



## **DALIT LITERATURE: A CONCEPT**

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Literary and cultural representations of race, class and gender can be seen everywhere in world literature in general and Indian Literature in particular, almost from the very old age, i.e. in the scriptures- religious and philosophical books and oral traditions of different regions of our nation. There is a verse in the old and ideal Bhagvad Gita:

*Man hi Parthvyapashrityaapisyuhupapyonayah!*

*Striyovaishyastathashudras tea pi yantiparamgatim!!<sup>1</sup>*

[O Parth! Even women, vaishyas, shudras and those with low birth (dog-eaters), taking my shelter, obtain the supreme destination.]

Men are classified in four classes according to the three 'Gunas' (modes) of nature- 'Gunakarmavibhagayoh' 1- people with 'satva' (goodness) are Brahmins, people with 'Rajoguna' (passion) are Kshatriyas, people with 'Rajo' and 'Tamo' (passion and ignorance) are Vaishyas and people with 'Tamo' (ignorance) are Shudras, and lower than that are Chandal (dog-eaters). In the above cited verse Lord Krishna himself states that there are no differences of classes in devotional service. The people with material involvement may have such wrong notions as high class and low class but for people absorbed in spiritual world every man deserves supreme destination and transcendental bliss. Further the Lord specifies:

*BrahmanakshatriyavishamShudranam cha Parantapa*

*KarmaniPravibhaktanisvabhavprabhavirgunaih<sup>2</sup>*

[O chastiser of enemies (Arjuna), Brahmanas, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras are distinguished by their qualities of work, in accordance with the modes of nature.]

Thus, the divisions took place according to man's attachment to work and not his birth. But latter people, especially connected with church, the priests made their own interpretation and began to suppress or even depress the lower classes on religious pretext, using their power, and it was the politics of religion rather than that of authority that worsened the condition. And these

people suffered for centuries under the wrongly interpreted religious principle. It reached so far that they were considered to be untouchables. With this suppression or oppression the term 'Dalit' comes into existence. 'Dalit' means suppressed or oppressed or even depressed. It also means exploited and down trodden. To this light, not only people belonging to the lower strata of society but women in India were also exploited. The aforesaid verse of 'Gita' indicates women also. The slaves of America may also be regarded 'Dalits' and we can see its spirit in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*. The same spirit is there in the stream of Black Literature. The striking example of the plight of Dalits and women are found in the great epic the *Ramayan*, too. In 'Sunderkand' of the *Ramayan* there is a chopai (couplet):

*Dhol, ganvar, shudra, pashu, nari, Ye sab tadankeadhikari.*<sup>3</sup>

[The drum, a stupid (uncultured, rustic), a person of low birth, quadruped (beast) and women, all these deserve severe beating] It is expressed by the great learned pandit 'Tulsidas', than what of a lay man?

As far as the concept and stream of Dalit Literature is concerned there are among the other opinions, two striking opinions are prevailing:

1. The literature written by Dalits about Dalits
2. The literature revealing Dalit Spirit

The first should not be the concept full in itself. As Bholabhai Patel has quoted Narayan Surve of Mahabharata- "Certainly, people, who are struck, writing themselves and people writing about those who are struck are different, but poets are sensitive. So their writing about Dalits should be accepted, even if they are not Dalits."<sup>4</sup> "Wherever Dalit chetana (spirit) is revealed, is Dalit literature,"<sup>4</sup> says Bholabhai. The logic, non-Dalit people cannot express the real feeling cannot be reliable. With the changing approach of people in general towards Dalits and prevailing Government policies, the scenario is changing rapidly. Secondly the writers belonging to Dalit class are generally well to do now and do not face the problems of untouchability and exploitation like far away Dalits who are not able even to express. In this regard the Dalit writers cannot at the same time express the real feelings as they are not suffering, if we accept the logic. On the other hand, there are some Dalit's Dalit, means the people who are treated as Dalits by

other Dalits. Then, what of them? But, within a decade or two, in this quickly changing scenario of the entire world, perhaps there might not be any one facing the problems of untouchability and social contempt. In that case, is the future of Dalit literature short-lived?

Moreover, some definitions and concepts regarding Dalit literature suggest that it involves

2

the rebellious spirit and confronting elements. Outrageousness cannot be the means of solving any problems or inspirational literature. As far as literature is concerned, it should have the quality of permanence and artistic beauty and at the same time it may be helpful in developing human values, social justice, generous behavior, etc. Angry opposition and bitterness cannot serve this. As Harshad Trivedi writes in his editorial article, “It becomes important whether Dalit Spirit or its beauty is revealed in the literature. The simple thing is it must not only reveal Dalit Spirit but become ‘literature’ also.”<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes, as in the case of feminism the literature by Dalits reveals the tone of complaint and confrontation, and nothing creative, inspiring angry opposition rather than social upliftment. The poem ‘Gokulgam and Kaniyo’ of a famous Gujarati Dalit poet Pathik Parmar may be striking in a sense but it does not create any sympathy or sense of social upliftment. See the lines:

