

ISSN : 2395-4132

THE EXPRESSION

An International Multi-Disciplinary e-Journal

Bi-Monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal



Impact Factor 3.9

Vol. 3 Issue 5 Oct. 2017

Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh

Email : editor@expressionjournal.com

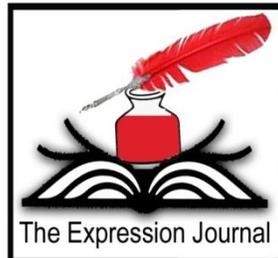
www.expressionjournal.com

The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 3.9)

www.expressionjournal.com

ISSN: 2395-4132



THE BACK DROP OF THE SOCIAL CHANGE

P. Mohan Rao

Assistant Professor

GRIET, Hyderabad

.....

Abstract

Dalit autobiography is a distinct genre of literature; Dalit autobiographical narratives constitute a significant of Dalit literature. Dalit autobiographies are strong means to fight against the social inequalities and injustice, Dalit autobiographies written by various Dalit writers broke the traditional uppercaste autobiographical writings which deepest the romanticized version of life, when the main stream autobiography ignored Dalit lives Dalit writers have been using writing as a weapon for their social assertion. In Marathi the Dalit writers have developed it as narrative of struggle against caste monopoly. One important feature of such writings is that varna vyavastha which declared Dalits as most inferior and untouchable part of society in this struggle autobiographies serves as moral source for Dalit movement. It is mainly since the sixties of this century that the word Dalit became on explosive catchword for social, cultural and political revolutionary movements launched by untouchable caste, essentially the mahars, in expressions such as Dalit Literature or Dalit movement.

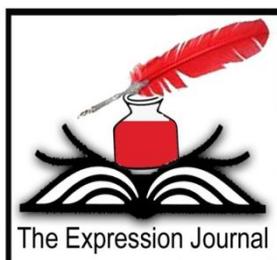
Key-Words

Dalit Marginalization, Self-Narratives, Self-Assertion, Search for Identity,
Dalit Movement, Autobiography.

.....

Vol. 3 Issue 5 (October 2017)

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Bijender Singh



THE BACK DROP OF THE SOCIAL CHANGE

P. Mohan Rao
Assistant Professor
GRIET, Hyderabad

.....

1.0. Autobiographies as Assessment of Social Tyranny

An autobiography may be based entirely on the writer's memory because the biographer, generally, depends on a wide variety of documents and viewpoints. The word autobiography was first used in its present sense by Robert Southey in 1809 though its original inventor William Taylor condemned the word with a sense of disapproval as 'pedantic' in 1797 in the English periodical the *Monthly Review*. However, the form of autobiography goes back to the distant past. Autobiographical works are by nature subjective. Some sociologists and psychologists have noted that autobiography offers the author the ability to recreate history.

It has been seen for centuries that, through autobiographical accounts, victims of social oppression have been able to present striking analysis of the oppression they have undergone. Among the more renowned of such works are the writings of Primo Levi, one of many personal accounts of the Shoah. Similarly, there are many works detailing atrocities and malevolence of communist regimes like Nadezhda Mandelstam's *Hope against Hope* and so on. From the 17th century onwards, "scandalous memoirs" by supposed libertines, serving a public taste for titillation, have been frequently published. They were typically pseudonymous and largely works of fiction written by ghost writers. Though such a work may be called as "fictional autobiography", writing about an imaginary character, the characters were writing their own biography. Some of those are Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders*, Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, and J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is yet another example of fictional autobiography, as noted on the front page of the original version. The term may also apply to works of fiction claiming to be autobiographies of real characters, e.g., Robert Nye's *Memoirs of Lord Byron*

1.1. Postmodernism, Autobiography, and Genre

In the present scenario, certain questions arise such as to what extent the theories, methods, and insights of postmodernism allow us to know about autobiography and to what extent the techniques, practices, and cultures of autobiography reveal about postmodernism. Autobiography,

The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 3.9)

www.expressionjournal.com

ISSN: 2395-4132

as a self-representational practice that is complexly situated within cultures, and autobiography studies, as an increasingly transdisciplinary critical practice, have incorporated postmodernist techniques and critiques with a variety of results. It seems appropriate, therefore, to consider the mutual historicization of autobiography and postmodernism, especially in the context of their shared interest in theorizing the subject. Postmodernism's performance of questioning not only intersects with but powerfully structures contemporary interest in autobiography.

