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A Study of Dalit Literature, The Literature of Resistance

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Abstract

Postcolonialism is not an offshoot or byproduct of colonialism, they are as some critics have argued, two parallel movements that have their own repercussions. (Young 2001, 57) While the former is a referent of the struggles of indigenous peoples living in many parts of the world, (Iverson, web) the latter manifested itself as a coercive practice when the ambitious policies of the British (the colonialists) began to have a direct or an indirect bearing on the lives of folks living in the remote continents. The dominion over foreign lands presented the British with viable opportunities which resulted in the adoption of unfair means and subjugation of the people, residing in these countries, exhausting all their economic resources. (Said 1978, 89) Postcolonialism, which is normally perceived as a reaction against the strategies adopted by British empire, stirred a feeling of revolt among the colonized, and its antecedents were evident in the crusades which initiated the process of decolonization. As Chatterjee argues, the colonial encounter fundamentally altered indigenous social structures, creating new forms of hierarchical consciousness (Chatterjee, 1993, 15). The very idea of being colonized gave impetus to the liberation movements in different places.

Keyword: Colonialism, Dominion, Revolt, Liberation, People

1. Introduction

In opposition to the oppressive and unequal Indian social structure and culture, Dalit literature—and particularly Dalit autobiographies—arose as a form of resistance. These Dalit writers' main goal was to criticize the caste system and caste hierarchy, which they believe to be the main reason for their oppression, marginalization, and subordination in society. The most notable development in Dalit literature as a topic of study occurred following the rise of the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra during the 1970s. Since then, Dalits in India have produced a substantial and impressive corpus of writing in a variety of regional languages, including Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Gujarati, and others, including autobiographies, short stories, novels, and poetry. Several well-known anthologies of Dalit literature include *Steel Nibs are Sprouting* (2013), *Sight* (2011), and *Poisoned Bread* (1992). A revolutionary mindset is a defining characteristic of early Dalit writing. This can be summed up as "the revolutionary mentality connected with struggle" by Sharan Kumar Limbale (2004:32). It is an ideology that acknowledges humans as its primary



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focus and advocates for rebellion against the caste system. It draws inspiration from Babasaheb's ideas and deeds and is unique and distinctive from other awareness. This awareness distinguishes Dalit literature as distinct. Dalit writing is purposeful because Dalit authors write from a predefined certitude. (2004:33) Dalit authors write from a sense of devotion and social duty. We can assume that this is the case with survivor literature. The same was true of Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel (1928–2016), who emphasized the importance of Holocaust survivors like him writing and recording their experiences for future generations. These survival tales serve as a testament to the survivors' tenacity and resolve in addition to the cruelty of the oppressors. Readers in the future can likewise try to stop this kind of systemic oppression from happening again.

Similar to how disability theorists are also activists, the majority of Dalit studies scholars are also writers and activists. Dalit writers fiercely oppose the unequal, unjust, and hegemonic social construction that denies them their basic human needs and forces them to live in oppression, exploitation, and poverty for centuries. They draw inspiration from anti-caste social reformers and thinkers. From modern social reformers like E V Ramaswamy Periyar, Jyotirao Phule, Jyothee Thassay, Ayyankali, and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar to saint-poets like Raidas, Eknath, Chokamela, Nimbarka, and Basava, they have all spoken out against the caste system and pushed for an egalitarian and compassionate society. However, Dr. Ambedkar's most radical contribution was his belief that caste was the primary cause of the Dalits' sad and terrible situation. The caste system in India is discussed in detail in his works *Caste System in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* (1917), *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), *The Untouchables Who Were They And Why They Became Untouchables?* (1948), *The Buddha and his Dhamma* (1957), *Riddles in Hinduism* (2008), and others. He also gave Dalits the intellectual and religious foundation for their anti-caste struggle.

2. Review Of Literature

The first Dalit autobiography in Punjabi to be published in English is *Against the Night: An Autobiography* (2010), which was first written in Punjabi by Balbir Madhopuri and translated into English by Tripti Jain. The work, which is set in the Punjabi town of Madhopur, primarily addresses the issue of how a man behaves with people who either don't understand him or want to see him in the slush where they believe he belongs. This true narrative of a Dalit's ascent from bonded labor to the position of editor of a socioeconomic journal, however, is ultimately one of optimism, achievement, and resistance. *The Outcaste* is the narrative of Sharan, originally written in Marathi by Akkarmashi and translated into English by Santosh Bhoomkar. Sharan, the main character of the book, was born to an upper caste man and an unmarried untouchable lady. This dual identity haunts him, and he frequently wonders if he belongs to the upper caste or is an untouchable. It offers unique perspectives on the identity issue. *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* (2003) is



