

**Resurrecting *Bhim*: Emergence of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar as
National Icon in Dalit Women Poetry Post 1990s.**

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Abstract

The last decade of twentieth century proved to be a watershed for the dalit literary sensibility. The reasons behind the perceptible cleavage can be easily summarized in the wake of some national and international events during 1990s that left an indelible print on the dalit literary representation. The most distinct feature of post 1990 dalit literature was the emergence of Dr. Ambedkar as the national icon. Though, he suffered in void as a national leader, eclipsed by Mahatama Gandhi during his eventful tenure. His unceremonious resignation as the first law minister due to the failure of passing of Hindu Code Bill in the parliament and the disappointment following the tumbling of Poona Pact made his follower susceptible of his constitutional credo. Still the dalit literary sensibility post 1990s altered it all. The thrust of the paper is to delve on the theme of resurrecting Dr. Ambedkar as the central figure in the poetry of dalit women, irrespective of the regional and linguistic diversity post 1990s. Their poetry also ventures into the troubled zone of dalit leadership that has gone astray from the path shown by the quintessential leader. Here, the poetry becomes a desperate call to revive his ideas and transforms into a powerful social activism. There is a blend of aesthetically appealing poetry on one hand and unmincing protest on the other hand. The paper endeavors to present an overarching frame encompassing the selected poems compiled post 1990s by Bengali, Hindi, Malyalam, and Marathi dalit women poets consolidating Dr. Ambedkar as a national figure.

Till when and how far should we suffer

Manu's preaching and worse than animal like existence

Untouchable dalits were searching for

The Road to salvation (8-11)

.....
He showed us the way

Prophet for dalits Dr. Ambedkar. (Takhure "Daliton Ka Masiha" 15-16)

Introduction

Dalit literature found its ground during 1960s-1970s. It was the era of Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra that rose as the militant group against the moderate views of Dr. Ambedkar. He fought his battle on the path of non-violence. His Mahad satyagraha at chavadar water tank in Mahad in 1927 marked a seminal turning point in Dalit history. It was participated by around five thousand men and women carrying lathis in their hands that marched towards the chavdar tank and drank its water. The incident jolted the roots of uppercaste purity-pollution ideology that restricted the lower caste people from accessing the same tank. The whole affair remained peaceful under his leadership. Another crucial incident during 1927 was the burning of Manusmriti, a draconian brahminical code book that had sealed the faith of a certain category of people so called lower caste and justified their horrendous treatment in the mainstream society. Both the incidents made Maharashtra the epicenter of the dalit struggle which soon engulfed the whole country. Dalit literature has its own epistemological history in different states. Though Marathi and Kannada literature both emerged during 1970s but Hindi dalit literature registered its presence during 1980s. Dr. Ambedkar remained a quintessential presence in Marathi dalit literature but his influence on the emerging regional dalit literature outside Maharashtra remained debatable. According to Akshay Kumar, "Ambedkar hardly figures in the Punjabi dalit poetry of the post-1970s." (282).

The last decade of twentieth century proved to be the decade of great upheaval for the dalit literary sensibilities. It almost pushed the nation on the brink of a civil war. Whole nation was divided into two camps; the svarna and the lower castes. The reasons for this social dissonance are easy to summaries. During 1990, Indian government led by V.P.Singh as Prime Minister implemented Mandal Commission recommendations. The new policies offered reservations to the SC and ST candidates in the government jobs and institutes of higher learnings. There was a nationwide stir across the country by the uppercaste people that ripped apart the belief of homogeneity in the educated Indian society. It challenged the prevalent view that caste was the thing of past in the modernized, intellectual uppercaste strata. There was nationwide uproar that unleashed the fury on the dalit population throughout the country. In the subsequent year i.e. 1991, the next government with Manmohan Singh as its finance minister introduced the Neo- Liberalisation economic

policies involving privatization and globalization. The new economic policy led a debilitating blow to the Mandal Commission policies of reservation. There was a large influx of foreign entrepreneurs that took over the job markets. There was no scope for reservation in the private sector and the under-privileged dalit youth lost out to the meritorious uppercaste counterparts. There was a wild unrest as many dalit youth lost their jobs and were thrown out on the street. A huge vacuum was felt to steerforth the simmering dalit agitation that was lashing out like a headless python. The eventful birth centenary of Dr. Ambedkar, literally “resurrected him as Christ reborn” (Kumar 287) or their lone savior. His revere not only filled the existing vacuum but also consolidated the dalit struggle at the national level. The theme of streamlining of dalit struggle has been captured in the poem Bengali poet Kalyani Thakur Charal’s poem “In your direction, Baba Sahev”. she writes “They got scattered at first (20) /.... / at last it dawned / all have the same destination (22-23)”.

