CHAPTER 3

Pre-Independence Dalit Literature:

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With the arrival of Dr. Ambedkar in the Indian political scenario, the oppressed untouchables had hoped for their better life. Dr. Ambedkar was highly qualified rational and missionary genius. But unfortunately, being a Dalit he himself had experienced the inhuman dealings based on untouchability. So he strongly protested against social evils. He was of opinion that the social evils had exploited untouchables–Dalits at social, economic, religious and educational levels. He had strongly condemned the Hindu scriptures which had created nothing but social divisions among Hindus. He found caste as the curse which was killing harmony of Indian humanity. So he had strongly presented evil aspects of the caste-system in his work *Annihilation of Caste*. Untouchability was worse issue than the racial issues of the Black and the White in Europe. So, he had strongly criticised the illogical, irrational, non-religious practices of orthodox Hindus. He had written evil aspects of castes in details in this book.

From the mid of the first half of the 20th century onward, under the influence of Dr. Ambedkar the Dalit movement had created a light of consciousness among the untouchables. They preferred to identify themselves as Dalits. And as a result, a good number of Dalit writers came forward with a mission to expose the Hindus’ cruelties and atrocities committed on Dalits. The Dalit journalistic writings, particularly in regional languages, performed an essential role in exposing the exploitations and atrocities committed on Dalits. The writers of
the journals had made it crystal clear that ‘the implementation of the Gandhian programme by the obstinate upper caste leaders was slow, reluctant and half-hearted.’ (Satyanarayana 111)

Dalits were aware of the superficial activities taken up by the upper-caste Hindus to lift up social status of Dalits. For the non-Dalits, India’s independence movement was more important than to lift up the social status of Dalits. The half-hearted activities of the upper-caste social reformers and activists to empower Dalits were criticised by the Dalit writers in their literary writings. One of the Telugu Dalit poets has satirised the upper-caste Hindus who pretended to be in favour of Dalit’s empower in his poem. The poem is stated in A. Satyanarayana’s research paper Dalit Protest Literature in Telugu: A Historical Perspective:

You prove that you are the descendants of sages
Outwardly you call us brothers
You boast to have listened to the teachings of Gandhi
Nobody follows (him), is not it injustice
You forget the words of Mahatma Gandhi
You born with anger at the untouchables (Satyanarayana 83)

This role of the Dalit writers was quite different than the role played by the so called non-Dalit reformists. ‘It is a movement, different from . . . or even the Gandhian movement for the upliftment of Harijan, in its robustness and unstinted criticism of the Brahmanical orthodoxies.’ (Das 22)
The practice of untouchability, throughout India, was very profoundly rooted in the Hindu society since thousands of years. Before independence it was strictly practiced. One of the famous Telugu Dalit poets Gurram Jashuva complains about the worst inhuman attitudes and approaches of the shallow-minded upper-caste Hindus in his poetry. He presents the worst than animal conditions of untouchables in the poem. Further, he has presented pain being Dalit:

We heard that for the old Brahma
Born Four Sons
The wretched lower than the animal
Who is this Fifth Caste person!
Savithri! (Mother). (Satyanarayana 86)

To eradicate untouchability good number of leaders came forward from the Dalit and non-Dalit communities. As a result, the Dalit liberation movement and the movement for Dalit’s human dignity were gathering impetus from 1857 onwards. Time and again, the beginning of the Dalit liberation movement was not accepted by the orthodox upper-caste Hindus in general and Brahmins in particular. The Indian Legislative Council had tried to abolish social evil of untouchability by passing a resolution. But it was not passed as orthodox upper-caste Hindus had apathetic attitude against the resolution:

“. . . it was firstly reflected in the Indian Legislative Council when Shri M. B. Dadabhoy moved a resolution for the abolition of untouchability, on 16 March 1916. However, it was not passed due to the apathetic attitude of the Congress towards social reforms.” (Kshirsagar 379)
Instead of getting depressed by the rejection of the resolution, the leaders more forcefully continue to get rid of untouchability. This inhuman practice of the upper caste was not tolerated by the highly conscious Dalit and upper caste leaders. They tried their best to eliminate untouchability right from the roots. As a result, actions were seriously taken to eradicate untouchability:

. . . the two Depressed Classes conferences held in November 1917 under the presidency of Sir Narayan Chandavarkar, chairman of the Depressed Classes Mission, and Bapuji Namdeo Bagade, a non-Brahmin leader, respectively exercised great influence on the Congress. Therefore, the Congress in its annual session held under the presidency of Mrs Annie Besant at Calcutta passed a resolution against untouchability, on 26 December 1917. (Kshirsagar 379)

The orthodox Hindus practiced inequality and untouchability. Earlier they did not permit Dalits to walk on the road or to drink water from the public well. Even, they prohibited the temple entry for Dalits. According to Dr. Ambedkar, Hindu religion is not the religion of equality and humanity. Dr. Ambedkar has strongly criticised such inhuman customs and practices of the orthodox Hindus:

“Historically speaking, service to humanity is quite foreign to Hinduism and to Hindus. The Hindu religion consists primarily, of rituals and observances. Love of man has no place in it. And without love of man how can service of man be inspired? . . .” (Jatava 65-66)
As a reaction against the inhuman cruelty committed by the upper castes, educated Dalits—alert, and conscious for human identity and dignity, came forward to establish their identity. In 1924-25 the Dalits of Travancore State had taken a very bold step ‘to obtain the use of the roads which skirted the temple at Vaikom.’ (Mandal 10)

