

Role of Modern Dalit Writing in Social Transformation and Democratization of Indian Society

Prof. Keshav Limbaji Pawar

Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Chhatrapati Shivaji College, Satara (Autonomous) (M.S.)
India

Dalit Literature is an unheard voice of age-old oppression and struggle for human emancipation in Indian society. It is a revolutionary literary movement in post-independent India that plays a significant role in human liberation and social transformation. In the 21st century, India is projected as a *Vishwaguru*, by contemporary politicians and media but India is notorious for having socioeconomic disparity, discrimination, exploitation, and humiliation. Every fifth person on earth is Indian, but every fourth person in India is a Dalit, who is treated as sinful and untouchable in social life. While celebrating the platinum jubilee year of India's independence, Dalits and Adivasis are humiliated and treated as untouchable and deprived of the livelihood resources. However, after the advent of Phule-Ambedkarite and the human liberation movement, the process of social transformation and human liberation has started in Indian society. After the independence of India, the Dalit literary movement evolved in India, which played a significant role in the formation of Dalit identity, social transformation and democratization of Indian society. Dalit literature is a revolutionary literary movement that expresses the unheralded voice of the inhuman atrocities inflicted on Dalits by the exploitative Hindu *Varna* and caste system. This literature emerged after the advent of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's human liberation movement, which aims at the liberation of Dalits from the shackles of age-old slavery and the establishment of a caste and classless egalitarian society. The present paper attempts to underscore the rise and development of Dalit literature in general and its significant role in human liberation and social transformation in particular. The paper will be helpful in understanding social reality in Indian society and the process of social transformation in India.

Keywords: Brahmanism, Dalit, Caste System, Exploitation, Liberation, Social transformation and democratization

Dalit literature is the unheard voice of the downtrodden classes in India. In Indian society majority of aboriginal masses are deprived of human rights and are treated inferior and exploited by the handful of upper caste people for ages. In the period of foreign invasions, the indigenous masses were enslaved by the Aryans through the hierarchical *Varna* system. However, in the 19th century, under the British regime, the downtrodden sections got acquainted with

European modernity and realised their pathetic condition. Especially after the advent of the Phule-Ambedkarite human liberation movement in the British regime, the downtrodden sections like Dalits and backward classes got access to education that was earlier denied by the Brahmanical system. Taking inspiration from Phule-Ambedkar, the educated youths in the Dalit community started to express their sorrows and sufferings through their writings.

Initially, this literature was written in Marathi during the 1960s, and the concern for these classes spread to Gujarati, Kannada, Telugu, Hindi, Punjabi, and some other Indian languages by the 1980s. The literature of Dalit consciousness has now evolved into a considerable literary movement and has acquired a Pan-Indian existence of its own. It is playing a vital role in the process of social transformation in India, especially in the assertion of human liberation and social justice.

Emergence of the Literature of Dalit consciousness:

The history of mankind is nothing but the conflict between various ethnic groups and tribes for better land and resources. It has been well reflected in the myths and epics of various cultures around the world. As far as India is concerned, the Brahmins, a Eurasian ethnic group that migrated from the northern hemisphere, settled in the Indian sub-continent and established their socio-political hegemony, which is popularly known as *Vaidik Varnashramdharma*. In this regard, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar reveals the references from the *Rigveda* in the 90th hymn of the 10th book. It runs as follows:

1. Purusha has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, and a thousand feet. One every side enveloping the earth...Purusha himself is this whole (universe)...12. The Brahman was his mouth; the *Rajanya* was made his arms; the being called *Vaishya*, he was his thigh; the Shudras sprang from his feet” (190).

