
DALIT LITERATURE: A SYMBOL OF REVOLUTION AND THE SEED OF DECONSTRUCTION

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Abstract:

“This battle to me is a matter of joy. It is not for wealth or for power, but for freedom”.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

Literature is a panacea, which heals the wounds of society. Dalit Literature is the embodiment of social and cultural indignities that heaped upon the Dalits especially their womenfolk. Dalit Panthers revived the term "Dalit" and expanded its reference to Scheduled tribes, Poor Peasants, Women and all being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion. Dalit is not a caste rather it becomes a Symbol of Change and Revolution. In the present scenario, Dalit Literature has taken a substantial shape, which is the battle for the liberation of Dalits. This paper tries to review and reassess the representation of the tribal women, who are thrice marginalized, suppressed, oppressed and survived but with the determination of Optimistic Ideas. The researcher focuses her attention on the works of Mahasweta Devi, a vibrant Bengali writer, whose works portrays the revolutionized women characters, who are the proof for the Deconstruction of the Archetypal women in traditionalized Indian society. Thus this paper explores the revolutionized aspects of Dalit Literature and views the Deconstruction of the Archetypal women characters in Mahasweta's indelible works.

Keywords: Dalit, Revolution, Deconstruction, Archetype, Tribal Women.

1. Introduction:

As Cyril notes, "While thought exists, words are alive and Literature becomes an escape, not from, but into living" It is in literature the concrete outlook of humanity receives its expression. It reflects the chief characteristics of the people for "whom and about whom, it's written". Dalit literature passionately and anxiously brings about the marginalized Dalit people and their sufferings addressed to both the Dalits and Non- Dalit readers. Among Dalits, Tribal Women seems to be the Champion of sufferings, whose virtues aren't considered to be worthy in a patriarchal, class and caste-based society, where she has given a subordinate status. The researcher focuses on Mahasweta Devi, who battled on behalf of the Denotified tribes of India, who were branded as "natural criminals" by the British. Thus this paper exposes the revolutionized aspects of Dalit Literature in general *Outcast: Four Stories* in particular and views the idea of Deconstruction of the Archetypal representation of woman in Mahasweta's *Draupadi*.

2. Who is a Dalit?

The word Dalit has been derived from the root "Dal" which signifies crack, open, split etc. Dalit has come to mean things or person burst, split, broken, torn asunder, downtrodden, scattered, crushed and destroyed. The Dalits were "outcaste" because they were not fit to be included in the four folds graded caste structure of the Indian society and were in the state of being a "No People". Apparently, this term was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of "Depressed Classes", the term the British used for what is now called the 'Scheduled Castes'. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar chose the term "broken men" in his speech in 1948. Thus the term 'Dalit' describes a condition of being underprivileged and deprived of basic rights and refers to people who are suppressed on grounds of their lowly birth. Dalit is a descriptive word evocative of bondage and agony, the anguish and frustrated aspirations of a vast victimized section of the Indian population right down the ages. The pioneers who worked for the liberation of the Dalits and other backward castes, like Phule, Periyar, Ambedkar propagated the idea of the need for a cultural revolution or a total transformation of the Indian society. In this paper, the researcher focuses her attention on the Tribal Community (ST) in general and Tribal Women in particular. It's the women who are thrice colonized and marginalized. Thus the Womanhood can be considered as Dalithood. The following tables envisaged the victimization of tribal women (SC and ST) which ensures that tribal women are the champions of the suffering.