A glance at the history of autobiography studies reveals that, at the end of the 1970s, just as the challenges to traditional modes of scholarly practice posed by more explicitly political forms of criticism and theory were affecting the academy, the study of autobiography was being remade. Two collections of essays published in 1980 inaugurated a new wave of interest: *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, edited by Estelle C. Jelinek, and *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, edited by James Olney. These were characterized by the vital conjunction of autobiography and emerging forms of criticism. Jelinek's collection situated feminist criticism in relation to autobiography, and Olney's collection examined autobiography through a range of emerging post-structuralisms.

Together, they demonstrated the impact of contemporary theory on the field. Moreover, in both volumes, there was evidence of an emerging critical focus on the mechanisms of value by which some autobiographers and autobiographical practices had been marginalized.

In traditional studies of autobiography, the terms that are likely to shift within postmodernism are taken as the stable elements in the story of one's life. Texts that affirm this stability, or that can be constructed as affirming it, form the "tradition" of autobiography. Clearly, the time has come to consider the implications of genre for autobiography, Postmodernism's skepticism about generic typology. The insights of some postmodernists into the functioning of ideology and representation offer an occasion to rethink the relation between autobiography and its tradition, as well as the status of autobiography as a genre.

1.2. Dalit Autobiography: A Medium for the Dalits' Revolution

Autobiographies are part of a literary genre that brings personal accounts of life in public domain. They incite others too to relate with their human emotions and circumstances with lived-up reality of the autobiography writer. Autobiographies serve different purpose in different times and if autobiographies of Dalit writers are called as narrative of pain, it carries certain historical truth. We can find such stories of bitter truth in different languages.

In Marathi, the Dali writers have developed it as narrative of struggle against caste monopoly. In Hindi also, several autobiographies were written to express precarious living conditions of Dalits. Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, Mohandas Namisray's *Apne-Apne Pinjarey* and Surajpal Chouhan's *Tiriskrat* are important autobiographies. Saran Kumar Limbale's *Akkarmasi* and Daya Pawar's *Baluta* were written in Marathi but have been translated into almost all languages. One important feature of such writings is that they are strongly social assessments of *varnvyavastha* which declared Dalits as most inferior and untouchable part of society. In this struggle, autobiographies serve as moral source for Dalit movement. They split open the pain and sufferings experienced by Dalits under the rigidity of tradition. All such autobiography writers

Vol. 3 Issue 5 (October 2017)

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Bijender Singh

The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 3.9)

www.expressionjournal.com

ISSN: 2395-4132

describe their childhood suffering and the cruel experiences of untouchability mostly in rural background.

In an autobiography, it is a normal trend to glorify the 'self' and boast about the extraordinary quality of oneself, but it changes at the hands of a Dalit writer. When he/she writes, it's about denial of opportunities, even to live as an ordinary human being. The self becomes the representative of all other Dalits who were crushed down and kept down because of their Dalit identity. Their entire life narrative gains a representative quality and imparts the true feeling of the sting they have suffered. The protagonist of the autobiography is, of course, the writer himself, but his personal experiences, instead of being unique and individualistic, cover the general condition of the whole Dalit community. They are called by their caste names like Bhangi, Chamar, Chuhara, Katik, etc. and in essence, these names stand for their state of untouchability. In colloquial terms, the world for them turns into an insult.

