



DALITISM AND FEMINISM: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The terms 'feminist' and 'feminism' were imported from French to English in 1894 and 1895 respectively. Feminism slowly emerged out of newly acquired social consciousness of some enlightened men and women. After brief survey of feminist concerns, let us now deal with the rise of dalit woman on social and literary scene of our country. Jotiba Phule's establishment of a school for untouchable girls was perhaps the first step towards metamorphosis in the life of dalit women. In 1936 dalit women held an independent conference to support Dr. Ambedkar in his decision to convert. The awareness regarding the position of Dalit women as a special case within the overall dalit movement, along with the recognition of dalit women as essentially who shares some of the feminist concerns with mainstream feminism have been the distinctive features of rising dalit feminism. This paper shows how Dalit women faced pains and sufferings in their life. Dalit women were double oppressed by a patriarchal and caste tyrannical society.

Keywords *Feminist, Feminism, Dalitism, Mainstream.*

INTRODUCTION:

When we are discussing about Dalit and Dalitism then it is necessary to discuss about Dalit women. Without Dalit women, Dalitism is totally incomplete and meaningless. When we were discussing about Dalit women, then we came to know, Dalit women faced caste and gender discrimination. Dalit women were subjugated on the basis of caste, class and gender

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discrimination The telling description of dalit women at the bottom of social pyramids, as seen by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is crucial in understanding their position as the lowest of the law.

Dr. Ambedkar was considered as the father of Dalit literature. According to the ancient Dharamshala's (religious texts) of the Hindus, they were only four Varnas (classes). This four varnas were called as The Brahmins, The Kshatriyas, The Vaishyas and The Shudras. The Brahmins were doing the work of priests, The Kshatriyas were doing the work of warriors, The Vaishyas were doing the work of traders and the Shudras were doing the menial work. Dr. Ambedkar was one of the great scholars of the world and studied hard about the caste system of India. Dr. Ambedkar studies Manusmriti and all the Vedas and sub-vedas. He read all the socio-economic books which was concern about the caste system in India. After that, we found that there were a deep knowledge and the origin of caste system in India in Dr. Ambedkar's writing. That's why, because of his tremendous study, he wrote the great "Constitution of India." In his opinion, Hindu society in the early stages was divided on the basis of class, as had happened the world over Dr. Ambedkar, father of Dalit literature. This explains the the various aspects of serious thought in Dalit literature. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was the source of inspiration for Dalit Literature. Dr. Ambedkar's writings are the inspiration for the Dalit writers Though there is no enmity about and although Dali literature as a distinct literary genre developed after his death, most of the Dalit critics accept Dr. Ambedkar as the originator of this literature due to his prose writings as well as his status as an icon of Dalit consciousness. Ambedkar brilliantly analyzed development of caste system in India in his works such as 'Castes in India – Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development ' (1916), ' Annihilation of Caste' (1936) and ' Who were the Shudras ' (1948). According to Dr. Ambedkar, the caste system is neither divinely ordained nor self-sprung through a particular incident in history; it slowly developed due to peculiar socio-economic – political conditions in the remote part of our country when the atmosphere was ripe for it. This Manu was not the originator of it, the caste system existed even before him and manu only codified the social practice. The class system slowly rigidified into caste system due to Brahminic class proclivity to enclose itself. The other classes also followed the suit through imitation and thus the 'enclosed units' viz. castes came into existence.

Dr. Ambedkar was a far-sighted constructive politician and sociologist. He founded the people's Education Society in Bombay in 1945 and started the Siddharth College in Bombay. The literature of this period appeared chiefly in Prabuddha Bharat, the mouthpiece of the Republican Party of India (formerly The Scheduled Caste Federation) and in the Dalit magazines brought out at the time of Dr. Ambedkar's birth anniversary. The Marathi literary scene during this period was dominated by Brahminical writing like V.S. Khandekar and N.S. Phadke and Dalit literature was not exempt from their influence. Dalit literature did present problems or stories concerning Dalits but this literature was still set in the mould of

