

## **Giving Voice to the Unvoiced: The Rise of Indian Dalit Literature**

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### **Abstract:**

The word "Dalit" connotes people who are impoverished, oppressed, abused, and in need. The origin of the Indian caste system is not a widely accepted theory. Several forms of inequality give rise to social prejudice in every civilized community. Additionally, it is dressed in "Casteism" in India. The subaltern literary voices of the tribals, Dalits, and other minority groups were absent from discourses tailored to the tastes of the nobility. The Dalits are denied their fundamental rights to equality, property ownership, and education. Dalit literature thus arises as a voice for all those marginalized, oppressed, and exploited populations who have long suffered from societal injustice and exploitation. The liberation of Dalits from this never-ending slavery is the central theme of Dalit literature. Dalit experiences and expressions are positing the history in quotidian. Though they may appear alien and anathema to the "upper" caste sensibility, they can be read as embodying the political in all its dimensions. Since Dalit literature is based on ideas of equality, liberty, justice, and solidarity rather than pleasure, Dalit critics need to find a new imagery of "beauty and truth" that is more responsive to contemporary lived realities. Otherwise, Dalit literature will forever be condemned for its lack of merits and taste within the overarching framework of traditional aesthetics. The Dalit writers' rejection of the hegemony of caste-based universalism challenges the neat binary world of postcolonial literary theory and calls attention to the internal contradictions of Indian society.

**Keywords:** Dalit language, literature, theory, aesthetics, mainstream. Dalit writings, Oppressed, Untouchables, Caste, Expression.

### **Introduction:**

India is one of the fastest-growing countries yet is notorious for its rigid caste system. Literature has been an integral part of India since time immemorial. In the post-modern era, when the problems regarding human rights occupy the central stage, it becomes an evident step to portray the marginalized community literally. Dalit literature is an attempt to bring to the fore the discrimination, brutality, and ostracization faced by the Dalit community in India. The members of the Dalit

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community have been pushed to the margins, and the majority have disregarded their lived experiences. Their stories have been deemed unworthy to be written about. However, in the modern era, the name "Dalit" refers to individuals who have been viewed as "outcasts," meaning they do not merit recognition within the four categories of the class system. The Manu Smriti, a holy text, describes the "Varna system" of society. It is a four-tiered Varna system that includes four social classes created from Lord Brahma's body.

#### **Concept of Dalit:**

The term 'Dalit' literally means "oppressed" and is used to refer to the "untouchable" casteless sects of India. Dalit, also called outcaste, is a self-designation for a group traditionally regarded as untouchables. Dalits are a mixed population of numerous caste groups all over India, South Asia, and the world. There are many different names proposed to define this group of people, such as 'Ashprosh' (Untouchable), 'Harijans' (Children of God), 'Dalits (Broken People), etc. The etymology of the word 'Dalit' The word 'Dalit' comes from Sanskrit, and it means "downtrodden," 'suppressed,' 'crushed' or 'broken to pieces.' Jyotirao Phule first used it in the nineteenth century in the context of the oppression faced by the erstwhile "Untouchable" castes of the twice-born Hindus. Mahatma Gandhi coined the word 'Harijan,' translated roughly as "children of God," to identify the former untouchables.

#### **Social Status of Dalit:**

Dalits have been destined for inferior activities such as leather work, butchering, or removal of rubbish, animal carcasses, and waste by this so-called civilized Hindu society. Dalits work as manual laborers cleaning streets, latrines, and sewers. Engaging in these activities was considered polluting to the individual, and this pollution was considered contagious. As a result, Dalits were commonly segregated and banned from full participation in Hindu social life.

#### **Dalit Movements in India:**

The earliest known Dalit reformer was Lord Gautam Budha, who preached abolishing untouchability. The earliest known reformation within Hinduism happened during the medieval period when the Bhakti movements actively engaged in the participation and inclusion of Dalits. In the 19th century, the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, and the Ramakrishna Mission actively participated in the emancipation of Dalits. Saint Kabir, the Mahanubhava sect, and the Sarkari sect in Maharashtra rejected the term untouchability and embraced Dalits as brothers. Maharashtra state was the critical state in the reformation of Dalits or the transformation from untouchable to touchable. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Rajashri Shahu Maharaj, V. R. Shinde, and the pinnacle towering figure Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar were the prominent social reformers in Maharashtra. In 1950, Ambedkar turned his attention to Buddhism and converted thousands of untouchable people to Buddhism. Westgal ch, Chaitanya Prabhutiatiated a 'Namo shudras movement' (ShudrasDalit), which changed an attitude towards untouchable community ty. Dalit reform movements have been in India since the ancient period right from Gautama

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Buddha. Still, it is in the course of reforming the state through the creative efforts of social reformers.

