

Lokshahir Annabhau Sathe as an Epoch-making Dalit Voice

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Abstract

Annabhau Sathe's writing mainly deals with an emancipation of humankind in general. Due to the existence of dynamics of powers and stigma of caste his literature was deliberately kept away from printing and publishing whose writing basically flourished out of experiences humiliation and exploitation of untouchables. He raised voice against the autocratic system by following the rebellious philosophies of Buddha, Kabir, Mahatma Phule, Shahu Maharaj, Karl Marx and Dr. Ambedkar. In Marathi literature, He made great impact after post-Ambedkarian period whose writing initially was at the margin but after 1960's he got vital position due to the exposition of the issues of untouchability, injustice, problems of laborers and Dalit women. The writers like Keshavsut, N.C. Phadke, V.S Khandekar glorified the culture, history and literary values and had very less interest in the exposition of the sufferings and exploitation of Dalits but Sathe brought about democratic revolution and demanded a society with equal social rights. Moreover, he has discussed and exposed the lives of oppressed Dalits and emphasized humanism and criticized the stigmatized social practices. The hierarchy of caste system which he believed to be the root cause of depression of millions of Dalits for centuries. His style, narrative technique, themes, language challenged the very basics of mainstream literature. He wrote ballads, novels, short stories, travelogues and plays that gave fresh look to Marathi literature and even gave a new literary test of rebellion to the readers. The present research paper humbly asserts his role as a Dalit voice by referring the select writing that punctures the power dynamics like African American intellectuals. His indomitable and undeniable role in liberating Dalits that ultimately led into the transformation of the society. His writings confronted the universal problems of humanity that is why this paper tries to eradicate the image of marginalized writer from Indian context.

Keywords: rebellious, emancipation, humiliation, untouchables, humanism

In general it is believed that Marathi literature is a kind of literature that represent an artistic expression of thoughts and ideas, passions, emotions and actions of human life. It also captures the day-to-day happenings of life like other literature. Marathi literature too is considered as a source of pleasure for many readers since 4,000 years and it will remain in the future too. A literature is defined as a true

reflection of personal, political, religious and spiritual conditions in which the writer lives. Marathi literature is known as one of the important types of Indian literature and that has made Deep Impact on the Canon of the Indian Literature.

In early 17th century Sant Tukaram, a noted Saint poet has achieved remarkable position in Bhakti literature. He is among us at the outcome of peculiar, economic, social,

political and religious views of his time. Tukaram was greatly disturbed by Varna system especially the two Varnas -Brahmins and shudras. Brahmins considered themselves superior than all other castes and the common man was politically, religiously exploited. As per the dictionary protest means disapproval when a person or group is physically, mentally, economically, politically and socially oppressed. Protest is born when a man decides to get rid of his exploitation and acts accordingly. It means that to express his protest one has to disapprove his circumstances to reform his present condition. Narendra Mohan writes:

*"The foundation of protest is laid when a man becomes conscious of his rights and for their attainment put himself into protest with body and soul."*¹

Sant Tukaram like all other sensitive writers became aware of the social oppressive conditions and revolted against it. His active participation in many of social and religious situation of his Time made Tukaram aware of the problems of torturing of common man under the influence of religious practices. Sant Tukaram with the help of Abangas spread awareness among the people regarding social and religious practices. Tukaram in his noted work 'Says Tuka' Or 'Tuka Mhane' expressed his protest against social and religious structures. With the help of Abangas, he expected society to be strong and healthy.