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an autobiographical narrative of the life of a sensitive and bright Dalit youth in independent India. It was first written in Hindi by Omprakash Valmiki and translated into English by Arun Prabha Mukherjee. It tells the story of how he overcame violence, discrimination, humiliation, and disdain in order to further his education and become one of India's gradually expanding Dalit intellectuals. *Poisoned Bread* (1992), curated by Arjun Dangle, is a compilation of contemporary Marathi literature translated into English. With the stories of over 80 Dalit authors, it is the first anthology of Dalit literature and makes a substantial contribution to the body of Dalit writing. Poetry, autobiographical excerpts, short tales, articles, and speeches that focus on many facets and concerns of Dalit writing make up this book. Laura Marcus's 2018 book *Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction* examines the development of autobiographical history, its main themes, and the connections between autobiography and other literary genres, including fiction. The definitive and most important works by members of the Subaltern Studies Collective, which was established in 1982 with the intention of creating a new critique of colonialist and nationalist viewpoints in the historiography of colonized countries, are included in Ranajit Guha's edited volume *A Subaltern Studies Reader- 1986-1995* (1997). From an early focus on peasant uprisings and popular insurgency to an engagement with increasingly intricate processes of domination and subordination in a range of the shifting institutions and practices of growing modernity, the articles in this volume trace the history of subalterns. Anup Shekhar Chakraborty and Padam Nepal's 2016 book *Politics of Exclusions and Inclusions in India: Construing Commonalities and Complexities* brings together a variety of topics related to the ideas of social exclusion and inclusion. It has twenty-one chapters that examine the differences and similarities between the politics of inclusion and exclusion in India. Gail Omvedt's 2003 book *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste* offers a distinctive examination of the 2500-year history of Buddhism, Brahmanism, and caste in India. In order to give a compelling explanation of the historical, social, political, and philosophical facets of Buddhism, Gail Omvedt has studied both the primary source of the Buddhist canon and contemporary literature, starting with Dr. Ambedkar's interpretation of the religion.

3. Objective Of the Thesis

1. Rethinking of resistance and dalit autobiographies
2. A study of Dalit literature, the literature of resistance

4. Research Methodology

Selected texts have been chosen for analysis as part of the current study, which is analytical in character. Additionally, a combination of comparative and theoretical methods would be used. I have selected theories such as post-colonialism, feminism, marginality, Foucault's concept of power dynamics, and subaltern studies under the theoretical approaches heading. Black studies, Holocaust studies, and feminist studies are some of the marginal discourses that I have



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introduced into comparative studies. By using secondary materials from libraries, organizations, websites, and archives, I have also attempted to further my studies. Additionally, I have included some of the ideas I gained from speaking with the chosen writers over the phone into my research project.

5. Result And Discussion

Indian literature encompasses a wide range of genres. Sanskrit literature, local color literature (with translations), translation studies, comparative studies, and English translation were all regarded as subsets of Indian literature. Numerous genres have been enhanced by new subgenres and subdivisions, such as Dalit literature, cultural studies, women's studies, and subaltern studies (which includes gay, lesbian, and tribal studies).

One of the biggest democracies in the world is India. However, because African Americans are a complicated issue, its social problem is the most significant. A sizable portion of the population leads a submissive existence. Dalits are now living outside of human habitation due to the varnasram lifestyle. India's "hidden apartheid" is the Dalits. The Indian government is not fulfilling its legal responsibilities to protect its citizens' basic human rights.

Dalit literature is a distinct genre, just like women's literature. Dalit texts are covered here by Dalit studies. It focuses on the lives and activities of the Dalits, a socially different group of individuals who have become entangled with or a part of mainstream Indian society. It is examined from a social, political, economic, and cultural perspective.

Re-Thinking of Resistance

Protest and defiance are not the only forms of resistance. It is the pursuit of identity, sexuality, individualistic self-assertion, and the issue of "control" over social evils. According to Mahatma Gandhi, satyagrah, or passive resistance, is a potent form of protest against injustice. According to Usha Bande, through non-violent, non-confrontational activity, resistance in turn transforms the social order. It eventually turns into the feared "weapon" of the weak. Reinterpreting in order to center the marginalized is a component of resistance. It takes the depressed into account. It is an opposition. This behavioral tactic has the ability to topple the prevailing system. It is contestatory and non-aggressive. It is a component of social life's dynamics. However, resistance is multivalent, complicated, and varied. Both the existence of the prevailing power structure and the Dalit desire to reject and rebel against it are expressed through the representation of resistance in Dalit's fictional narrative. Furthermore, Dalit issues are culturally specific and must be addressed in the South Asian setting.

