

## Repression and Resistance in Dalit Feminist Literature

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### Abstract

Feminist movements and Dalit feminist movement in India are mainly based on the experience of Repression and gender discrimination. Patriarchy, gender disparity and sexual violence are the basic reasons for these movements and they also find place prominently in the writings of Dalit women as they have come forward to write their experiences from women's point of view around 1980s. Baby Kamble, Urmila Pawar in Marathi, Geeta Nagabhushan in Kannada, P. Shivakami, Bama in Tamil have got national level consideration. Dalit women were raped; insulted and abused by the upper caste people. They are insecure in the society as they have been exploited on the various levels. This feeling of insecurity of the Dalit women is the central theme of their writings. These women writers have come forward to express their ideas, their experiences in social violence as well as in domestic violence and thus they protest their traditional existence with anger and anguish. Geeta Nagabhushan's dalit novels, Barna's *Sangati* (2005), P. Shivakani's *Grip of Change* (2006) are initial important writings of dalit feminism; Dalit feminism writing is different from the conventional way of Feminist writing. Their experiences, expression, method of narration are extremely different from the upper caste women writers. It is found that every woman in the world has been degraded to second grade citizenship. The Dalit women in India suffer more due to their Dalit identity.

**Keywords-** Feminism, Anguish, Suppression, Equality, Injustice

Feminism is a strong source of inspiration for the contemporary Dalit women writers. Individual identity is at centre of almost all Dalit feminist writing. They ask questions to the traditional values and call upon all Dalit women to identify their inherent powers and live a respectful life. They even raise voice against social organizations, Dalit male writers and activists who deceived dalit women in all field and complain that Dalit men activists talk about humanity but are not humane towards their wives. Dalit feminists struggle to change the base of the society by writing their radical thoughts. As Dalit feminism is a new phenomenon, no strong voice is raised against social injustice so far. Dalit feminism is very much concerned for and commitment towards humanity; and it raises its voice against any kind of narrow attitude, violence and vengeance on the Dalit women and freedom of entire community. Dalit woman is taken into consideration as cheerful and satiated as she never raised her voice against injustice done to her. But her anguish is bursting out from her heart. Sukanya Maruti says,

Enough of this life on earth

The blame and the humiliation.  
Why does the roaring ocean not  
Open its belly and swallow me?

(Sreenivasan, *Journal of Literature and Aesthetics* p-274)

Dalit feminist writers are exhibiting their anger in their writings. They give preference to liberation and equality of women. Dalit feminists are against Marxism as caste and gender have not been included in it. Dalit feminism is the result of Dalit woman's bad experiences. Atrocities and social discrimination have compelled them to express their anger. The atrocities and injustice on Dalit women on the base of religious customs, cultural and social norms are the main concerns of Dalit feminists and are poignantly depicted by dalit women in their writings. Vemula Ellaiah points out, "Where there is oppression, there is resistance. Oppression in a way is counterproductive. Since dalit women are oppressed, they will find their own forms of resistance and dalit feminism is a form of resistance" (Purushotham K. and Bheemaih J., *Journal of Literature and Aesthetics* p-341).

In comparison to upper caste women, Dalit women's life is filled with ups and downs. The upper caste women have been suppressed by their husband, Dalit women's life is full with suppression from all direction. Sexual humiliation of women is the worst kind of humiliation for any community. Caste system and patriarchal subjugation are main reasons for sexual humiliation. The irony is that, though Dalit males disapprove the philosophy of *Manusmriti*, they are the followers of this philosophy in real life so far as Dalit women are concerned. Dalit women suffer from maltreatment, oppression by their husband and in-laws. Writing of Dalit women is the apt examples of all the ill-treatment. Tayavva and Tali in Geeta Nagabhusan's *Aasaregalu* (1996. Props), Son, in B. T. Lalita Nayak's *Gati* (1986 Plight) are the representatives of many oppressed Dalit women who are suffering in the dark corner of the society. Neither Tayavva, nor Tali, nor Soni get support from any men, either in parental home or in their in-laws' houses. They struggle too hard to lead the life and are the symbols of every Dalit women who are suffering every day. They have to say that they suffer only because of their husband and in-laws.