**Dalit Writing:**

The untouchables were long denied access to formal education, which would have energized and inspired them to launch a legitimate literary movement in opposition to the established literature monopoly. Some educated "Untouchables" came into contact with contemporary education during the post-independence era and saw they needed to adopt a new way of thinking. The birthplace of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the champion of the oppressed, is where this literary movement started. Thus, in the early 1970s, "Dalit Literature" gained popularity and quickly expanded to surrounding states like Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and many more. In Dalit literature, the Dalits convey their rage and bitterness towards those they hold accountable for their current situation. It calls into question the standing and circumstances surrounding the Dalits. Hira Dom's poem is regarded as the earliest work of Dalit literature, and Swami Achyutanand's writings and social activity exposed an oppressive societal framework. Dalit reality is portrayed in Dalit literature. With this portrayal, the untouchables subvert the upper class's purported purity and speak out loudly throughout the caste-ridden society. Since the 1970s, many poets and writers from Dalit communities have been producing poems, short stories, novels, and autobiographies brimming with themes of caste oppression, identity issues, poverty, untouchability, and revolution.

These writers generally do not express their disapproval of any one group; instead, they see themselves as cut off from both the government and the social structure, which they believe keeps them impoverished and debased. Stated differently, the pursuit of Identity is fundamental to Dalit culture. Because of this, Dalit writers have responded in several ways to issues relating to poverty, hypocrisy, injustice, social discrimination, and other social practices. These answers are kinds of protest meant to bring about a revolution and social change. The primary distinction between Dalit and mainstream literature is that the former rejects the long-standing Indian caste, class, and religious customs. At the same time, the latter maintains that customs cannot be disregarded entirely. According to the Dalit writers, a particular class has been using the word "tradition" as a "safeguard" for their purposes. Regarding this, Dangle states that a tradition is created and nurtured by ideas and ideals, and these ideas and principles give rise to and maintain a tradition. A tradition's foundation is determined by the overall set of circumstances and the social structure at the time.

The privileged elite constantly seeks to create a helpful custom that protects its interests. The weaker segments of society are sick of this custom. In actuality, a small number of people have forced all of our religious, social, literary, and cultural traditions on the majority. (Dangle, 261). Comparably, Bama, a Tamil Dalit fiction writer, has created precious works about gender, caste, and societal marginalized groups. She pens the first autobiography by a Tamil Dalit woman. Her books, translated into English and several other Indian languages, include Karukku, Sangati, and Vanman. She reveals the shame of religious conversion and the caste system in

Karukku. Her work effectively highlights the issue of Dalit consciousness. She fiercely opposes the caste-based Indian society in general and the Roman Catholic Churches in particular for their practice of untouchability.

**A New Flavour:**

Apart from its resolute commitment to love, forgive, and fight, one of the solid arsenals produced by the Dalit community is the articulation, through literature, of human emotion and writing about bodies and sexuality, compelling rage, and justifiable challenges to authority. Over the first half of the twentieth century, besides BR Ambedkar, a proliferation of Dalit writers produced work in multiple vernaculars, writing in a tone that conveyed their selves in the most direct form. The list below attempts to cover some recognized and famous works that gained prominence through their craft and expression. They have given rise to thought, philosophy, and meditation and let many bathe in the pain and joy they put forth. For generations, Dalits had to be locked in someone else's hateful interpretation. Their oppressors undermined and stole their registers of protest and sweetness in life. Dalits, therefore, had to witness their beauty being manipulated and relegated to an ugly demeanor. Dalit writers, though, used this to their service. Time was made unavailable to Dalits, so they slashed the rigid conventions of temporality and space in their writing.

**Conclusion:**

On the whole, Dalit literature gives a message about their community, not individuality, revolt, passivity, progress, and backwardness. This message is to the entire world about their status in society by portraying the exploitive, helpless, and engrossed with grief, suppressed and enslaved, and a subaltern state. To some extent, Dalits in India can be compared with African Americans regarding the mutilation. The shared political position of these authors is against the hegemony of upper and middle-class Hindu beliefs and for the power of human beings against oppressive social rules. The Dalit author questioned religion and Identity throughout their literature. It could be said that Dalit literature achieved a firm foundation in the mid-20th century, but its framework was established in the early 19th century. Today, Dalit writers have their literary foundation with ideology and publish numerous journals. They also have several political organizations supporting them. The most prominent of these is the Dalit panthers (begun in the 1970s), which has borrowed much of its ideology from America's Black panthers. The future of Dalit literature is embarked on Dalits' present status and sensibility. New reforming waves are undoubtedly blowing for radical development in Dalit literature, such as protest literature. Thus, Dalit literature is a new dimension in the day-to-day and used-up literature. With great amazement, people are fascinated by this new charismatic dimension in literature, i.e., Dalit literature.

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