CHAPTER 7

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The Indian society, according to archaeologists and historians, until the Aryans’ settlement in India, there was no such caste-based social system. After Aryans’ settlement, they had established the *Varna*-based social system which in course of time turned into caste-based social system. As a result, various castes came into existence and a few castes were considered as untouchable because of their unclean jobs. As time passed, they were known as untouchable and untouchability became indispensable part of the Indian social-system. During the ancient time, untouchables had been ostracized from social, political, religious, and cultural activities of the upper castes of Indian society. Gradually, it resulted in excommunication and their human identity marginalised. And thus, their human dignity was removed. As an outcome, the people were made Untouchable in their own mother-land. In the course of time, the condition of this unfortunate Dalits became worse to the worst. As time passed, the orthodox considered even their shadow as polluting. The shallow-minded upper castes had a respectable place for animal in their society but not for Dalits.

At the very beginning, Buddha and Mahavira revolted against these inhuman conditions of the downtrodden and poor. They tried to give human identity to the untouchables. They did not try to empower these pathetic people politically, socially or economically. Rather both had presented spiritual awakening of the human beings. The revolt of Buddha and Mahavira for the downtrodden and poor could not change the inhuman social condition of Dalits. Thus, Dalits’ inhuman social condition remained as it was.
Later on, during the medieval ages which are also known as Bhakti era, many Dalit and non-Dalit saint-poets all over India, had criticised and satirised socially unequal Indian society. In their songs they presented the wretched conditions of the Dalits. But their sole purpose was religion and religious teaching and preaching. They did not strongly revolt against caste-based discrimination.

Saint-poets had satirised and criticised caste-based inhumanity as well as religion-based prejudices but it did not bring change in rigid social-system. Thus, since ancient time to nineteenth century the Dalits and non-Dalits had tried their level best to eradicate social evil of caste system. But they could not get victory as their goal was not social, political or economic equality but religious and spiritual. Somehow, they succeeded in giving human identity to the untouchables.

The British Rule in India had played a very significant role in removal of the social evils from Indian society. The British had legally banned the customs of orthodox Hindus like Satipratha (in this funeral custom with or without the willingness of wife, she was burnt alive with the dead body of her husband), child marriage, widow remarriage and so on in India.

Thus, the British had played a role for social reform. They also emphasised on the spread of English education among the Indians. English education among Indians brought renaissance. Gradually, many social reform organizations were established. They also played their part in the reformation.
In the nineteenth century, a hope for better life of Dalits emerged with Mahatma Phule’s mission to empower Dalits. He had severely criticised orthodox Brahmins for their inhuman practices. In his rational writings, he had bitterly satirised and criticised Hindu gods, goddesses and religion based superstitions.

He practiced the human equality of man and woman. He was a visionary person who believed in reason and humanity. Not only Dalit but also non-Dalit women of India owe to Jotirao Phule and Savitri Jotirao Phule because they were the pioneer of woman education in India. It was the Phule couple who started first school for Shudra and Atishudra (Dalit) girls. Jotirao Phule also tried for the higher education of the Dalits. He did his best efforts to retrieve identity and dignity of Dalits. He succeeded in his mission to provide education to Dalit boys and girls. This was the landmark event in the history of India. Untouchables’ new identity was gradually created.

Along with Mahatma Phule, British government had done many efforts to enrich Indians with English education. Gradually, the spread of English education had opened new doors for Indians. Thus, with the emergence of Indian literature in English, a new era in Indian literature has begun.

The first half of the twentieth century was mainly the period of revolutions. Gandhi made a profound impact on the psyche of Indians in general and freedom fighters in particular. Love for nation and India’s freedom were found in every nook and corner of India. Gandhi wanted to appeal the ethics and moral responsibilities of the orthodox Hindus. He wanted to change the minds of the upper caste Indians morally towards the Dalits. Under the influence of Gandhian ideology, the upper caste writers like, Mulk Raj Anand,
Rabindranath Tagore, Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, etc., had presented Dalits in their literary writings. But the writings of the non-Dalits were sympathetic which felt nothing but pity on the worst conditions of the Dalits. They did not present any radical solutions to bring changes or to lift up Dalits’ social, political, and economic status. Rather upper caste mainstream writers like the non-Dalit social activists suggested minor changes in existed unequal caste system. The suggestion is identical with Gandhi, as he too favoured social system of *Varnas*; and suggested minor modifications in the existed inhuman Indian caste system.

The upper caste writers as well as the upper castes social activists anyhow failed to abolish irrational caste system as a whole. So Dalits were treated as tragic lots in the writings of the mainstream writers. In regional languages and in English language many works were written based on the theme of Dalits. But in the works of upper caste writers reality of Dalit community was not presented faithfully. In the mainstream writings Dalits were presented merely as piteous people who were born to suffer and not to revolt for their rights.

