Dalit Literature in Marathi: An Introduction

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Abstract

Marathi literature has been enriched by Dalit writings in recent times with varied narrations of agony, pain and representativeness. This paper is an attempt to introduce Marathi Dalit writings to the wider reading community and the author has taken up to present the overview of this rich canvas.

Keywords: Marathi literature, Dalit writings, agony, pain
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The word 'Dalit' comes from the Sanskrit language and means ‘ground’, Suppressed’, 'crushed' or 'broken to places. The word ‘Dalit’ was used in 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of depressed classes, a term the British used for what are now called the scheduled castes. The term was revived in 1970s by ‘Dalit Panthers’ who expanded its reference to include scheduled tribes, poor peasants, women and all those being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion. The new name Dalit (meaning "the oppressed”) marked their awareness and social consolidation. ‘Dalit’ is the name for total revolution. It is revolution incarnate, it is a symbol of change. It gained currency and their protest movements found voices of assertion and out or in writings now collectively called ‘Dalit Literature’.

Dalit literature is the writings that are about Dalits. Dalit literature is one which acquaints its people with caste system and untouchability in India, its appalling nature and its system of exploitation. It is the literature produced by the Dalit consciousness. Its implied value is human freedom. It primary motive is the liberation of Dalit’s. Dalit writing is a post-Independence literary phenomenon. The emergence of Dalit literature has a great historical significance. It has served the purpose of awakening the consciousness of the downtrodden for forging their identities.

Dalit literature questioned the mainstream literacy theories and upper caste ideologies and explored the neglected aspects of life. Dalit literature is the literature of Dalits based on their lives and experiences. This ‘anubhava’ (experience) takes precedence over ‘anumana’ (speculation) only Dalit writers can express their experiences in an authentic manner. Dalits know the experience of burning in the fire of sorrows, hatred, disrespect, injustice, inequality and untouchability. Dalit literature forms an important, yet distinct part of Indian literature.

Before going to the study of Dalit literature proper, it would be rewarding to know as to how this phenomenon can be defined. Knowing some of the definitions of Dalit literature would also help us understand some of the basic features of this brand of literature.

In fact, there are a host of definitions of Dalit literature. Various people have defined it in various ways stressing different features of it as per their perceptions. Some of these definitions are as follows. Keshav Meshram, a prominent Dalit critic defines Dalit literature thus:

We should call those untouchables the Dalits who were subjected to injustice for thousands of years. And we should call Dalit literature to that literature which is created by the writers from the erstwhile untouchable class.

A Dalit activist, thinker, writer and critic namely Raja Dhale has defined Dalit literature as follows:
Whoever will create literature by adopting a stance of opposition to cultural conspiracy and oppressive social system and whoever will try to bring on the right track a misguided society could be called a practitioner of Dalit literature.

Baburao Bagul, a Dalit writer, greatly widens the scope of Dalit literature and connects it to human liberty (rights) and defines the term as below:

The Literature that advocates human liberty that treats human beings as superior to any other things in the world and that strongly opposes/condemns the idea of superiority based on false distinctions like race, varnas and castes is called Dalit literature.

**Dalit literature in Marathi**

As far as the emergence of Dalit literature is concerned, traces of Dalit literature are seen by some people in the abhangas (religious poetic compositions) of a Maharashtra varkari saint poet from community, namely, Chokha Mela who is who is said to have lived in the twelfth century. The Social, cultural and similar pains of the Dalit’s are seen to have been sometimes passingly-brought to the notice of the world by movements such as Mahanubhavas and by people like Mahatma Phuley, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, Gopal Hari Deshmukh (Pen name Lokahitwadi), S. M. Mate and the like.

Although thin roots of Dalit literature could be found in the writings / message of the above-stated movements and the people, the firm roots of what we call Dalit literature today are in Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar’s philosophy, movements(s), struggles, agitation etc. for the upliftment of the Dalits. In other words, t is by now established that Dr. Ambedkar is the main source of inspiration behind Dalit literature in its present form.

Dalit literature has handled a number of genres such as poetry, auto narratives, short stories, drama, Novel etc. Of all these genres, the most important and, in fact, the first one is poetry. There would be a very long list of Dalit poets and their works which is hardly likely to be complete no matter how many of them you accommodate in that list. However, some of the most representative writers and one of the most representative works of their recorded in parenthesis, whenever possible, first in Marathi and then its English translation wherever applicable in front of their name are: Narayan Surve (Maze Vidyapeth- My University), Keshav Meshram (Utkhanan-Excavation), Waman Nimbal kar (Gavkusabheril Kavita-Poems from Outskirts of Village), Daya Pawar (Kondawada- Suffocating Enclosure), Namdeo Dhasal (Golpitha- Redlight Zone), Tryambak Sapkale (Surung-Dynamite), Pralhad Chendvankar (Audit), J. V. Pawar (Nakebandi-Suppression), Arjun Dangle (Chhavani Halate Ahe-Camp is Shaking), Yashwant Manohar (Urtham Gumpha- Caves of Progress) etc. al.