Thus, according to Brahminical literature and scriptures, Indian society is based on a divine social order, i.e., the hierarchical Varna system. Among these, the *Brahmins* are privileged and empowered to control all the resources of the land, whereas the *Shudras* are deprived of human rights and compelled to serve the above three *Varnas*. Moreover, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar explored the fifth class, i.e., untouchables, Adivasis, and nomadic tribes, who are treated as sinful and exploited inhumanly in social life. These Shudras and Atishudras were denied the right to education and deprived of livelihood resources. So, these aboriginal masses lived a degraded and dehumanised life for ages. For the first time, Madara Chennaiah, a cobbler-saint from the 11th century, is among the earliest known Dalit writers to express the depressed voice of Dalits through his Vachana poetry. He is often referred to as "the father of Vachana poetry", a form of writing with rhymes in Kannada. There were also Dalit Bhakti poets in that era, like Guru Ravidas (15th century) and Chokhamela (14th century). However, it was later, primarily in the 19th century, that literature became an instrument of resistance. Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, a champion of the human liberation movement in modern India, explores, in his remarkable 'Ballad of the Conquered' (Slave), the enslavement of Shudras. He states:

The wicked Aryan Brahmins conquered the original inhabitants of this land and subjugated and stigmatized them as (their hated) slaves. You were never anyone's vassals. Question the Vedas bluntly,

and drag them out (in the open) publicly. The *Dasyus* (the so-called slaves) were, indeed, brave, pure at heart and upright in their conduct....You were the original lords of this land, O *Dasyus*. Take a balanced view (think rationally) about the degradation (miserable condition) to which you have been reduced (by the Aryans). Humanity has been outraged by your degradation and nobody respects you (speaks well of you). (Patil: 53).

Thus, it seems that the Brahminical caste system is an unjust social order that has resulted in the predicament of Dalits in India. In the Varna system, there is upward power and reverence, whereas downward duties and disgust. In Indian society, one can find that Brahmins are worshipped as *Bhudev*, i.e., earthly gods, whereas *Shudras* are treated as subhumans and compelled to survive in servitude. Later in the course of time, Indian society was segregated into many hierarchical castes, in which some castes like Mahar, *Manga*, *Dhor*, *Dhed*, *Khatik*, *Mala*, *Madiga*, *Chambhar*, *Chura*, *Pariha*, *Pasi Jatav*, etc. were treated as the untouchables in society. Hence, in the 19th century, due to the influence of Mahatma Phule's human liberation movement, Dalit leader Kisan Faguji Bansode (1870–1946) asserted the Dalit Identity through his writings. He warns the descendants of Aryans to be alert; he writes, "The Aryans-your ancestors-conquered us and gave us unbearable harassment... You treated us even worse than slaves and subjugated us to any torture you wanted. But now we are no longer your subjects". (Omvedt:35).

According to these references, it seems that Dalits are the indigenous aboriginal masses suppressed by invading Aryan Brahmins under the *Vedik Varnashrama Dharma*.

In the 6th century BC, Gautam Buddha promoted human liberation movement and egalitarian society first time in India. St. Chokha Mahar, St. Tukaram, Mahatma Phule, Kishan Faguji Bansode, and Janaba Kamble were early Dalit authors in Maharashtra who protested through their writing. Mahatma Phule and Periyar Ramaswami wrote and campaigned against Brahmanism in the 19th century. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar led a pan-Indian Dalit liberation movement in the 20th century to establish a democratic society free from manmade discriminations. He abolished the oppressive caste system bestowed with the liberty, equality, social justice, and education, which Brahmins had denied *Shudras* and *Atishudras* for millennia. Thus, Phule-Ambedkarite human liberation movement led to Dalit literature. In 'Gulamgiri' and 'Whipcord of the Farmer', Mahatma Phule described *Shudra-Atishudra's* plight in stark terms. Mukta Salve, a *Mang* caste untouchable student in Savitribai's school, wrote about untouchables' plight for the first time in Modern India. She boldly questions God why Brahmins cruelly slaughtered and treated *Mangas* and *Mahars* under the Peshwa reign. This is the beginning of Dalit writing in India.

