

# An overview of Dalit literature at the inception

Dr G G Ratnan, Professor of English, Head of BSH,DNR College of Engineering and Technology, Bhimavaram AP India  
534202

**Abstract:** Dalit is a vibrant and powerful word in Indian society. Dalit literature of today tends to be more realistic as it is the expression of the first-hand experiences, which the dalits had been confronting in their life. These expressions are These experiences are pinched from their real life therefore; it is parallel to life. It opposes exploitation and oppression and craves for social equality and economic justice. It is a movement to bring about social change. Dalit literature explains people with the evils of caste system and untouchability in India. Dalit literature is correlated to the principles of negativity, rebellion and champions the cause of humanity and equality among men by raising voice against the evil customs of discrimination rampant in society. Thus, it also tries to undermine the caste system in India and is revolutionary in nature. One must admit that it has left an stubborn impression on the Indian literature in general.

**Keywords:** Dalit, exploitation, realistic literature, elite, marginalized, privileged.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts a retrospection of Dalit literature in India and uplifts its salient features. Initially the term Dalit is from Sanskrit dalita meaning “broken or scattered “ is a name for people belonging to the lowest stratum castes in India, previously characterized as “untouchable”. Dalits were excluded from the four fold varna system of Hinduism and were seen as forming a fifth varna, also by the name of panchama. Dalits now profess various religious beliefs, including Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity, Islam and various other belief systems. Schedule caste is the official term for Dalits nasn per the Constitution of india. Dalit literature is a literature written by Dalits about their lives. Dalit literature emerged in the 1960s in the Marathi language, and it soon appeared in Bangla, Hindi, Kannada, Punjabi, Sindhi and Tamil languages, though narratives such as poems, short stories, and autobiographies, which stood out due to their stark portrayal of reality and autobiographies, which stood out due to their stark portrayal of reality and Dalit political scene. One of the first Dalit writers was Madara Chenniah, an 11th century cobbler-saint who lived during the reign of the western Chalukyas and who is also regated by some scholars as the “father of Vachana Poetry” anothera poet who finds mention

is Dohara Kakkaiah, Dalit by birth, whose six confessional poems sirvive. Dalit literature emerged in the Marathi language as a literary response to the everyday oppressions of cast in mind twentieth – century independent India, critiquing caste practices by experimenting with various literary forms subsequently, Dalit literature emerged as remarkble phenomenon in various Indian languages. In 1985, the term “dalit literature” was used at the first conference of maharashtra dalit sahitya sangha. Although the first dalit literature conference was held in 1958 by newly convented Buddhist writers, Annabhu Sathe, acommunist who turned to Ambedkarite movement in the later part of his life, is credited as the funding father of dalit literature. Further Dalit literature denounced the then-prevailing portrayal of life by mainstream Marathi literature. The Dalit literature has scattered today across the nation and it is now growing in almost all Indian languages. Dalit writer Mulkras Anand’s novel Untouchable may be cited as an example. Hence, its foundation took place in Marathi language in Maharashtra. The credit for the upliftment of the dalits and nursemaid in them a sense of self-respect goes in the first place to Dr.Babasaheb Ambedkar who was from Maharashtra and the Ddalit masses there hugely supported him loyally and unflinchingly.

The literary manifestation of this social awareness is Dalit lietrarure. The notable initial writers like Anna Bhau Sathe, Shankarrao Kharat, Baburao Bagul, Namdeo Dhasal, Raja Dhale, Daya Pawar, Waman Nimbalkar, Arjun Dangale, Yogiraj Waghmare are some of the exponents of Dalit literature who gave an impetus to it in Maharashtra. At the very outset, one should take into account the real implication of the word “Dalit”. The word “Dalit” does not refer to only Buddhists and backward classes but to all those who have become victim of exploitation, oppression and discrimination on the part of society by theupper society. This definition abided by with that given by Baburao Bagul in the Dalit literacy conference at Mahad. He says; Dalit literature takes man as its centre. It participates in man’s joys and sorrows and leads him to a just revolution. It teaches equality to the mass of humanity, that is society. It considers man noble. Dali literature never spread hatred among men but love. its struggle for equality This is analogous to the preaching of Lord Buddha who also believed that love has great power and people can be united only

by the bond of love. Lord Buddha and his disciples believed in the equality of men at all levels. Thus, Buddhist preaching is corresponding to the principles of Dalit literature in which the suppressed voices of the marginalized groups find expression through. The Dalit literature comes to enfold all that writing which is either written by a Dalit writer or focuses dalit people. There is weird 'uniqueness' of Dalit literature as the languages, experiences and heroes of dalit literature are unique. The term "Dalit literature" came in trend in this century after the first Dalit literacy conference held in 1958. However, a precursor of the dalit consciousness and dalit identity had been present in the stories from Buddha's Jatakakathas, poems of Chokhamela and the writings of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule was the trailblazer revolutionary to use the word Dalit in the context of caste system. Dr. Ambedkar scamped the heritage forward and brought the miseries of Dalits to the foreground by dint of his writings. His works inspired a number of Dalit writers in several Indian languages.