*Vas Akhamanmansbafatu hoy to avegandh*

*E sungheelokunchanechitarechade.....*<sup>6</sup>

[The people of higher class feel disgust smelling the bad odour of the boiling meat in the entire Vas (Dalit residence).] Then the lines,

*Kaniyoenapoyara hare nadiyenawa jay ne*

*Emanmootaripade.*

*Ejnadinupeeinapani*

*Kaniyathiabhadaychhebadhalok re ujaliyat*

Here, Kaniyo, going for a bath with his son and spoils the water with urine and the same water is drunk by the higher class people who get polluted (unholy), may be a good satire, but at the same time it creates utter sense of confrontation. Contrary to this is the padas (hymns) by the great Dalit saint Dasi Jivan, creating sense of respect which are illustrated hereafter. The Gujarati poem ‘Maro Shamaliyo’<sup>7</sup> by Nirav Patel expressing the delight of the Dalit aged woman who finds the

young Garasiya (a high caste) woman dead, as she would get the beautiful read sari of the dead woman for her daughter and regards it as the blessing of god. It is not only superstitious but provoking the sense of disgust and confrontation.

There are some Dalit poets who have been successful to express the true spirit to some extent. The Gujarati writer B.N.Vankar has provided notable critical approach and his poems like 'Overbridge' and 'Pratik' show true insight:

3

*Have,*

*Amenutanganrachishun,*

*Ne*

*Manavmanavthiupeshitnahin hoy.*<sup>8</sup>

[Now, we'll compose new songs and man won't be neglected (disregarded) by man.]

Here, the optimism, decency and sense of social justice are expressed with convincing lucidity. But such poets are rather rare. In most of the cases Dalit poetry shows hot temperedness and sometimes becomes volcanic and moves away from the track of literature. As the famous folklorist JhaverchandMeghani says –

“The poems of Dalits either become the treasure of abuses or crazy lamentations. The poet's duty to discriminate between utter annoyance and righteous anger, between wrath and vigour (passion) is grave. The revelation of righteousness or merit in the first expectation is the clean and pure expression (revelation) of the passion. To attain that righteousness, the heart has to digest so many draughts of poison.”<sup>9</sup>

Besides, most of the Dalit writers also believe that the origin of Dalit literature from Maharashtra in particular and other states in general is attributed to the savior of Dalits Dr. Ambedkar. They want to follow the path carved by the great person passionately and aggressively. But they should remember the actual words of Dr. Ambedkar as he himself urged them and insisted to be generous and create the sublime literature:

“I intently want to say to litterateurs, to develop sublime values of life and culture by your creation of literature. Make your thoughts generous and sublime and not sentimental and confined (narrow). Liberate your speech from within the four walls. Spread the light of your pen

everywhere to remove darkness of every village instead of keeping it confined to your own yard. You should not forget that there is a separate world of neglected (disregarded), Dalit (exploited), poor and miserable people in our country. Understand their misery and suffering and devote your creative energy to uplift their lives by literature. The true humanity lies there.”<sup>10</sup>

We hope the men of literature, Dalits or non- Dalits, will interpret these words literally and follow the advice, shattering all the prejudices and shallow thoughts. Then the future of Dalit literature should definitely be bright.

In the saint traditions of Saurashtra, there were some Dalit saints, who created some popular and remarkable spiritual poetry in the form of padas (verses). Among them, Trikam, Hothi, Ravi or Rohidas, and Jivan are well known spiritual figures. The tradition of Dalit saints begins with Trikam, known as ‘Vadina Sadhu’. Despite of the fierce opposition by Brahmins against the ‘diksha’ (ceremony for declaration as the saint) of the antyaj (dalit) saint Trikam, he proved himself as the true spiritual person. His padas also proves that –“All Brahma (godliness) is covered in the body of man, the soul without any form or shape is the true Krishna, and his ras dance is being played within.” The very lucid and simple of Trikama’spada-constructions is his most popular one, depicting true form of devotion and vairagya (renunciation):

*Gharogharalakhjagana mere lal!*

*Lal! Mara dilamansantolagivairagee....*

[O my dear, we are to alight every home with devotional consciousness. The true colour of renunciation is carved in my heart o saints....]

The most popular and universal among all these saints is DasiJivan. There is not even a single hut which is free from the Vani (hymns) of DasiJivan. The people living in temples, ashramas, the bhajan singers and people connected with cattle business in the whole of Saurashtra sing and hear the sweet bhajans of DasiJivan. There are some illusions about him, but he was born as a son of a Chamar (tanner, Dalit) at Ghoghavadar village near Gondal. His surname was Dafada. Due to his affectionate appeals as Radha (Gopi-beloved) to Krishna in his padas, he was regarded as the incarnation of Radha and was called Dasi (the female servant of God):

*Jivanjagamanjagiya, narmathithiyanar,*

*Das namdarsaviya, e Radha avatar.*

[Jivan got awakened in the world, and became feminine, indicated the name Dasi, as he was the incarnation of Radha.]

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