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**Dalit Literature: An Echo of Dalit's Pain and Misery**

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**Abstract**

Literature is the mirror of life in which writers write about the real situation of the world around. They use literature as the tool to show merits and demerits of society. Dalit literature, an emerging branch of Indian literature is not exception of it. It represents the life of the Dalit community of India. The Dalits have been oppressed and exploited for thousands of years. Their life is full of pain and misery. They are often considered untouchable in the society. They live outside the village. They work as a farm labourers or workers to earn their livelihood. They also do some menial jobs like sweeping, cleaning toilets and removing the skin of dead animals. In spite of their hard work they cannot live the normal life like other human beings. They are tortured, oppressed, exploited, and raped by the so called upper caste. Some dalit leaders like Mahatma Phule and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar fought for the rights of the Dalits. They lead dalit movements. The Dalits were influenced by them and started writing about their pain and misery in particular kind of literature and that literature later known as Dalit literature. Dalit literature is written with a purpose of bringing social change. The dalit literature becomes the literature of the Dalits, about their pain and misery. The aim of the Dalit literature is the liberation of the Dalits from caste discrimination which is going on for years. The present research paper is the analysis of the pain and misery of the Dalits in India.

**Keywords:** Dalits, Dalit literature, oppression, exploitation, discrimination, injustice

**History and origin of Dalit**

Usually the term Dalit is used for the downtrodden of India. The term describes all the untouchable communities who are living outside the boundary of village as well as scheduled tribes, landless labourers, workers, the suffering masses, and nomadic and criminal tribes. People who are lagging behind economically also come in this group. Etymologically, the term 'Dalit' has its origin in the Sanskrit language. It comes from the word 'Dalita' which means oppressed.

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Here the root word is 'Dal' means split, broken, crushed. The term was first coined by Jyotiba Phule, the founder of the Satya Shodhak Samaj. Later it was Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar who popularized the word Dalit for untouchables of India. But the Dalits are now redefining the word with it their identity- Dalit are those who practice equality, believe in equality and fight for equality!

In the past the Dalits were called by different names such as Dasa, Asura, Chandala, Harijan, Bhangi, Chamar, Pariahas, Pre Aryans, Antyajjas, Mahar, Mala, Madinga, Paraiya, Pulyan etc. But today the term Dalit is used for them. Arjun Dangle, the writer and the leader of the Dalit Panther Movement describes,

Dalit is not a caste but a realization and is related to experiences, joys, sorrows and struggles of those in the lowest stratum of society. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary. (Dangle 26)

Some historians believe that the Dalits are the original inhabitants of India. They resemble the African in physical nature. They lived somewhere near the Indus Valley. They were living happy life and do farming until the arrival of the Aryans in India. They fought with the tribes but they were defeated by the Aryans. The original inhabitants who fought and were enslaved were kept outside village limits. They became untouchables (SC). Those who fled to the forests and hills became tribals. (ST)

**Dalit literature in India**

Dalit literature is a literature of Dalits, of their pain , misery, injustice, inequality, slavery, degradation, poverty and tribulations. It portrays the lofty image of grief. Every human being enjoy liberty, honour, security, justice, equality but these values are not enjoyed by the Dalits. They are often oppressed on the name of caste. They have to remain untouchables to the Caste Hindus. And this agony is expressed in Dalit literature by the writers like Bama, Joseph Macwan, P.Sivakami, Sharankumar Limbale, G.Kalyan Rao, Baburao Bagul, Jatin Bala etc. The term Dalit literature was first coined in 1958 in the Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangh in Mumbai. Dalit literature found its highest position in the writing and thinking of Mahatma Phule, Narayan Guru and Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar. Jyotiba Phule opened school for Dalit women education. As a result many of Dalit women can study there. Many dalit writers emerged and they wrote about their experience in a particular kind of Literature which was later known as Dalit literature. Non Dalit writers also took interest in the life of the Dalits and wrote what they have seen around them, especially about the Dalit's pain and misery. Arjun Dangle in the

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Poisoned Bread states, “Dalit literature is not simply literature, it is associated with a movement to bring about change. It represents the hopes and ambitions of a new society and new people”. The aim of the dalit literature was to get self respect, equality and justice.