Protest in Marathi literature was not explicit in the writings of writers like Keshavsut, N.C. Phadke, V.S Khandekar. These writers glorified the culture, history and literary

values. But the literature of Elite class has very less interest in the exposition of protest elements and wrote very little about the sufferings and exploitation of Dalits. Dalit writers on the philosophical path of Shahu Phule Ambedkar exposed their collective protest against exploitation. It is true that Dalit literature has brought about democratic revolution which demanded a society with equal social rights. It has discussed and exposed the lives of oppressed Dalit and emphasized humanism and criticized the stigmatized social practices. It had challenged the hierarchy of caste system which is believed to be the root cause of depression of millions of Dalit for centuries. The philosophy of Dr BR Ambedkar and Jotiba Phule was a key in the formation of protest Movement in Maharashtra that gave birth to Dalit literature in Marathi language. Dalit literature challenged the very practice of traditional literature and came up with subject, styles and techniques. Dalit literature mainly dealt with the exposition and oppression and suppression of Dalit and manifested their protest. In contemporary Dalit writing, Dalit writers imitated writings of Tukaram, Sant Gora Kumbhar, Chokhamela and others. Dr B.R. Ambedkar started a periodic 'Muknayak' in 1920 that has again inspired Dalits to compose poems.

Indian society has strongly built up on the foundation of Hinduism. The socio-cultural condition of India was based on Hindu scriptures that had channelized the Varna system wherein Dalits were denied the life of humans and treated like animals. Dalits were oppressed and humiliated in the fear of god, religion and holy books. Dalit writing emerged out of an agitation and rebellious

acts of Dalits against their exploitation and discrimination. Varna system has degraded their importance and treated Dalit like slaves. The leading writers like Annabhau Sathe, Daya Pawar, Waman Nimbakar, Tryambak Sankale, Arjun Dangle, Namdeo Dhasal, J.V. Pawar, Pralahad Chendewankar and Raja Dhale harshly deconstructed hegemony of upper class through their literary masterpieces. Annabhau Sathe under the shade of Phule- Shahu and Ambedkar dethroned the dominance of upper class and also shown the path of emancipation to Dalits who was born in an untouchable community. His writing raised various issues of working class, untouchables, women, and Dalits. He has established himself as the intellectual and political leader of common masses that gave him an identify as communist. He observed that the socio-cultural condition of India was based on Hindu scriptures that had channelized the Varna system wherein Dalits were denied the life of humans and treated like animals. Sathe, being a sensitive writer identified different problems of Dalits. His stories, novels, poetry, plays and travelogues and provides critical insights into the question of the Dalit identity. The teachings of Ambedkar sharpened their sensitivities, and made them outward-looking, articulate and assertive in their expression. His narratives capture the local idiom finding global space, subverting the conventional epistemology. Annabhau Sathe was born on August 1, 1920 in Wategaon village, Sangli District in Mang community. This community was supposed to be identified as one of the most backward and depressed communities in Maharashtra. It was again notoriously

branded for criminality during British Raj. His community has nomadic nature so they couldn't fulfill their basic needs of bread and butter. In addition to that they used to walk miles and miles on feet in search of food and shelter. During their walk they used to do mean types of works to satiate their hunger for food. The journey of his family from Wategaon to Bombay could be considered a representative example of his community. Annabhau Sathe's parents had five children and due to famine and low quality of land his family experienced utter poverty that resulted into constant migration from his native village to Bombay to find out some means of livelihood. Depressed communities like, Mahar, Mang, Chambhar, Dhor, and Pardhi had spent their lives in very miserable and poor condition. His writing represents the marginalized sections of Maharashtra whose literary endeavour became voice of voiceless and strives for their rights. Though he has contributed to Marathi literature and known as one of representative writers of Dalit literature but his works are undertaken for study in Marathi language and very less research has been done in English language as such. Here Dr. Yashwant Manohar's a noted Dalit writer his Marathi book स्वाद आणि चिकित्सा stated the base of Annabhau Sathe's thoughts;

*'त्यांनी फुल्यांचे डोळे घेतले आणि जीवनातील कुरूपता दिसली. त्यांनी आंबेडकरांचे मन घेतले आणि त्यांना येथील विषमता दिसली. त्यांनी मार्क्सची माणुसकी घेतली आणि इथला नरक दिसला.'*² (He took the eyes of Phule, saw the ugliness of life. He took Dr. Ambedkar's mind and observed inequality. He imbibed Marx's humanity and found hell here.)