In the post-independence era, the Phule Ambedkarite movement and constitutional safeguards led to self-respect for Dalits. However, the upper caste mentality of the *Savarna* community could

not digest the respectable lives of Dalits that led to cases of atrocities in Maharashtra and other parts of India. In the 1970s, the Dalit Panther, a militant movement of Dalit activists and writers came to existence to fight against upper caste atrocities. The term "Dalit" is derived from Sanskrit and means downtrodden, oppressed, exploited, or condemned to peripheral living. The term generally includes Schedule Castes (SCs), Schedule Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBCs), but is mainly confined to SCs in day-to-day usage and political discourse. Religions like Buddhism, Jainism, and the Bhakti movement opposed Brahminical religio-ideological hegemony of in the mediaeval age. In the 21st century, the Dalit Panther identified its friends and foes and created a space for itself in the global scenario.

Following Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's example, many young people from untouchable castes began to express their silenced voices through writing during the post-independence era. Students in Milind College in Aurangabad, which was founded by Dr. Ambedkar to provide education for the underprivileged sections of society and eventually became the centre for Ambedkarite literature, stood out among their peers. The educated youths in this centre began to write fervently about their experiences as Dalits. Prof. P. E. Sonkamble, while studying at Milind College in Aurangabad, wrote his memoir in the college magazine entitled *Athvaniche Pakshi (Birds of Memory)*. In his memoir, Sonkamble wrote about his childhood experiences of caste discrimination like untouchability, poverty, hunger, and

humiliation in villages in Marathwada. In the latter part of the 20th century, in Maharashtra, radical Dalit writers such as Annabhau Sathe, Wamandada Kardak, Harishrao Sonule, Mrs. Hira Bansode, Narayan Surve, Daya Pawar, Baburao Bagul, Arjun Dangle, Keshav Meshram, Namdeo Dhasal, Yashwant Manohar, Laxman Gaikwad, Tryambak Sapkale, Shantabai Kamble, Kumud Pawade, Kishor Shantabai Kale, and Sharankumar Limble et al. expressed the revolutionary voice of the Dalit community and raised revolt against the unjust Hindu socio-cultural setup. It is the collective voice of Dalits in Indian society that brought about Dalit consciousness and started the process of social transformation in India. In the 21st century, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar proved to be a champion of human liberation and social justice, and all the downtrodden and deprived sections of society are following his message of Educate! Organise and agitate for human rights and dignity. Hence, the literature of Dalit consciousness or literature of protest is also known as 'Ambedkarite literature, and it has crossed national boundaries and gained international recognition.

Vision and Voices of Major Ambedkarite Writers

Sahitya Ratana Annabhau Sathe

Anna Bhau Sathe (1920-1969) was a prominent Dalit writer and social reformer from Maharashtra. Born into an untouchable family in the Mang caste, he faced caste discrimination throughout his life, which he reflected in his writings. Despite not receiving formal education, he emerged as a

powerful voice for social justice in his writing and activism. His works depicted the struggles, oppression, and injustices faced by Dalits in Indian society, often drawing from his own experiences. His writings highlighted the harsh realities faced by Dalit communities in India and sparked the resilience, aspirations, and spirit of protest within the Dalit community. Annabhau was also involved in social and political activism and played a significant role in the laborers' movement. His work serves as a testament to the power of literature to challenge social hierarchies, promote social equality, and amplify marginalized voices.

The well-known novel '*Fakira*' focuses on the theme of struggle for liberation and social justice. The protagonist in the novel, 'Fakira, is a young revolutionary from a deprived community who rebels against the system and struggles for justice for the deprived masses. When there was a great drought in the village, people were dying of hunger and starvation. In such a situation, Fakira a revolutionary youth looted the treasury and grain storage of the government and distributed it among poor, hungry people. In the very preface of this novel, Annabhau writes, "This novel is not made only by my talent; if there is not a vision of true life, then the words of talent, emotion, etc. become meaningless." (www.pdfnotes.co/fakira-kadambari) Hence, the novel '*Fakira*' is important in many ways that embarked on literary revolution in modern Marathi literature. It is significant as a rural Dalit historical novel that brings the rebellious life of the Dalit hero to society. The rebellion of the Fakira inspires social justice and freedom in the age-old

suppressed country like India. In the novel, we see a different foundation of morality. '*Fakira*' stands as a testament to the transformative power of literature in challenging social hierarchies, promoting equality, and amplifying marginalised voices.

