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## VOICES OF DALIT FEMINISM

Sunil Patil

Associate Professor, Department of English, Arts and Commerce College, Ashta, Tal. Walwa, Dist. Sangli

**Abstract:-**There is a potential contribution of Dalit women writers for Dalit literature is remarkable. Self-experience and burning indignation reflected in the Dalit writings. Muktabai, an untouchable girl who read her essay on the problems and sufferings of untouchables in the school established by the great reformer Jotiba Phule, in 1852, was the first example. After a period of a century or more Dalit women have awakened and are again giving literary expression to their deep feelings.

**Keywords:**Dalit Feminism , potential , Dalit writings , Dalit women .

### INTRODUCTION:

There are many female Dalit writers from Maharashtra – Kumud Pawade, Jyoti Lanjewar, Urmila Pawar, Hira Bansode, Sugandha Shende, Surekha Bhagat, Asha Thorat, Aruna Lokhande, Susheela Mool and Meena Gajbhiye etc.

Lecturer Kumud Pawade who is scholar in Sanskrit, once considered a language of the God that the lower castes were not allowed to learn or even to hear. In the changing course of time, a Dalit woman teaches Sanskrit to the students from the higher castes. She has published many articles on culture, social education and the problems of women. She authored Antahspot (Inner Burst). We come across the problems of non – educated women, ugly outlout of educated and advanced Dalit Women towards non-educated women and atrocities on Dalit women are some of the subjects of impressive and self-disciplined writings of Mrs. Aruna Lokhande, Mrs. Asha Thorat and Sugandha Shende. Mrs. Thorat also has been doing research on Dalit folk literature.

Dalit woman has suffered too much and still she is suffering. She has to suffer the burning desert of casteism in search of some oasis. The Dalit Woman is a Dalit amongst Dalits. According to Mrs. Bansode, due to casteism that Dalit Women are being dishonored and molested. She complains in one of her poems about inhumane game of the oppressors she begs justice in the court of people. She attacks orthodox culture.

The history of Dalit Sahitya movement and the Buddhist revival is more profoundly a part of the Mahar movement. There, we find sophisticated creativity, pride and militancy of Dalit Panthers and Dalit School of literature. Dalit literature through popular and widely circulated issue named Marathwada devoted a large part of its Diwali issue to Dalit literature. It was the first appearance of Dalit literature on Marathi literary scene. Asmitadarsh was the chief organ of Dalit literature.

Dr. Ambedkar wanted equality not only in religion, power in politics but also in education and cultural creativity. The Dalit writers began their serious work in the 1950's. Although most of the writers have come out of the Buddhist movement, one the earliest, Annabhau Sathe, who belonged the Untouchable Mang Caste, was deeply influenced by communism. In the sixties, the flow of Dalit Literary writing increased in the form of short stories, novels and drama. Every year conferences were held. Individual volumes of poetry began to publish by the Maharashtra Buddhist Literature Committee, Asmitadarsh Press, or The Marxist Magova Press in 1970. The face of Marathi literature has changed by Dalit Literature and which inspired similar literary creativity in Gujarat and Karnataka. A stream of autobiographies from Mahars, Buddhists, Chambhars, other Dalits and De-notified tribes etc. has been pioneered in Maharashtra. Dalit writers are extremely interested in Black American literature.

Probably, in 1986, the first Women's literary conference in Maharashtra named Dalit Women's Dialogue has organized by Mina Gajbhiye, a very young woman, is so far the only feminine poet regarded in the new Dalit School. Bebi Kamble and Shantabai Kamble have published their life stories. There are six to seven Dalit women poets who have published their poetry. There are also 'crying songs' of an Untouchable caste. Even though it is the Mang caste which is most often described as 'village musicians' in the *Gazetteers*, Mahars seem to have been the chief musicians and actors in Tamasha , the folk drama of Maharashtra from the 16 century onwards. The social construction of poor Dalit along with patriarchal, middle class norms led to marginalization of the poor, rural Dalits and women. It created negative impact upon women's cultural

expression, status etc. Many of Bhangi caste who call themselves 'Valmiki' tracing their lineage to the author of the 'Ramayana'. Devdasi culture was presented time to time by an English weekly *The Dalit Voice* from Bangalore. *Religion and Society* (Bangalore) has also pressed Dalit culture, Hindu and Christian.

