



WEAVING THE THREAD OF “DALIT FEMINISM”: A SELECTED STUDY OF HINDI DALIT WOMEN WRITERS' POETRY

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the attempt of Hindi Dalit women writers where they can be seen in the procedure of weaving the thread of “Dalit feminism” in Dalit literature. The paper shows this engagement by the selected poems of Dalit women writers in the Hindi Belt. We all know that presence of a caste structure is the bitter reality of Indian society. The people are identified by their caste after their name and their geographical belongings.

The structure of the caste system is divided into four varnas Brahmins, Vaishyas, Kshatriyas, and Shudras the fourth category known as ati-Shudras or the untouchables remained outside of the caste structure. With this identity card of caste, the discrimination, and atrocities also take place in different forms at various levels. The most insensitive part of this caste structure is that “women” were never even mentioned in this varna- vyavastha. It reflects that they were never considered “subjects” in Indian society. Thus, the Hindi mainstream writings in literature assert themselves with a category called women’s literature where they are giving space to their dreams, aspirations, and desire.

But, within this category of “women,” there is another category of women who finds invisibility in their issues, participation, subjectivity, and dreams. This other category of women asserts itself with a separate category in literature and becomes vocal in raising their issues. They called themselves “Dalit women” and critiques the Dalit male writers and Hindi mainstream literature as they failed to give them any agency. Thus, the Dalit women's writings in Hindi assert themselves in Dalit literature where they are giving space to their “outside” and “inner” world.

Thus, the following paper explores this progressive consciousness of Dalit women writers by taking the selected poem of Dalit women writers where they can be seen in the procedure of weaving the thread for “Dalit feminism” to save their subjectivity.

Keyword: Dalit, Hindi literature, Feminist literature, Dalit women writers, Dalit women Poetry.

Indian society is divided into a unique stratification of caste structure which governs the social relation of an individual to another individual. The people are identified by their caste after their name and their geographical roots. Caste becomes the identity card of a person, wherever they go the roots of the caste travel along with them.

The structure of the caste system is divided into four varnas which are based on ritual purity, and assigns the different positions to its citizens in the ascending to the descending order as Brahmins, Vaishyas, Kshatriyas, Shudras, the fifth category known as Ati-Shudras or the untouchables {Panchams} remained outside of the caste structure. A Dalit holds the identity of India's "untouchables" and is considered the "Impure" subject. The "touch" of untouchables pollutes those, who occupy the highest place in the caste-based Hindu social hierarchy. The stigma of pollutant and untouchability imparted to its status is wholly notional. This stratification known as the Chaturvarnya model is wholly based on the "Purusha Sukta" of the Rig Vedas which articulates "For the prosperity of the worlds, he (the creator) from his mouth, arms, thighs, and feet created the Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya and the Shudra."¹ The Ati-Shudras which are known today with the identity of Dalits remained outside of this model, fall within the category of (Avarnas) and are called the fifth (Panchamas) which further contributed to their marginalization at a different level. Because, of this identity card of caste, the discrimination, and atrocities also take place in different forms at various levels.

The scriptures which remained the base of the division of Indian society into the different castes distributed the duties among the masses which further stabilized and fixed the occupation of the individuals and demanded faithful performance of their duty. Dr. Ambedkar credits casteism with imparting fixity, rigidity, and stability by stating as:

¹ Vasant Moon Ed. *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches Volume-7*. Government of Maharashtra : Bombay. 1990. Print. Page 24.

The caste as a sociological institution resembles a Corporation in which the Board of Directors never changed. It was the law of status which classified men according to their birth and it was fixed and static; ability was not recognized as the means to cross the class-barriers.²

Thus, the caste system contributed to the paralyzing of the individual which hampered the growth of individuals at a different levels in the society.

Certain Dalit texts- such as Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, Bama's *Karukku*, *Sangati*, and Tulsiram's *Murdahiya* projects that although, in independent India, the practices of the untouchability were legally banned under Article 17 of the constitution of India, still the untouchability is in continuous procedure sometimes in explicit and nowadays in implicit form. Panikkar illustrates this point by saying "[T]hrough the legal disabilities have vanished the social facts remain, no doubt in a modified form."³

The most insensitive part of this caste structure is that "women" were never even mentioned in this varna- vyavस्था. It reflects that they were never considered "subjects" in Indian society. Thus, the Hindi mainstream writings in literature assert themselves with a category called feminist literature where they are giving space to their dreams, aspirations, and desire which they find are different from the male writings in Hindi mainstream literature. But, within this category of "women," there is another category of women who finds invisibility in their issues, participation, subjectivity, and dreams. This other category of women asserts itself with a separate category in literature and becomes vocal in raising their issues. They called themselves "Dalit women" and critiques the Dalit male writers and Hindi mainstream literature as they failed to give them any agency. Women as subjects are never discussed in Dalit male writings. They are either portrayed as victims or find

² Moon, Vasant Ed. *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches Volume-7*. Government of Maharashtra: Bombay. 1990. Print. Page iii.