Annabhau's poems and songs often celebrated the struggle and resilience of marginalised communities, including Dalits, and advocated for their empowerment. His works emphasised the need to challenge the oppressive caste system and fight for social transformation. Annabhau states in his song that Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar has told us to change exploitative systems in the world with revolutionary activism. He writes:

Strike a blow to change the world,
Said me Bhimrao
Why did a giant elephant stuck in
mire of slavery
Come out of the and attack on foe
The wealthy have ceaselessly
exploited
The fanatics also harassed
The crocodile swallowed the gem it
sought,
Thieves have become masters
Branded us inferior and enslaved for
ages
Imposed the humiliated life by
discrimination
Come on brother on the chariot of
unity togetherly to make the new
world. (harinarke.blogspot.com)
(Translated by the researcher)

Through his artistic expression, Annabhau aimed to inspire and mobilise people towards Ambedkarite ideals of

equality, justice, and human dignity. His writings continue to resonate with Ambedkarite followers and have been embraced as anthems of social change and empowerment.

Baburao Bagul

Baburao Bagul (1930–2008) was a prominent Dalit writer from Maharashtra, India. He is widely recognised as one of the pioneers of Dalit literature in the Marathi language. He was born into an untouchable Mahar caste in the Amravati district of Maharashtra, so he experienced the brutal realities of caste discrimination and social marginalisation throughout his life. Bagul's writings portray the lived experiences of Dalit realism, challenge societal norms, and expose the oppressive structures of caste-based discrimination prevalent in Indian society. He boldly depicted the brutalities, humiliations, and inequalities faced by Dalits.

Bagul's most significant work is his collection of short stories entitled '*Jevha Mi Jat Chorali*' (*When I Hid My Caste*), published in 1963. In this, he realistically presented the daily struggles and dehumanisation endured by Dalits. Bagul's stories in this collection provide a poignant and thought-provoking exploration of the Dalit experience, ultimately contributing to the broader movement for social justice and equality. His narratives are severe and uncompromising, exposing the hypocrisy and prejudices of a society based on caste. In his writings, he explores Dalit identity, violence, exploitation, and the quest for dignity. As a Dalit writer, Bagul played a crucial role in giving voice to the

marginalised and challenging the dominant narratives of his time. His works were instrumental in influencing the trajectory of Dalit literature, inspiring subsequent generations of writers to investigate and articulate the Dalit experience. The work of Bagul remains integral to the larger movement for social justice and equality.

Wamandada Kardak

Waman Tabaji Kardak (1934 - 2004), popularly known as Waman Dada Kardak, was a prominent Ambedkarite poet and singer from Maharashtra, India. He was born into an untouchable Mahar caste, so he experienced caste discrimination and humiliation. He joined the Samta Sainik Dal (Army of Soldiers for Equality) established by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and worked as a staunch Ambedkarite activist and poet. He sang Ambedkarite songs with such zeal for the anti-caste movements of Buddha, Kabir, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, and Babasaheb Ambedkar that he reformed the minds of hundreds of people, enabling them to understand the caste system and changing forever their perspective towards life and society. His poetry reflects his deep admiration and reverence for Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and his human liberation movement. As an Ambedkarite poet, Kardak's writings revolve around the themes of caste discrimination, social inequality, and social justice. His poems celebrate the legacy of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. He advocated for the rights and dignity of Dalits and deprived classes in India through his revolutionary songs. In an exploitative caste system, Dalits are deprived of their basic human rights and livelihood resources, So Wamandada asks in his song:

Tell us - Birla, Bata, Tata - where is it
our share?

Tell us in your pile of wealth, where
is it our share?

In the farms, our sweat drips,
the thief runs with ready loots

Tell us the runaway of this looter ,

Tell us - Birla, Bata, Tata - where is it
our share?