The *Dalit* literature is one of its most significant recent trends since the sixties (*Poitevin 1996*). The trend is still alive, possibly on the increase, and a matter of literary debates and dissemination in a score of specialized journals, academic studies, literary conferences and seminars, regular press reports and articles. The term *Dalit* literally signifies the depressed and suppressed groups of various social formations (*Guru 1998: 59*). But it is used in ways which vary with the specificity of contexts, the speakers' ideological positions and the political strategies of those who address audiences with it. In the matter of facts, the term is essentially a political idiom and often puts one in a temper.

It is mainly since the sixties of this century that the word *Dalit* became an explosive catchword for social, cultural, and political revolutionary movements launched by untouchable castes, essentially the *mahars*, in expressions such as "*Dalit* literature" (*Anand 1992; Dangle 1992; Lanjewar 1995; Gros 1996; Bhoite 1977*) and "*Dalit* movement" (*Jogdand 1991; Gopinath 1994; Kshirsagar 1994; Omwedt 1994, 1995; Pendse 1994*). The use of the word actually tends to be appropriate for the castes traditionally discriminated as untouchables. This also refers to their specific conditions of cultural indignity and social subalternity. This limitation is often denounced as an illegitimate political discursive event. But the word is commonly used with this restrictive meaning by the supporters, as well as the critics and opponents of the *Dalit* liberation movements in India.

This explains that the term *Dalit* often leads to controversies among social reformists, literary analysts, social scientists, and political workers on account of its ambiguities and strong political overtones (*Guru 1998*). As a result, we enlist as autobiographical writers not only a number of untouchable caste members, as it might be expected, but also members of other socially weak categories who may be culturally stigmatized and socially boycotted for reason of untouchability. Dalithood is a kind of life condition that characterizes the exploitation, suppression and marginalization of *Dalit* people by the social, economic, cultural, and political domination of the upper castes' Brahmanical ideology (*Ambedkar 1990: 204*).

1.3. Indian Untouchables and African Blacks: A Similar Story

Dalit literature in India finds a similar position like the African-American black literature.

Vol. 3 Issue 5 (October 2017)

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Bijender Singh

The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 3.9)

www.expressionjournal.com

ISSN: 2395-4132

Both the literatures depict miseries of the downtrodden people through caste discrimination and racial discrimination in the respective countries. Such people have become victims of a peculiar class or caste structure. Race is nature made while caste is manmade (*Dangle 1992:306*). However, the similarity between the both is that the blacks could not change their colour of skins nor could the untouchables their caste. Both black and Dalit writers are in search of their respective identities in society. Both writers write for the awareness of social commitment and the aim is to find new cultural values.

For radical thinkers like Baburao Bagul, major ideologue of Dali panther, the category is structured and extended as to carry the history of the revolutionary struggles of all oppressed people, and has the “ontological ability to define itself with all the lower castes, tribal people, toiling classes and women.” “The term represents those who have been broken and ground down by those above them in a deliberate manner...In the term and concept Dalit itself there is an inherent denial of dignity, a sense of pollution and an acceptance of the karma theory that justifies the caste hierarchy.” (*Zelliot 1992: 267*)

1.4. Dalit Autobiography

In the 1970's, initially with the rise of education, the Dalit panther and other Dalit writers began to write short stories and personal life stories. Cheap news paper and cheap printing began to develop these economic and social factors that made task of writing autobiography easier and more beneficial. Dalit autobiographies describe initially Dalits who had been dependent on the caste Hindus and later on overcame the dependency. Dalit literary expression shows a dramatic increase throughout the Hindi belt. The publication of Dalit books has increased, new Dalit journals' have growing numbers of readers, and the newspapers have begun to include articles by Dalit writers. The Dalit autobiographies are contextualized within certain larger socio-historical process.