M.Swami Margaret, a Dalit-middle-class, university educated, Telugu speaking Dalit-Christian-Woman primarily writes for Dalit women to uphold their interests. She opines that we should be defined by others not by ourselves. She knows that her voice is important because it is the voice of a socially suppressed and silenced class. She has submitted a path-breaking dissertation on 'Writing Dalit Feminist Discourse through Translation : Translating Select African American Short Stories into Telugu' When she joined for her M.A. in English in the University of Hyderabad, received a strange experience from the other urban students. She was influenced by African American women writers.

Dalit feminists share a definite sense of identification with many basic articulations raised by the movements. We have gained a lot from them. When the movement is armed with a clear understanding of its own historicity based on the experience of oppression and discrimination, we can form coalitions, and build solidarity with other marginalized groups. It is productive to have in mind the historical dialogue between different marginalized sections of people. Otherwise, there is the danger of Dalit Women, their self-definition and their particular positioning in the society being rendered visible. For example, the Dalit ideologues like Katti Padma Rao, Gopal Guru and Gaddor Seem to be less sensitive to the internal patriarchy of Dalit communities. They maintain that all women are Dalits. Since the upper caste women are not allowed to enter into their kitchens and are treated as impure during their menstrual periods, they are also untouchables. Here 'untouchability' is the ideal framework to fight against caste oppression, claims Gopal Guru. What he overlooks is that untouchability is a phenomenon that evokes various notions and images of bodies-bodies that are marked by their caste, gender, class, sexual orientation, age and other identities. And different bodies are ascribed different cultural meanings. Not all bodies possess even identities. Not all Dalit bodies are one, not all female bodies are one. They interact with each other being caught in a complex web of interesting identities. Dalit men, even those identified with the movement, does not see us as intellectuals. 'You are a Dalit body, a Dalit female body. Why can't I possess it? Why can't I just come near you? It is threatening'. This happens at a very physical level. To prevent this, one of the strategies that I use, is to stay with upper-caste women as Dalit men will not dare to express and behave in the same manner with them.

A Mang woman, Muktabai, in 1955, wrote about the subjugation that the poor mangs and mahars especially women, suffered at the hands of the upper castes. She points that how the mahars have internalized brahminical values and saw themselves as superior to mangs. Dalit women writers are sensitive to the differential treatment meted out to different sub castes and women within Dalit communities. Muktabai challenges the Brahmins to 'try to think about it from your own experience'.

In Dalit feminist discourses, brutal patriarchy with Dalit communities is one issue which repeatedly appears. However, the views of Dalit male intellectuals on the negotiations between caste and gender are interesting. According to Ilaiyah, comparing to patriarchy in Dalits with Hindu, the Dalit patriarchy is more democratic. How can any oppressive structure be democratic at all? He substantiates his argument by stating that certain customs like paadapooja (touching the feet) are not observed in Dalit families. He, of course, notices the facts that there are oppressive practices like wife-battering prevalent in the Dalit families. However, 'the beaten up wife has a right to make the attack public by shouting, abusing the husband, and if possible by beating the husband in return. Dalit woman shouts back not because of 'democratic patriarchy' but because of the socio-economic situation she is trapped in. The Dalit woman, more often than riot is dependent on her own labour. She labours outside her home from morning till evening. When she comes home, her husband will be waiting to snatch her hard-earned money which is often the only source to feed the family. If she refuses to give him the money, the husband beats her up. The woman shouts back; in the process of resistance she might beat him back. This is not because of democratic patriarchy in her family. It is very hard to understand her clear location in Indian society.

Majority of the writers formed near about forty Dalit groups. These are called Dalit Rangbhumi spread from Pune, to a number of cities in the state and to Delhi. Many write their own plays, a few adapt plays from the American Black theatre, some revive the arts of *tamasha*. A Dalit art exhibition was held in Nagpur in 1979 and All India Art Conference was called in Hyderabad in 1987. By the early 1980s there were more than 105 million Untouchable distributed throughout penninsular India. The exact number is difficult to determine, because government statistics do not account for those who are converted to non-Hindu religions, even when they are demonstrably treated as Untouchables by their neighbors. At the lowest estimate, the Untouchables account for more than one out of every seven Indians.

Near about ninety percent live in India's rural villages, compared to approximately eighty, percent of the higher caste population. Although Untouchables are commonly clustered together in segregated hamlets at the edge of a village, they are a small and vulnerable minority in any given region, making resistance to exploitation and violence very difficult. The 1971 census figures show that fifty-two percent of the Untouchable workforce was landless agricultural laborers, compared to twenty-six percent of the non Untouchable workforce. The Untouchable literacy rate was only 14.7 percent compared to 29.5 percent for the total population.

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