

## **Dalit Studies: A Brief Insight**

**Mathangi Deepak**

*Lecturer, Department of English, Anna Adarsh College for Women Anna Nagar Chennai-40, Email id:mathangideepak@gmail.com*

“Emperor, Kings, artisans , peasants big people little people at the bottom we are all the same all just alike on the inside and when our clothes are off nobody can tell which of us is which”.

[Mark Twain “Does the Race of Man Love a Lord?” North American Review April 1902].

In the ocean of literature this paper that I am pursuing is a speck. It gives me an opportunity to share and that I am able to walk through the path of the oppressed people to reach their desired heights and to be part of this long struggle. This paper presents a birds eye view of the history of of Dalit literature with special focus on Women and their part in this powerful reverberating genre of Literature.

In the traditional Indian society every Indian has a well defined identity- his family, the place where he lived decided a lot for him. Literature is thus intimately related to the throbbing realities of the life of the people.

It transcends the boundaries of language, region, nationality and religion and does not generalize. Among various literatures that exist in the world, India being one of the most ancient countries with deep rooted, unique and diversified cultures has produced various genres of literature and each has its own distinct features. Literature is a garland of written works, it stands tall among all ruins as a true representative. Literature has always been used as a sharp powerful instrument to make a revolution in the day to-day order and norms.

Speaking about Dalit Literature it has blazed into limelight and has marked a place for itself among various other literatures. The literature is so powerful and reverberating that it has drawn the recognition and has created a place for itself among other world literatures. The history of evolution of this literature has overcome many odds it has crossed many hurdles, traditions and history looms large in this literature.

To break a silence that has lasted for many generations that one cannot count is to define the word “Dalit”. The word literally means “broken” people or “oppressed” people. Their writings are starkly packed with emotional feelings. In a nutshell this literature brings out distinctly the pain, agony, sorrow, innumerable tribulations and the vastly degradation inflicted by one human being on another human being. This prominent literature is a Representation of Rejection followed by revolt acceptance and lastly awareness followed by Realization.

The concept of revolt that plays a vital and indispensable role has been born from the womb of battered human consciousness. It belongs to the lofty genre of literature of ‘Self Expression’. For many generations the condition of Dalits has been suffering and revolt mainly that of Dalit women.

Dalit writing awakens in every reader a consciousness of the shattered and highlights particularly atrocities meted out to women. It has become a powerful vehicle of communication. Translating all regional works to English has made it even more forceful and thought provoking. Dr B.R. Ambedkar is considered to be one of the stalwarts who led from the front for the

cause of the Dalits his views seem to be in the vicinity only in the present day. Though there are long miles to go and hurdles that are yet to be crossed before achieving the final goal of liberation.

“Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we should redeem that pledge .... At the stroke of midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation long suppressed, finds utterance... we end today a period of ill fortune and India discovers herself again” (Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, 1889- 1964, first Prime Minister of India, in his historic midnight speech August 15,1947).

Dalit and Postcolonial literatures can be compared to the sea’s rising with passion and zeal to reach the sky and they tried to find solace in their writing which are reflected in a number of myriad ways. Identity assumes political significance for both these genres. These literature conceives recreation, resurrection. revolution and liberation. They are rich treasure house of

knowledge and kind of knowing that is a quintessential part of culture.

In any prehistoric culture women assumed a particular cultural role. Women's writing was actually a rapid and powerful undercurrent which was subordinated to the mainstream. "Dalit women are the Dalits among the Dalits" says Gail Omvedt a feminist sociologist. Dalit writers in their writing are making an attempt to change the notions of a very old deep rooted custom though it seems a uphill task, the solid ice can be melted. Among many prominent writers Bama has occupied a significant place. Her thought provoking novel 'Sangati' published in 1994 draws the attention to the readers about the culture tradition lifestyle ill treatment undergone by Dalits, there are no areas which is left untouched, but special concentration and attention is given to the women. Bama sincerely believed that these writings would atleast make the women realize her position in society, With great struggle against odds, crushing barriers, the beginning has been made, the torch has been lit, only time can say whether the light that emerges from the torch showers its rays in all directions without diminishing the arduous journey,

this journey should be carried on, only then the desired results of women's emancipation can be achieved.

