surviving in the service or for promotion and transfer. And then even if they get some time they spend it in looking after their families. Under these circumstances, the community's interest is neglected.

On the other hand, marginalization of co-opted Dalits is an inevitable process in the Indian society, which retards the rate

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of their assertion. This process is also very simple. Either the dominant sections do not listen to the co-opted Dalit, or exclude him from the process of decision making or criticize him vehemently and so on and so forth to marginalize him.

Conclusively, after nearly four centuries of subjugation, having been raped, looted massacred, lynched, spat upon, pushed through back doors, denied human respect, thought of and treated as sluts and harlots, fit only to breed and suckle babies, to wash, cook and sweat, after having been sexually depersonalized and taken bodily for the having, the Dalit women of the modern era are just beginning to be recognized as human beings as sexual creatures clothed in their own personal skins, as Indian citizens with public rights and duties, private longings and desires, like any other citizen of this republic.

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