

## Portrayal of Dalit Women in Dalit literature

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#### Abstract

Dalit women are characterized in Indian English literature to focus on the caste, gender and class discrimination of the Indian society. Pain, agony and frustration of the Dalit women are centralised to the Dalit literature. Dalit literature written in regional languages dragged the attention of the reader, scholars and critics due to its lucid narrative style, narration of the incidents of daily life and influence of the mother tongue. Dalit women characters of the Indian English novels are need to analyse to understand the condition of the Dalit women, their role in society and importance in the Indian English literature. This paper attempts to analyse the portrayal of the Dalit women in the literature. This paper focused on the thematic concern, narrative techniques and social implications regarding the Dalit women in the autobiographies of the Dalit women writers. Writers have shown the struggle of existence, quest of identity and struggle for equality of the Dalit women in their writings.

**Keywords:** Dalit literature, women, patriarchy, marginalization

**Introduction:** Dalit woman is always remained key figure in the fictional narration. She is positioned at the intersection of caste and gender of the hierarchy of the Indian society. Along with caste-based discrimination, patriarchy is also connected with the Dalit women. Depiction of the Dalit women, in the Indian English novel has been evolved with the time. Writers of new age have given the voice to the Dalit women characters to tell about their experience of torture, exploitation and status in the Indian society. This paper analysed the Dalit women characters to show the social, cultural and individual struggle of the Dalit Indian women. This paper also highlights the importance of Dalit women in highlighting the social issues like caste, gender and class discrimination, identity crisis, oppression on women and

impact of it on the contemporary society. This paper attempted to show the evolving strategy of the narration of the Dalit women in Indian English novels by the novelists in relation with selected Indian English novelists.

**Historical context of Dalit Literature:** The term Dalit is generally used for those who are oppressed and exploited by the oppressor or upper class. These oppressed people always occur at the bottom of the hierarchy of the society. They were known as 'Untouchables'. Literature regarding these people and literature written by Dalit comes under the term Dalit literature. Dalit literature has a long and rich history. Regional languages like Marathi, Telugu, Kannada, Gujarati, Bengali and others are fulfilled with several types of the novels which narrated the Dalit women characters.

Social reformers like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Jyotirao Phule wrote several books and articles regarding the blot of the untouchability of the Indian society. They awakened the people of Indian society for the reformation. Their struggle and ideology influenced to the fictional writers to write about the Dalits in their writings. Dalit literature was developed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, due to the reformers and education policies of the government. Education played the pivotal role in the development of the Dalit literature. Literature was used by the authors, scholars and philosophers to reform the Indian society and raise the voice against the brutality of the upper class society. Black panthers movement of America influenced for the emergence of the Dalit Panther movement in 1950s and 1960s. It influenced to the Dalit writers and motivated them to write about the Dalits. Today Dalit literature developed and widened its scope. It became centre of the literary world to speak about social and political issues. Dalit literature stood as a revolt against the caste, class discrimination and injustice. Literature portrayed struggle of existence of her, her fear of decisiveness of the society, physical and mental exploitation of her and misfortune of her due to the social hierarchy and patriarchy. Autobiographies of the Dalit writers depicted the realistic presentation of it. Baby Kamble's the *Prison We Broke (Jin Amucha)* 1986, Shantabai Kamble's *The Kaleidoscopic Story of My Life (Majya Jalmachi Chittarkatha)* 1986, Kumud Pawade' collection of the autobiographical articles entitled as *The Outburst* are the fine examples of it. Kumud Pawade attacks on the patriarchal Indian society's customs and tradition where false belief is husband is god. According to her he is man he is not

god. These autobiographies are included the real experiences about the Dalit women of the Maharashtra. Baby Kamble in her literature wrote about the exploitation of the Dalit women and she presented horrified reality of the Dalit women exploitation. Mukta Sarvagod narrated incident related her education that her slate checked from the distance because she was untouchable. She had to push her slate through the ground to check. She could not clean her slate by using the water of the pitcher because untouchable had not right to touch the water of the untouchable in the traditional Indian society. Shatabai Kamble explained in detail about the oppression of the patriarchy and customs of the Indian society. She had provided example that she would be buried by the father because she was fourth daughter. Even her father too wanted bury her alive. She denied live with her husband because he married to her widow cousin. She separated from him and showed dignity of the woman. Vimal More highlighted the true social reality about the Indian social custom that begging in the name of god. She narrated the incidents related her father who would go for begging in the name of goddess Amabai.