In the galaxy of dalit writers Sivakami, another writer and author of the famous novel 'The Grip of Change' published in 1989 reveals the strong valour and the mental stability of the marginalized women with all the harsh and odd realities, still they have not lost hope and continue their lives with their tradition. The masterpiece work explores the voices of the unheard people.

Both novels 'Sangati' and 'The Grip Of Change' have proved to be the greatest tool more importantly in the ideological struggle for social transformation. These two masterpiece works have been a movement of powerful possibilities of multiple expressions and inspirational voices in many parts of the world. It proves the implication for the resolution of the crisis in self and community. After the emergence of these two novels Dalit culture and identity has come under increasing strain from both the centrifugal and centripetal forces. Identity of the self which is portrayed as the interplay of all the characters provides individuality and uniqueness coming from a combination of traits to a person or a group. These novels

are understood as webs of shared, ongoing dynamic interactions and narratives, which grants particular choices and the life portrayed projects significance and normative content which makes it possible to exercise autonomy and moral agency. Every narration in both these novels elucidate Dalits oppression through oppression and discrimination of women. This literature has always been the forerunner for effective and purposeful intervention in forming various innovative experiments. It grounds its writing on traditional paradigms. Bama and other contemporary writers draw extensively from their own life and hence their works become not only autobiographical but also a history of a whole long community. The lines that are written in their works stands testimony to every Dalit woman.

“We stand now where two roads diverge. But unlike the words in Robert Frosts familiar poem, they are not equally fair. The road we have been travelling is deceptively easy, a smooth super highway on which we progress with great speed, but at its end lies disaster. The other fork of the road – the one

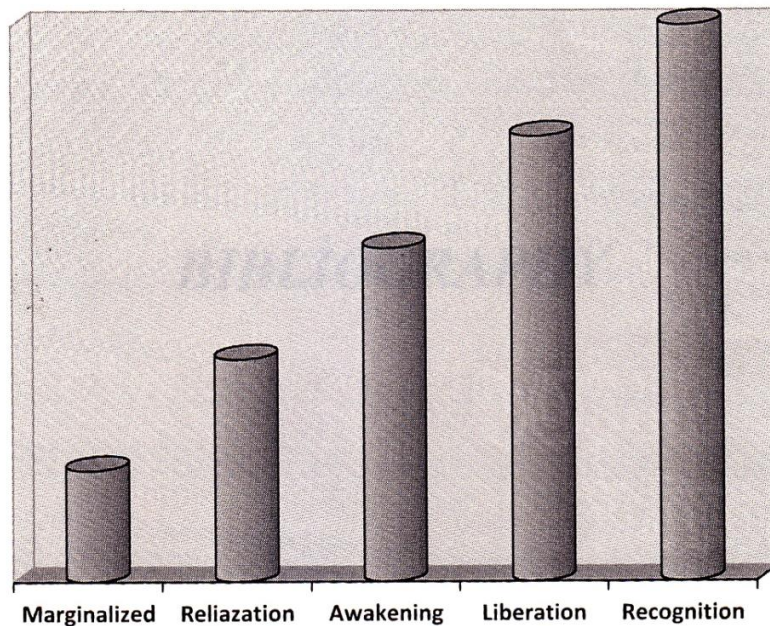
‘less travelled by’- offers our last, our only chance to reach a destination that assures the preservation of earth”. –Rachel Carson

In the concluding lines of the article I want to affirm that Dalit Literature is the only means which can help us to rediscover and unearth our ancient past, which has been deliberately destroyed by our own opponents. It would also help us to revive and survive what remains as our symbol and would also pave way for creating new works. Today Dalit Literature has been the powerbase which lends support to voices of the Dalits and which would help us in shaping our present without loosing hold of the past. This would ultimately lead to the liberation of the Dalits by destroying the value systems which made the Dalits captives.

“Revolutions are not made; they come. A revolution is as natural growth as an oak. It comes out of the past. Its foundations are laid far back”. [Wendell Philips Speech January 8, 1852].

Will there be a Renaissance or Transformation?

A graph representing the upward journey of the suppressed community.



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