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'Dalit' Literature in Maharashtra: A Source of Social Documents



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Abstract: The 'dalit' autobiographies can be considered as social documents, since they explore the social, economic and cultural position of 'dalits' during pre and post-independence period of India. These social documents can help to explain the position and the process of transformation of 'dalits' in Maharashtra. This article has explained the 'dalit' autobiographies and its relevance as social document.

Keywords: -Literature, Social Documents, Dalit, autobiographies.

INTRODUCTION

The 'dalit' literature, in a constructive sense, was originated as a result of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's thoughts. The leader of 'dalits', Dr. B.R. Ambedkar embraced 'Buddhism' in 1956. (For details of Conversion, See, Keer: 1971) 'Dalits', especially the 'Mahars' sacrificed the old social identity (as Hindus) and established a new identity as the 'Neo-Buddhists'. The thoughts of Dr. Ambedkar deconstructed the old culture and replaced by new culture. This new way of life was based on 'liberty, equality and fraternity'. (Karhade Sada:1983). The 'Neo-Buddhists' (the 'Mahars') are also known as 'dalits'. The 'dalit' youths have presented their sorrow, emotions, resulted from the caste system, in the form of literature. The poems, stories, novels are the forms of the 'dalit' literature. Punalekar S.P. (2001: 215-216) writes that, "Dalit writers themselves are either victims or witness to social inequalities and violence. Some have direct or indirect links with social, political and cultural organizations of 'dalits'. A few among them are staunch social activists and often use literature as a vehicle to propagate their view on 'dalit' identity and the prevailing social consciousness. Dalit literature does not constitute a homogeneous or unified entity. There are divergent current and tendencies. Its call for self-identity and freedom is governed by different theoretical and philosophical streams".

Dalit writers, including females, mostly belonged to the Hindu 'Mahar' caste or neo-Buddhist group, i.e. the 'Mahar', a caste of Scheduled Castes, who embraced Buddhism in 1956 following Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. In this stream, there are also writers belonging to other Scheduled Castes who are still within the Hindu fold-they are 'Chamars', 'Dhors', 'Mangs' and 'Bhangis'. (Ibid.:216). The 'dalit' literature is available as in the form of poems, novels, short stories, autobiographies etc. Some of the dalit writers are given below according to their form of literature.

Many 'dalit' writers have created their literature, which narrates the evils of caste system. 'Dhasal Namdev' (Golpitha), 'Meshram Keshav' (Utkhanan), 'Pawar J.V.' (Naakebandi), 'Dangle Arjun' (Chhavani Halate Aahe), 'Sapkal Tryambak' (Surung), 'Pawar Daya' (Kondwada) are some important 'dalit' poets, who have presented their sorrow and pain through the poems. 'Dalit' stories are also one form of literature. Although, the stories are imaginery, but have got definite ideology and social background. 'Anna Bhau Sathe' (Khulawadi: 1957; Barbadya Kanjari: 1960; Thaaslelya Banduka: 1972), 'Kharat Shankarrao' (Bara Balutedar: 1959; Tadipar: 1961; Sangva: 1963; Aadgharach Paani: 1970), 'Bagul Baburao' (Jevha Me Jaat Chorali: 1963; Maran Swast Hot Aahe: 1969), 'Badhu Madhav' (Aamhihi Manasa Ahot: 1981; Petalele Aakash: 1983), 'Hiravale Sukhram' (Vishwagangechya Kathi: 1979), 'Dangle Arjun' (Badhavarachi Manasa: 1981), 'Meshram Yogendra' (Ratkalaleli Manasa: 1980), Meshram Kesham (Patraval: 1981; Maran Mala: 1988; Kolishtake: 1990), 'Hoval Waman' (Benwad: 1973; Yelkot: 1982), 'Dethe Bhimsen' (Girhan: 1988), 'Pawar Urmila' (Sahave Bot: 1988; Chouthi Bhint: 1990), Ingole Pratima (Javayacha Por: 1989) are some important 'dalit' story writers, who have narrated the injustice, discrimination, caste conflict, inhuman treatment etc. through their stories.