The present research paper revisits the select literary contribution and offers him an identity as a global figure of humanism who advocated the rights of Dalits. His literature punctures the societal structure wherein Dalits have been crippled in Gavgada system. It is known fact that Dalit literature has gained great attention and acclaimed as one of the significant literatures which mainly dealt with an emancipation of humankind in general. Due to all forms of power, marginal literature was deliberately kept away from printing and publishing that's why many readers were unknown about their literary contribution. In Today's scenario, Dalit literature has developed in different languages like Marathi, Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, and Gujrati and it mainly followed the philosophical path of Buddha, Kabir, Mahatma Phule, Shahu Maharaj and Dr.Ambedkar by which Dalit intellectuals thought that marginalized people could be shown the path of progress. Novels like Chitra, Awadi and Vaijanta His literature confronts the universal problems of subaltern groups of Maharashtra who questioned hegemonic powers of upper class. In the preface of his novel Vaijanta (वैजजंता) declared the role of writer:

जो कलावंत जनतेची कदर करतो त्याचीच जनता कदर करते हे मी प्रथम शिकून नंतर लेखन करित असतो. माझा माझ्या देशावर, जनेतेवर नि तिच्या संघर्षावर अढळ विश्वास आहे. हा देश सुखी, समृद्ध, नि सभ्य व्हावा, इथे समानता नांदावी, या महाराष्ट्रभूमीचे नंदनवन व्हावे अशी स्वप्ने पडत असतात. ती मंगल स्वप्ने पाहत पाहत मी लिहित असतो. केवळ कल्पकतेने कृत्रिम डोळे लावून जीवनातील सत्य दिसत नसते. ते सत्य हृदयान मिलावावे लागते. डोळ्याने सर्वच दिसते. परंतु ते सर्व साहित्यिकाला हात देत नाही. उलट दगा मात्र देते. माझा असा दावा आहे, कि हि पृथ्वी शोषणागाच्या मस्तकावर तरलेली नसुन ती दलित, कष्टकऱ्यांच्या तळहातावर तरलेली आहे. त्या दलितांचे जीवन तितक्याच प्रामाणिक हेतूने नि निष्ठेने मी चित्रीत करणार आहे. (वैजजंता) ³

Initially, he was influenced by N.C. Phadke and V.S.Khandekar, noted Marathi novelists who followed the catch phrase 'arts for life sake'. Sathe witnessed that mainstream literature dealt with life of upper class and hardly depicted the problems of lower community people. Through his literary works he proved to be as an exceptional and anti traditional that not only raised voice against Brahmanism but also sensitized millions of subalterns regarding their exploitation. His major subjects are like:

- Caste Discrimination
- Gender issues
- Depiction of rural life
- Rebellious Spirit
- Rejection of power dynamics

His writing exposed that the protagonists are oppressed, broken and traumatized by hegemonic powers of upper-class community. They are discriminated at every walk of life because they belonged to subaltern community. Annabhau Sathe shows deep gulf between upper class and subaltern by using skillful characterization and themes. He established himself as a leading writer of Dalit literature whose literary masterpieces were an outcome of social and political disappointment and frustration. He gained knowledge from his family and his immediate social surrounding which was full of suffering and hardships. He has used literature as one of the positive forces to depict the dissonant social and political realities of Maharashtra in which he primarily exposed the oppressive systems of power and miserable condition of working classes.