Meshram, Shankar Kharat, W. Kapur, Prakash Jadhav, Manohar Wakode, Bhaup Munchhai, Daya Pawar, Sharan Kumar Limbale, Umakant Randhir, Shiva Ingole, Baburao Bagul et al, Ram Dutonde, Yuvraj Sontakke, Uttam Ambhore, Mangesh Bansode.

The writer of this paper is aware that this is a very scanty list. Interested readers can go to source which give an exhaustive, extensive and comprehensive list of such poets and their works. Some of the women from Dalit community have also written and have been writing poems. Some of the most representative Dalit women poets are: Prof. Kumud Pawade, Sugandha Shende, Dr. Jyoti Lanjewar, Hira Bansode, Dr. Lila Patil, Dr. Asha Thorat, Suresha Bhagat, Cicilia Carvalo, Pardnya Lokande, Nirmala Londhe, Prof. Pratibha Ahire, Maya Vasnik, Usha Hingonekar, Jyotsana Chandgude, Sandhya Rangari, Nilambare Shirke, Dhammajiyo Kambale, Usha Ambhore, Meena Gajabhiye, Prof. Pradnya Bade et al.

Dalits have also written heroic / folk poetry, the poetry that is sung to the accompaniment of music before the masses. Some of the most famous folk poets from among the Dalits are people like Vaman Dada Kardak, Vitthal Umap, Lokshahir Sambhaji Bhagat, Devanand Gadpayale et al.

Other genres which some of the Dalit writers have handled are genres like short stories and novels. Some of the most representative writers of these genres are and one of the most representative works of theirs (recorded in parenthesis first in Marathi and then in its English translation whenever applicable in front of their name) is as follows: Anna Bhau Sathe (Fakira), Shankarrao Kharat (Davandi-Heralding), Baburao Bagul (Jevha Mee Jaat Choradi Hoti- When I had Hidden My Caste), N.R. Shende (Tambada Dagad- Red Stone) etc.,

After poetry, the other most notable and most influential genre that Dalit writers have handled is of auto narratives. Some of the most representative writers and one of the most representative works of theirs (recorded in parenthesis first in Marathi and then in its English translation, whenever applicable, in front of their name) are: P. E. Sonkamble (Aathawaniche Pakshee- Birds of Reminiscences), Madhav Kondivilkar (Mukkam Pust Devache Gothane- At Post Devache Gothane), Daya Pawar (Baluta- A Fixed share), Shankarrao Kharat (Taral Antaral-Low and High), Laxman Mane (Upara-An Outsider), Laxman Gaikwad (Uchalya- A Lifter), Dr. Narendra Jadhav (Aamcha Baap aani Aamhi- Outcaste: A Memoir), Uttam Bandu Tupe (Katyavarchi Pote- Survival on Thorns), Sharankumar Limbale (Akkarmashi-The Outcast) Kishor Shantabai Kale (Kolhattyacha Por-Lad of A Dansuese), Partha Polake (Abharan_Clothes of a Goddess Namely Marriai), Rustum Achalkhamb (Gavaki-Village Service), Dadashehe More (Gabaal-Untied Luggage), Bhimrao Gasti (Berad-Person from a merciless, Fearless Community), K.O. Girhe (Bhatakyaa-Nomad), Gulab Waghmode (Ranbhairee-A Waandering Bird). It may be noted that, like all other earlier lists of writers and their works, this is also an incomplete list.

Some of the women from Dalit community have also written auto narratives. Some of the most representative writers and one of the most representative works of theirs (recorded in parenthesis first in Marathi and then in its English translation, whenever applicable, in front of their name). are: Baby Kamble (Jina Aamcha- Our Living), Shantabai Kamble (Majya Jalmachi Chittarkatha- Strange Story of My Life), Kumud
Dalit writers have also handled drama as a form of literature. Some of the most representative writers—and one of the most representative works of theirs (recorded in parenthesis first in Marathi and then in English translation, whenever applicable, in front of their name)—are: Kisan Fagoji Bansode (Sant Chokha Mela—Saint Chokha Mela), M.B. Chitnis ((Yugayatra—Journey of an Age), Gangadhar Panatawane (Mukhawata—Mask), Datta Bhagat (Wata Palwata—Routes and Escape-routes), Bhi. Shi. Shinde (Udhdavasta—The Destroyed), Ramnath Chavan (Bamanwada—House of Brahmins) etc.

As it is a matter of common knowledge that apart from Marathi, Dalit literature is now written in other Indian languages also such as Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Konkani, Malayalam, Punjabi, Telugu etc. Dealing with Dalit literature in all these Indian languages would be a very big project. Hence this paper is limited to an introduction to Dalit literature in Marathi only.

As far as the relevance and the future of Dalit literature today is concerned, it could be said that so long the discrimination, violence etc. against the Dalits continue in some form or the other, so long the Dalits are not completely allowed to be a part of the Indian mainstream, so long the upper castes in India do not wholeheartedly accept the Dalits as their brethren, a literacy area like Dalit literature will have its relevance and will be continued to be written, read and studied.

Works Cited