During the pre-independence era of twentieth century, Dr. Ambedkar had jolted the orthodox Hindus by demanding equality in economy, society, politics, education and religion for Dalits. He had profoundly studied Hindu religion, religious texts, mythology, and Indian history. He came to a conclusion that it was irrational caste system that had deprived the Dalits of their rights being human. He demanded equality based egalitarian society. He wanted to empower Dalits, educationally, politically, economically, and socially. Thus, Dr. Ambedkar gave a new identity to the Dalits.

Dr. Ambedkar’s speeches on equality, liberation, universal human values, importance of education, etc. were rational, reason and truth based writings. Like Mahatma Phule, Dr.
Ambedkar had strongly suggested Dalits to get education. The philosophy of Ambedkar became inspiring source for the Dalit writers to present themselves in their own way in their writings. Thus, history witnessed the beginning of new writings in regional languages as well as in English by Dalit writers.

Dalit writers used different forms of literature to present Dalit culture and Dalit life. But the genre of poetry was popular among them. The Dalit writers, unlike the non-Dalit writers in their regional dialects had presented the reality of Dalits’ world. The Dalit writers in particular and Dalits in general influenced by Ambedkarite ideology. As a result, Dalit writers had presented Dr. Ambedkar as a hero or a champion in their literary creations. The pre-independence Dalit writings were dominated by Dr. Ambedkar or Ambedkarite ideology.

In the post-independence era, the appeals of Mahatma Phule and Dr. Ambedkar for the Dalits to educate themselves become centre of their creations. This is how the seeds of the Dalit Literature were planted. Educated Dalits have exposed the tyranny and inhumanity of the orthodox Hindus; and at the same time, they protested against caste-based discrimination. Dalit writers have presented Dalit culture and community in their writings. Thus, they used literature as their tool to present their own world and life with ground realities. Dalits writers became the voice of the oppressed and depressed in their literary writings. And Dalits’ quest for human identity in literature began.

Marathi Dalit literature directly influenced by Dr. Ambedkar has emerged first to expose injustices and atrocities committed on Dalits by the non-Dalits. The Dalit writers have protested against caste-based discrimination and religion-based prejudices in their writings.
At the same time, it has also presented the struggle for identity, liberty, equality and dignity. Gradually, in other regional languages the Dalit literature has raised the voices of protest. Gradually, in Hindi, Punjabi, Gujarati, Telugu, Malayalam, and other regional languages Dalit literature has presented authentically and realistically Dalits’ world and Dalit sensibility. Thus, Dalit literature is the voice of the oppressed Indians.

To let experience the world uniqueness of Dalit literature, Dalit prose and verse are translated in English language. Dalit literati elites have presented authentic scenario of Dalit life, Dalit community and Dalit culture which are new and unseen to the world community. The writings of the Dalits have influenced not only the mainstream literature but also the world literature. Dalit literature is appreciated worldwide not only for its reality and humanity but also for its rational, social and universal appeal. Dalit writers have also written Dalit literature in English language.

The mainstream literature is following Sanskrit and English aesthetics—beauty and pleasure. In comparison to the mainstream literature, Dalit literature is based on socio-cultural realities. So, Dalit aesthetics, unlike beauty and pleasure, presents reality and liberty. Therefore Dalit aesthetics is rational. Thus aesthetics of Dalit literature are different. Likewise, characteristics of Dalit literature are different. So, Dalit writers and critics reject mainstream literature’s criteria for judging literature.

By presenting unique literature and different aesthetics to the readers, the Dalit writers have largely contributed to acquire Dalits’ human identity in the world. Dalit Literature is a novel Indian literature. It is welcomed by the readers because human being and humanity are at the centre.
In the first decade of the twenty first century human worlds are divided into under developing, developing and developed nations. Majority of oppressed are found in under developing and developing nations. India’s Dalit literature represents the voice of oppressed humanity in the developing nation. India, though developing very fast in different fields, still her citizens like Dalits and women are the victimised oppressed class.

For the rural and urban development of India, it is necessary to know the reality of Dalit culture and life. The Dalit writers have exposed the unique Dalit world, life and sensibility into their writings. So, without Dalit literature reality of India could not be understood. Dalit literature is playing very crucial role to understand India with her ground realities about socio-cultural, political and educational facts. On the whole the real image of the Indian literature would be incomplete without Dalit literature.

The Dalit literature, the voice of oppressed humanity, can be given global platform. Dalit literature is playing momentous role in presenting oppressed voices of the Indians. Dalit literature has provided a sound podium to the unheard oppressed voices of the oppressed Indians. Dalit writings have created awareness among the Indian oppressed communities. It is because of such writings of the Dalit writers that the Dalits are proud of their traditions and culture. Thus, Dalit literature has established itself as the voices of the oppressed among the world literature.

Thus, Dalit literature has strongly tried to set human identity of Dalits in Indian society. This literature has also presented facts authentically before the world readers to understand human identity and existence of Dalits.