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Khandekar and Phadke. But Anna Bhau Sathe stands out prominently among progressive Marxist's artist and writer, who followed Marxism by the book. Dr. Ambedkar led an agitation with comrade Dange against the 'Black Act' in 1938. Even before Dr. Ambedkar appeared on the scene, there were people like Gopalbaba Valankar, Pundit Kondiram and Kisan Phagoji Bansod, who through their writings contributed in the conscience raising of dalit masses. But Anna Bhau Sathe and Narayan Surve were the pioneers of Dalit literature in Maharashtra. Anna Bhau Sathe and Narayan Surve were the great writers in Marathi Dalit literature in Maharashtra. These Dalit writers were the inspiration for the other Dalit writers in Marathi Dalit Literature. Even Baburao Bagul was also the inspiration for the other Dalit writers. Baburao Bagul was one of the pioneer Marathi Dalit writer. Baburao Bagul's "Jeevha me jat chorli hoti" and "Marn swaste zyala" were the pioneering work, which gives inspiration to the other Dalit writers. Even there were some female Dalit writers, who wrote Dalit literature such as Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Shantabai Kamble, Mallika Amar Sheikh etc. Baby Kamble wrote Jina Amucha, This book was translated into English named, "The Prisons We Broke" She even describes about the caste and gender discrimination. Urmila Pawar wrote Aaydan which was translated into English "The Weave of My Life." Urmila Pawar describes about the caste system and gender discrimination in her book. She spoke about the pains and sufferings of Dalit women. Shantabai Kamble wrote Majya Jalmachi Chittarkatha. In this book, Shantabai kamble spoke about the caste and gender discrimination. She even spoke about pains and sufferings of Dalit women. Mallika Amar Sheikh wrote I Want to Destroy Myself. She describes about caste and gender discrimination and even spoke about the pains and sufferings of Dalit women. Even in Tamil Dalit literature Bama wrote Karukku. In this book, Bama describes about caste, class and gender discrimination. Bama was a radical feminist and she raises the question of women identity in her book, Karukku.

There are distinct stages in the development of dalit literature. In the early stage, Hindu religious literature was monopolized entirely by upper caste Hindus who not only pushed the untouchables on the boundaries of the villages; they also made them invisible in their literature which was largely religious. Even there were non-Dalit writers such as those of Prem Chand and Mulk Raj Anand discourses of pity. They are like social reformers. They wrote about the social issues and social problems. They wrote about bad rituals and traditions in our society.

Even in Gujarat, there were some Dalit writers wrote Dalit writings. When we spoke about Gujarat Dalit literature then the very first journal comes to our mind called as Aakrosh. There were some Gujrati poets, who wrote Gujrati Dalit literature.

Joseph Mcwan is considered the most acclaimed writer of Gujarati Dalit literature. He wrote the famous novel Angaliyat, for which he won Sahitya Academy Award He even wrote collection of short stories. Joseph Mcwan wrote about the pains and sufferings of the Dalits in



his book, Angaliyat. The other famous Gujarati Dalit literature novel was Gidh and Choki (The Vigil) was written by Harish Mangalam. Mohan Parmar also wrote about the pains and sufferings of Dalits in his book Poth. There are other short story writers like Dalpat Chauhan, Harish Mangalam and Dhamabhai Shirmali they wrote short stories Munzaro (The Anxiety), Talap (The Craving) and Narak (Hell).

The Tamil dalit literature is of more recent origins as compared to Marathi or Kannada. One reason for the late rise of Dalit literature in Tamilnadu could be due to the Dravidian identity which subsumed counter socio-literary movements. Poomani and Sivakami were the pioneer Dalit writers in Tamil. Sivakami wrote Pazhiana Kazhidalum (1989), which was a pioneer book for Dalit literature in Tamil. This novel written by a Dalit woman writer is a severe indictment of patriarchy inherent in dalit leadership. Her second novel, Anandee depicts the “violent exploitation of woman’s body and points out how the family as an institution is embedded in patriarchal. One of the finest Tamil Dalit writers, Bama wrote the famous novel called as Karukku. Bama was a radical feminist. She raises the question of women identity in her book, Karukku. In Karukku, Bama describes about the thrice subjugation of women such as caste, class and gender discrimination. Even in Sangati, another famous book of Bama, describes about the thrice subjugation of women such as caste, class and gender discrimination. Edayavendan’s Nandanar Teru (1991), Vadai Paudun Vazhvy (1994) and Arumugam (1999) are other signified Tamil dalit novels.

