

## **Dalit Literature:Future Prospects**

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### **Abstract**

*Dalits are considered as people of discrete set of low casters, who have been marginalized and oppressed in every possible way. Dalits have recently started showing resistance against oppression through their writings. Many Dalit writers like Bama, baby kamble and arjun Danglay, came up with their own stories of pain and suffering, narrating the agony of Dalit life in its true fashion. Dalit men writers were the first to write their ordeals but of late Dalit women have also come into the literary scene by expressing themselves through their autobiographies. These Dalit women autobiographies are generally written in Indian regional languages like Marathi and Tamil. Dalit writings became a matter of great interest after movements led by jotiba Phule and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. In my paper i shall deal with the necessity and impact of some famous translated Dalit women autobiographies.*

**Key words:** *Dalit, Oppression, Suppression, Marginalization, Caste, Poverty, Autobiography*

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## **Introduction**

Dalits are considered as people of discrete set of low castes, who according to S.M Micheal are excluded on the basis of their extreme collective impurity from the relations with higher beings (both human and divine). They are members of the lowest that be education or social or political life. Dalits are marginalized on the basis of traditional Indian Brahminical caste system. Earlier they were called as “Shudras” but of late they have been given the title of Dalits.

Women in general are always marginalized by patriarchy, so Dalit women are more marginalized than Dalit men; they are facing humiliation due to upper caste people as well as due to their own men folk. The plight of Dalit women is more depressing than Dalit men. The position of women is both pitiful and humiliating, really. In the field they have to escape from upper caste men’s molestations. At church they must lick the priest’s shoes and be his slaves while he threatens them with tales of God, heaven, and Hell. Even when they to go their own homes, before they have had a chance to cook some kanji or lie down and rest a little, have to submit themselves to their husbands torment. (Bama 122)

According to Aloysius Irudayam S.J., Jayshree P. Mangubhai and Joel G. Lee, in *Dalit Women—Speak Out: Caste, Class and Gender Violence in India*, “Schedule caste or Dalit women in India today number 80.517 million or approximately 48 per cent of total Dalit population, 16 per cent of total female population, and 8 per cent of the total Indian population”. In spite of such huge population still Dalit women are weak and need encouragement to fight against their oppression. The violence done to these women provide sufficient evidence of their exploitation and discrimination to which they are subjected to both by upper class people and as well as by their own men folk. Of late these Dalit women are trying to break their shackles and resist to oppression they face.

These women were inspired by B.R. Amedkar and Jotiba Phule Movement. According to Ambedkar in one of his speeches, I am conscious of the fact that if women are conscientized the untouchable community will progress. I believe that women should organize and this will play a major role in bringing an end to social evils ... The progress of the Dalit community should be measured in terms of the progress made by its women folk. Every woman should stand by her husband, not as his slave but as his contemporary, as his friend. (Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, speech to the Dalit Mahila Federation in 1942)

Dalit women started resisting against oppression with the help of their writings. They wanted to make their plight known to whole world, but mostly due to

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lack of proper education their works were written in regional languages, but in late 20th century many of the works of Dalit women were being translated. It was during rule of British rule in India that trend of translations started. Britishers after learning the native Indian language started translating the works of Indian authors into English. This progressive trend was later also followed by Indian authors who had learned English language. They started translating their sacred texts into English and other regional languages. In 20th century with the emergence of English language as the global language and mid-1980s boom in English-language publishing in India has resulted in many more translations than ever before.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Navya movement swept through Indian regional literatures. This was a consciously modernist movement, one that broke from the classical predilections of the past and redefined the concerns of literature. Navya was heavily influenced by European writing and Existentialism, and the short story was primary vehicle of its expression. From Hindi to Kannada, Tamil to Bengali, younger writers 'killed their fathers' with vigorous new prose. There was, at the same time, the heady idealism of a nation newly-born, one in which its intellectuals and artists would talk to each other and exchange ideas. Translation, often into English, was the medium of expression through which this exchange took place. (Mehrotra 374)

English language promised writers of regional Indian literature, worldwide readership and fame. Due to this reason works written in various Indian regional languages were translated into English. In the case Dalit women, they were marginalized in their pursuit of knowledge so they did not have access to English language or preferred their own regional languages over English language to write about their agony. So their works were translated into English language. Dalit women chose the medium of autobiography to express their predicament.

