

THE RISE AND IMPACT OF MARGINALISED LITERATURE IN MODERN INDIAN LITERATURE

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Abstract :

Modern Indian literature has witnessed a significant rise in works that focus on the experiences of socially marginalised groups such as Dalits, Adivasis, and women. This genre, rooted in the socio-political movements of marginalised communities, has gained considerable traction among readers and scholars alike. Through oral narratives, autobiographical accounts, and translations, these voices have found a platform in contemporary literary discourse. This article explores the emergence, mechanisms, and impact of marginalised literature in India, highlighting its role in addressing identity, social prejudice, and economic marginalisation while fostering cultural recognition and social realism.

Keywords : Marginalised literature, Dalit literature, Adivasi literature, Feminist literature, Social realism.

Introduction :

Modern Indian literature has experienced a surge in narratives that spotlight the social realities of marginalised communities, including Dalits, Adivasis, and women. This genre, often referred to as marginalised literature, has carved out a significant space in the literary landscape by presenting stories from the perspectives of those who have historically been oppressed and excluded. These narratives not only reflect the cultural and traditional heritage of these groups but also engage with contemporary socio-political issues, providing a voice to the voiceless. This article delves into the rise of marginalised literature, examining its origins, evolution, and the critical role it plays in modern Indian literature.

The Rise of Marginalised Literature in Modern Indian Literature :

Modern Indian literature has had a recent surge in work that focuses on social themes. A burgeoning genre of literature has surfaced, known as Dalit, Adivasi, and feminist literature, authored by individuals who hail from the very backgrounds they depict in their writings. This genre has gained significant popularity among readers. Authors craft narratives from the point of view of persons who are politically, economically, and socially marginalised.

The Emergence and Mechanisms of Marginalised Literature :

A significant socio-political movement has led to the emergence of marginalised literature. Marginalisation is the process by which society isolates, excludes, and pushes an individual to the edge. It is a methodical procedure, a form of collusion intricately constructed like a network with the inherent qualities of control and subjugation, compelling the subject to surrender. A multitude of works addressing women, Dalits, Adivasis, and peasants emerged with the objective of amplifying the discourse on identity within society.

The Role of Oral Narratives and Modern Literary Recognition :

Oral narratives, transmitted throughout generations through spoken language, commonly shaped their narratives, highlighting their abundant cultural and traditional legacy. It is only in recent decades that different writers have written these stories, providing them with a voice and establishing their identity in the contemporary world. Prestigious literary journals frequently feature the publication of concise narratives, poems, essays, and autobiographical writings. Many educational institutions acknowledge the new voice by incorporating writing samples into their courses.

The Impact and Scope of Marginalised Literature :

This movement effectively tackles the marginalisation, adversity, and endeavour of individuals to develop their own identity and place. The movement extensively examines and emphasises these challenges as its core characteristics. Furthermore, there is currently a substantial endeavour in progress to render literature from many languages into English, thereby giving a platform to those who lack representation. We establish a connection between these changes to larger procedures of societal portrayal, research of one's identity, and scholastic success.

Continuing Challenges and the Role of Literature :

Adivasis, Dalits, and females continue to experience enduring social prejudice and economic marginalisation. Nevertheless, literature has become a notable method of self-expression for these communities, indicating an improved social identity.

Embrace of Social Realism and Cultural Nationalism:

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, Indian authors started to adopt social realism and promote cultural nationalism. Although the author's identity and the circumstances of the poem are disputed, Hira Dom's 1914 poem "The Cry of an Untouchable" (Ek Achut ki Aah) is often seen as an early instance of contemporary marginalised writing in India. It had a crucial part in fostering a new discourse on the 'empowerment of the untouchable' throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Consequently, this became a crucial component of Mahatma Gandhi's political theory and nationwide campaign.

Challenges in Reconciling Pride with Equality :

Sisir Kumar Das examines the struggle encountered by authors in the late colonial to early post-colonial period of Indian literature as they grapple with the task of balancing their admiration for Hindu social groups with the principle of equality in his chapter on the 'narratives of suffering'. Literature portraying the experiences of marginalised populations acts as a mirror of the collective consciousness about the social, political, economic, and racial injustices suffered by these people across several generations. During the period after gaining independence, there was a notable increase in the production of literature that focused on the experiences and perspectives of marginalised groups.