Do the justice ! Bring the weighing
scale- where is it our share?

All cream runs towards them,

here we sit with hunger burning

Hey Shopkeeper Dada, where is our
bag of wheat flour,

Tell us - Birla, Bata, Tata - where is it
our share? (Translated by the
researcher)

(samatechigani.blogspot.com)

Wamandada's poetry often captures the struggles and aspirations of the Dalits and highlights the need for social reform challenging the oppressive caste system. His verses embody the spirit of resistance and serve as a medium for raising awareness and mobilising communities towards social justice. In his most quoted song, '*O Human*', which is considered the national anthem of the casteless republic in Maharashtra, he sings:

O humans! I must sign your song here,

I must sing a song for your welfare,

I must sign such song

That the riddle of your hunger be
resolved

All your sorrows crumbled and be fall,

One laughs and millions cry,

Such a world must not be there.

(Translated by researcher)

(atta-deep-geetmala.blogspot.com)

Thus, the Wamandada's songs are known for their powerful imagery, emotional depth, and the ability to evoke a sense of pride and self-assertion among Ambedkarite followers. Kardak's poems have been recited and celebrated in Ambedkarite gatherings, literary events, and social justice movements. Through his poetic expression, Waman Kardak made significant contributions to Ambedkarite literature and the broader Ambedkarite movement. His verses continue to inspire and resonate with those striving for equality, justice, and the ideals espoused by Dr. Babasaheb. Ambedkar.

Namdeo Dhasal

Padmashri Namdeo Dhasal (1949–2014) was an influential Dalit poet and activist associated with the Ambedkarite movement in India. He was born into an untouchable caste in the Pune district of Maharashtra. He experienced poverty, hunger, and caste discrimination in childhood. His father was working as a hamal for a butcher in a slum in a red-light area in Kamathipura, Mumbai. Due to poverty, Namdeo had to work in brothels. He had seen the lives of prostitutes at an innocent age. He also worked as a taxi driver in Mumbai. Dhasal had seen the lives of Dalits in the slums of Mumbai, so he played a significant role in raising the voice of the marginalised Dalit community through his powerful poetry. He was one of the founders of the Dalit Panther movement, which aimed to combat caste-based discrimination and advocate for the rights of Dalits. His poetry reflected the harsh realities of Dalit life, exposing the deep-rooted caste oppression prevalent in Indian

society. Dhasal's verses were characterised by their rawness, anger, and sense of rebellion against the social order.

Dhasal's notable work is the collection of poems called "*Golpitha*," published in 1972. The poems in "*Golpitha*" vividly depict the lives of sex workers, drug addicts, and the marginalised underclass of Mumbai. Dhasal's writing unflinchingly addresses themes of poverty, caste discrimination, and the struggles faced by the Dalit community. His poetry was known for its intense and confrontational style, which aimed to bring attention to the harsh realities of caste-based society in India. Namdeo Dhasal received several prestigious awards for his contribution to literature, including the Sahitya Akademi Award in 2004. His poetry is known for its powerful and provocative portrayal of Dalit experiences and has inspired subsequent generations of poets and activists. In his revolutionary poem, '*O Human*, he says that the present world with discrimination and exploitation should be abolished and a world of equality, love, and peace be established. He writes:

Man, you should explode
Yourself to bits to start with...
One should crumble up temples,
churches, mosques, sculptures,
museums
Wage class wars, caste wars,
communal wars, party wars, crusades,
world wars...
After this all those who survive should
stop robbing anyone or making others
their slaves
After this they should stop calling one
another names white or black,

Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, or
Shudra;

Stop creating political parties, stop
building property, stop committing

One should regard the sky as one's
grandpa, the earth as one's grandma

And coddled by them everybody
should bask in mutual love

Man, one should act so bright as to
make the Sun and the Moon seem pale

One should share each morsel of food
with everyone else, one should

compose a hymn

To humanity itself, man, man should
sing only the song of man"

(roundtableindia.co.in)

