

The Creative Launcher

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Dalit and African Literature as the Discourse of Resistance: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

The research article is to give literary representation to Dalits and Africans against the politics of caste and race. Dalits, we all know, suffered suppression, humiliation and oppression in the past and present in the name of Varna system while Africans have been forced to serve their masters under the colonial system. It is an attempt to focus on a comparative study between these two groups in the context of oppressions and marginalities at socio-economic, religious and political level, while asserting their identity and solidarity demanding egalitarian and just society. The paper will include selective writers: Sharan Kumar Limbale, Baby Kamble, Omprakash Valmiki, Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Chinua Achebe, Meja Mwangi as their genres of discourse of resistance are psychologically and sanguinely committed to the deep-rooted dignity, all-round emancipation and liberation of Dalits and Africans.

Keywords- Caste, Race, Postcolonialism, Varnashramdharma, Resistance Discourse

In Vedic time, Dalits were given irrational and inhuman treatment and were not understood as human beings. To have domination, Aryans waged constant wars against the aboriginals and conquered over their regions and socioeconomic resources. Their nefarious intention has been rightly exposed by James Massey in his book *Downtrodden: The Struggle of India's Dalits for Identity, Solidarity and Liberation*: "Systematically, the first colonizers (Aryans) took away the basic human rights of the first people of the India and managed to convince them that their resulting status had been ordained by God himself." (Massey 12).

Dalits were forced to accept the atrocities and draconian laws "which forbade them the right of any education, rising arms and to do any business and trade."(Chand 4)Their physical contact in

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negotiation and even shadow was polluting; “the wind which had touched the body of a Chandala (Dalit) considered impure.” (Fick 319). Further they were undergoing more and more societal hierarchy and laws created by the Vedic society and sparing their lives with wounded soul. In the hymns of ‘Manu Smriti ’cruel laws were made for Chandalas. To govern over Dalits for thousands of years, Manu implemented Chaturvarnashram dharma which was legalized and structured to posit the supremacy of Brahminism. Jaffrelot states the structure:

He Brahmin is equated to the mouth of the creator. Mouth being the noblest part of the anatomy, the Brahmin becomes the noblest of the four classes. As he is the noblest of the scale, he is given the noblest function, that of custodian of knowledge and learning, the Shudra is equated to the feet of the creator. The feet form the lowest and the most ignorable part of the human frame. Accordingly, the Shudra is placed last in the social order and is given the filthiest function, namely to serve as a menial. (Jaffrelot 2005, 34-35)

With the passage of time, the Vedic society created the fifth Varna and it was about periphery for Ati Shudras who have been denied space in Varnashramdharama.

It is said that injustice and cruelty cannot exist longer. After centuries, Brahminical notions were challenged by *Jainism, Bhuddhism, Bhakti movement, Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj* and *Jat pat Todak Mandal* and more. For them there was no space for caste but deeds, in The Jain Sutra, it is stated, “By one’s action one becomes a Brahmin or a Kashatriya or Vaishya or a Shudra.”(Muller 140). These movements had the fundamental purpose to reform the socio-religious structure of the Indian society from the caste ridden structure of the society. In modern history of India, Joti Rao Phule and Dr. Ambedkar emerged out as great social leader and revolutionary figure for Dalits. They led a crusade against Varnasharamdharama and fought for the basic rights such as equality, fraternity and liberty. Ashok Jha mentions about Phule; “It was his aim to reconstruct the social order on the basis of social equality, justice and reason.” (*Dalitisation* 18)

Dr. Ambedkar also made a relentless struggle for the political assertion of Dalit identity and many satyagrahas for the abolition Untouchability and Temple Entry for Dalits. Gandhi too stood with Ambedkar for ‘India is a homeland for Dalits’. Undoubtedly Ambedkar’s writings and speeches have been source of Dalit Literature.

To the context of Africa, we find the same extent of brutalities, genocide, rape and structural violence but in different way and reason. For Africans, the Whites were oppressors and colonial masters but for Dalits, they have oppressors from their own region and land. For them racism was the

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root cause of slavery and oppression and it was also been an ideological support for colonial hegemony. By the comparison of the both groups, it is noted that Dalits and Africans have experienced the past and the present full of brutality, inequality, oppression and injustice. With such experience they have been writing about their lives with the identity of Dalitness and blackness through literary narratives of pain. Their writings are mainly concerned about assertion of identity, dignity, equal rights and opportunity and hopes and aspiration of an egalitarian society.

By the paradigm shift, Dalit writers are making their own agency of representation and reclaiming the space. This research will include such work to define Dalit literature as the discourse of resistance: Sharan Kumar Limbale's *The Outcaste*, Kamble's *The Prison We Broke*, Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*.

There has been some issue of representation and representability but it is all about resistance. In *Untouchable*, Anand shows the predicament of the untouchables in the Indian society as denial of 'space'. Bakha knows why he is not able to occupy the space as all of a sudden, he realises his position in the words, "All of them abused, abused, why are we always abused? (. . .) because we touch dung. It is only the Hindus and the outcastes who are not sweepers. For them I am a sweeper (. . .) Untouchable! Untouchable! That's the word. I am untouchable." (Anand 1959 38)

Velutha in the novel, *The God of Small Things* was made silent to 'space' premised on the absence of power, the absence of self-determination against dominant social realities. Though he is god of small things, he carries a long suffering of pain and brooding despair. Aijaz Ahmad comments:

Velutha is the untouchable carpenter, the maker of little wonders in carved wood and thus the god of small things, whose tempestuous sexual encounter with Ammu, the upper caste woman, towards the end of the story violates all the love laws laid down by caste boundaries and the ideas of propriety as to who will love whom and how". (Ahmad 1997 105)