There are also novels, which are wrote by 'dalits' and the central theme of the novel was the evils of caste system. However, this form of 'dalit' literature could not establish itself, as the other form of literature established. 'Anna Bhau Sathe' (Fakira: 1959; Varanecha Khoryat:1951), 'Meshram Keshav' (Pokharan: 1979), 'Tupe Uttam' (Jhulva:1980), 'Dethe

Bhimsen' (Iskot: 1980) are some writers, who have created the novel, which talks about the sorrow and pain of the 'dalit' community.

The 'dalit' autobiography is also one more important form of the 'dalit' literature, which has been most effective and realistic. The basic difference between the 'dalit' autobiographies and other forms of 'dalit' literature (as poems, stories, novels) is that, the first one is based on experiences and hence realistic, whereas the others are imaginary or partially based on true story. Therefore, the researcher has selected only the 'dalit' autobiographies to analyse the social, economic and cultural position of the Scheduled Castes or 'dalits'.

2. DALIT AUTOBIOGRAPHY: A SOCIAL DOCUMENT

The term 'autobiography' is derived from the Greek word. 'Autos' means self + 'bios' means life + 'graphein' means to write. Together it can be stated as, 'to write about the self life'. Or in other words, the autobiography is a book about the life of a person, written by that person. The word 'autobiography' was first used deprecatingly by William Taylor, the scholar in German Literature, in 1797 in the English periodical, the 'Monthly Review'. (See Wikipedia dictionary). Further, Lane Sarah (2004) argued that, "An autobiography is an account of a person's life told by that person. Autobiographies use the first person 'I' and are based on a person's truthful life experience. Topics include personal triumphs, failures, hardships, thought-provoking problem situations, or personal needs that the reader can identify with. Exceptional human experiences such as my social, psychic and death-related experiences are usually left out. The overall account reads as a story of that person's life experience".

The 'dalit' autobiography is an autobiography written by 'dalit' writer. The 'dalit' autobiographies explore the social and transformation journey of the 'dalit' as an individual and also as a whole. These narrate the past and present social evidences of the society. Arti Kusare-Kulkarni (1991:31) writes that, "In the 'dalit' autobiographies, the autobiographer do not describe himself as the hero, but the autobiographer remains as 'anti-hero'. The surrounding social and cultural situation of the community, in which the writer lives, is described as the hero. Various social references in the past and present are given. The 'dalit' autobiographers also narrates the magnitude of social awareness among 'dalit' community, as well as, the psychological understanding of the dalits and Non-dalits over various social and cultural issues. Therefore, the 'dalit' autobiographies are said to be 'socio-literal' and hence considered as social document".

The life of the 'dalit' is painful and sorrowful. The social stratification treats 'dalits' with cruelty and in inhuman way. The pain and sorrow of 'dalits' is reflected and narrated through the autobiographies. Many 'dalit' intellectuals have accepted this method of exploring reality of the 'self' and the 'society'. Although, the 'dalit' autobiography is written by an individual, but that individual gives an explanation to the surrounding social and economic situation and the experiences, which are representing the 'dalit' community as a whole. Therefore, it can be stated that, the 'dalit' autobiography narrates the oppression, agony and anger of the 'dalit' masses. Thus the researcher has treated these 'dalit' autobiographies as the 'social documents'. These social documents are best to analyse the social, economic and cultural reality of the dalits over the years. These documents can help to explain the position and the process of transformation of 'dalits' in Maharashtra. However, It is a fact that, there is no method to test the reality and the magnitude of evidences, described in autobiographies.

3. CONCLUSION:

The Scheduled Castes were known as the untouchable castes. They were treated indiscriminately. The inhuman treatment was being given to the untouchables. The Scheduled Castes were socially and economically deprived. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the leader of 'dalits', fought against the social injustice. The constitution of India also protected the Scheduled Castes from inhuman treatment. However, there have been increasing atrocities against 'dalits'. Despite of these all, there is one caste named 'Mahar' in 'Maharashtra', who accepted the thoughts of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and went through social, economic and cultural transformation. The 'Mahars' are now known as 'Neo-Buddhists'. The position of Neo-Buddhists is that-they are socially organized, economically moderate (this is true in case of small group in urban area) and culturally rich. The researcher has pointed out the stages of transformation of the Scheduled Castes of 'dalits', especially with reference to the 'Mahars' or the 'Neo-Buddhists' in 'Maharashtra'.

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