

HORIZON OF DALIT CASTE EXPANSION IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The term 'caste', used to describe a system of social relations that is considered to be uniquely Indian, and that presumably distinguishes the traditional Indian society from the West, is ironically not of Indian origin. As is well known, the term comes from the Spanish word 'casta, meaning race. The Portuguese seafarers, who arrived on the west coast of Indian for trade in the fifteenth century, were the first ones to use it in the Indian context. In the popular understanding, caste is an ancient institution of the Hindus, based on the ideas of varna, karma, and dharma pronounced in a text called the Manusmriti. These ideas translated into a hierarchical society, structured around the notions of purity and pollution. The varna system divided the Hindus into four varnas were the achhoots (the untouchables). These four or five categories occupied different positions in the status hierarchy, with the Brahmins at the top, followed by the other three varnas in the order mentioned above, with the achhots occupying a position at the very bottom.

The Caste, according to this article view, was a pan-Indian social system with little or no variations across regions. It also remained virtually unchanged over centuries, from the times of its origin in the ancient past up to the British colonial rule, when the colonial state introduced a fundamentally different social and economic regime .with the process of Westernization/modernization, unleashed during the colonial period and accelerated by the Indian state after its independence in 1947, the spread of 'secular' education and the growing influence of urban culture caused caste to gradually decline. Caste, it is argued, would have nearly mobilized the 'primordial sentiments' of the common people for their narrow political and electoral gains.

After a modest start Dalit literature has made its presence felt in the field of contemporary literature and criticism. There has been spurt of writings about the dalits in the last decade. Scholars from various states of India and abroad are taking up the Dalit literature as there

research interest. There have been many publications related to this field during the last decade or so. Many of these publications refer to as the critic of the Hindu castes. Lalit k. sahay in his book, 'Ambedkar: As critic of Hindu Religion' presents the varied critical standpoints of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's standpoint. This book is divided into different chapters according to the criticism of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on different aspects of the Hindu religion. It was Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar among Indian leaders who took up the cause of untouchables whole heartedly. He did so with deep sense of duty and devotion, unmindful of what one might think of him during or after the national movement for independence was over in India.

He played a very significant part at a crucial period in the history of this country and offered solutions to the several ticklish problems India was confronted with during the struggle for political reforms. With a passionate zeal and relentless fight he hammered out constitutional provisions for the upliftment of the depressed classes.

In another book entitled 'Ambedkar Politics in India and Caste ' the author Shyam Shankar Prasad Gupta delineates the history of Ambedkar's movement. This book talks about Ambedkar's fight for the rights of workers and peasants. In the late 1920s and especially in the 1930s when he had formed his independent labor party, he took up the cause of tenants (from both the Dalit Mahars and the caste Hindu Kunbis) in the Konkan region of Maharashtra. With the support of radicals then in the Congress Socialist party, the Independent Labor party organized a huge march of 20,000 peasants to Mumbai in the 1938, the largest pre-independence peasants' mobilizations in the region. In the same year, Ambedkar joined with the communists to organize a strike of Mumbai textile workers in protest against a bill about to be introduced by the British Government to curb labor strikes.

Lalit k. sahay discusses Ambedkar's view on Indian caste system , untouchability, varna versus caste system, Dr. Ambedkar's experience of caste and his views on Buddhism, theories of the origin of untouchability , relationship of touchables and untouchables, social concept of untouchables and untouchability, etc., in his book 'Ambedkar and Caste System.

Shyamlal in his book 'Ambedkar and Dalit Movement: Special reference to Rajasthan ' finds out the emergence of Ambedkarite Movement in Rajasthan. This book examines the emergence, ideology and programme, mobilisational strategies and spread of the Ambedkarite Movement, against the backdrop of two important changes witnessed in the state since the early 1930s: a ware of Dalit assertion and grass –roots activism. It is based upon extensive field work and interviews with the initiators of the movement and generation of post-independence educated, upwardly mobile, socially aware and politically conscious Dalits. While tracing the socio-political history of the Ambedkarite Movement and conversion to Buddhism over 75 years, this book presents an account of Dalits' endeavor, encounters and experiences. It provides an understanding of the impact of Ambedkar

speeches and agitations on both Dalits and Indian politics and challenges the tenor of ritual power that defines Hinduism differently.

Raj Kumar's book 'Dalit personal Narratives: Reading Caste, Nation and identity ' primarily examines Dalit autobiographies. It is a historic breakthrough because till recently, Dalits in India were voiceless. These narratives thus symbolize how Dalits are breaking down the age-old barrier of silence. Focusing on multiple marginalities pertaining to caste, nation and identity, the author has followed an inter-disciplinary approach across disciplines such as history, sociology, law, religion, philosophy and gender studies apart from English literature, to bring to the reader remarkably different personal narratives of both Dalit men and women.