The main theme of feminist Dalit literature is to focus on women as victims of sexual harassment; she is stripped naked, molested, raped, assaulted and burnt for no proper reason. Dalit women have rejected their traditional image and have raised their voice against their exploitation. The upper caste people do not think of caste or untouchability while imposing corporal punishment or at the time of indulging in lecherous activities or while committing rapes. If she accepts, lecherous activities of men, she does not remain an untouchable. Treatment of Sohini by Pandit Kalinath in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, (1935) exposes the ill-treatment of, Dalit women by high caste men. In Bama's *Sangati* (2009) Mariamma escapes from village chief who tries to molest her, but is eventually harassed in front of Panchayat by the chief. There is an upsurge of such incidents in dalit women's writings. Gender and caste legacy is widely prevalent in modern time in India. In some case, gender discrimination is allowed and even justified on the grounds of caste. Thus, the violence against women has been institutionalized. If there is an incident of caste clash, the high castes Hindus suppress them by destroying their crops, burning their houses and raping their women. Rape of Dalit women is a sharp weapon of high caste people. Dalit women have been living in the atmosphere of constant violence in the society. They do not have social status and their problems are harsh, because of caste.

Literature written by Dalit women is a voice of resistance because of their hardships. Anger against Hindu religion, culture and divine laws seen constantly in Dalit feminist writings. Jyoti Lanjewar, a Marathi Dalit woman writer, expresses anger in the following lines,

Begging won't get anything here  
Not sympathy, not love,  
A suit in court wins injustice.  
Tears are of no value,  
Getting water is a struggle,  
Wrapping yourself in smoke from a dead fire won't work,  
You have to plant the cinder of revolt in your own body.

(Anand Mulk Raj and Zelliott Eleanor, *An Anthology of Dalit Literature*, p-104)

Dalit feminist literature says that, all women should be respected and treated as human beings irrespective of their caste. Rebellion, revolt, anguishes and agonies are constantly found in Dalit feminist literature that craves for equality and justice, rejecting Jamindari system, illiteracy, atrocities, suppression and sexual exploitation. They revolt against existing conditions and express hurdles of their life in their writings. They have worked as village servants, cutting wood, carrying messages, bringing fuel/dragging out dead carcasses, etc. Large portion of their writing represents such menial work. Nevertheless, experiences of oppression, dispossession, exclusion, subjugation are also widely visible in their writing. Dalit feminists believe that promiscuity is the result of injustice inflicted by snvarnas on dalit women. Gayatri Spivak argues that the voice of the subalterns is not heard properly:

It is not so much that subaltern women did not speak, but rather that others did not know how to listen, how to enter into a transaction between speaker and listener. The subaltern cannot because their words cannot be properly interpreted. Hence, the silence of the female as subaltern is the result of failure of interpretation and not a failure of articulation. (Nubile Clara: *The Danger of Gender: Caste, Class and Gender in Contemporary Indian Women's Writing*, p-35)

After independence, Dalit women appeared in cultural arena by breaking the silence. This is shown in Urmila Pdwar and Meenakshi Moon's *Aamihih Itihas Ghadawala*. (Even We have Made History, 1978). In Dalit feminist literature, Dalit women express their conditions authentically. Historically, there is no evidence of protest and resistance of Dalit women against exploitation. They led such a life that they had never been allowed even to perceive and think of their misery. After a long period, they have now become the subject of writing, appearing as a child widow, child bride, married girl, suffering mother, suffering daughter-in-law, left at the mercy of the in-laws. Different images of Dalit woman, who is crushed by the joint Hindu family, have found place in their writings. Science and technology has created new environment and encouraged Dalit women to portray their real conditions. The sorrows, miseries, servitude, misfortunes, sexual exploitations and assaults of Dalit women have occupied central part of the literature. Though their writing has appeared in different regional languages there is not much difference in sensibility articulated by Dalit women.

Dalit women's writing, which has emerged from anger, pain, and inequality, it gives a detailed picture of Dalit society, exploitation of Dalit women by their husbands at home and by their landlords at working place. Dalit feminist writing protests the established social system which is based on injustice. Dalit women writers express their sufferings in different voices and these voices are explosive and violent, which is the only way of resisting extreme physical violence, frustration and sexual dominance. Poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, question of livelihood all have pushed them to the state of anguish, and make their voice explosive. Therefore, we should not think that by only

shifting from home to public life and going to work place does not mean that they are liberated from the law of patriarchy.

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