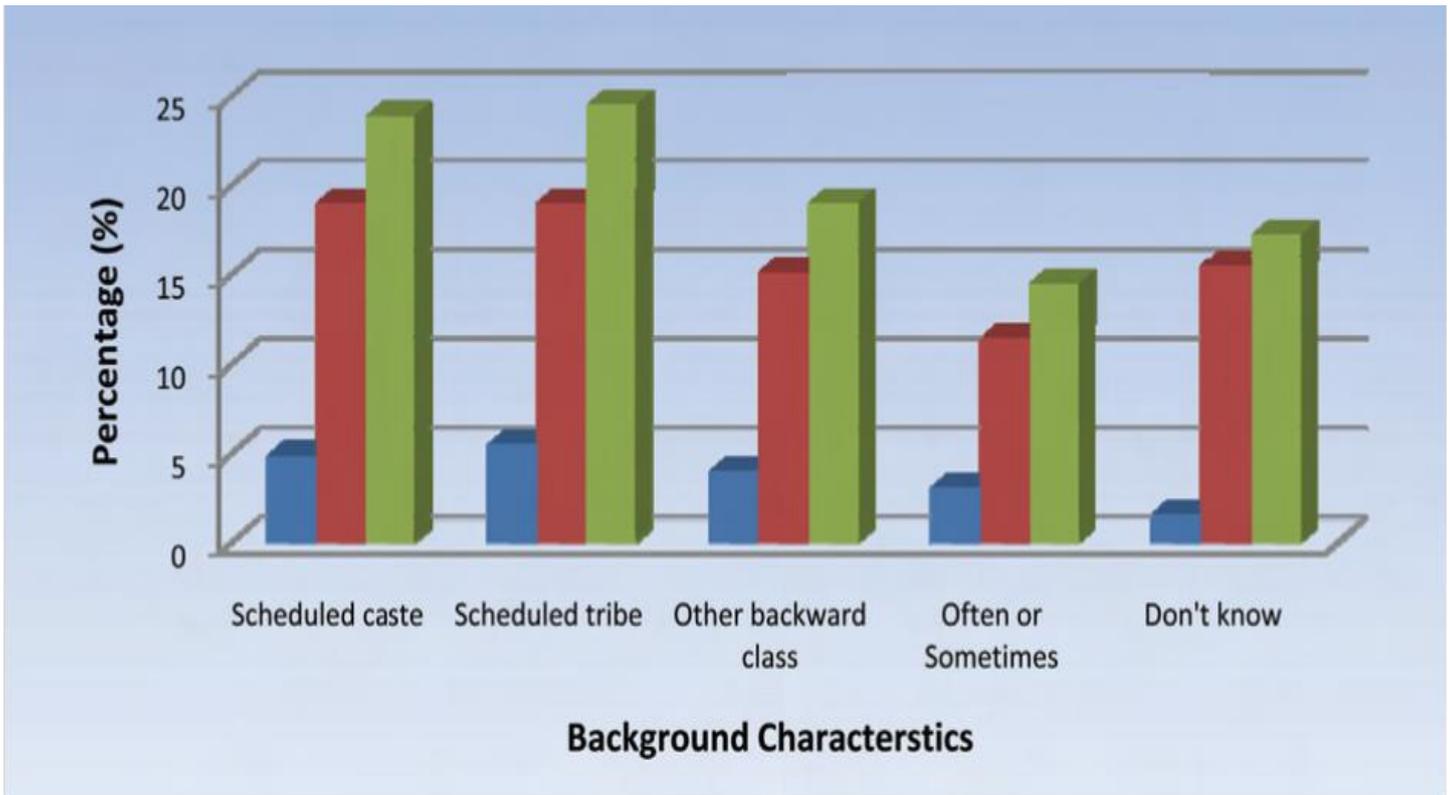


Table 1 shows that the prevalence of Violence is much higher among women belonging to STs and SCs than others

Background characteristics	Percentage who have ever experienced physical violence since age 15	Percentage who have experienced physical violence in the past 12 months			Number of women
		Often	Sometimes	Often or sometimes	
Caste/Tribe					
Scheduled caste	41.7	4.9	19	23.9	15609
Scheduled tribe	39.3	5.5	19	24.5	6866
Other backward class	34.1	4	15.1	19	32938
Other	26.8	3.1	11.4	14.5	27582
Don't know	28.5	1.6	15.5	17.2	466
Total	33.5	4	15	18.9	83703

Source: NFHS-3, 2005-06, M/o H&FW, GOI

Table 2: Experience of physical violence - during the 12 months preceding- the survey India, 2005-06

The genesis of Dalit Literature:

Dalit Literature is a phenomenon in the modern era of literature where the tormenting experiences of Dalit, Untouchable are expressed by writers that are exposed to present the contemporary social, mental condition before Dalit and non- Dalit readers. Mulkraj Anand was the first to insulate Dalit Literature through his novels like 'Untouchable', 'Coolie' in English and there are simultaneously translated in English and different languages. This Dalit Literature is made popular in Marathi by Maharashtra Dalit poets, writers. It solely aims at generating awareness of Dalits about their social situation in the society, to all conscious readers. Poems, short stories, novels and autobiographies written by Dalit writers provided useful insights into the question of Dalit identity. Now the subaltern communities found a new name by coming together with the perspective 'Dalit is dignified' thereby rejecting the sub-human status imposed on them by the Hindu social order.

