

“Revisiting Traumatic Past in Dalit Autobiographies in English Translation”

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Abstract

Dalit literature is an outburst of Dalit Movement in Maharashtra which is known as one of the protest literatures emerged in opposition to Hinduism. Dalit movement has shaped intellectual arena of Dalit community which has been prospered under the dynamic path of Shahu-Phule-Ambedkar. Dalit jewels criticized and out braved their historical and social past in their writing. This perspective of Dalit writers is fruitful in delineation of traumatic past of Dalit writers especially in Maharashtra. Baburao Bagul, Shankarrao Kharat, Annabhau Sathe, Kishor Shantabai Kale, Dr. Sharankumar Limbale, Urmila Pawar revisited their traumatic past in their respective writing and represented that their past is overshadowed with the activities of protest against Indian Caste System. The present research paper revisits the traumatic past of Dalits under the light of Indian Caste System in selected autobiographies of Maharashtra authors to expose heinous and its ill-effects of caste system on Dalit Community.

Key words: Dalit, Hinduism, traumatic, heinous

“In Hinduism, conscience, reason and independent thinking have no scope for development”.

-- Dr.B.R.Ambedkar

Postmodern literature is used to describe certain characteristics of post world war phenomenon. It possesses the features like fragmentation, paradox, questionable narrators; pastiche and it reacted against the ideas implicit in Modernist literature. Postmodern literature, like postmodernism as a whole, is a complicated term and is hard to define. The distinction between high and low culture is also attacked with the employment of pastiche, the combination of multiple cultural elements including subjects and genres not previously deemed fit for literature. Postmodernist revives the historical and cultural elements of earlier period but rejects the 19th century concept of realism. The post modernist rejected the enlightenment ideas of modernist and gave birth to the meta- narratives. Dalit Writers, like

postmodernist rejected the theoretical assumptions of Sadashivepethi literature and came up with Dalit narratives.

Dalit literature is the byproduct of African American literature; it imitated the aesthetics of slave narratives to expose the brutality of Indian caste system in India. Dalit literature has become an inevitable part of main stream literature. The scintillating presence of Shahu, Phule and Dr.Bhimrao Ambedkar paved the way for the emergence of various genres in Dalit literature in India. At present days, it has been gaining wider significance across the globe due to its penetration of Dalit issues like casteism, exploitation and the ill effects of Indian Caste System. It runs parallel to African American literature as far as their narration and themes are concerned. It is only with the significant representation of Dalits, Dalits literature stands to be cleansed from the problem of caste discrimination. Dalit literature has examined the problems of caste discrimination in all its philosophical, existential and epistemological aspects. It has traveled from mid 20th century with Dalit narratives to the current times with all its socio literary exuberance initiating a literary and cultural transformation in the fabric of Dalit society.

It has been labeled as the 'literature of oppressed' or 'depressed classes'. It stands in opposition to Sadashivepethi literature in its literary perspectives and has strong resemblance with African American literature as far as experiences and themes are concerned. No doubt, the diamonds of Dalit writings like Baburao Bagul, Shankarrao Kharat, Dr.Sharankumar Limbale, Laxman Mane, Daya Pawar, Urmila Pawar and Dr. Narendra Jadhav followed the footprints of Phule and Dr. Ambedkar. Their indomitable spirit has tried to eradicate heinous caste system and engrossed themselves in exposing Dalit concerns like caste discrimination, exploitation, humiliation, Dalit feminism and protest against the hegemony of Indian caste system. Dalit literature bloomed in poetry, novel, drama and above all in autobiography. The emergence of Translation Studies has played a pivotal role in gaining widespread attention and popularity to the Dalit literature in globe.

