

Major Developing Trends in the Representation of the Marginalized Sections of the Indian Society in the Indian Dalit Literature: A Critical Study

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Abstract: In this paper I focus on the various developing trends of the Indian English literature and the other regional literatures of India in regard to the representation of the marginalized classes and individuals of the country. This paper also refers to the literary works of the writers belonging to these marginalized sections, writing both in English and regional languages (Bhasa literatures), that provide a voice to the marginal in the postcolonial Indian society.

Keywords: Dalit writings, Bhasa literature, class conflicts, marginalized individual, privileged and marginal writers, family, domestic violence, protest.

Society and class conflicts have always been important factors in Indian literature. The evolving Indian literature (that includes various regional 'Bhasa' literatures and the Indian writings in English) has given a proper shape and a universal image to these conflicts and problems. The themes of Indian literature are no longer dominated by the privileged classes. The writers are vehemently writing about the marginalized sections of Indian society. Writers from the oppressed classes are also coming up with their works and generating ripples in the Indian literary scenario. In this paper I focus on the various developing trends of the Indian English literature and the other regional literatures of India in regard to the representation of the marginalized classes and individuals of the country. This paper also refers to the literary works of the writers belonging to these marginalized sections, writing both in English and regional languages (Bhasa literatures), that provide a strong voice to the marginal in the postcolonial Indian society. The Indian literature, both in English and the regional languages, has started receiving tremendous responses from the marginal sections of the society that are now contributing seriously and in great amount to the Indian literary domain. So far, till the first half of the twentieth century we have seen that the literary works produced by writers belonging to the privileged sections of the society have formed the bulk of the colonial and postcolonial Indian literature. But now things are changing and in this scenario we see that different Dalit writers and writers of the marginalized sections of the society are evolving and occupying a prominent position in the modern Indian literary discourse. In the writings of the main stream writers also we see the representation of the subaltern sects of the Indian society and the problem of their subjugation. In this paper I intend to make a study of the

recent Indian literary works produced in English and in various regional languages (many of which are translated into English) that concern the various problems of the marginalized classes. I also refer to some bhasa literatures, produced by different dalit or marginalized writers, written in their respective regional languages and which establish the fact that the literature by the writers from the margin has started redefining the horizons of not only the Indian English literature but also the Indian literary domain as a whole.

The twentieth century Indian writers like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, A. K. Ramanujan, Arundhati Roy, Khushwant Singh, Shiv K. Kumar, Mahesh Dattani, Amitabha Ghosh, Girish Karnad and many others belonging to different genres of Indian English literature, who generally belong to the more or less privileged classes of the Indian society, have presented from time to time the conditions of the marginalized sections of the Indian society through their writings. Simultaneously, in recent times literary works produced by the writers belonging to the marginalized sections of the society have equally presented the subaltern culture and tradition of India. It is important to note that how these two types of writers are defining the conflicts between the upper and the lower classes of the society. Which one is more prominent in presenting these marginalized sections will be a matter of discussion in this paper. It is not easy to categorize the marginalized sections under a single class. The marginalized sections of society such as orphans, slum-dwellers, servants, disabled young and old, laborers, farmers, prisoners, rebels, outcastes, the paralyzed, the oppressed men or women, the tribal groups, the dalits, minority groups, prostitutes, gays or lesbians and minority communities have been represented in literature. To start with the writers of the privileged groups we see that representations of the subaltern sects are prominent in their works. But it is also important to note that the oppressed individuals belonging to the lower classes of the society are less highlighted compared to the marginalized individuals, like the women, religious minorities, homosexuals and lesbians, who are not Dalits by their social status and who are a part of the upper-class society. Sufferings and exploitations of women have always been a subject of Indian English writers. Women become a marginalized class irrespective of their social and communal orientations. R.K. Narayan's novels *The Dark Room* and *The Guide* are the finest examples where the novelist deals with the sufferings of the marginalized sections. In *The Dark Room* Narayan deals with the sufferings of Savitri a house wife who is neglected by her husband. The husband Ramani continues with his extramarital affair and Narayan develops a traditional suffering Hindu woman out of Savitri who fails to commit suicide and returns back to her corrupted husband only to live with the burden of her husband's sin. Savitri represents the traditional Hindu wife who silently suffers at the hands of her husband, family and society. In *The Guide* Narayan has dealt with the lives of the poor village people. But the actual theme of the novel revolves around the story of