Today, resistance literature is a global phenomenon. Decolonization, democratic and secular governments, Marxism, the Dalit movement, and the feminist movement all contributed to this. Subaltern concerns make up the majority of these. In summary, post-modernism is an anti-authoritarian movement; post-structuralism is a critique of historicism, emphasizing the inequity



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towards the marginalized; post-colonialism signifies a greater consciousness of the power dynamics between the colonial subject and the former imperial power; and post-Dalit shifts its focus to the cultural landscape in order to address Dalit's problems. Actually, resistance serves as the foundation for all forms of change, and change is an ongoing, worldwide phenomenon. "A projection of alternative truth" is what resistance is. According to Foucault, resistance is a "reverse discourse."

Subaltern Studies

A component of the postcolonial undertaking is subaltern studies. This postcolonial study examines the literature, history, culture, and discourse patterns unique to the former European colonies. The Third World nations are the subject of the investigations. Then, the Eastern nations are referred to as the Orient. Orientalism by Edward Said delves thoroughly into the topic. Lesbian-gay studies, feminism, hybridity, subaltern problems, Dalit and Afro-American studies, and more are among the emerging topics of study. The British phrase "subaltern," which combines the Latin words "under" and "other," refers to a person of lower military rank. M.H. Abrams continues,

A recurrent topic of debate is how, and to what extent, a subaltern subject, writing in a European language, can manage to serve as an agent of resistance against, rather than of compliance with, the very discourse that has created its subordinate identity. (Abrams 306)

In India, subaltern studies includes Dalit studies. Because it is a philosophy of resistance, this study is subaltern. It is socially progressive, politically engaged, anti-establishmentarian, and economically sharing. Similar to Dalit activism, Dalit poetry and autobiographies offer a fresh perspective on social ills in India, such as gender issues and inequality. Identity crises is the subject of the investigation.

Usha Bande distinguishes 'resistance literature' from 'literary resistance.' She says that, Resistance literature stands for definitive texts, which examine the relationship between literature, and Third World liberation movements whereas 'literary resistance' is contestatory in nature and it is used for a genre of oppositional writing, a writing meant not only to protest but also to materially and conceptually change the existing situation to allow for empowerment." (Bande 4)

Despite being a century old, Indian Dalit literature has its own history and traditions. the works of authors other than the 12th-century Sharanas, such as Chokamela, Ekanath, Ravidas, Kabir, and Vemana.

The Bhakti movement in Tamil Nadu around the seventh century marked the beginning of Indian Dalit literature. As Saiva saints, the Alvars and several Tamil Nayanars were Dalits. Their songs



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express disapproval of the Brahmins' worldview and social dominance. Pothuluri Veerabrahman, a Dalit saint poet, for instance, performed charitable work.

The "Phule Phase" is the second stage of Dalit literature. According to Jotibha (Rao) Phule, a Marathi social reformer, Dalit samasyas need Dalit samadhanas, or replies. Periyar (Tamil Nadu), Narayan Guru (Kerala), and Phule (Maharashtra) also searched within their traditions for a solution. Marxists, for instance, are completely incapable of resolving their own issues. The fundamental locus standi for caste, untouchability, gender bias, and other issues were duly questioned by Phule. The primary cause is the Hindu religion.

The "Ambedkar phase," which began in 1927 following the Mahad protest movement and convention, is the third stage. This was a pioneering anti-Hindu elite protest movement. The strike gave the Dalits more self-assurance. The Vedic ideas of rigidity, Brahminhood, and Manu were disapproved of by the Ambedkarite groups. The Dalits believed in fundamental rights and obligations, existential rights, and self-rights. They even started using Dalit strategies to deal with their issues. This was supposed to be a counterattack, an anti-thesis, or some sort of anti-establishmentarian tactic. This art genre was Dalitized. At one point, Elaine Showalter urged women to demythologize the phrase and utilize it for whatever reason they saw fit. Similar to how Gandhi utilized truth and non-violence as his particular weapons for India's liberation, Dalit intellectuals too employed their weapons.

The Dalits believe that caste is the primary cause of India's problems. The history of caste is covered in this section. Caste is a phenomena and a social construct. Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaisya, and Sudra are the four varnas that Manu created. Sudras performed artisanal work, agriculture, and other services for the aforementioned three castes; Kshatriyas ruled the nation; Vaishyas engaged in trade and commerce; and Brahmans performed priestly duties. People who led impoverished, unattractive lives stayed outside and were referred to as "untouchables." The non-natives were also Brahmins. In the fifth century BC, the Aryan people became confused with the indigenous Dravidians. The Indo-Gangetic plain was the primary location for the Aryan-dominated Dravidian population. They spoke Sanskrit, and its dialects gave rise to other Sanskrit family languages, including Bengali, Odiya, Assamese, Hindi, Urdu, Kashmiri, Rajasthani, Gujarati, Marathi, and Bihari. Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, and Tulu are among the languages that the Dravidians, who were concentrated in the south, developed. The fact that some Dravidian languages are spoken in Afghanistan and the north (where they are now extinct) serves as evidence.