The neo- liberalization policies adopted by the Government in 1991 too played a vital role in making the dalit literature a national discourse. The reasons were the sudden influx of foreign entrepreneurs and foreign publishers divulging in the large scale translation works of dalit literature into the foreign languages. It allowed the interface across regional and linguistic barriers confining the dalit literature within their linguistic zones. It was the time when dalit literature went global. Thus its translation into other languages gave a thrust to its readership and increased its accessibility manifolds not only in India but to the Western Academy as well. The poets writing dalit literature post 1990s appeared to be keenly aware of the shifting paradigm. Their poetry, in the wake of the above cited events reflected a deep sense to amalgamate their intricate thought processes into a powerful national discourse. Their poetry aimed to capture the tempo of their community rather than the individual self. Their target audience were now no more restricted to their own region but they were reaching out to the world. Thus, with the strong under currents of nationalism, dalit literature of post 1990s emerged as “ all India Dalit discourse” (Kumar).

Birth Centenary of Dr. Ambedkar in 1992, clashed with the Anti Mandal aftermath throughout the country. There was a sudden euphoria within the dalit community, and the time seemed ripe to revive the high points of the dalit struggle. Admist the social turmoil unleashed in the country in the form of caste struggle, there was a strong desire among dalit women poets to revive their oppressive past and the ordeal suffered by their ancestors. It accentuated the seminal role played by Dr. Ambedkar as their savior from the draconian

brahminical order. The nostalgia of the dreadful past comes alive in the poetry of Malyalam poet Merli. K. Punus

We were wandering for years
Looking for way through ages
Living a life like that of an animal

Sun arose from Maharashtra
He taught us education was priceless
His name is Ambedkar. ("*Ambedkar Ne Raha Dikhai*" 5-14)

There was a felt need to bring back to life Dr. Ambedkar's ideology while addressing the contemporary dalit leaders. Poets have delved upon the ways and means deployed by him during his relentless fight against the monster of caste. Though his moderate constitutional means based on Gandhi's principles of non-violence and satyagraha were debunked by his own followers during his lifetimes. Still the poets of post 1990s have projected an aura around him raising him to a high pedestal of a lone savior of the toiling masses. The reverence for their forgotten leader is well displayed in the aesthetically appealing poem of hindi poet Dr. Sushila Takbhure.

You trod the path full of struggle
Your life is revered
For the exploited and sufferers
You have special love (9-12)

You taught us to live
You taught us to fight
Through, knowledge, wisdom and patience
You brought the prosperity and change ("*Jai Bhim*" 29-32).

The dalit women poetry of post 1990s communicates in the multiple voices of the community. There is a strong element of the representation of community than the individual self. The poems tend to communicate in the binaries of 'us' and 'you'. This can be seen as one of the distinct features of the poetry of post 1990s. That is an urge to consolidate the

identity of the dalits as a monolith community. The poets address the leader as collective “We” irrespective of their language, region or caste. Before 1990s there was an overwhelming presence of Mahar dalit writers with the thrust of self representation while as in the dalit women poetry of post 1990s, the sub-castes seemed to be dissolved into one monolith identity. The poets are well read and politically aware of their constitutional rights . They have foregrounded his triumph as the father of Indian constitution in their poetry. Marathi Poet Usha Ambore has remarked on the decisive role played by him in this great feat and the social transformation it envisaged for the independent India. Indian constitution brought all citizens of India on the common platform irrespective of their castes. In her poem she has captured the admiration of her community over this great accomplishment. It indeed gave him an international recognition.

Like a flowing river
Your pen
Turned a barren land
Into a fertile terrain (1-4)

Truly Baba Saheb
World must be astound to think
Which ink you used
In your pen? (“*Baba Sahev*”25-28)

Poets have evoked the different images of bright sun, a deft potter, blue uninterrupted sky, etc. to pay homage to their leader. In a philosophical poem by hindi poet Poonam Tushamed, poet has compared the memories of Dr. Ambedkar to an ethereal experience of being surrounded by a hue of blue colour reflecting from his coat.

In my eyes floats
Blue colour
Which comes from the
Blue coat of that revered man
From his clothes

It spreads everywhere
I feel enthral
When I look Up
The sky above me
That has turned
Deep blue and clearer than before. (*“Yeh Neela Rang” 7-15*)

The poetry compiled in the reverence of Dr. Ambedkar displays the nostalgia of the pre-independent India. It represents the subtle voice of dalit community that has come a long way from the dark ages of animal like existence and can now retrospect the determining role played by their leader in the revolutionary changes brought over in their wretched lives. But the poets did not stop there. The deep-seated anguish once again comes to fore when they reflect on the fractured constitutional deliverance of their rights and the caste war waged in the background of anti mandal agitation. The poetry takes a sudden turn as it transforms into a desperate call for the rebellion against the atrocities inflicted on the dalit community in the modernized India. In the poem of Malyalam poet Shr. A.S.G, poet lashes out at her own people in un-mincing words, for their submissiveness. She evokes the violent history of her ancestors and the legacy of great leaders who engaged in the lethal combat with their oppressors to put an end to the inhuman treatment.