'Railway Raju' who turns into a false saint and starts residing among the villagers to save himself from the police. The novelist ironically shows how Raju, in his saintly disguise, is compelled to do a fasting for bringing rain to the draught hit village. The poor villagers and their lifestyle cast a great influence on Raju which turns him from a railway guide into a spiritual guide. In this novel Narayan portrays the poor village people as a separate entity without going into details about their inner conflicts and happenings. Anita Desai's novels *Cry, the Peacock*, *Voices in the City* and *Bye-bye Blackbird* deal with the age old problem of the sufferings of women in the family. Poets like A.K. Ramanujan (*Of Mothers, Among Other Things*), Nissim Ezekiel (*The Night of the Scorpion*) and Agha Shahid Ali have portrayed the silent labour and sufferings of mothers in their poems. While describing the helplessness of his aged mother while picking up a grain of rice from the kitchen door in *Of Mothers, Among Other Things* Ramanujan says,

My cold parchment tongue licks bark/ in the mouth when I see her
four/ still sensible fingers slowly flex/ to pick a grain of rice from the
kitchen's floor. (Ramanujan, *Collected Poems*: 61)

Shashi Deshpande has also dealt with the same theme relating to the sufferings of women and discriminations in her novels like *That Long Silence* and *Small Remedies*. Mahesh Dattani is a prominent modern playwright writing in English. He has dealt with the issues like gender discrimination, communal riots, homosexuality and child abuse. His plays *Tara* and *Bravely Fought the Queen* deal with the exploitations of women in the family and society. *On a Muggy Night in Mumbai*, by the same playwright, deals seriously with the predicament of the homosexuals and lesbians who, though belonging to the privileged sections of society, are marginalized for their alternate sexualities. Dattani has also dealt with the pathetic conditions of the HIV infected patients in his play *A Special Season (Ek Alag Mausam)*. In Dattani's *Final Solutions*, while talking about his act of throwing stones in the rath yatra Javed says,

Javed. I had permission to do exactly what I had been asked not to
do all my life! Raise my voice in protest. To shout a scream like a
child on the giant wheel in a carnival. The first screams are of
pleasure. Of sensing an unusual freedom. And then...it becomes
nightmarish as your world is way below you and you are moving
away from it...and suddenly you come crashing down, down and
you want to get off. (Dattani, vol I: 204)

It is the protest of Javed against the injustice done to him by society for belonging to a minority community. In most of the cases discussed above we see that the writer is dealing with the cases of discriminations and victimizations of the people who are marginalized but mostly belonging to the privileged classes. Thus, it is the representation of the conflicts within the upper class people. In some cases the poor people are delineated as a separate entity and its conflict with the upper sections of society becomes a matter of major concern for these writers. For example Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* shows how Velutha belonging to

a lower class is victimized for getting involved in a love affair with Ammu a married woman of the upper caste. Roy ironically describes Velutha in chapter eleven "The God of Small Things" of the novel, with the same name, which aptly conveys her ideas about these insignificant people of society:

Who was he, the one-armed man? Who *could* he have been? The God of loss? The God of Small Things? The God of Goose Bumps and Sudden Smiles? Of Sourmetal Smells – like steel bus-rails and the smell of the bus conductor's hands from holding them? (Roy, 217).

Communal discrimination is a major issue that has become an indispensable part of the literature of the margin. While Dattani shows the discriminated Muslims in his play *Final Solutions*, the poet Nissim Ezekiel, himself belonging to the minority (Bene-Israeli) group, describes in his poem *Background*, *Casually* how he became a victim of religious discriminations as a boy. While talking about his painful experiences at school Nissim Ezekiel Says,

I went to Roman Catholic school, / A mugging Jew among the wolves, / They told me I had killed the Christ, / That year I won the scripture prize. / A Muslim sportsman boxed my ears. / I grew with terror of the strong / But undernourished Hindu lads, / Their prepositions always wrong, / Repelled me by passivity. / One noisy day I used a knife. (Parthasarathy, 34-35)

Therefore, we see that the discriminations and crimes committed against the marginalized sections of society are described by the above writers. But, we often see that these writers are basically confined to the problems of the people who are a part of the privileged sections. While describing the Dalits or the poor people these writers focus on the conflicts between them (the Dalits) and the upper class. These writers, in most of the cases, are silent regarding the inner lives and conflicts within these sections (Dalits and the poor) of the marginalized classes. The problems of violence against women, their sufferings and exploitations, communal discriminations, homosexuals are there among the Dalits as well. These things are now becoming prominent and more frequently getting reflected through the writings of the Dalit and the marginalized writers belonging to the lower sections of the Indian society. The number of languages in which the tribal, Dalit and the marginalized classes of society have started expressing themselves has increased vigorously, which shows that a considerable amount of space has been created for the subaltern and the Dalit sections to express themselves and to interact with the main stream of society. Literatures are now being produced in tribal languages as well. Languages like Kukna, Bhili, Gondi, Mizo, Garo, Santhali, Kinnauri, Garhwali, Dehwali, Warli, Pawri and others are getting enriched with different literary writings. Having their own scripts the tribal writers of Mizoram, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Gujarat, Jharkhand and others have emerged as prominent voices in the Indian literary scenario to delineate the new marginal discourse with their literary genius and to enrich the Indian literature with their creative

writings. In the last decades of the twentieth century tribal writers like Atmaram Rathod, Laxman Mane, Sivakami, Bama have come up as major Dalit writers.