The present paper shows the traumatic past of Dr.Sharankumar Limbale and Urmila Pawar and lands them in the category of postmodernists. 'The Outcaste' of Sharankumar Limbale and 'The Weave of My life' of Urmila Pawar have skillfully exposed their traumatic past as Dalits. Moreover these two productions are distinct and significant in their thematic concerns. Both writers uncover issues of caste discrimination and problems of Dalits in Maharashtra. Limbale and Pawar like postmodernists are not happy with their historical, cultural and social position in Maharashtra.

Dr.Sharankumar Limbale' The Outcaste; A Memoir:

Limbale is regarded as the most prolific writer of contemporary literature whose literature aimed to expose the brutality of the upper class in Maharashtra. The Outcaste, the

autobiography of Sharankumar Limbale, is the translation of Marathi version, *Akkarmashi* which he has penned at the age of twenty five, depicts the oppression of one family and shows the feministic perspectives too in a skillful way. Dr.Sharankumar Limbale has stated:

"Dalit literature is marked by a wholesale rejection of the tradition, the aesthetics, the language and the concerns of a Brahmanical literature that, even the at its best, carried within it the signs of the caste-based social and cultural order. Instead, Dalit literature has established its own tradition with anti-caste or untouchable thinkers like Buddha, Kabir, Phule and Ambedkar as its signposts (Limbale, Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit literature, 10)

This trend started in 1873 when Jyotirao Phule, a Marathi Dalit (then known as an Untouchable), published his book *Gulamgiri* (1873) (Slavery) and dedicated the treatise to the then Negroes in America as a 'token of admiration for their sublime disinterestedness and self sacrificing devotion in the cause of Negro Slavery'. (Keer, *Mahatma Jyotirao Phoolley, The Father of Indian Revolution*, 113)

Dalit literature represents the anti-Sadashivepethi in the handling of its subject matter and literary devices.

Regarding with the purpose of writing The Outcaste, in an interview with Siva Nagaiah Bolleddu, a Scholar in English at Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur; A.P., Sharankumar said: The span of my autobiography is my childhood, I want write about my pain and pangs. I want write about the suffering of my community. So I cannot give importance to my personal life. I am writing for social cause. , [http://www.the-criterion.com 12]

Dr. Limbale asserts the destructive role of upper caste people in his outstanding autobiography *The Outcaste*. The two Patil's of different villages are the representatives of whole structure of Hinduism in which we can find Dalits are crushed , exploited and made animal for their carnal desire. Limbale puts forth his traumatic past by showing the illegal relationships of Hanmanta Patil and Yeshwantrao Patil with his helpless mother, Masamai. *The Outcaste* delineates the traumatic past of Limbale which has strong affinity with African American masterpieces.

Limbale demonstrates the naked picture of Maharashtra in which he exposes the evils of caste system and sexual exploitation of Dalit women. In villages Dalit women are not only discriminated on the basis of caste but also forced to enjoy upper caste landlords to accomplish upper caste sexual desires.

„The Patils in every village have made whores of the wives of Dalit farm labourers. A poor Dalit girl on attaining puberty has invariably been a victim of their lust. There is a whole breed born to adulterous Patils. There are Dalit families that survive by pleasing the Patils sexually. The whole village considers such a house as the house of the Patil's whore. Even the children born to her from her husband are considered the children of a Patil. Besides

survival on the charity of a Patil what else can such a household expect?"" (Limbale, The Outcaste 38)

The sexual exploitation of Masamai from upper caste annihilates Limbale and largely surmounts and disturbs the rest of his life. He felt sympathy about the helpless situation of Masamai and criticizes the brutal foundation of Varna system in Indian context. He thinks that his Masamai is the representative of thousands of Dalit women in India; it is true that Dalit women have been sexually exploited in many villages of Maharashtra. Limbale states that to be born beautiful among Dalits is a curse. His traumatic experience makes us to realize about the brutal foundation of Hindu established order. Limbale's traumatic past can be indentified in the following statement:

„“Why did my mother say yes to the rape which brought me into the world? Why did she put up with the fruit of this illegitimate intercourse for nine months and nine days and allow me to grow in the foetus? Why did she allow this bitter embryo to grow? How many eyes must have humiliated her because they considered her a whore? Did anyone distribute sweets to celebrate my birth? Did anyone admire me affectionately? Did anyone celebrate my naming ceremony? Which family would claim me as its descendent? Whose son am I, really?"" (Limbale, The Outcaste 37)

Urmila Pawar: The Weave of my life: A Dalit woman's Memoir:

Urmila Pawar is one of the prolific and versatile writers of Dalit writings who worked for the transformations of Dalits women and established herself as a noted feminist. The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoir is a translation of Marathi version of 'Aaydan' which unfolds the story of three generations. Moreover, it is an account of personal journey from the simple village girl to noted writer. Pawar as a dalit writer has established herself after Daya Pawar, Baby Kamble and Shantabai Gokhale as the prominent voice of Dalit literature.

Her memoir 'Aaydan', which was published in the year 2003 and was translated by Dr. Maya Pandit as The Weave of my life: A Dalit woman's Memoir.

"My mother used to weave Aaydan and I was writing this book, both were activities of creation of thought and practical reality of life." (Pawar, The Weave of my life: A Dalit woman's Memoir I)

The Weave of My life: A Dalit woman's Memoir is a record of a women's self-discovery and assertion of her own identity that is connotative to thousands of Dalit women. Urmila Pawar uses weaving as the central metaphor with help of that she revisits the traumatic past of her personal life. Poverty, caste discrimination, sexual exploitation and gender issues are significant aspects of traumatic past. Urmila Pawar was conscious about her caste and poverty. She narrates one of the incidents of school which shows irresistible presence of caste discrimination and poverty.

"The upper caste girls always used words like „Ladu", "Modak", "karanjya", "Puranpolya". They brought such novel items in their tiffin boxes as well as at times we went on excursions. However, I never asked myself the stupid question, why we do not prepare such dishes at home? We were aware, without anybody telling us, that we were born in a particular caste and in poverty, and that we had to live accordingly." (Pawar, The Weave of My life 3)

Urmila Pawar total growth is an outstanding example of emancipation Dalit from common to uncommon women. In Aaydan Pawar follows the footsteps of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's philosophy and gives the social message of equality to women's of Indian community. She states that;

"Don't you know that Babasaheb had asked in the Hindu code Bill to give the daughters their share of property? So come on, get up now!" (Pawar, The Weave of My life 17)

African American and Dalit Writing:

African American and Dalit writers had experienced similar kind of traumatic past in their respective lives. African American writings dealt with issues of racism, oppression and liberation of Blacks against the white system. Similarly Dalits have shown their animal like position in Hindu social order. Both streams of literature are quite impressive in their protest despite of unfavorable situation. African American literature has examined the problem of racial discrimination in all its philosophical, existential and epistemological aspects. It has traveled from mid 18th century with slave narratives to the current times with all its socio literary exuberance initiating a literary and cultural transformation in the fabric of American society. Richard Wright, James Baldwin and Toni Morrison revisited their traumatic past in their individual works. Their outstanding literary productions became representative of African American ethos. Similarly Dalit literary writing exposed the brutality of Hindu society and its heinous foundation of caste system. No doubt, Dalits engaged themselves in showing ill effects of Indian Caste System.

Conclusion:

In European context modern literature is known as the literature of elite class. It has deeply enjoyed historical and cultural past. But post modernists took opposite stance against modernists and criticized modernist's perspective too. Similarly, Dalit writing has rejected the aesthetics of Sadashivepethi literature and exposed of unanimity of Hindu society. In that stream Dr. Limbale and Pawar are the postmodernists who had rejected the literary canon of Sadashivepethi literature. The present paper exposed the traumatic past of Limbale and Urmila Pawar and draws the clear cut distinction between Sadashivepethi and Dalit writers as far as their past is concerned.

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