The Dalit autobiographies have arisen as the important genre of Dalit assertion. Finally, it has given Dalit writers a way of uniting with a larger Dalit community to create a powerful group to fight against the caste discrimination. Dalit autobiographies are meant to be understood as a representative life story. Dalithood is a kind of life condition that characterizes the exploitation, suppression and marginalization of Dalit people by the social, economical, cultural and political domination of the upper caste Brahmanical ideology. (*Poitevin: 1978*)

India is one of the largest democracies in the world, but ironically being a caste-structured society, it is found that a large section of people live in a life of luxuries and insufferable sadness. The caste or *varna* system in India has treated Dalits in different way. After centuries of suppression, the Dalits are in the struggle for emancipation under the liberation movement established by B.R. Ambedkar who believed that only education could bring about a change in the oppressed lives of the Dalits. Education gave Dalits a lot of self-confidence and propelled them to fight against their oppressors. In the words of *M.F. Jilthe (1984; 16)*, “The voiceless found a voice here; the wordless found word here”. Being largely influenced by the Afro-American struggle for liberation and equality in the white dominated Americans the Dalits in Maharashtra united themselves to fight against the tyranny of caste system. They formed the ‘Dalits Panthers Party’

Vol. 3 Issue 5 (October 2017)

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Bijender Singh

(inspired by the Black Panthers Party in 1972) and spread awareness amongst the Dalits of their dehumanized existence, and the necessity to be liberated from the bondage of untouchability. Thus the autobiographies, poems, short story writings by Dalits revealed their pathetic and debase existence and effectively sowed the seeds of protest and revolt in the mind of the Dalits.

1.5. Dalit Literature: An Anti-Caste Struggle

The term 'Dalit' came from Marathi which means 'oppressed and rooted in the soil'. Dalit literature in India is a literature of protest, pain and agony. As a genre, Dalit literature was established in the 1960's and 1970's when Dalit writings were published in Marathi and Gujarati. Nearly two decades later, the term gained popularity in Tamilnadu. Tamil Dalit writing also has its major influence from the self-respect movement which was an anti-brahmanist movement founded in 1925 by E.V. Ramaswamy Naikar in Tamilnadu. Dalit Literature came as a part and parcel of anti-caste struggles, agitation for reserved places in the interest of social justice and political protest for economical equality (*Gautaman: 96*).

The Dalit writings sought to bring out the pain and suffocation experienced by the untouchables in the hands of the upper castes forces. Rajgoutham (1995) points out the different functions of Tamil Dalit writing. He is certain that Dalit writings have brought about a change in the attitude of Dalits. He says, it is the function of Dalit writing to awaken, in every reader, a consciousness of the oppressed Dalit. Dalit writings have placed the Dalits on the tracks of self-realization and equality. Such works have above all helped, in the words of Raj goutham, 'to awaken the Dalits who is asleep within the conscience of all people of all castes' (p. 97). Secondly, those works have also instilled amongst the Dalits a confidence and about their existence. It has double objectives of liberation and proved reflection of Dalit culture.

After centuries of silence, when the Dalit writers say their stories themselves, they express their own experiences. They are the representatives of the entire community. "A public rather a private gesture 'me-ism' gives away to our-ism and superficial concern about 'individual subject' usually give away to the collective subjection' of the group" (*Cudjoe; 280*). After rising up the Dalit Panther Party, a number of autobiographies were written in Marathi followed by Kannada and also Tamil Dalit writing. Some of those major works have been discussed here. *Karruku* is the first Dalit autobiography written by Bama. It is not only the Dalit autobiography but achieved a specific identity, having written by a Dalit Christian. Dalit movements dominated mostly by men and had a tendency to sideline issues concerning Dalit woman. The Dalit women were compelled to voice their mercy doubled up due to caste and gender discrimination, this result was rise of Dalit woman voice. Thus '*Karukku*' means palmyra leaf and Bama finds many similarities between her strife-filled life and the saw-edged *Karukku*. As a Dalit woman, she is twice over oppressed by her caste and gender. In Bama's case her position is further endangered by her existence as a Dalit Christian. *Karukku* is a reflection of different themes like religion, recreation, and education etc, through these perspectives. Bama gives us a clear picture of the caste oppression meted out to the Dalit Christians not only by the upper caste society (so called upper caste) but more so within catholic church itself. The book is about Bama's inner quest for discovery and resultant courage which forces her to move away from the life of a nun to live the

The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 3.9)

www.expressionjournal.com

ISSN: 2395-4132

life of a Dalit woman. *Karukku* is thus a pathetic and moving statement of the suffocation and suppression of the trampled and marginalized existence of the Dalits. This book is also a revelation of the inner strength and vigour of Dalit woman as represented by Bama.