The Mizo literature has a century old literary tradition which is highly influenced by the Christian tradition. Poets-cum novelists like L. Biakliana, Lalzuithanga, dramatists like Lalkailuia, L.Z. Sailo, Lalluangliana Khiangte, essayists and literary critics like Kaphleia, C. Thuamluaia, James Dokhuma have enriched the Mizo literature from time to time. In these literary works we see that the lifestyle of the Mizo people has been delineated with care and importance. These writings often contain moral ideals. But what we see here is that the influence of Christianity and the foreign culture is dominant which has got mixed up with the local colour of the Mizo life. But things are not the same with the Tamil, Gujarati, Marathi or Bengali Dalit literatures. The marginal writers belonging to the Tamil or the Marathi literature have presented their own regional culture where foreign influences are of negligible importance. In the literary works of the marginal writers we see that the inner conflicts between different communities of the Dalit sections are prominent. These conflicts are visible simultaneously along with the conflicts with the upper classes of society. The conflict among the marginalized classes is not so prominent in many of the writers belonging to the privileged class. The novel *The Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand narrates a day in the life of Bakha who is an outcaste. His sufferings and a number of humiliations in the course of his day is narrated in details. Bhabani Bhattacharya's novel *So Many Hungers* shows the sufferings of the poor people and deals with exploitation and greed set against the background of the independence movement and the Bengal famine of the early 1940s. The recent work of Arundhati Roy's award winning novel *The God of Small Things* elaborately shows the class conflict in Kerala (India). We see how Ammu, a girl belonging to the upper class suffers after getting involved in a love affair with Velutha an outcast. Velutha is beaten up to death by the police. Although there were other intentions but what we see here is that a major incident of class discrimination is shown over here. So, here, we see that divisions and conflicts between the subaltern classes do not form major issues. But in Tamil marginal writers like Sivakami, Abhimani, Bama, Gunasekaram, and others we see a prominent presentation of the problems like class conflicts, family exploitations of women and violence that take place within the marginalized classes. In her novel, *Aanandayee*, Sivakami focuses on violent exploitation of woman's body in the family. In her autobiography (*Karukku*) in Tamil Bama, a Dalit woman writer, discusses her sufferings as a woman. *Karukku* discusses the discriminations and oppressions suffered by the Dalit women at the hands of different social, governmental and religious institutions. The presentation of the class and gender discriminations against women within the Dalit class and also within society has given rise to the new discourse of Dalit feminism that talks about the painful and laborious toil of the Dalit women within family and society. Bama highlights the subjugations of the Dalit women by men in the family. Bama's another

important novel *Sangati*, is an instance where we see the delineation of such domestic violence against women within the family. Instead of highlighting the conflict between different classes, the novel focus on the discrimination against dalit women in the family that belongs to a socially discriminated class, that is, the conflict arises within the Dalit class and the individuals (particularly the women) are doubly discriminated by society and within their families. The dalit woman faces social discrimination as a dalit and gender discrimination within the family as a woman.

It is important to note that gender discriminations and patriarchal oppressions among the Dalit communities have always been important issues for the Tamil writers. Gunasekaran's play *Bali Aadugal* is an important example where we identify the marginalized feminine space within a marginalized class. The play, inspired by a historic inscription, from just after the Chola period, tells a horrific story of Dalit oppression. A temple car (chariot) of Amman Devi breaks down during a temple festival and the Priest asks for a human sacrifice as expiation for the deity. The Dalits become the soft targets. When a Dalit youth is chosen for the sacrifice he bargains with the priests and saves his life in exchange of his wife, a Dalit woman. The tale depicts the Dalit woman who is twice marginalized. The Dalit Feminism gets an impetus through this literary discourse. Oppression of women is an important issue for both the Dalit as well as the upper-class literatures. Women have been treated as a marginalized section of society. In Shashi Deshpande's novel *Small Remedies* or in the novels of Anita Desai we see that this conflict is on a different level. Here we see that women are considered to be the marginalized ones and discriminations are done against them. We see this discrimination in Mahesh Dattani's play *Tara*. This has been witnessed among the Dalit communities in the Tamil writings as well. In the writings of Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy or Mahesh Dattani, who generally belong to the privileged classes, the marginalized sections are viewed not from their own point of view. But in the Dalit texts of Tamil, Marathi or Gujarati literature we see that these marginalized classes speaking back to the centre. They are representing themselves.