Dalit Poetry:

There is plenty of Dalit poetry expressing the violent lashing experiences of the poet's life effectively. His famous poem was 'Vidhyapith'. The other poets like Keshav Meshram "Utkhanan" (Excavation), Daya Pawar- 'Kondwada' (suffocating Enclosure), Nandedo Dhasal- 'Golpitha' (The Red Light Zone), Triyambak sapkal - 'Surung' (Dynamite) and so on.

Unlike the tremendous Dalit poetry as a powerful mean of Dalit expressions, folk poetry too practiced for propoganding Dalit sensibility. Vaman dada kardak, Bhimrao kardak, Vitthal Umap, and so on are the prominent Dalit folk poets. The folk poetry includes Ballads which enthralled the common people of the Dalit community. It too creates awareness about Dalit reform movements.

Dalit Short Stories:

Short stories and novels are important genres of literature that exploited by Dalit writers for expressing Dalit sensibility aptly. The short stories like 'Fakira'- Anna Bhau Sathe, 'Davandi'- Shankarrao kharat, 'Jevah Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti (When I robbed a caste) - 1963 Maran Swast Hot Aahe-1969 (Death is becoming cheap)- Baburao Bagul, Red stone - N. G. Shinde are the best examples of Dalit short stories by Dalit writers.

Dalit Auto Narratives:

The scorching experience is the price of Dalit Literature. Anguish, revolt, and negativism are the distinctive features of this literature. When anguish leads to revolt, then the will to totally negate is born. Dalit Literature has nurtured this will. This 'anubhava' (experience) takes precedence over 'anumana' (speculation).

Mahasweta Devi: An Emblem of Revolution:

Mahasweta Devi, veteran Bengali writer, and activist, who puts a question mark on the progressive, democratic, civilized nation India. Even after the jubilee of independence, the

marginal are deprived. Through her works, she exposes the feudal system which is anti-tribal, anti-woman, and anti-poor.

The researcher focused on Mahasweta's works which are distinguished by a powerful, direct, unsentimental style with which she approaches the themes of struggle, resistance, and empowerment.

Dalit Literature: A Symbol of Revolution:

Dalit Literature is an attempt to bring the forefront experience of discrimination, humiliation, suppression, and anguish and mirror forth the depiction of the ill-starred marginalized section of Indian society. It's protest literature against all forms of exploitation based on class, race, caste or occupation. Dalit Literature is an outburst of the burning flame of victims from many centuries the suppressed anger erupts through self-narratives of Dalit Literature. Dalit Literature with its rustic dialect gave a fierce jolt to the established Brahmanical language. The experience of life expressed in Dalit Literature is so spirited, its agony so mind-distressing as to make the eyes of the white-collared people death pale.

The portrayal of Woman in Dalit Literature - A Rebel:

The woman is the embodiment of all virtues. Dalit Literature appears to be engaged in the retrospection of ideas regarding women, women's liberation, struggle for women's liberation, the human relationships that transcend woman-man relationship, equality of opportunities and an egalitarian way of life. The Dalit woman depicted in Dalit Literature envisioned as a Rebel. But the forms of her rebellion are many and different. One can encounter rebellious heroines in Dalit Literature women, who seeing the mud thrown on her honour, injustice perpetrated on her as poor, lover or husband fighting for society, the betrayal of nation or society, the injustice being inflicted on her as Dalit, more so as female Dalit, gnash their teeth in rage and are ready to charge.