This denial of space and rights we also get in *The Prisons We Broke*, where Baby Kamble writes her experiences of caste oppression on Mahars and appalling poverty on her community. She makes the description of poverty of her community, "Children looked as if they had rolled in mud, snot crippling from their noses in green gooey lines. If one were to use a figure of speech, their noses were like leaky taps of snot. Their bodies would be completely bare without a stitch on them" (Kamble 2008 8)

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But the idea of resistance is what we get in *Joothan*, an autobiographical novel which is based on communal identity. It is among a body of Dalit writing that is unified by an ideology, an agenda and literary aesthetics. Valmiki's readership manifolds, "We need an ongoing struggle, and a consciousness of struggle, a consciousness that brings revolutionary change both in the outside and in our hearts, a consciousness that leads the process of social change." (Joothan X)

To the subject of resistance against race and colonial forces, African writers' writings: Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* and *Petals of Blood*; Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* and Meja Mwangi's *Carcase for Hounds* and *The Mzungu Boy* have negotiated the space for the African oppressed racially and politically and appeared as landmark in representation of Africans racial victims. When the African nation Kenya was under the British control, the colonial administration passed a policy for the giving more and more land for white settlers. Later it became a profitable base for Whites, besides using Africans as cheap labour. They claimed superiority in terms of race, power and knowledge and imposed on Africans distorted history of human civilisation. In the novel, *A Grain of Wheat* every character goes with relentless struggle to fight against race and colonial forces and uproot the colony in order to free nation and establish their own language and culture. Chinua Achebe is marked another influential writer who rewrote the history of his people before the arrival of the White people and the wretched time when they arrived to Igbo land in his seminal novel *Things Fall Apart* rejecting White Supremacy. To add a literary record over the history of violence due to race,

I am Black; I am in total fusion with the world, in sympathetic affinity with the earth, losing my id in the heart of the cosmos and the white man, however intelligent he may be, is incapable of understanding Louis Armstrong or songs from the Congo. I am black, not because of a curse, but because my skin has been able to capture all the cosmic effluvia. I am truly a drop of sun under the earth. (Fanon 1986:27)

The above quote from Jean-Paul Sartre's introduction to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* states that how African natives lived in trauma, violence and mental chaos and how White supremacy crumbled them into for long years of instability.

In order to bring the Dalits and Africans in limelight, the literary representation will be a very significant step to put the problems at public sphere. It is the time to rewrite the history of Dalit literature and Dalit lives and in the similar fashion Black Africans have challenged the unshakeable foundations of the White masters.

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Review of Literature:

To tender the great change in the society we come across different kind of school of thoughts that talk about structuring society, fighting and struggling against the aged old oddities. These school of thoughts known as Hegelian, French, Nationalist, Marxist and subaltern as they nurtured the main motive to articulate their explicit corrective political agenda pushing subaltern and a historical lives from margin to centre. The influence of these schools from the West also entered to India and Africa as a result we found some legends like Fanon, wa Thiong'o, Phule and Ambedkar. In a review of Fred Majdalany's: "A State of Emergency: The Full Story of Mau Mau", Ngugi talks about revolutionary movement as a means to change a corrupt and oppressive colonial government, "Violence to change an intolerable unjust social order is not savagery: it purifies man. Violence to protect and preserve an unjust and oppressive social order is criminal and diminishes man." (Ngugi 1983 18). Ambedkar too juxtaposed his writing, speeches and activism for the liberation of his own community.

Imbibing this impact, the domain writers took their writing as their weapons of revolution but Savarna and White critics misrepresented and blamed that they could write without form and meanings. Limbale in his book *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* against those elite critics says:

A realistic and accurate representation of African Americans cannot be found in the American literature up to the Civil war. Marathi writers have not portrayed Dalits accurately either. Middle-class writers wrote novels about the lives of Dalits, based on their own imagination. Due to the absence of the authentic experience of Dalit life, these works are lifeless, shallow and distorted. (Limbale 92)

B.R. Ambedkar correspond similar critique in his article entitled "Slaves and Untouchables" where he writes:

Slavery was never obligatory. But untouchability is obligatory. The law of slavery permitted emancipation. Once a slave always a slave was not the fate of the slave. In untouchability there is no escape. Once an Untouchable always an Untouchable. The other difference is that untouchability is an indirect form of slavery. (Kapoor 208)

But the slavery comes to touch the same level. Since there has been colonial control over the economy and natural resources of the nation, the Africans have been compelled to be enslaved and

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auctioned for survival, once they become slaves, women have undergone another torture done by White masters and they have been treated as sexual slaves and objects.

By the process of learning and research, a new vision might begin slowly but steadily a powerful movement and new discourse to guide the voiceless. The aforesaid narratives will provide Africans and Dalit traditions and culture to challenge elite literature and perceptions. It might invent some theories that will draw attentions of academicians, statesmen and social thinkers to develop alternative yardstick to measure and value writings of voiceless. As a result, it must be given space just equal to the mainstream writings in seminars, University syllabi, and literary genres and so on.

Conclusion

To conclude, it can be strongly stated that both the domains have gained a momentum as known as a literature of resistance. It is to establish an alternative paradigm and also reconfigure the contours of everyday materiality. It draws the attention of academics and social spheres and the people of the world to reflect the meaning on the ground realities of Dalits and Africans. The paper will be instrumental to have dissemination of knowledge and vision of Dalit studies and a great literature from Africa.

Further it would be an attempt to focus on the demand of egalitarian notion and just society. Let it be hoped that our discussion may bring Dalit consciousness and African Literature to people adding some new history to Dalit and Africans movement, literature and culture.

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