Wake up sons
Remember your bravery (1-2)

We have braved all atrocities
We suffered lashes on our back
We suffered in silence (4-6)

Then against them
Like a volcano they erupted
Kabir, Raidas, Phule,
Ambedkar are there names.
They broke
The chains of slavery

Showed us the path of humanity (“ *Jago Sapooton*” 10-16)

There is a distinct lamentation for the failing dalit leadership in the poetry. According to an article in *The Hindustan Times*, Namdeo Dhasal, a prominent dalit literary figure and leader joined BJP-Sena in 2012 (Ghosh 15). In the twist of faith it was the same party against which he once stood in 1970 and formed Dalit Panther. By this fateful exploit, he brought down the faith of his community in a single stroke. For once, he was considered to be the only militant option who could contain the uppercaste ideology of Sena and fought against them. In another incident, social media went berserk when PM Modi declared that the reservation is the right of Dalits that no one can snatch. He was applauded for his philanthropic gesture for the marginalized population. All such events delineate the concern that the dalit struggle once started by Ambedkar has whimpered to the politics of opportunist and securing the petty favors from the government. Ironically these endeavors are in sharp contrast to Ambedkar’s ideology. The leader wanted the dissolution of caste system. He was staunchly against the petty favours and demanded the equality for his people in the mainstream society. The digression of the dalit leaders from the path shown by him has been lamented in the poem of Marathi poet Chaya Korengaokar. The poem appears as a dirge written over the failure of their contemporary leaders to steer forth their struggle in the right direction.

Baba Saheb
Since many years in town and village
In every nook and corner, you stood
Showing the path with your raised hand
But caravan has moved in different direction
Panther leaders have also gone astray
I am afraid lest
You should be placed
In a temple
That is why I am standing
Before your pedestal and guarding you
Holding, a pen in my hand.

(Korengaokar 23)

There is a wide spread dissonance amongst the dalit poets over the turn of events in the Indian socio-political scenario. This deep-seated unrest for the ignorance and the submissiveness of their community on one hand and disintegrating leadership on the other hand are considered to be the root causes behind the stagnation and the deprivation in their lives. This can be seen as another distinct point of the post 1990s poetry. It has strongly critiqued its own community and held them responsible for their lowly existence. Everything cannot be blamed on the uppercaste and braminical discourse. This disgruntlement has been captured in the poem of Hindi poet Dr. Sushila Takbhure .

Before the world Dr. Ambedkar
Voiced the pain of the Dalits
For equality and dignity
He taught them to fight
Still Dalits
Failed to understand their Rights (15-20)

Failed to see their present and future ("*Yatana Ke Swar*" 21)

In another insightful poem by Dr. Takbhure, there is a call for the introspection to the entire community. The reasons for the ever widening chasm between the uppercaste and the marginalized population have been deliberated upon in this poem. It is a recollection of the troubled thoughts in tranquility. The poem throws a profound question at the target audience.

Pain for us and comforts for them
Why this partiality
Let's reflect
Why are we insulted? ("*Poorvajon ka mukti sangram*" 1-4).

Post 1990s poetry of dalit women writers has emerged as a powerful national discourse that endeavors to project a monolith face of dalit community as 'us' or 'we' while reviving the aura of Dr. Ambedkar as their quintessential leader. The poets are paying their homage to the great leader as they traverse the troubled and forbidden zones of their oppressive history. The poetry delves on their oppressive past and foregrounds the decisive role played by him in revolutionizing their animal like existence though poets seemingly overlook his failures as

the law minister and in securing the separate electorate for the lower castes. This revival could be ascertained to certain political-social developments such as anti mandal stir, neo-liberalization policies and birth centenary of Dr. Ambedkar during 1990s that exposed the disjunctures between the uppercaste and the lower castes and accentuated the caste division in the modern Indian society. Dr. Ambedkar was resurrected as a national icon to give identity to this caste war.

There is a perceptible discontent in the poetry for the political state of affair in regard to the elusive dalit leaders and community's stagnating lives. Here, poetry transforms into a clarion call invigorating their people from their slumbers. Dr. Ambedkar remains central to their social activism of post 1990s. His resurrection as their national leader places him at par with stalwarts like Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatama Gandhi as the leader of masses.

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