



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

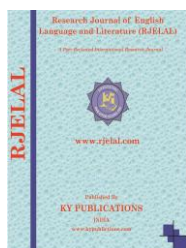
2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

CASTE AND GENDER DISCRIMINATION: THE ELEMENTS OF CALLOUSNESS, SUPPRESSION AND RESISTANCE IN THE SELECTED DALIT LITERARY TEXTS

RASHMI S PATIL

Assistant Professor in PG Studies in English

B.L.D.E.A's S.B.Arts and KCP Science College, Vijayapur



ABSTRACT

The Caste and Gender structures are the indispensable parts of Indian Social System. Countless lives crush throughout their lives under these constantly running wheels. Dalits have lived extremely wicked life, getting churned up with the heavy burden of utter poverty, caste discrimination, exploitation, injustice and humiliation. The antagonist forces of society has engulfed their self-esteem, sense of fulfilment in life, life of honor. Women on the other hand has to go through three-fold exploitation- of being a lower caste, of being a woman and of being born in impoverished family. Patriarchy and Caste system has lashed out at her till she bled to the very last stage. Birth itself became dark curse for these tormented souls who never found any serenity, contentment, or joy throughout their lives. The present paper by taking for reference the literary texts of Bama, P.Sivakami, Urmila Pawar, Sharankumar Limbale and Siddalingayyadelineate the inhuman attitude of society towards these downtrodden people, their suppression at every stage of their life and resistance of these crushed souls.

Key Words: Inhumanity, Humiliation, Suppression, Exploitation, Resistance.

Introduction

The Human History-in Indian context- has witnessed many facets of exploitation, discrimination, indifference, injustice and inhumanity being meted out on relatively weaker group of people by collectively self-made privileged group of people. The nation India which has the sacred fundamentals in its basket such as Tolerance, Humanity, Secularism, Equality, Fraternity, Spirituality etc. bear the dark shadows too which darkened its otherwise brightened social and cultural spheres. The Indian Social System- in the name of Caste and Gender- has proved to be a way more hard-hearted than the societies of other nations. The discrimination and exploitation of people under the heavy roofs of Caste and Gender has put the indelible mark on Indian society. The

treatment of one person from the person of the same society is somewhat appalling which makes one to lose the hope of the existence of humanity in the society. The deep suffering of countless lives began to unfold in the literary texts which gave birth to distinctively different literary field Dalit Literature. These literary records of the astounding experience of Dalits and the numerous Political, Social and Philosophical movements spread the awareness among people which later contributed in subdue of the exploitation of these downtrodden people, though not the complete abolition of the existing evil social practice

Literature gradually has become the weapon to expose the harsh realities of Indian Social system. Dalit Literature has originated to deal with the unheard cry of those tormented souls which

toiled throughout their lives for taking birth in the cursed social system. Many Dalit writers began to write about the experience of their own lives without any exaggeration or biased content. Each Dalit literary text is the heart wrenching life record of a Dalit which can be seen as the representation of Dalits in general. Hence, Few Dalit literary works can be taken as the instances to deal with the coarse elements of Caste and Gender discrimination and these works present Dalits as the helpless victims of Caste system, and Women as the twice exploited victims, one for being a Dalit, secondly for being a woman.

Bama's work "Sangati" records the "Happenings"/"Events" taking place in Paraiyar community, the Dalit community existing in Tamilnadu. The flow of real life can be felt in this unique narrative work where the writer gives us glimpses into the lives of her family members and her community. Vivid characters show us equally vivid exploitation they go through in the society which is biased with caste and gender structure. We have Pachamukhipilai who despite of full-term pregnant woman goes to the field to work to run her family and right at the way she gives birth to the child on the field itself and she cuts off her umbilical cord with rusted spare and goes back to home holding the bloodshed infant in her hands. The character Miriam lives a life of struggle both at home and at factory. Thaayi, the writer's neighbour gets constant beating from her suspicious husband who doubts at her character and cuts off her hair, make her face look ugly by hitting and thus keeping her away from the staring of other men. Mariamma, the narrator's cousin, suffered blows, kicks and beatings by her husband every other day. Periamma, the narrator's aunt, was beaten to death by her husband and everyone stood numb, not helping that poor woman. Despite of these sorts of hardships, Bama's women characters laugh, spend merry time, not bothering about their wicked life they live life to the fullest and thus they resist in unique way by living happily.

P. Sivakami's "The Grip of Change" recounts the story of Thangam, a Paraiyar widow woman who becomes the easily-available-body to her brothers-in-law and the Upper caste man for their sexual

satisfaction. The childless mother as she was, she denied her share in the property of her husband and gets demand from her in-laws that she should share her body with them to get her share in the property. She vehemently opposes and goes for work in the sugarcane fields of an uppercaste landlord who in turn rapes her after knowing her social and financial vulnerability. She cannot resist because she is in the strong clutches of powerful man. And the landlord would come to her whenever he feels to satiate his sexual hunger, and she has to remain silent as there is no alternative way for her. The landlord's wife sends her brothers to beat Thangamma so that her husband can stay away from her. She bears these blows of men silently. Physical and psychological trauma has left her speechless. The most appalling part is both her family and society abuse her for not opposing the move of the landlord. The callous society nowhere questions the cruel act of that landlord. However, she approaches Dalit leader Kathamuthu and with his help she decides to file a complaint against the landlord, and afterword live as companion of Kathamuthu at his home and thus showed resistance against the exploitation of Patriarchy and Society.