The Prisons We Broke (2008) is Baby Kamble's first Dalit autobiography. It deals with two major problems of society; firstly, the oppression, and exploitation of the Dalits by the upper caste, secondly, the discrimination towards woman in a patriarchal society (*herrenschmidt: 1996*) Dalit community has always been more important than her own individual suffering. She has completely observed her people, and therefore *Jina Amucha* was the autobiography of her own community. *The Prisons We Broke* is a graphic revelation of the inner world of the Mahar community in Maharashtra. This autobiography is unique because in analyzing Brahminical domination, it also speaks out for the woman of her community, presenting an unflinching portrait of its woman, subjugated by both caste and patriarchy.

Narendra Jadav's *Outcaste: A Memoir* (2002) discusses various stages of his parents' lives. His family struggled against bondage and fought for justice at the beginning of *Outcaste*. Mahar is Damu's caste, stigma, and destiny. It tells the world that this 20 year old boy is the lowest of the low in the Hindu *chaturvarna* system, the system of four castes. He is so low that his touch pollutes. He is an Untouchable. "Graded inequality" is "the soul of *chaturvarna*" (*Who are the Untouchables, 1948 Vol. 7: 307*). Soon after Damu's present ordeal, he will launch a *satyagraha* demanding entry for Dalits into the Kala Ram temple in Nasik. (*Educate, unite, and agitate; Indian Express; 2003*).

Outcaste is an expanded, rewritten version in English of Dr. Narendra Jadav's *Amcha Baap Amhi* (*our father and us*) published in Marathi 10 years before. There, Damodar Ranjaji Jadav's story was reproduced almost exactly as he had scribbled it in his diaries. The language was rough, the rural and the narration unselfconscious, the language of out caste is refined, its structure conscious schematic and its narration fluent. The main theme throughout the narrative runs the slogan coined by Dr. Ambedkar, which unites all Dalits, "educate, unite, and agitate". Damu sees this slogan as his personal mission and, though he himself is an illiterate, he educates his children to the best of his abilities. "The saga of Jadav family bears testimony to that certainty (*Maseeh Rahaman: 1997*).

Sharankumar Limbale's autobiography *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi* (2009) describes various stages of the writers struggle with the caste system. Sharan Kumar Limbale, the author of *Akkarmashi, bastard* (1984) first served as a teacher and then took a job in post office as telephone operator. He introduces himself as a worker of the Dalit panther and a bastard *Akkarmashi*, the Marathi word refer to the child born from extra-marital relationship and is used only as an abuse, as a child, the author used to stay in the Mahar Wada (the residential area of the Mahar at some distance of the village).

Limbale describes the life of a man who suffered not only through caste system but also through pain of not even being allowed in the caste system. *The Outcaste* clearly shows how the lives of Indian's lowest citizens are completely controlled by the society around them. The dominating theme is the Dalits' constant battle with hunger. As a child, Limbale firmly believed that hunger controlled man and if there had been no hunger, there would have been no war.

Vol. 3 Issue 5 (October 2017)

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Bijender Singh

The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 3.9)

www.expressionjournal.com

ISSN: 2395-4132

Another impossible hurdle that the author suffered his entire life was no identity no home, no place of belonging.

Siddalingaih's *Oorukeri* (2003) was originally written in Kannada. The term *Oorukeri* means 'neighborhood'. It refers to residential colony and ways. In this respect, it is similar to *Vasti*, an autobiography by the Marathi writer, Vasant Moon. Both these works recount the trauma and suffering not only of the individual but also of the community. Various stages of the writers' life, poverty, and humiliation are the most prominent Dalit issues. The author narrated the story of his journey self-sufficiency and self-esteem with the help of education.