Dalit writers do not look upon widows, prostitutes, depraved women, as Dalit, the exploited with compassion alone but they make them valiant, create commotion in their inner minds and take them towards radiance. They fight for the truth and for themselves. They revolt to protect their self-respect. They do not brood over injustices perpetrated on them, nor do they just rave against it, but take up arms and prepare for a fight. The courage to fight, resoluteness, and rebelliousness is the very essence of their life. That is why Dalit writers do not portray Dalit women as hollow idealists, overflowing with love, embodiments of sacrifice but rebellious, change-oriented and thoughtful.

Dalit Woman: A Symbol of Revolution:

In Dalit woman's journey towards the destiny of revolution, she has to undergo the process of Victimhood to Victorhood where she suffered; marginalized and at last achieved the destination. The researcher enriched this idea with Mahasweta's work.

Mahasweta's indelible writing is *Outcast*: Four stories, which focused on the fate of four marginalized women characters- Dhoul, Shanichari, Josmina, Chinta. In *Outcast* Mahasweta

envisages a three-tier hierarchical structure in Indian society. Mainstream (Non-Marginalized), the Marginalized, finally the Outcast- marginalized by the marginalized. The intention of the researcher is to exhibit the Gendered causes lying underneath the socio-political, economic exploitation of tribal- Dalit minority women.

The first story "dhouli" presents the sad plight of an "untouchable" young widow, who was seduced and impregnated by Misrilal, a Brahman. He absconds and returned when he heard that dhouli sells her body in order to feed her son and for herself. Misrilal forced her to move to the city to become a prostitute.

Devi's second story "shanichari" an Oraon girl, who was marginalized by her own society when she came back with diku's- a mainstream man, a child in her womb. Gohuman has sold shanichari to a brick- kiln owner in Barasat, where she faced economic and sexual exploitation leading to pregnancy. She was sent back to her native, only to face Ostracism.

In "the fairytale of rajabasha", self-imposed ostracism, which was the consequence of the love of 'josmina' for her husband 'sarjom'. Both were sold to a landowner where josmina faced sexual exploitation which turns to be a hallucination, as she attained motherhood by her master. At last, to save her beloved from being ostracized by their own community, josmina committed suicide

The "Otherness"- "Other World" of women can be traced out from these stories, which implies the "World of Tribal Dalit Women", where no light can ever penetrate. In the opening of *dhouli*,

The bus left Ranchi in the evening and reached Taharr at night[...] the world beyond and the wide, metalled road ended here. They used poor, rundown buses for the poor. (*dhouli*1)

Marginalization implied by the use of words like "poor, rundown buses for poor, rundown people" Mahasweta makes it clear through her narrative the label of "otherness"- "outcast" is conferred by the power dynamics and hegemony exercised and enjoyed by the privileged class.

Outrageous Marginalization by the Marginalized:

The Outcast people are those who are marginalized by the marginal, which doubled their sufferings. In *shanichari*, where she "enjoyed sitting on the floor of the[train] compartment", heard the folk tale narrated by her grandmother.

Don't you know the story about the carpenter who carved a girl out of wood and became her father? (*shanichari*35)

The implication of this tale inset in the opening of *shanichari*, which foretold that shanichari will be treated as a commodity and thrown away as soon as her commoditized existence becomes useless to the males in her life. Driven out of her village, forest shanichari went to the brick kilns, where she is provided with clothes by her owner only to be stripped and raped.

This final marginalization of shanichari was really presented by the Village Priest and Chand.

Chand: We should think about this as a community. There could be more shanicharis in the future. Should we cast out our own women?

Naiga: We'll think about it if it happens again. Not now. This is a new problem. (*shanichari* 54)

Through *the fairy-tale of rajabasha*, Mahasweta suggested that the Dalit people are nothing but a "maal", "goods", "commodities", "jungle Jaan wars", "forest animals" to the mainstream people. "To Niranjana, josmina was just fresh meat; dark jungle flesh which he had paid for."(*shanichari* P 72).

The Revolutionized Voice of the Dalit Women:

Dalit literature seems to be a platform on which Mahasweta spelled and enriched the voice of Dalit- tribal women. In analyzing these stories one can find the transformation in these characters. For instance, Dhoulis exploitation turns from a coy, submissive girl into a resistant, rebellious woman who flouts the norms of the upper caste, patriarchal society. Dhoulis cut short misrilal's feeble, unfinished mutterings.

misrilal: I love you...

