



AN EXPLORATION INTO THE MARGINALIZED VOICES OF INDIA: DALITS AND ADIVASIS

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ABSTRACT

Dalits and Adivasis who fall on the lowest rung of our society, are the most disadvantaged people. They have always struggled to get their due place in the society. They were given different names like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, aboriginals, untouchables, indigenous or Harijans, but nothing could change their status in society and they are denied of even their most essential rights. Though with the advent of Dalit and Adivasi literature, they are getting a platform where they can portray the real picture of their lives. Their writings claim for their identities.

Keywords: *Dalit and Adivasi literature, marginalization, identities*

INTRODUCTION

Dalits and Adivasis who fall on the lowest rung of our society, are the most disadvantaged people. They have always struggled to get their due place in the society. They were given different names like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, aboriginals, untouchables, indigenous or Harijans, but nothing could change their status in society and they are denied of even their most essential rights. Though with the advent of Dalit and Adivasi literature, they are getting a platform where they can portray the real picture of their lives. Their writings claim for their identities.

The paper discusses the roles of their literatures in raising awareness about their otherwise limited lives and bringing them into public domain. Their writings which can also be termed

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as Fourth World Literature, have given them true representation and developed a medium of assertion and articulation for them and most importantly by portraying the stark realities, they have shattered the over romantic and lofty ideals regarding the lives of the deprived sections and specially women. Their writings contribute to strengthen their social and political movements and provide them a platform to voice their issues. In the late Sixties many Adivasis in Kerala express their disapproval at the misrepresentation of their lives in films and literature and it was then that the first novel written by any Adivasi in South India came into existence, *Kocharethi* by Narayan in which he has narrated the first hand experiences of his community. His views are reflected in an article by Saraswathy Nagarajan for *The Hindu*, "The misrepresentations were marginalizing a marginalized community. I wondered what I could write about and that is when I decided to stick to what I knew best. So I chose to describe my life, upbringing and culture"(April 2011).

The term Adivasi is self explanatory which means the one who has been living here from the very beginning, the original inhabitant who has his own distinct language and culture and the term Dalit is even larger and applied to everyone who is oppressed and broken or exploited by the dominant of the society. Dalit Panthers who were a group of Dalit activists defined the word in their 1972 Manifesto as, " A member of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, neo-Buddhists, the working people, the land-less and poor peasants, women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically, and in the name of religion"(‘Dalit Manifesto’ ix).

They may have their specific issues and agendas but they are fighting for the same cause-equality and social justice. The only difference is that Dalits who are treated as untouchables and outcaste are trying to gain a new identity which will enable them to live a life of dignity, and Adivasis or Tribes who are looked down upon as primitives and uncivilized are struggling to preserve their ethnicity and rich cultural heritage which is on the verge of disintegration due to the onslaught of social, economical and political commercialism. It is really encouraging that the lesser known tribes and ethnic groups are also coming to the fore and ushering into a new revolution and events like the one we have here today would definitely do a lot to make the people aware about them.

Fourth World Literature in other countries also shares the same stigma of social, political and cultural boycott in their own native lands by the non-natives. Deprived of their natural resources, the natural inhabitants are thrown out of their territories, forced to live on the margins of the society without any participation in the mainstream culture. Their lands and resources are occupied and captured by the European or other colonizing powers. The term Fourth World came into vogue in 1974 after the publication of George Manuel's work *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality*. Manuel defines Fourth World as the "indigenous people descended from a country's aboriginal population and who today are completely or partly deprived of the right to their own territories and its riches" (40). The term got popular after



the emergence of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) in 1972. “Native people of America, Aborigines of Australia, Maoris of New Zealand, First Nations of Canada, Dalits and Tribes of India are considered as people of Fourth World” (Rao and Reddy). Prof. Rajasekhar Patetti of Acharya Nagarjuna University, Andhra Pradesh, has edited a book named *Exploring Fourth World Literatures: Tribals, Adivasis and Dalits* which takes a comprehensive look at Dalits and Adivasis of India along with the natives of America and Australia.

There have always been the two streams of thinkers regarding the origin of Dalits and Adivasis one which relates with the Aryan Invasion Theory and the other is the Brahminical one. The former says that the original inhabitants of India were conquered and subjugated by the Aryans who came from outside. They destroyed the pre-existing Indus civilization. The Aryans were skilled warriors, hardy, unscrupulous, superstitious and even cruel adventurers who steadily extended their migrations and mercilessly uprooted the indigenous people who opposed their march. Swami Dharma Teertha in his work, *History of Hindu Imperialism* describes:

Dominated by the military and predatory spirit, they (Aryans) lived the life of activity, adventure and enjoying of all the good things of the world. They invoked their gods...constantly to destroy the aboriginal tribes whom they contemptuously called 'dark-skinned dasyus' and 'rakshasas' (demons). Many hymns of the Rig Veda are fervent appeals to the gods to annihilate Dasyus. (13)

Hindu epics and mythologies are abundant in such illustrations in which it can clearly be seen that scrupulous Aryans manipulated the innocent tribal people for their own benefits, sometimes for the materialistic gains and sometimes to maintain their supremacy in the society. Ekalavya in *Mahabharata* was the better archer than Arjuna but the Aryan guru tactically provoked him to sacrifice his thumb in the name of *gurudakshina* and thus destroyed his ability to fight. Since the very beginning there has always been a tendency to intentionally sideline the myths and roles of the Tribes that bring them out as national heroes. The 104 million Adivasis and millions of de-notified tribes in India are possibly amongst the most excluded communities and this exclusion is multilayered, even their language and culture is on the verge of extinction.

Due to the lack of any certain running scripts, their literature was not available for the reading public but it definitely does not mean that the Adivasis distant themselves from literature. They have rich cultural heritage of oral literature and more and more numbers of journals and publication houses are being initiated to promote the writings of the Tribes. It is very promising that the young educated people though few in numbers, coming from these marginalized sections, are working hard towards creating a literary identity for Adivasi

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literature and making it popular among the reading public. Dr Ganesh Devy who is a Sahitya Akademi award-winning writer and activist, gave up his job as Professor of English to work with the Adivasis of India and founded ' Bhasha' which means 'language' or 'voice' as a research and publication centre for the documentation and study of literature in Adivasi languages. It got a tremendous response from Tribal writers and artists because their culture is not limited to their oral literature only, they have an invaluable culture of dancing, singing, painting, sculpting and handicrafts too.

Now the time is changing, print media and social networking websites have really helped the writers coming from the underprivileged background to speak and stand for their rights. It has emerged as a chief medium of assertion for them where they can raise their issues from, they are freely expressing their anger and dissatisfaction against the unjust social system which will definitely bring a positive change in their unknown and unrecognized lives. As a result, we can see many young writers and activists and especially women are participating in this campaign for social change.

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