Autobiography can be defined as the story of one's own self. It is an important ancient literary genre which had gained importance among suppressed classes of society in 18th century. Among the suppressed classes Black women were first to write their autobiographies, they were followed by Indian Dalit women in 20th century. According to Bhiku Parekh,

First as a story of a unique self, Autobiography presupposes a culture in which individuality is valued and cultivated. Unless a culture encourages men and women to make their choices, form their views, take risks, look upon life as journey and, in general to fashion their lives as they please, one man's life is no different from other's the autobiography is only possible in a society with well developed

historical manner of thinking. (Parekh 250)

But in case of Indian society which is continuously affected by caste system and where lower caste people are silenced, writing an autobiography is a bit difficult job. Indian Dalit women chose this daring genre to voice their concerns and agonized tales.

They wanted to tell their stories of pain and marginalization. So many Dalit women tried their hands at writing. Bama, Shantabai Kamble, Baby Kamble and Urmila Pawar are considered as famous Dalit women who wrote about their plight and their work has been translated into English from various regional languages they wrote in.

Bama is the pen-name of a Tamil Dalit woman, from a Roman Catholic family. She has published three main works: an autobiography, *Karukku* in 1992; a novel, *Sangati* in 1994; and a collection of short stories, *Kisumbukkaran* in 1996. Bama is famous for her autobiography *Karukku*, which was translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom. It was written in Tamil language and this book tells Bama's story as Dalit Christian women. She was from Paraya Community and *Karukku* revolves around life in such a community. Bama even after being well educated was marginalized, suppressed and crushed upon. She discusses that even Christianity religion which propounds equality before God does not provide any equality in real sense. She by writing *Karukku* wanted to set an example to her fellow Christian Dalit women who can also break their traditional specific role and get educated and make their plight known to the world.

Shantabai Kamble is a Marathi writer and Dalit activist. She wrote first Dalit women autobiography entitled *Majhya Jalmachi Chitarkatha*, translated as, *The Kaleidoscopic Story of my Life* in 1988. In this autobiography she talks about how Dalit women are marginalized by both upper class families as well as by Dalit families. Her work focuses on her growing up as women, poor and Dalit. She was the first Dalit women teacher in Sholapur district.

The protagonist of the story, Najabai Sakharam Babar, bears the burden of class, caste and gender. She is from the Mahar caste, one of the biggest Dalit communities in Maharashtra. Shantabai Kamble completely believed that education is only medium which can protect rights of Dalits. She is the ardent follower of Ambedkar's views and opinions.

Baby Kamble wrote *Jeena Amucha* translated as *The Prisons We Broke* in 1986. She represents her community, critiques the Hindu caste system. It is one of the first Dalit women autobiographies which talks about position of women in

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patriarchy and as well as in Indian caste system. She talks about the life in her village, called Veergaon, as a woman of the Maharwada community. Maharwadas suffered from ignorance and starvation, they never saw a prosperous side of life.

They were considered as dirt by upper caste Hindus and they in turn reflected upper caste as pious as God. Baby Kamble wrote in autobiography in order to speak out her misery and show resistance towards age long traditions of suppression.

Urmila Pawar wrote her autobiography, Aaidan translated as A Weave of Bamboo. She talks about Konkan region of Maharashtra where weaving bamboo baskets was caste based occupation. Urmila Pawar tells that there is close connection between weaving of bamboo baskets by her mother and her own writing. She talks about discrimination, untouchability, labour, gender and sex inside and outside Dalit community. Urmila Pawar recounts three generations of Dalit women who resisted overcoming the burden of their caste. As Dalits, or untouchables, make up India's poorest class, they are forbidden from performing anything but the most undesirable and unsanitary duties.

Dalits were believed to be racially inferior and polluted by nature and were therefore forced to live in isolated communities. Urmila Pawar belongs to one such community who broke the traditions of her community and expressed her views through her writing.

Initially Dalit male writers stated writing about their dilemmas and representation of Dalit women by these male writers was based on empathy and sympathy. Even Progressive Indian writers gave sympathetic, instead of realistic, portrayal of Dalit Women. As they were not given truthful illustration, so these women tried to form their own representation. They wrote about their agony and tried to put forward their position in front of the whole world.

Traditional Dalit communities had denied the ways of Ambedkar, they accepted themselves as impure and not worth equality. They wanted age long traditions to continue and remain in the lowest order of society but there were some Dalit communities who fought for equality and followed the path of Ambedkar. They showed resistance towards oppression and started to write back their stories of pain due to inequality. These women adopted writing as medium of expression because this medium promised them worldwide support. Writing proved to be most convenient way for gaining support and sympathy from across the world. Dalits in contemporary times are gaining education and expressing their outlooks with utmost pride.

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