Urmila Pawar's "The Weave of My Life" is a memoir that records the lives of three generations Dalit women who struggled to overcome the excessive burden of Caste and Gender. 'Weaving' happens to be the major metaphor as it's the central means of running her family. She interlinks her mother's act of weaving aadyans with her act of writing. She feels both the weaves are similar as their weave is of pain, suffering, and agony. Having been born in the impoverished family, her life crushes under the wheels of economic, social and caste forces. Women of her family has to travel far by facing all geographical odds to sell the wood they have collected or grains they have cultivated in the fields. They feel their mere birth is a curse as they have to struggle for mere survival. They would struggle very hard for one time meal, proper clothe and shelter, leave apart the comforts of life. The book traces the experience of writer with caste ad gender discrimination in matter-of-fact manner devoid of self-pity. The memoir traces Pawar's life from the early young age in a village where her

family and community lived a life of hardship and drudgery. In the wake Ambedkarism, her family and community embraces the Buddhism which brings them in the open air to breath fearlessly and freely. The resistance thus achieved in the form of conversion. The writer herself shows resistance in various forms such as marrying a person of her choice against the wishes of her family, after moving to Mumbai, she indulges in social activity and campaigns against the wishes of her husband. She lived a hard life on the one hand and on other she lived rebellious life.

SharankumarLimbale's work "The Outcaste" is numbing autobiographical account of Mahar Dalit who becomes half-caste person as he is the illegitimate son of Dalit woman and Upper-caste man. Limbale portrays the pathetic and unenviable life of a poor man who suffers in every possible way at every stage of his life. Commonly, normal Dalit feels outsider within his society, but in the case of Limbale , he feels outsider within his own community as each member of his community ridicule him for not being accepted by the upper caste man as his son. Everywhere he feels humiliation and empty for not being able to have the full recognition of his life. The utmost agony of the writer is that he cannot be accepted by his upper caste father nor does he feel any love and affection from his mother, on the top of it, the community too keeps him at bay. The complete alienation encapsulate his life for the longest period. When he felt education to be the only means to wipe out all the agonies from his life, he began to wander here and there to seek admission in the institutions as he cannot fill the forms of admissions completely. Patil, the uppercaste landlord has threatened him not to use his name anywhere or else he has to face the dire consequences. However, with the help of his headmaster, he was able to complete his education. He moves to city to get occupation and the humiliation followed him there too as none is ready to rent him their house due to his caste. He has to live the heinous area of city which is reserved for Maharcommunity. He ultimately hides his caste and got rent home, living in fear of exposure of his disguise. However, with proper education and revolutionary thoughts, he

was able to fight with identity crisis, humiliation and injustice meted on him. He also took initiative to spread awareness about the importance of education among downtrodden people.

Om Prakash Valmiki's "Joothan" is another appalling autobiography of an untouchable who spent his childhood with the food of leftover. Joothan literally means scraps or leftover of food left on plate. An inedible food destined to garbage or animals became surviving food for Dalits. Under various circumstances, these Dalits are forced to fell to the extent of accepting and consuming joothan for centuries and the word encapsulates the pain, disgrace, poverty of a community which placed in the bottom of social hierarchy and became easily-exploitable sort of community by the upper-caste people. The story surveys the life of a Dalit person form a young boy from Sweeper caste to the educated young man who made his community to look at him in awe and thus become the inspiration to the countless lives. Interestingly, his parents too are not self-pity sort of people, instead they knew the paramount importance of education and hence encouraged their son to the fullest to get education, His father even questioned the inhuman behavior of the writer's teacher and his mother threw the leftover on the face of the upper caste man when he refused to carry the more leftover food from the function. The rebellious nature of his parents instilled in him the equally rebellious attitude and he bent on receiving education and thus became the first high school graduate in his community. The cruel obstacles he overcome became high end inspiration to others. Under the influence of Dr.B.R.Ambedkar, he further continued with his fierce thoughts to redemption Dalits from wrecked life.

Baby Kamble's "The Prison We Broke'- acclaimed as the first autobiography by a Dalit woman in Marathi, perhaps even the first if its kind in any Indian languages- is the writing on the lives of Mahar community in Maharashtra and provides graphic insight into the tenets of Indian society such as Patriarchy and Caste systems deeply rooted. She through her work shows how Dalits are considered as lower of low in India, and dalit women as the lowest of low in society. They are persecuted not

only by the society, but by their own family and community too. Though Kamble doesn't experience atrocities of caste system personally, she does witness the multidimensional exploitation being meted out on her community. She records the various experiences of Dalits and dalit women such as their struggle to get one time food, the foodless days and nights they spent, their celebration when they were able to get leftover, their toil in working fields, death of infants due to malnutrition etc. bring chill in our spine. But what relieve the mind of the writer is Resistance her community come up with. She notices the revolutionary influence of Dalit's leader Dr. B. R. Ambedkar on her community who disseminated the idea that education is the only weapon to destroy the social evils prevailing in the society. Hence, these Dalit women despite of their husband's opposition, decided to send their children to receive education, they even participated in the political and social movements of the time, thus breaking the Prisons they were living in so far.

Considerable number of writers have recorded the numbing experiences of these cursed souls in their works. The above selected Dalit literary texts too shed light on the callousness of the society, exploitation of downtrodden people by so-called privileged class of people, the grip of patriarchy, atrocities these Dalits and Women faced in social institutions. And ultimately resistance comes as a fresh breeze in the world of discrimination where the crushed lives stood firmly and fought for their humanly rights.

References

1. Bama, "Sangati", Trans, LaxmiHolmstrom, OUP, 2005
2. Kamble, Baby, "The Prison We Broke", Orient BlackSwan, 2008
3. Limbale, Sharankumar, "The Outcaste", OUP, 2007
4. Pawar, Urmila, "The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs", Bhaktal & Sen, 2015
5. Sivakami, "The Grip of Change", Orient BlackSwan, 2006
6. Valmiki, Omprakash, "Joothan", Bhaktal & Sen, 2007