Dalit literature by Dalit writer portrays the hopes and aspiration of the exploited masses, their miserable plight, and their struggle for survival, their day-to-day predicaments, their humiliation and traumatic experiences as well as their outlook towards all these events. In order to understand the reason of the atrocious condition of these dalit folk one should go back to the history of social caste system in the name of manudharma in India. According to the ancient Hindu dharmashastras and culture there were four varnas : The Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Shudras. Unfairly the Brahmins gazette the theory that the caste system is not man-made but God-made and it is a divine decree. In the following ages, Manu the reliable champion of caste system arranged it in his seminal monograph Manusmriti. The Hindu caste system was based on birth and transfer from one caste to another was strictly prohibited. In this rigid caste system, shudras were considered downtrodden and untouchables and they were subjected to exploitation by the upper caste i.e. The elite section of society. This dominance of dalits by elites is noticeable in the history of Hindu Society. For ages, the dogma prevailed and the dalits were kept silent in the name of religion and God until Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar rose to refute the so-called divine decree that caste system is God made. In the traditional caste-ridden Indian society, shudras were the labourers who were assigned menial works of inferior kind. These shudras were relegated to the lowest stratum of the society for they were supposed to have emerged from the feet of Lord Brahma. They lay at the bottom in that hierarchy which came to be known as class system. They were denied the privileges enjoyed by the upper classes and were asked to perform the duties assigned to them. The

voices from the dalits with a complaint were suppressed and at a later stage, they came to be regarded as untouchables. The dalits of today are the untouchable shudras of yester years. The humiliation and injustice meted out to Dalits. The trauma of untouchability, the exploitation of Dalits by elites are the themes noticed in Dalit literature. The dalits are ever exposed to bleak reality surrounding them which is reflected in their writings too.

There exhausted consciousness has found expression in Dalit literature. As a result, Dalit literature has elements of realism. Dalit literature is based on the realistic view of life struggles whereas the mainstream or upper-caste literature presents the romantic and idealistic view of life. Sharankumar Limbale chastises this vainglorious idealism of mainstream literature in the following manner: Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram is a foolish aesthetic concept. There is no truth and beauty, in the world comparable to that, which is found in human beings. Therefore, it is indispensable to discuss the equality, liberty, justice and fraternity of human being (p.22) in this milieu one can notice that dalit literature explored the neglected sections of society on the other hand put the mainstream literary theories and elite ideologies under inquiry. Since dalit literature reflects the barren reality of dalit experiences, authenticity and honesty have become the attributes of dalit literature. In the quest of literary substitutes, Dalit writers have re-discovered the marginalized voices of low-caste saints. They found relevance in Buddhism, which celebrates equality among men.

Through the folklores attested that Dalits were members of an ancient primitive society and were relegated to subordination by the upper class civilization. Dalit literature is now impudently challenging the upper class hegemony of literature. The rising force can challenge the Sanskritized and elitist Indian literature. In fact, Dalit literature is in the real sense Post-Hindu literature, which dares to dispense with Sanskrit symbolisms. This process was initiated by none other than Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar who looked down Sanskrit language as essentially casteist languages, which was known to only a handful of people in society, almost all of them belonging to upper castes. The contemporary dalits are using books and pens to champion their cause. Dalit literature possesses the potential of changing social structure but Indian society is yet to see through and realize that potential. In present scenario, a multitude of publications is devoted to the depicted of Dalit situation in India. A separate body of literature termed as Dalit literature has successfully emerged and made its presence felt.

Conclusion: Thus, Dalit literature has diverted the course from privileged to marginalized, idealistic to realistic and has left an indelible print in its journey so far. It has grown into a literary force that is here to stay. Asserting the importance of Dalit literature, a notable poet Arundhati Roy has observed: "I do believe that in India we practice a form of apartheid that goes unnoticed by the rest of the world. And it is as important for Dalits to tell their stories as it has been for colonized peoples to write their own histories. When Dalit literature has blossomed and is in full stride, then contemporary (upper caste?) Indian literature's amazing ability to ignore the true brutality and ugliness of the society in which we live, will be seen for what it is: bad literature." Jaydeep Sarangi, in his 2018 introduction to "Dalit Voice," writes that Dalit literature is a culture-specific upheaval in India giving importance to Dalit realization, aesthetics and resistance.

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