Dhoulis: Thuu! To hell with your love!

If you have taken me by force,

I would have got an acre of land.

But you're not even a man!

Give me what I need to bring up your son. (*dhoulis*23)

Through Dhoulis's insistent, interrogating statements, Devi disrupts the dominant gendered ideology and invests the seed of revolutionized Dalit voice. Mahasweta portrayed an outraged woman the vibrant words exposes that outrageousness.

In *Shanichari*, she defends herself and asking, "Who's to blame for all this? Who?" (*Shanichari* P51) This question forces the readers to rethink and re-evaluate the forces operating behind the exploitation of Shanichari. In deeper analysis, one can critique the political constitution of India, as it gives the marginal basic rights and representation only in law, not in application. But it is possible in Dalit literature, where the writers voiced for the Dalits in general women in particular, whose outrageous cry can reach the dominance - mainstream and the Dalit voice has been enriched and revolutionized.

Dalit Literature The Seed of Deconstruction:

Art and literature have been shaken by Derrida's concept of "Deconstruction" where the core idea is 'nothing is center'. The researcher attempts to apply the ideology in Dalit Literature where the writers deconstruct the archetypal representation of Dalits in general and Dalit women in particular.

The Archetypal Representation of Woman:

Generally speaking, archetypes are the symbols, images, characters, and stories recurring again and again in the works of literature, and are therefore transformed into collective prototypes. As per M. H Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham:

An embodiment in a literary work evokes a profound response from the attentive reader because he or she shares the psychic archetypes expressed by the author.

(A Handbook of Literary Terms. 23)

In search of the archetype of women, it has been witnessed in our society where women seem to be a slave where her role seen as an 'object' not as 'being'. Literature projects this explicitly. From the time of Shakespeare till now the victimization of a woman is inevitable in society. Traditionally right from the ancient days, India is a male-dominated culture and women are covered with many thick, slack layers of prejudiced, convention, ignorance and reticence in life. In the mesh of Patriarchy, Class, Caste the Victim has sandwiched by the domination at the Emotional, Intellectual, Social, religious and Sexual levels. The archetype of women in this world and literature is a woman who is expected to surrender herself into her Man. She has been represented as a spineless wooden creature subjected to patriarchal and socio-cultural power whose role is acted in a passive manner without any optimistic ideas of survival. The writers have depicted the pathetic condition of women in their works.

Dalit Literature- Deconstruction of the Archetypal Woman:

Mahasweta Devi has brought out the rebellious spirit of the tortured tribal Dalit women. Mahasweta portrayed the idea of deconstruction of the archetypal representation of a tribal woman explicitly in the story of *Draupadi*. It is the story of a Santhal tribe woman Draupadi who is subjected to violent sexual violence. Comparing her with Mahabharata's Draupadi, Devi asserts that,

She has no savior to save her because in the post-colonial nation-state the so-called 'Saviours' are depriving people of the benefits of Independence.

Draupadi @ Dopdi depicts how a marginalized tribal woman derives strength from her body and her inner feminine core to fight against her marginality. According to Devi's view,

Women should be judged from the point of view of a Human and not of race, gender, caste, class. Devi portrays the true face of Dalit and Feminist assertion where Draupadi uses her Wholeness of mind and body to fight against her Identity.

The unveiling of garments reveals immense female power:

Through the vibrant reaction of Draupadi, Mahasweta proved the deconstruction of the passive- Archetype woman and shown the Revolutionized, Active and Rebellious Dalit woman.

Conclusion:

By viewing and assessing the Dalit literature especially the works of Mahasweta Devi it has been proven that Dalits are no more remain to be Dalit (helpless) that they are equally stronger with other people of the society. Their optimistic thoughts and courage shape themselves into the pinnacle of the revolution. Thus this paper exhibited the idea that Dalit Literature is the symbol of Revolution and it is the seed of Deconstruction of the archetypal representation of a passive Dalit woman.

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