Assertion in dalit Society, literature and History ' a book edited by Imtiaz Ahamad and shashi bhushan Upadhyay brings together contributions from scholars across the humanities and social sciences to provide an incisive analysis of the identity of the Dalits in history, literature and society. The essays organized in four thematic clusters, raise crucial questions: Who is a Dalit? Are dalits a social or sociological category and what is their relationship with the mainstream? How are women represented among the Dalits? Can a Muslim be a Dalit? Can the dalits form a unitary, socio-political category?

Concerned and cognizant of the collective trauma and memory of centuries of unspeakable oppression, the essays in this volume focus on dalit assertion and agency in postcolonial India, their challenge of the bigotry and prejudice of the dominant castes and their quest to break free from poverty and social exclusion. They also examine the dynamics of a pervasive caste system that is intrinsically hostile to the growth of a collective consciousness among the backward classes.

C. Joe Arun in his book 'constructing Dalit Identity ' examines the process by which the Dalits of Tamil Nadu, South India, attempt to construct their identity by transforming the symbols of pollution into symbols of their culture and positive identity. It argues that conflict is a necessary condition for identity formation. For it remains as a resource that helps them become self-conscious of their low and polluted identity and guide them to imagine a new identity. To this end, instead of negating the symbols of polluted identity used by higher castes, the Dalits use the same symbols and myths to deconstruct their low identity and re-define themselves. This book explains that conflicts, symbolization and identification are the three key phases in the construction of identity. By analytically dividing social groups into the categories of Upper Castes, Upper Backward Castes, Most Backwards Castes and Dalits , this study is also able to examine , in a meaningfully differentiated manner, the relative changes in attitudes and economic position of Non Dalit groups in these states. In short, changes in Dalit identity are also analyzed in terms in terms of the particular characteristics of each state: high growth rates in Gujarat, increased political mobilization in Uttar Pradesh, and Naxalite violence in Bihar.



'Socio-political Concerns in Dalit literature: A critical survey ' edited by Satendra Kumar deals with different aspects of dalit literature. Satendra Kumar makes an effort to bring the neglected parts of the Indian social fabric into the mainstream, by cogitating over the configurations and potentialities in developing a new consciousness and identity among Dalits, besides trying to sensitize the non Dalits with the issues and concerns of Dalits through different genres of their literary productions. At this juncture what is more important and engaging is the fact of sufferings of dalits because the period of their pain, agony, misery, humiliation, exploitation and inhuman treatment they were subjected to, is as old and long as is the existence of any institution.

'The History of Telugu Dalit Literature' written by Thummapudi Bharathi is the first book of its kind in English. It mainly focuses on the Telugu Dalit Literature produced after 1980s. In Andhra Pradesh, the powerful Dalit literature originated mainly from the atrocities on Dalits in Karamchedu (1985) and Tsundur/Chundur (1991). The Dalit Movements sprouted when the constitutional remedies failed and social democracy unrealized.

'An Anthology of Gujarati Dalit Literature ' edited by D.S. Mishra contains the creative writings by Dalit writers because they have direct experience and realizations of Dalit Communities. Though Gujarati Dalit Literature is inspired by Dr, Ambedkar's ideology and Marathi Dalit Literature, it has its own independent identity. A few Comparatively young and moderately Gujarathi Dalit poets and writers, exposed to national and world literature, dedicate themselves no neglected areas of experience in literature of the time. They decide to expand the horizon of literature, they explicated the vision of treating a Dalit at least as a Human being. Gujarathi Dalit Literature is committed to the plight of Dalit community, particularly the SC, the ST and the Baxi panch groups. It straightforwardly deals with discrimination and exploitations of these communities. It emphasizes the theme of exposition of the sufferings of non-high castes people and pays little attention to the forms of literary pieces. It has been widely criticized for the lack of forms. But Gujarathi Dalit Literature is quite recent and to expect perfection of forms at this stage is too much.

This anthology makes visible the ideology and aesthetic difference that Malayalam Dalit writing has from its mainstream writing . Arranged genre wise and chronologically, this volume includes introductions for each genre, and short bio-notes on the authors and translators. This article introduction interprets the historical, cultural, and social contexts of dalit writings, and provides the logical and conceptual framework of the selections for a better understanding of this hitherto marginalized discourse.

Thus we find that dalit literature is spreading its wings in different parts of India. After making its presence felt in the Marathi literary scene, this literature is being written in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Punjab. There

has been a renewed interest by scholars in this area and understand the dalit question. Anthologies and histories of dalit literature belonging to different states are coming into limelight. This is a healthy sign for dalit literature.

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