In Karnataka dalit literature, Devanuru Mahadeva’s Odalala and Kusuma Bale are famous dalit novels. Some important Kannada dalit writers are Chennanna Vaikar, Siddhalingaiah, U. R. Anatha Murthy wrote Samskara which describes about Brahmanism.

Sharmila Rege wrote the book, “The Pan on Fire.” In that book, Sharmila Rege raises a very pertinent question about why the autobiographies have become a unique form of articulation to express Dalit consciousness. There are Dalit writers they wrote various forms of Dalit literature. Dalit writers wrote novels, short-stories, and poetry. But their favourite form of writing was of autobiography. Through Dalit autobiographies, Dalit writers express their pains and sufferings. There are some famous Dalit autobiographies such as Daya Pawar (Baluta), Shankar Rao Kharat (Taral- Antaral), Laxman Gaikwad (Uchalya), Laxman Mane (Upara). Even there were some famous female Dalit autobiographies such as Bama’s Karukku, Baby Kamble’s Jina Amucha, Urmila Pawar’s Aaydan etc.

There is a conscious subversion of literary traditions championed by Brahmanic literature through substitution of ‘abrahamanic’ traditions and cults. The opposition stance of dalit literature which negates and inverts all ‘accepted’ aesthetic and social conventions against traditional ‘dalit literature’ is brought out in the backdrop of Gujarati dalit literature by Dr. Rupalee Burke in vocabulary which is equally applicable to all Brahmanic/ Dalit literature. Dalit literature is innately man-centric and disparages any art which is abstract,

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spiritual or narcissistic. It is because of this reason that the postulations of 'Art for Art's Sake' movement came under severe attack by dalit writers. Dalit literature articulates dalit struggle for equality and dignity in social sphere. Dalit writing is thus rooted in its social and economic framework and its literary expression is born out of this desire to establish an egalitarian society based on scientific values of equality and brotherhood. The celebration of eternal values such as liberty and fraternity in the precious human subject from the crux of dalit writings.

Let us now scrutinize major preoccupations of feminists all over the world and acquire a brief idea of history of feminism. Woman in most of cultures is taken as weaker sex. For instance Manusmriti, a well-known ancient law book of India, considered women unfit for self-reliance. The book of law makes it clear that women are not only dependent; they should be made so far the benefit of society. Its famous sloka 'Pita rakshtu komarye pati rakshtu yovne putra rakshtu vardya kye na stri svatratarayeh arhati' unequivocally states that women are not capable of freedom due to their debilitating nature. Women represent a sex which remains invisible most of the times. The terms 'feminist' and 'feminism' were imported from French to English in 1894 and 1895 respectively. Feminism slowly emerged out of newly acquired social consciousness of some enlightened men and women. Many early evolutionary biologists and social biologists saw woman as biologically programmed for nothing more than reproductive functions. It is not only the underdeveloped and developing countries in which the unevenness between males and females exists, even in advanced countries like America, women face discrimination through what is known as 'Glass Ceiling.' Glass Ceiling refers to barriers based on predispositions such as gender or race which prevent an individual from moving to management level positions. After this brief survey of feminist concerns, let us now deal with the rise of dalit woman on social and literary scene of our country. Jotiba Phule's establishment of a school for untouchable girls was perhaps the first step towards metamorphosis in the life of dalit women. Slowly but steadily Dalit women too started becoming politically active and the participations of a large number of dalit women in the mass mobilization programmed of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar confirms the observation that during this period dalit women became conscious about the issues affecting them. In 1936 dalit women held an independent conference to support Dr. Ambedkar in his decision to convert. Although they fully supported Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in his declaration of leaving Hinduism yet simultaneously expressed the hope that he would not ask them to adopt a religion in which they will have to bear restrictions on their freedom. The women conference held during the scheduled caste federation meeting of 1942 was quite a success and impressed. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar remained a dedicated champion of dalit women's rights through his life which is reflected in his support for the passage of Hindu Code Bill as law minister of independent India.