Thus, Dalit literature focuses on human liberation and social justice which has been denied to aboriginal masses in Hindu society for ages. Mahatma Phule and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar embarked on pan-Indian Dalit liberation movement and the Dalit literature reached that movement to common man. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is the life force for the human liberation movement for the coming generations. He dedicated his life to fighting against caste-based discrimination and advocating for the rights and upliftment of Dalits in India. Hence, Dalit literature also aims at a casteless and raceless society based on the principles of liberty, equality, and social justice. It encompasses a wide range of writings, including books, essays, speeches, poetry, and other forms of artistic expression. Initially, it emerged in Marathi in Maharashtra, the home state of Dr. Ambedkar, and later in Hindi, Tamil, Kanada, Telugu, Gujarati, and Bengali. The close study of the literature of prominent

Ambedkarite writers shows the gravity and intensity of the Dalit problem in India.

The prominent Marathi writers are Narayan Surve, Daya Pawar, Shankararo Kharat, Baburao Bagul, Arjun Dangle, Keshav Meshram, Namdeo Dhasal, Yashwant Manohar, Laxman Gaikwad, Tryambak Sapkale, Shantabai Kamble, Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar, Kumud Pawade, Kishor Shantabai Kale, and Sharankumar Limble et al. Whereas Omprakash Valmiki, Ramkumar Sambhriya, Kausalya Baisantri, Jatin Bala, Shanti Swaroop Baudh, and Kanwal Bharti are prominent Kalyani Thakur Charal Hindi Belt Dalit writers. Bhagya Reddy Varma, Aravind Malagatti, Siddalingaiah, P. Sivakami, Meena Kandasamy, Bama, John Rathinam, and Gurram Jashuva-all these writers adhere to and advocate the Ambedkarite ideology of human liberation in their writings. In 21st century Ambedkarite writers and thinkers, including V.T. Rajshekar, D.R. Nagaraj, Kancha Ilaiah, Gail Omvedt, Anand Teltumbde, Dr. Suraj Yengde, and many others, are theorizing Ambedkarite literature as literature of social justice and cosmic humanity. Their writings have played a crucial role in shaping the discourse around caste, social justice, and equality in India.

Conclusion

Dalit literature continuously evolve and nurture, with new voices and perspectives of the struggle against caste-based discrimination and social justice. Dalit literature is a vital tool in addressing caste-based discrimination and social justice in India. It explores the Ambedkarite human liberation movement, critiques the caste

system, and advocates for human rights, social justice, and social transformation. Dalit literature often reflects the experiences, struggles, and aspirations of Dalit communities, addressing issues such as caste-based violence, social discrimination, and the fight for equal rights. The age-old caste oppression and stigma of untouchability created a sense of inferiority and servitude among the Dalit community. However, the Dalit writers argue that the exploitative caste system, superiority of *Savarnas*, and submissiveness of Dalits are the root of their exploitation. Hence, they appeal Dalits to organize and agitate for their rights and also appeal to mainstream society to understand the plight of Dalits and aspire for social equality and fraternity. All the Dalit writers are Dalit literature motivates the Dalits to acquire education and originate self-respect among Dalits. Hence Dalit literature changes the outlook of both the communities i.e. oppressed and oppressors so the Dalit literature is playing a significant role in social transformation in Indian society.

In 21st century, Dalit literature has become a prominent socio-cultural and literary discourse in India, promoting the Ambedkarite ideology of human liberation and social justice. It advocates for a society free from discrimination based on caste, race, gender, religion, or skin color. Dalit authors articulate modern democratic values like liberty, equality, fraternity, dignity of human life, and social justice. In a multicultural country like India, teaching Ambedkarite literature in schools and colleges is essential to promote social equality and communal harmony. The

essence of Dalit literature is Gautam Buddha's gospel for mankind, focusing on Pradnya (wisdom), Sheel (nobility), and Karuna (compassion), which are universal values for a happy and healthy human life.

In today's world of material greed and restlessness, Buddha's wisdom and compassion are crucial for global peace, love, and happiness.

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