Historical Significance of Marginalised Literature:

The emergence of marginalised literature has considerable historical significance. Historically, Dalits, Adivasis, and females have been marginalised in Indian society. These disadvantaged communities articulate their distress and intricate circumstances via their literature, including the disintegration of familial systems, extreme poverty, degradation, and demanding living conditions. The word "marginalised" is often used to refer to the Dalits and Adivasis in India, since these two groups have traditionally faced economic and cultural marginalisation.

Overlooked Plight of Women :

While our attention is mostly directed on classifying marginalised people according to caste and class differentiations, we often neglect the challenges faced by women in our society who are deprived of their rights within their own community and lack autonomy. The Dalits, Adivasis, and women are campaigning for both economic benefits and cultural validation, as well as a distinct sense of identity. Munshi Premchand's short tales and novels often tackle the predicament of marginalised communities. The acclaimed book *Godan* provides a deep insight into the systematic subjugation of the impoverished within the context of the contrasting states of affluence and destitution, as well as the caste system.

Literary Responses to Premchand's Work :

The story revolves on Hori and Dhaniya, who represent small-scale farmers from marginalised socio-economic backgrounds. Jayprakash Kardam's *Chappar* is a significant addition to Dalit literature, offering a

direct reaction to Premchand's *Godan*. Chandan, the protagonist of the story, has resemblance to Hori, a character created by Premchand. In spite of facing financial difficulties, Chandan aspires to bestow a cow onto a Brahmin, certain that it is the only means to lead a meaningful existence. Mulk The Untouchable, written by Raj Anand, is widely regarded as a groundbreaking piece of Indian English literature. It has the same social reformer viewpoints as Premchand and Jayprakash Karam.

Technological Progress and Liberation :

The protagonist of the tale is Bakha, who works as a sweeper, specifically known as a bhanghi. The reason for his lack of social awareness is his inability to understand the prejudice he experiences from others. He holds the belief that his detested job of cleaning toilets can only be escaped by technical advancements, namely the installation of new water closets. When writers assume the responsibility of representing marginalised communities like Dalits and Adivasis, their works often exhibit a gendered viewpoint.

Gendered Perspectives in Marginalised Literature :

Literature that focuses on the disadvantages faced by males often seeks to understand and empathise with the hardships that women experience. There is a tendency to have a likeable male main character or hero in the story. In their works, they use a method called "scripting atrocities" to vividly portray acts of sexual violence, including public disrobing and rape of women. The book "Aj Bazar Band Hai" by Mohanadasa Naimisaraya delves into the humanitarian endeavours of Sumit, an untainted journalist, who motivates prostitutes to recover their self-respect by challenging their assigned fate and liberating themselves from their immoral ways of life.

Empathy and Inclusive Unity :

He depicts prostitutes as 'members of the country'. Surajpal Chauhan's short story "Ahalya" is an archetypal tale about a mythical female character who is turned into stone as a result of Lord Indra's anger. This narrative serves as a prime example of its kind. The adivasi poem of Ram Dayal Mumda, titled 'Just like you, I too', shows a deep and profound understanding of empathy and inclusive solidarity among individuals of all genders. 'Like you, I use bovine excrement as a fuel source for the oven.' In this situation, the narrator used the pronoun 'you' to specifically address her elderly grandmother.

Commonalities and Distinct Characteristics in Marginalised Women's Writings :

The writings produced by women who are marginalised have unique qualities, although they also exhibit similarities with the writings of males who are disadvantaged. Similarities may also be found in female writing that is not neglected. In her autobiography "Dohra Abhishap" (Double Curse), Baisantri challenges the dominant male perspective and its misleading assertion of gender neutrality. This literature functions as a mirror of society, illuminating the different dynamics of male-female interactions in Dalit culture as opposed to those in upper-caste Hindu society. The memoirs provide an appropriate classification of the male characters, including Baisantri's spouse, as individuals who exhibit male chauvinistic attitudes in several aspects.