Annabhau Sathe started writing by giving due importance to Dalit subalterns who explicitly rebelled the aesthetics of mainstream literature. Although his writing did not possess the mainstream aesthetics but aimed to exposé terrible oppressive systems wherein Dalit subaltern were made slave and carried endless responsibilities. His writing was revolutionary and demanded a social transformation. Milind Awad a noted writer states the significance of Annabhau Sathe:

As a Dalit writer, Annabhau Sathe was a leading personality in Maharashtra. In the 1960's, his writings provided sophisticated creativity and the great wheel to Dalit cultural and social movement particularly in Maharashtra. His writings gave new levels of self pride, militancy and analytical clarity to the movement. Annabhau Sathe's literary activity gave Dalits a self consciousness that proved to be decisive factor in framing the contemporary Dalit, political and social and cultural movement in Maharashtra. His writings are useful and unique tools for understanding subaltern communities' artistic consciousness in Maharashtra. Due to these and other charismatic reasons he is the central figure of the Dalit literary movement in Maharashtra.⁴

There is another significant parameter which can be a propellant reason for undertaking the present study. He not only wrote about the social-political issues but also actively involved in the process of protest on the actual ground in the early years of his life. He is also an ardent observer of the social,

political upheavals in Maharashtra particularly after independence. Sathe along became the voice of depressed class in Marathi but brought realistic approach to Marathi literature which was so far polluted by propaganda for political awakening, social reforms and conventions related to themes. But there is deficiency in getting research material in English language still the researcher decided to undertake this project to show Dalits as marginal, helpless, frustrated.

Dalit writing is known for outburst feeling and expressions and has produced number of Dalit writers in post- independence period. It is phenomenal and remarkable as far as its literary representation is considered. Annabhau Sathe was born in the village of Wategaon, near Sangli, in a family belonging to Matang community which is identified as one of the shudras of Varna system. This community was totally deprived from all social rights and government facilities. The utter poverty and frequent migration prevented Annabhau from obtaining formal education. It is still unclear how much formal education Annabhau received. Annabhau wrote 32 novels, 15 short stories, 1 travelogue, 12 screenplays, and 10 ballads in Marathi language.

Annabhau Sathe belongs to the tradition of Dalit writing who with the help of novel, short stories, ballads, and plays represented a voice of subaltern Dalits. He nurtured his critical thoughts from Buddha, Jotiba Phule, Ambedkar and Marx and his writing solely rests on problems of Dalit subalterns in Maharashtra. He was the organic intellectual; particularly in Marathi language

took its literary inspiration from his experience that he has undergone in Wategaon and in Mumbai city He has equally contributed to several genres of literature and the following statement is very well known which is used to show his philosophical concerns:

‘पृथ्वी शोषणागाच्या मस्तकावर तरलेली नसून ती दलित, कष्टकऱ्यांच्या तळहातावर तरलेली आहे. (This earth is not balanced on precariously on the Shaysh Nag’s hood, but rests secure in the Dalits and worker’s hands).

His literature confronts the universal problems of subaltern groups of Maharashtra who questioned hegemonic powers of upper class. Initially, he was influenced by N.C. Phadke and V.S.Khandekar, noted Marathi novelists who followed the catch phrase ‘arts for life sake’. Sathe witnessed that mainstream literature dealt with life of upper class and hardly depicted the problems of lower community people. Through his literary works he proved to be as an exceptional and anti traditional that not only raised voice against Brahmanism but also sensitized millions of subalterns regarding their exploitation. His major subjects are like: Depiction of the adventures stories of Dalit protagonists, Exposition of women’s

problems, Love relationship, Demonstration of rural life, Rebellious Spirit, Debunking of upper-class hegemony, Problems of communists and laborers. His novels like Chitra, Awadi and Vaijanta are deeply concerned with the issues of Dalit women’s subjection and also show broken and traumatized by hegemonic powers of upper-class community. Annabhau Sathe appealed to all Dalits for the change by saying:

Take a Hammer to change the world
So saying went Bhimrao!
And their protest would lead to:
Sitting on the chariot of unity
Let us go forward
To break the chains of class and caste
Hold to the name of Bhim!

Gender Disparity, Social Justice and Rebellious Spirit are the characteristics of Sathe’ literary career but as his literature is mostly available only in Marathi literature and very less research has been done in case of English language. Even it is found that his literature has tremendous voice of humanitarian principles and has resemblance with African American intellectuals like Richard Wright and James Baldwin. In Indian context regionalism and caste factor plays decisive role in restricting Dalits in their literature only.

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