**Suffering in Dalit literature**

The Dalits were considered as untouchables and outcaste in India. Even their touch, shadow and voice was considered as polluting and avoided by the caste Hindu people. So they had to take broom behind them. They could not keep certain domestic animals like cow. They cannot wear certain metals for ornaments like the upper caste women. They were obliged to wear a particular type of dress, to eat particular type of food, to use a particular type of footwear, and were forced to occupy the dirty, dingy and unhygienic outskirts of villages and towns where for habitation they lived in dark cottages. The Dalit men wore a turban, a staff in the hand, a rough blanket over the shoulder and a piece of loin cloth. The Dalit women wore bodices and rough sarees barely reaching the knees.

The untouchables could not use the water from the public wells and ponds which were used by the upper caste. They had to drink filthy water they could find. The Dalit children were not admitted to school where the children of the caste Hindu study. Himansu Charan Sadangi states,

Their miseries did not end at this. As they were illiterate, ill- treated and untouchables, for ages all public services including the police and military forces were closed to them. Naturally they followed hereditary occupations. Some of them plied trades of a lower and degrading order such as street sweeping, scavenging and shoemaking. Some skinned carcasses and ate carrion, tanned hides and skins, worked in bamboo and cane, and mowed grass. Others who were more fortunate tilled the land as tenants or worked as labourers in the fields; a great number of them subsisted on food or grain given to them as village servants. Thus deprived of social, religious and civil rights, they had no chance of bettering their conditions and so these untouchable ‘Hindus’ live the life of bygone and dead age dragging on their miserable existence in insufficient accommodation, unsanitary surroundings and social segregation. In short they were born untouchables, they lived as Untouchables and they died as untouchables.(Sadangi 33-34)

After independence of India lots of progress has been done in the field of Science, Technology and education. Lots of progress has been done to improve the status of the Dalits, but it could not transform the Indian orthodoxy. It is often seen in the Indian newspapers that the Dalit kids are expelled from schools, the Dalit women are raped.

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In a new generation many dalit leaders has emerged in India to improve the position of Dalits. But due to other problems of India, their agenda get twisted, misinterpreted and even ridiculed. Many of them do not want to be identified as Dalit for obvious reasons. Some of them used Caste Hindu surnames to avoid the pitiable situation.

**Experience in Dalit Literature**

The experiences which were articulated in Dalit literature have not yet been expressed in any other literature. The experiences are of particular kind of Dalit community. They have several characteristics. Limbale asserts,

They constitute an engagement in self search to achieve self respect; and the rejection of traditions and a religion that are opposed to such self respect. They mark a rebellion against overbearing religion and tradition, as well as hypocrisy masquerading under seductive names such as freedom or democracy. They express pain of human beings who are not treated as human. They demonstrate respect for the Buddhist value of treating humans as human. And they nurture the feeling of unending gratitude towards Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and Mahatma Phule. (Limbale 32)

Dalit literature represents the life the dalit writers has experienced and seen in their life. They articulated their experiences out of a desire for freedom. The character of Dalit literature is collective rather than individual. The experiences which are portrayed here are the product prepared from chemical process, with pain and revolt as the ingredients. Dalit consciousness plays a prominent role in this.

**The Language of Dalit literature**

Dalit literature is different from the other literature as it represents the life and misery of the Dalits, the downtrodden of India. It portrays a new world, a new society and a new human beings. The reality of the Dalit literature is different so as its language. The Dalit writers use the uncouth impolite language of Dalits. It is written in the spoken language of the Dalits. The language doesnot recognize cultivated gestures and grammar. The dalit writers use the language of the quarters rather than the standard language. To the Dalit writers the language of the Dalits seems more familiar than the standard language.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, it can be said from the above analysis that the Dalits are fighting for their rights of equality and justice. For thousands of years they bore their torture and exploitation but now they are fighting for their rights. Their voices are found in rejection of social values or revolt. Works of many Dalit and non Dalit writers portrays pity and misery of Dalit community. Dalit literature is the best tool to express their rejection.

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