Gujarati dalit short story became prominent with Gujarati *Dalit Varta* (1987) edited by Mohan Parmar and Harish Mangalam. Many of these stories show a voice of protest against the oppression and injustice which seem to be inevitable in an untouchable's life. Resistance can be seen from some women characters but they are in negligible amount. Journals like *Samajmitra*, *Hayati* and *Sarvanam* have made important contributions in building up the voice of the marginalized in the Gujarati literary discourse. In the stories like Arvind Veghda's "Rakhopa na Saamp", Vasantlal Parmar's "Ek Chhaliyun Daal ni Khatar", Hasmukh Vaghela's "Jhaal" the women become an easy target for sexual exploitation. In Joseph Macwan's novel *Angaliyat* we see the presentation of Angaliyat, a child. The book is translated by Rita Kothari from Gujarati as *The Stepchild*. This story symbolically refers to the condition of the Vankars, a Dalit community, in the society. The novel vividly explores the ethos, fears and aspirations of the Vankar community

through the characters of Valji, Methi, Teeharam, and Bhavaankaka. A milestone in the history of Dalit literatures, this novel is set in rural Gujarat of the first half of the twentieth century and is rich in local colours sufferings, passions, emotions and expressions of this Dalit community. In this novel Joseph Macwan depicts the evil of internal colonization in society even after several years of independence. The Vankars are exploited, subjugated and colonized by the more powerful upper caste of the Patels. Methi's sufferings at the hands of her cruel husband and also in society depict the multiple layers of exploitations for the marginalized individual. This is what we see among the upper castes where sections like the women, children, homosexuals and others are facing the same problems. The network of power and exploitation is spread everywhere irrespective of social classes, and everywhere we get victimized individuals whom we consider as the marginalized like the Dalits. The Marathi writer Laxman Mane's novel *Upara* also deals with the sufferings of a Dalit boy and his family who are meted with inhumane treatment in society for belonging to the low caste. They are treated as criminals and are suspected for everything that goes wrong in society. Mane's characterization and plot development depict the meaninglessness of the lives of the Dalits in the postcolonial Indian society. Ajay Navaria, an important writer of novels and short stories, has worked to represent this Dalit consciousness. In his famous novel *Udhar Ke Log (People From That Side)*, he delineates a boy who is always conscious about his being a Dalit. He considers his Dalit self to be his enemy which deprives him from everything in his life. He is ill treated in his school. After growing up his beloved—herself a sex worker—rejects him after knowing that he is a Dalit. The psychological conflict is intense over here. The inner mind of the marginalized person is brilliantly portrayed here. Here, the conflict is not only between classes but also within the self. The exploration of this inner self of the marginalized individual is to a large extent missing in the writings of the other writers not belonging to the marginalized classes.

The Hindi Dalit literature commenced with the writings of Kabir and Ravidas and got an impetus with the writings of Swami Achhutanand and Dr. Ambedkar who propagated the idea of creating a separate culture for the Dalit community which can recognize and represent a large section of the marginalized people along with their specific social identity and respect. Munshi Premchand is a prominent name among the literary stalwarts belonging to the marginalized sections of the Indian society. His novel *Godaan (The Gift of a Cow)* is a Hindi novel first published in 1936 and is considered to be the greatest Hindi novel of modern Indian literature, although originally written in Urdu. The novel focuses on the social and economic exploitation of the poor villagers. *Karmabhoomi (The Land Where One Works)* is his other Hindi novel which shows the influence of Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagraha movement on him. It is the story of a young man Amarkant who belongs to the upper class of the society, but defies the barriers of his culture and family. Though he is already married his relationship with his wife gets strained and he is attracted towards a lower class girl Sakina. Sakina is not

accepted by his family. Amarkant leaves his home and finally settles in a village of untouchables. He starts teaching children and helping villagers in their fight for their rights in different contexts. The story is a great effort to create a space where the privileged and the marginalized can co-exist through mutual interactions. Therefore, it is important to note that the representation of the marginalized sections of the Indian society has developed in various ways. With the emergence of the Dalit and the marginal writers, different horizons of the marginal classes have been identified and discovered. It is obvious that the writers belonging to this Dalit and other marginal classes differ in their representation of the subaltern classes. But they are in no way in conflict with the mainstream writers. The ground is prepared for the oppressed individuals of all types, whether Dalit or upper class, to express themselves before the country and the whole world and to make society listen to them.

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