While the sudras lacked upanayana, the first three varnas did. They were "twice born" as a result of the Upanayana ceremony. This allowed them to study the Vedas. The underprivileged, subjugated, and "helpless" people were known as Sudras. Castes were eventually created by the Chaturvarna system, but they were centered on crafts. According to Jan Mukherjee, the varna



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system, which explains the formation of the caste system based on castes and clans, does not excuse the establishment of untouchability.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar claims that untouchability was created as a result of the great power politics between the Brahmins, Buddhists, and Jains. According to Ambedkar,

“It is born out of the struggle for supremacy between Buddhism and Brahmanism which has so completely moulded the history of India and the study of which is so woefully neglected by the students of Indian history.”
(Ambedkar 379)

Brahmins used to consume beef and sacrifice cattle. They hated the beefeaters and later stopped the practice. This was to continue to be different from Buddhism.

Or it's possible that the Jains indirectly educated the Brahmins about the importance of rigorous vegetarianism. In this sense, Mahatma Gandhi was influenced by Gujarati Jainism. To put it another way, the Buddhists advocated against the animal sacrifices and Vedic rites of yajna and yagas performed by the Brahmins. Buddhism also had an impact on merchants and farmers. As a result, Brahmins prohibited cow sacrifice and ceased eating beef. This occurred during the Gupta dynasty's control in the fourth century AD.

This is one of the primary causes of the Dalits' outdoor colonial lifestyle. Additionally, this was a social segregation. They did not harm Brahmins and instead consumed the dead cow or cattle. Ambedkar refers to these individuals as "broken people."

As the remaining members of the vanquished tribes, the "broken people" lived outside of villages, with some of them living as tribes in forests. These individuals performed the most degrading work. Because they would transport carrion and other contaminating materials, they were referred to as "untouchables." Antagonism developed between the two. The untouchables, also known as chandalas, holeyas, or puliyas, were deemed ritually impure by Brahmins. They put them under a lot of constraints. According to Prabhati Mukherjee,

“One touching a chandala should bathe with one’s clothes on. To touch, talk with or even to look at a chandala made one undergo penance. For touching an Aryan woman, a chandala was fined one hundred panas, and for adultery with her a chandala was sentenced to death.” (Mukherjee 41)

For millennia, the untouchables have resided outside of the villages. Their way of life is a sad and unsightly tale. They rely on leftovers, tubes, roots, and dead animals to survive. They were promptly instructed to cease eating the carrion by Ambedkar and Gandhi. Due to their acceptance of their status as untouchables, Dalits led docile and subservient lives. They were only sometimes sympathized with by the kings, social reformers, and members of the upper caste. Protests against the social ill of untouchability took place.



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6. Conclusion

There is a consistent improvement in the Dalits' acceptance in the cultural mainstream and in their representation in literature, according to a thorough analysis of this research on their cultural resistance and evolving identities in the altered sociocultural context with explicit constitutional provisions protecting their rights and dignity. This study aims to investigate the social plague of untouchability, its effects on the Dalit community, the influence of the Dalit movement and Dr. Ambedkar's ideology on Dalits, and the cultural resistance that Dalit autobiographers have offered as a response. This study also aims to explain the term "Dalit" and the evolving Dalit identity in the context of India's shifting social landscape.

The untouchable population in India is referred to as "Dalit," a name that was coined in the twenty-first century. Since untouchability originated in the Later Vedic era, the untouchable community views it as a protection against their degraded situation. By establishing a fifth Varna, "Avarna" or "Ati-shudra," the outcasts were included into the Hindu social structure during the Later Vedic era. These "Ati-shudras" were deemed unclean and untouchable, and they were compelled to lead socially isolated lives. After the Mauryan era, discriminatory laws and customs were put on them to maintain their oppression, which made the practice of untouchability more complicated. Dalits criticized Mahatma Gandhi's designation of this untouchable group as "Harijans," linking it to the illegal "Devdasi" practice. The Dalit group existed in a state of social exclusion and humiliation until the Indian Constitution's protective clauses were established. In order to protect them from social, cultural, and economic abuse, this marginalized and disadvantaged segment of Hindu society was incorporated into the Scheduled Castes.

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