³ Panikar, K.M. *Hindu Society At Cross Roads*. Asian Publishing House: Bombay. Print. Page 26.

themselves as the “lost women” of Dalit writings. No, Dalit male hero can be seen fighting for her sister, mother, or wife or sacrificing his dreams, and life for their sake.

This paper focuses on the engagement of Hindi Dalit women writers where they can be seen in the procedure of weaving the thread of “Dalit feminism” in Dalit literature. When I say weaving, by that I mean that they are building a foundation for the Dalit feminist assertion.

On reading Dalit writings carefully one can find the “lost” women of Dalit writings. In the Dalit male writings, their assertive role is absent. They are very much present in the Dalit writings but with an “invisible presence”. They either become vocal for their family, or their children, but not for themselves. They are portrayed as the good “idealistic”, “sacrificing” lady of the Dalit male writings and leave the hidden message of portraying them as the “goddess” who always sacrifices for their family. My reading of Dalit writings always disturbed me when I found them the “lost” women of Dalit writings. Interested in women’s issues, I was trying to find their role in the pages of Dalit male writings, but I never met with them in their assertive role. They are very much present in the Dalit writings but with an “invisible presence”. They either become vocal for their family, or their children, but not for themselves. This kind of portrayal, I found very dangerous because it leads a Dalit woman in the tradition of “idealism” where in the end their aspirations and dreams have to die. This kind of image portrays a very negative message in the society where such “idealism” becomes the criteria for governing the society and makes the foundation of exploitation in the society.

Thus, the Dalit women's writings in Hindi assert themselves in Dalit literature where they are giving space to their “outside” and “inner” world. The Dalit women with a very progressive approach try to attack the caste system with their writings and even reveals the contradiction of Dalit male writers which comes as “gender discrimination” within the Dalit community. Thus, the following paper explores this progressive consciousness of Dalit women writers by

taking the selected poem of Hindi Dalit women writers like Rajat Rani Meenu, Rajni Tilak, Kanta Bhimrav, Naresh kumari, Kusum Meghval, poem. Thus, the paper attempts to explore the work of Dalit women writers' poetry where they are interrogating, questioning, and exploring their space to save their subjectivity.

The Hindi Dalit literary sphere can be seen now as the echo of several Dalit women writers, who have asserted to contest communal and literary erasure, forced silencing, and reduction in the last three decades. The emerging writings of Hindi Dalit women authors illustrate their fight with the caste, class, gender, and space as well as their struggle for the publication. They are exploring different kinds of questions, and different kinds of hurdles that they find in their social development.

Dalit writing in Hindi entered the Hindi literary scene very late. Vimal Thorat in *Dalit Sahitya Ka Strivadi Swar* provides some reasons for the late emergence of Dalit women in the Hindi belt. She underlines illiteracy among Dalit and tribal women as the reason for the void in the Dalit literary world. She says that social economic and cultural backwardness prohibited them from going into the schools. If somehow they got admission into the school, then the biased nature of teachers and institutions destroyed their self-confidence. Their culture was defined as inferior to break their confidence. They were advised to follow their traditional work. Because of this, they lost their confidence and left their studies in between.

However, even the late emergence of Dalit women writers like Rajat Rani Meenu, Kaveri, Sushila Takbhore, Raj Bharti, and Tara Parmar facilitated in spreading of the wings of the Dalit literary world.

The poem by Kanta Bhimrav strongly illustrates the Dalit women in their very strong assertive role in the leading quality feminist and Ambedkarite movement. The poem itself is very interesting as it appeals to the Dalit women to become vocal for everyone, who belongs to the marginalized section of the society as the poem illustrates it as follows:

Tum Tilak mat Bano Raj ka

Tum Tilak mat Bano Mathe ka

Tum Tilak Bano to sirf

daliton ka, sirf daliton ka.

Tum janm lo baar baar

kisi dalit ke ghar

dalit ka

aur tab tak Lado

tab tak dalit, ban jaen

duniya ki rah ka neta

shrivad aur Ambedkarwad ka parcham⁴

The poem by Naresh kumari “Dohra abhishaap” reflects the double struggle of a Dalit woman which comes in form of gender and caste. The gender struggle she faces within her community where she has not been given any assertive role. She is confined to the household walls where certain duties are assigned to them with no rights. She finds herself reduced to the furniture of the house, like a puppet where everybody expects her to dance according to them. The poem reflects this as follows:

dalit mahila

Jhelti /hai dohra abhishap

aurat hone ka abhishap

dalit hone ka abhishap

ghar mein

aurat Hoti hai

vah Hoti hai kolhu kai bail- si

jhutha bartan

vasi akhbar

purani

adhghisi juti si

chulhe mein jalti sulagti lakadi si

ghar mein

aurat Hoti hai

sharab ki

Aadhi bachi bottle

Deewar per tange calender se

band kamre mein

kanch ki khidkiyon se

takrati, fadfadathi

hatash chidiya si

Patti ki ungaliyon mein sulagti cigaret Jaisi

ghar mein

aurat Hoti hai

chabi ka ek khilauna

kutte ke jabdon mein

ek sukhi haddi si

ek Jinda Lash

khilona gadi mein jalti Lal batti jaisa

is purushvadi, savarn samaj mein

aurat ka jivan hai

abhishap.⁵

The poem “Dalit Naari ki pehchan” by Kusum Meghval describes the consistent journey of a Dalit women where she can be seen in the continuous struggle for her family. The poem also reflects the stereotypes and imagery which are assigned to Dalit women. The poem illustrates it as follows:

Kante aur pathar bhi darte Hain

uske nange paon se,

Sardi garmi aur barsat

bitate Hain din uske

kheton aur khalihanon mein

Aakash ki chhat tale

Aandhi ho ya tufan

takrati hai, vah donon se

⁴ Ibid. Page 183.

⁵ Ibid. Page 194-195.

nahin janti vah rukna
nahin janti vah Darna
lagi rahti hai aathon pahar
Apne Parivar ki poshan mein
fir bhi kahlati hai vah abla
nahin janti vah kaisi hoti hai thakan
yahi hai ek dalit nari ki pahchan⁶

The poem "Badal sakti ho tum Bhagya apna" invites the Dalit women to create and explore the meaning of women. She appeals to break down all the traditional standards by which her dignity is defined. She invites the reader to discover her meaning of feminism and masculinity within herself. she does not need to get defined by the meaning of the social standard et by the society. The poem invites the reader to follow the meaning of buddha who says apph"deepo bhav. This means one has to fight for itself to protect her identity. The poem illustrates it as follows:

Badal sakti ho
tum Bhagya apna
Apne hi striarth
Kaun kahta hai
tumhen milta hai
Bhagya se sab kuchh?
Badli hain hawayen maine
Badli hai dishaen maine
apne hi purusharth se
nahin hota hai Bhagya sab kuchh
hota hai purusharth sab kuchh.
Jana nahin hai tumne kabhi
kya hoti hai Budh ki Shiksha
kya hota hai Arth
Arth dipon bhav ka
Jaan jaati hai vah⁷

The poem "Bin Shirshak" by Rajni Tilak exposes the patriarchal mindset which is present in the mind of males and females. It is not only that men become the vehicle of the caste chain in society. But, the women also somewhere nurture the roots of the caste in the society. This unconscious presence of the roots of the caste can be seen at the time of marriage The matrimonial columns in newspapers and Internet sites like Bharatmatrimony, and Shadi.com. Jeevan Sathi.com very clearly reflects still the presence of casteism in the Indian society where there is no dearth of people, who wants to marry within the castes, the cases of honor killing in the name of caste very much depict the imprints of casteism in the Indian society.

Thus, "Roti- Beti ka sambandh" is debarred with dissimilar castes throughout the centuries by the means of endogamy by which the interaction between different castes cannot be possible to maintain the purity of the blood.

meri likhi kavitaena
bhav chahti Hain
hamari Kahi kahaniyan
Mul chahti Hain
Chinhit ki gai aalochana
Dhyan chahti Hain
..... krambaddh jaati vyavastha mein
ek -ek tah mein
lipati hai pitraSatta
stri aur purush ke Manas mein
yah brahmanvad ki poshak hai
to paltvar jaati vyavastha ki purak bhi
cidhinuma krambaddh jaati vyavastha
pitra Satta ki tahon mein
ek ke upar ek

⁶ Ibid. Page 202

⁷ Ibid. Page 202-203.

khadi hai man Manas mein⁸

Thus, it can be seen that the poems which have been discussed in this paper by the Dalit women writers are very different. They take into account their struggle which is associated with their community. They echo the sound of an individual to collective struggle within and outside their community. Their poem stands them as an assigned part of the feminist struggle as it carries the vision of establishing socialism in the society which will be based on the Ambedkarite ideology. The poem echoes the progressive approach where they are ready to deconstruct the traditional imagery, and symbolism assigned to them in the society. They can be seen in the continuous dialog with the Dalit women to explore and enter the closed room of society and Hindi Dalit literature where they are visualizing the vision of a society where their role in making and recreating their history themselves will be marked. Remembering their struggle of the past they move forward to not repeat the history, or get registered in the history with no identity of dignity. Thus, they move forward so that they can leave a strong imprint in the history which can aspire to the coming generation, and thus the agenda of establishing Dalit feminism can be achieved on the realistic ground.

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Vasant Moon Ed. Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and SpeechesVolume-7. Government of Maharashtra: Bombay.1990. Print. Page 24.

⁸ Ibid. Page number 212-213