The awareness regarding the position of dalit women as a special case within the recognition of dalit women as essentially women who shares some of the feminist concerns with mainstream feminism, have been the distinctive features of rising dalit feminism. One significant event in the rise of dalit women on socio-political and literary scene was the foundation of National Federation of Dalit Women (NFDW) in 1987 and its acceptance of 12 point agenda which formed base of dalit women movement. Along with it, another important organization championing the cause of dalit women is Bahujan Mahila Mahasangh (BMM), which takes a radical position of removing all Vedic Brahmanical tradition and tries to replace them with the Bahujan tradition of the 'adimaya.' It seeks to oppose common civil code and tends to revive customary law and community based justice. BMM, thus, takes a radical position and is sometimes criticized for excessively glorifying Dalit Bahujan familial and community practices. It views all traces of patriarchal power as negative structures, resulting from the processes of Brahmanization.

There were various Dalit women writers who spoke about the pains and sufferings of Dalit women. Baby Kamble wrote about the problems of Dalit women in her book, "The Prisons We Broke" Urmila Pawar wrote about the pains and sufferings of Dalit women in her book, "The Weave of My Life" Sharmila Rege spoke about the problems of Dalit women in her book, "Pan on Fire" Even some Dalit male writers like Namdeo Dhasal, Anna Bhau Sathe, Baburao Bagul, Daya Pawar, Dr. Yeshwant Manohar and Dr. Narendra Jadhav etc; also wrote about Dalit women. All the Dalit women writers wrote about the caste and gender discrimination in their writings. Baby Kamble wrote about the caste and gender discrimination in her book, "Jina Amucha" in Marathi translated in English "The Prisons We Broke" Urmila Pawar wrote about the caste and gender discrimination in her book, "Aaydaan in Marathi translated in English" "The Weave of My Life" Even in Tamil language, one of the finest Dalit women writer, Bama wrote about the caste and gender discrimination in her books like Karukku and Sangati. Bama's Karukku describes about the caste, class and gender discrimination. Karukku throws light on caste, class and gender discrimination. Bama was a staunch feminist, so she raises the questions against the caste and gender discrimination of Dalit women. In this way, we must say that, patriarchy plays a vital role in Dalit women's writings.

"Brahmanical Patriarchy operates by conditioning two different kinds of mentalities. Kancha Illiah was one of the great writers in Tamil Dalit literature. Kancha Illiah wrote the book "Why I am not a Hindu." In this book Illiah wrote about patriarchy and Dalit women suffering. Our dalit women are ordinary people but real. Sharmila Rege in 'A Dalit Feminist Standpoint' clearly brings out the lacuna of Dalit movement which even today confined itself to male representation of Dalithood: The justification for Dalit feminism lies, according to Gopal Guru, in the following reasons:



1) It is not only Caste and Class identity but also one's gender positioning that decides the validity of an event.

Joanna Liddle and Ram Joshi in their book 'Daughters of Independence' subtitled 'Gender, Caste and Class in India' argue that there was a Pre-Aryan culture in India which was matriarchal, egalitarian and free from caste. This culture is supposed to be destroyed by Aryan Hordes who established in its wake the caste system as well as a strict control over sexuality of women. He puts forth the stand that Dalit feminists have started questioning "the seeming invisibility of caste in equality to mainstream Indian feminism." (Rao. 1-2). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak acknowledges the impropriety of imposing the borrowed notions of first world feminists to the third world situation which is perhaps a more complex site for disputation between caste, religion, region colonization etc. The contrast between upper caste feminism and Dalit feminism in India has its parallel in bourgeoisie versus workingwomen disjunction in France of 19th century. During that time in France middle class women were confined at home, with songs of praise for their captivity.

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