Aravind Malagatti's *Government Brahmana* (2007) tells us the story of painful experiences of his life at childhood and youth. The author reflects on specific instances from his childhood and student days that illustrate the normative cruelty practiced by the caste Hindu society on Dalits. His autobiography is structured to provoke us into looking at caste experiences in all facts of society. In that sense, it shows that in the face of the oppressive structures, there are two aspect of these accounts of Dalits suppression, one is surely rooted in the Vedic narration of the Sudra's, and other is a full out of capitalism which is based on "the class antagonism relation, belonging to a definite historical much disdain and suspicion making him double alien, his academic education social status tore him apart from his roots and threw into a class of education "bastards"ref(authors and writers by Roland Barthes), in the "Marxism and the plate after the meal" (*Government Brahmana*: 2007: 18).

Vasant Moon's *Growing Up Untouchable in India* (2002) is the translator's first Dalit autobiography to be published in English. Moon's story is about his *vasti* or a community of people considered to be at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. Moon explains us with the powerful personal and collective memory of caste oppression and struggle in India from the 1930's to the 1950's.

They even published political and social magazines news papers and established traditions of writings among the Dalits *Joothan* by Omprakash Valmiki. This was first published in Hindi in 1997 and translated into English by *Arun Prabha Mukherjee* in 2003. It is a memoir of growing of Untouchable starting in the 1950's outside a typical village in Uttar Pradesh. *Joothan* is also a remarkable journey from childhood to is later life. He describes childhood days at home in the Dalit *basti* in rural Uttar Pradesh. He grows in the Central Indian city of Gwalior until the left home for college they were Mehtar and Chamars and Bhangis were lowest of the society so called untouchables.

Bibliography:

Ambedkar, B.R. *Ambedkar. Volumes*, 1990. P.204.

Bagul, Baburao. *Major Ideology of Dalit Panthers*, Pune: Centre for Science and Cooperative Research in Social Sciences, 1992.

Bama. *Karukku*, Trans. Laksmi Holstrom. Chennai: Macmillan, 2000. P.2-13

Berreman, Gerald D., *Caste and Other Inequalities: Essay on Inequality*, New Delhi: 1979.

Cudjoe, R. Selwyn & Maya Angelou. *The Autobiographical Statement Updated. In Henry Louis Gates*

Vol. 3 Issue 5 (October 2017)

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Bijender Singh

The Expression: An International Multidisciplinary e-Journal

(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 3.9)

www.expressionjournal.com

ISSN: 2395-4132

Jr. (Ed.), Reading Black, Reading feminist, New York: Meridian Publishers, 1990. P.272-306
Dangle, Arjun. *Poisoned Bread*. Bombay: Sangam Books, 1992
Gowtham, Raj. We have no need of halo's. *India Today Annual*, P.96-98,
Herrenschmidt, O. *Ambedkar and the Hindu Social Order*. Pune: 1998. P. 7,
Lingaiah, Sidda, *Oorukeri*. NewDelhi: Sahitya Academi, 2003.
Malagatti, Aravind. *Government Brahmana*. Chennai: Orient Longman, 2007.P-.1.
Mishra, Vanditha. *Educate, unite. Narrate. Indian Express*. New Delhi: 2003.
Moon, Vasant. *Growing up untouchable in India*. NewDelhi: Vistar Publications, 2002. P-22.
Nagaraj, D.R. Afterword. *Oorukeri*. By Siddalingaiah. NewDelhi: Sahitya Academy. 2003.P-111.
Rahman, Maseeh. *Rise of Education Eater*. Madras: 1997.
Valmiki, Omprakash. *Joothan*. Kolkata: Samya. 2003.
Zelliot, Eleanor. *From untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*, New Delhi: Manohar, 1992.

Vol. 3 Issue 5 (October 2017)

Editor-in-Chief: Dr. Bijender Singh