Labour and Economic Contributions of Marginalised Women :

Labour acts as a distinguishing factor between women belonging to disadvantaged and non-marginalized socioeconomic strata. A woman belonging to a disadvantaged group has more exposure to the outside world and, like the male members of her family, contributes to the economic framework of her household by earning revenue via employment. Marginalised women, because to their vulnerability and lack of independence, are more vulnerable to injury. However, they also exhibit more confidence and self-assurance. In contrast, middle-class women largely prioritise domestic duties and depend on their husbands as the main earners.

Viramma: An Autobiographical Illustration :

The autobiographical tale "Viramma" portrays the determined character of an illiterate, lower-class Dalit woman. During an interview with a French anthropologist, the anthropologist discloses that despite her little formal education, she effectively navigates her existence in the village, deftly managing disputes and safeguarding her own identity. Furthermore, she reveals extensive details about her life to the person conducting the interview, including the repercussions of her assertiveness on her marital relationship. Readers learn that the power dynamics in husband-wife interactions are less hierarchical in rural working-class homes compared to middle-class marriages.

The Evolution of Dalit Writing and Its Recognition :

Since about 1992, the Indian diaspora has been aggressively promoting the acknowledgment of Dalit literature as a noteworthy literary genre, distinguished by the author's social identity. The authorship of Dalit and Adivasi persons within the Indian diaspora is marked by the clear distinction between two interrelated notions, namely 'empathy and compassion' (shanutviti) and 'experience' (anutviti). Some writers who are marginalised may refuse to accept works by authors who are not marginalised, when it comes to discussing marginalised perspectives, due to the latter's limited personal experience.

Debates on Empathy and Experience in Dalit Literature :

The discourse on Dalit themes in literature, namely the juxtaposition of anutviti and shanutviti, mirrors the discussions on gender in feminist writing. Disregarded literature is superficial, if not entirely fictional, and can never compare to 'experience'. Therefore, empathy by itself is inadequate.

Historical Dalit Protest Movements :

In the early 1800s, the Dalits began to establish protest groups in different parts of India. The regional-level movements largely focused on addressing the Dalits' menial, contaminating, uncompensated or undercompensated, and hazardous occupations, as well as their practice of untouchability. The mentioned movements include the Satnami Movement (1820–1830) in Madhya Pradesh, the Adi-Dharm Movement (early nineteenth century) in Punjab, the Ezhavas or Iravas Movement (early nineteenth century) in Kerala, the Nadar Movement (1920s) in Tamil Nadu, Ambedkar's Movement (from 1920 onwards), and the Dalit Solidarity Programme (from 1992) as a nationwide movement. These movements engaged Dalits not just in the roles of initiators or leaders, but also as members or participants. The participation of those outside the Dalit community in these movements has been minimal and, in the majority of instances, nonexistent.

Perspectives on the Caste System :

Although all of these regional projects shared the goal of eliminating untouchability, their proponents had diverse viewpoints on the matter and used distinct approaches to tackle it. Some people believed that although the caste system itself was not inherently evil, the sanctioned practice of untouchability within it was. Therefore, their main goal was just to eliminate untouchability rather than tackle the whole caste system. A considerable proportion of those who acknowledged this were non-Dalits.

Efforts to Elevate Dalit Status :

Conversely, other people argued that caste itself was not inherently harmful, but rather the problem lay in the marginalised position that Dalits held within the caste system. As a result, they sought to improve the social status of the Dalits, who were traditionally placed in a lower position within the caste system. They felt they were entitled to a higher position in the caste system. Their conviction was that by advancing the Dalits to a higher status within the caste hierarchy, they could successfully eradicate the social disgrace of untouchability associated with them. Both the Nadar Movement in Tamil Nadu and the Ezhavas or Iravas Movement in Kerala strive to accomplish their objectives.

Divergent Approaches in Dalit Movements :

Although both the Nadars (historically known as Chanaan) and the Ezhavas were engaged in the occupation of extracting toddy, their attitudes to their individual conflicts differed. The Chanaan group of Tamil Nadu self-identified as Nadar, indicating their status as rulers, and claimed their place as Kshatriyas within the caste system. They prioritised enhancing their economic status and political clout. As a result, their belief in untouchability disappeared. People have ceased to see them as untouchables. They have become a model or ideal figure for other persons who are part of the Dalit community (Hardgrave, 1969, p. 81).