In the autobiography of Urmila Pawar '*The Weave of Life*' (Aidan), she portrayed the marginalisation and double oppression of the Dalit women in the society. Quest of identity is the central issue of her writings. She presented the crucial life of the woman who is basket waver and her struggle for existence, poverty and against male dominance. The title itself indicates that it is related with the woman. In India, many women are earning their bread and butter through the weaving. The weaving consists different types of weaving. She presented the unhappiness and reasons of the

pain of the woman of the Indian woman. It is the story of the woman who is belonged from the Mahar community. Hardships of the Dalit women are imprinted through the character of Mahar woman. She becomes the representative of such women who are leading their life passively in the society. Weaver woman has to collect foggots and carry the huge loads of woods to sell in the market for their livelihood. They cannot earn enough money from such hard works. Write has shown that how poverty effect on the life of the Dalit woman. She narrated the poverty as-

“They somehow managed to buy a little rice which they cook in big mud pot and serve some watery soup. This was served to men first, in one common dish...was usually because there were few plates in the homes” (17).

It is true fact of the rural Indian Dalit family where people cannot get enough for their family, even many people dies due to the malnutrition. Government facilities are never getting to such families. Pawar narrated the hunger of the family as they had to live on left food of the upper classes. She narrated through about it in her words as-

“Our sister-in-law, Vitha and Parvati would also go begging, along with the other women in our community...Their entire house would survive for two days on those leftovers” (43).

It is not strange to the people of Maharashtra because still today upper class society gives their left food to the downtrodden society and in replacement of it, they use for them for their personal works, in return of it they never give anything except left food. This is not about food only food but Dalit woman

had not proper clothing too. Upper class society watches at the Dalit woman very sarcastically. Urmila Pawar narrated it as- “I had only two sets of clothes, which I wore alternatively for three to four days. It was not surprising that they look extremely dirty. My clothes made Biwakar teacher froth at the mouth” (43).

Urmila Pawar shows the sexual exploitation of the Dalit women. She comments about wretchedness of the male dominated society where woman is treated as puppet. Oppression of woman is the common thing in the Indian society but Dalit woman is the victim of the double oppression. Pawar very critically noted it by narrating the incident regarding it. She narrated about the physical relation between Urmila and her husband. By narrating about such experiences she proves that Dalit woman is the victim of the double oppression. At one side she faces the cruelty of the society and cruelty within family and neighbourhood. Husband of Urmila had not given the permission for further education at ease. It is common ideology of the Indian Society that woman should associate with the kitchen and children. But now the reformation takes places in society, not all women but majority women achieved the education but tribal communities are far away from the education policies and reformation. Dalit women of the tribal communities are leading the traditional life and they are associated with cultural traditions and customs which are brutal and ferocious for the health of the women. These practices take place in the name of god and goddesses.

Baby Kamble has portrayed Dalit woman as struggler in her book *The Prison We Broke*. She presented the struggle of the Dalit

woman against the poverty, caste discrimination and child marriage. She focuses on the quest of identity issue of the Dalit woman and brings in lime light the condition of the Mahar Dalit woman. She described the caste discrimination and untouchability incidents in her lines as-

“When Mahar Women labour in the fields, the corn gets wet with their sweat. The same corn goes to make your pure, rich dishes. And you feast on them with such evident relish! Your palaces are built with the soil soaked with the sweat and blood of Mahars. But does it rot your Skin? You drink their blood and sleep comfortably on the bed of their misery. Doesn't it pollute you then?” (56).

Above words of Kamble are evident enough to prove the reality of the caste discrimination against the Dalit woman in the society. Rural regions Dalit women work on the field of the upper class for their bread and butter. Their work is most valuable for the upper class but their touch pollutes to them. They accept service but they don't like to them. In urban areas too, upper class people exploits the lower classes people, blood and caste instinct makes man animal for other human. Domestic violence is also

the most dangerous one in the Dalit Indian society. Dalit woman always becomes victim of beating of husband, they suffer from the physical injuries. Mental torture also explained in detail by Baby Kamble in her book. She narrated the incident related fathers preaching to son about how to beat wife as-

You are a man. You must behave like one! You must be proud and firm. You must walk tall. Twirl your moustache and show us that you are a man...Never mind if you have to go to prison for six months. You must chop off your wife's nose and present it to her brother and father. They mustn't have any respect left to sit with the members of the panch” (100-101).

In short, autobiographies of Dalit women writers depicted true and pathetic condition of the Dalit women. Their books are a true memoir of the India society which records the social history of the Indian society. These books show the society that in developed societies and countries caste discrimination still exists. Even today, in every part of India, daily one or many incidents take place where Dalit woman is victim of the brutality of the society.

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