Identity Transformation and Conversion :

Many Dalits who reside in urban areas and are not part of the Nadar or Chanaan group frequently choose to identify themselves as Nadars to conceal their stigmatised and untouchable social position. By the end of the 19th century, the Jatavas, an untouchable caste in Agra, had successfully claimed the position of Kshatriyas, a higher social class, in order to counteract the negative perception associated with their identity. Nevertheless, this movement was of little duration and eventually proved unsuccessful in attaining its goals. The lower castes tried to imitate the habits of the upper castes as a means of protecting themselves from the practice of untouchability (Ambedkar, 1979; Lynch, 1969).

The Caste System and Dalit Movements :

However, there were some who maintained the viewpoint that the caste system was intrinsically flawed and, as a result, required its total abolition. This is the predominant view held by the majority of Dalits and the groups they support. They hold the belief that the presence of a caste system sustains social stratification, leading to an imbalance of power and status between the upper and lower castes. Some Dalit groups conducted a retroactive analysis of their beginnings, saw themselves as a separate cultural group, and sought to connect with their 'neglected' identity while disassociating from and protesting against their present identification as untouchables within the Hindu society.

The Adi-Dharm Movement :

The Adi-Dharm Movement exemplifies such an undertaking. The Adi-Dharm Movement was founded by the Churas of Punjab. The Churas, who are members of the Scheduled Castes (SCs), were dissatisfied with the social status that was allocated to them within the Hindu social structure. To establish their own sense of self, they aligned themselves with a movement called "Adi-Dharm". It was an autonomous religious system, akin to a religion, that originated in the early 1900s. The participants of this campaign demanded recognition as Adi-Dharmis instead of being categorised as Hindu untouchables. However, this attempt once again proved to be unsuccessful, since a division arose among them based on sub-castes. A considerable proportion of persons renounced their association with Adi-Dharma and embraced other egalitarian faiths.

Dalit Movements and New Religious Identities :

A group of Dalits, driven by their aspiration to eliminate the caste system and the notion of untouchability, founded a different religion that is independent from Hinduism. The Satnami Movement, which emerged between 1820 and 1830, is a prominent example. Ghasi Das, the founder of the organisation, belonged to the Chamar caste, which is classified as a Scheduled Caste (SC). Following a prolonged period of seclusion, Ghasi Das imparted profound and influential insights to his fellow members of the caste. He claimed that all individuals were equal irrespective of their caste, and that there was only one god, referred to as the God of the authentic name, or 'Satnami'. He took on the position of the highest-ranking religious leader and forbade the worship of Hindu deities, the rituals associated with them, and the use of wine, tobacco, and meat. The popularity of this movement significantly decreased after the death of Ghasi Das in 1850. This movement made no significant effort to improve the economic situation of its followers. The Chamars' stigmatised identity remained unaffected by it in the long term.

The Pulayas of Kerala and Conversion to Christianity :

In order to mitigate their plight of untouchability, the Pulayas of Kerala resorted to conversion as a strategic measure. The Pulayas started their transition to Christianity in the 17th century, and this progression intensified significantly in the early 20th century. In the early twentieth century, they began protesting against the practice of untouchability. The Pulayas, influenced by both the Nadar Movement and the Ezhavas Movement, expressed their objection not only to the abhorrent practice of untouchability and political marginalisation but also to economic exploitation. They embraced Christianity on a large scale in order to secure their physical, economic, and social welfare. Nevertheless, despite their conversion to a new faith, they continued to face difficulties in breaking free from the repressive caste system and the notion of untouchability (Mathew, 1986, pp. 97–119).

Conclusion :

The emergence of marginalised literature in contemporary Indian literary scene signifies a notable transformation in the literary and cultural milieu. This genre has effectively highlighted themes of social injustice, identity, and economic marginalisation by giving prominence to the voices of Dalits, Adivasis, and women. The incorporation of these tales into widely accepted literary discussions and educational curriculum indicates an increasing acknowledgment of their significance. Despite persistent obstacles, the continual development and influence of marginalised writing highlight its crucial function in promoting empathy, cultural acknowledgment, and societal transformation in Indian culture.

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