As an outcome of the resolution against untouchability, in 1927 a Dalit leader from Madras Shri M. C. Rajah was nominated as member of the Indian Legislative Assembly. The real energy was poured in the Dalit liberation movement with the conclusion of Poona Pact in 1932. But pity was that the non-Dalits’ attitudes remained same as it was earlier towards Dalits. Dr. Ambedkar had remarked on orthodox Indian society in the preface to the second edition of the text *Annihilation of Caste* about the inhuman dealings:

> I do not care for the credit which every progressive society must give its rebels. I shall be satisfied if I make the Hindus realize that they are the sick men of India and that their sickness is causing danger to the health and happiness of other Indians. (Ambedkar 6)

The remark of Dr. Ambedkar was apt because the shallow-minded orthodox Hindus did not in favour of equality. Dalits were considered for the first time a separate Indians with distinct existence in Indian politics after the Poona Pact.

Before political empowerment of Dalits, temple entry prohibited for Dalits. The upper-caste gods also remained untouchable for the untouchables. “On 24 March 1933 Shri Ranga Iyer introduced the Temple Entry Bill in the Indian Legislative Council, but due to the
apathetic attitude of the Congress, it was not passed.” (Kshirsagar 380) That was one of the reasons, why Ambedkar had said that Hindus became dishearten and divided into castes and sub-castes.

Dr. Ambedkar in his detail study of Indian castes-system strongly criticised cruelty and injustice by one caste to another caste. He reached to the conclusion that it was the caste system of Hindus responsible for the rigid and inhuman behaviours of the upper-castes. Dr. Ambedkar observed that all evils of Indian society are based on caste-system so he had strongly criticised the Indian caste-system:

Caste does not result in economic efficiency. Caste cannot and has not improved the race. Caste has however done one thing. It is completely disorganized and demoralized the Hindus.

The first and foremost thing that must be recognized is that Hindu Society is a myth. The name Hindu is itself a foreign name. It was given by the Mohammedans to the natives for the purpose of distinguishing themselves. . . . One caste enjoys singing a hymn of hate against another caste as much as the Germans did in singing their hymn of hate against the English during the last war. The literature of the Hindus is full of caste genealogies in which an attempt is made to give a noble origin and an ignoble origin to other castes. (Ambedkar 47-50)

Rational movement for Dalits’ identity and dignity was started by Mahatma Jotirao Phule, for the Shudras and atishudras emancipation and followed fully by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar later on. Both the leaders gave new vision to the downtrodden community to
struggle for their human rights. Their ideas and thoughts have remained the great force for the creativity among Dalits. Thus, first emerged the Dalit centred literature. The purpose of this literature was to provide social, cultural, educational, political and economical better position to Dalits. As Dalits experienced inhumanity and anti-social treatments since centuries, at the initial stage in Dalit writings anger and revolt remained the remarkable characteristics:

\[\textit{Vidroh} \ (\text{Revolt})\] one such irregular literary magazine claimed to stand for “the man who wants to begin armed straggle in literature and outside the field of literature.” . . . (Sharma, S. 195)

The Dalit writers gave vivid self-experienced expressions of sufferings, pains, agonies, trauma etc. into their writings. At the same time, in their literary creations, they strongly desired the total change in society. They wanted equality in social, political, and economical fields. In their writings, above all they demanded dignity and identity being human.

Dr. Pathik Parmar in his article on \textit{Gujarati Dalit Poetry} has cited Dr. Ambedkar’s views on Dalit literature and responsibilities of the Dalit writers:

I earnestly appeal to the literary creators, you prosper the values, the values of life and cultural through your literary creations. Your thoughts should not be limited or shallow but make them liberal and vast (universal). . . Do not keep the enlightenment done by your pen limited to your home alone, spread that light everywhere to drive away the darkness of every village. You should not forget that there is another world of the neglected, Dalits and helpless human
beings within our nation. Try to understand their misery and anxiety and
dedicate your creative power to make their life respectable to other beings.
Genuine humanity lies there. (Parmar 137)

In Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati and other regional languages many Dalit writers had
contributed to shape the Dalit literature during the Pre-Independence era. Under the great
influence of Dr. Ambedkar many Dalits, at the first stage, had started to write poetry, story or
essay to present Dalit sufferings and issues. They wanted to remove Dalit sufferings right
from the roots. Mainly their poems were available in Marathi then in other languages. Their
poems are chiefly concentrating on the great contributions of Dr. Ambedkar to retrieve
human identity and equality in society, religion, culture, and economics.

Gopal Baba Walangkar, the Marathi Dalit was ‘an ex-soldier’. (Zelliot 4) He had
harshly criticised orthodox Hindus. He had even appealed Dalits to burn the Hindu scriptures
which were used against the Dalits to deprive the Dalits—social, economic, political and
cultural equality. Zelliot has noted Pandit Kondiram’s poem in his Dalit Sahitya: The
Historical Background:

Keep the memory of our age-long suffering in
your minds.

When you see a human animal, have a little pride!

Burn the Brahman scriptures and give a true
message!
This is the warning of Pandit Kondiram. (Pandit 5)

An untitled poem by Marathi Dalit poet, Kamalsingh Baliram Ramteke published in Janta, 21st June 1941 presents that India was far better when ruled by the natives, the Dalits; and the worst when she was ruled by the non-Dalits. It also presents how Dalits were made slaves and tortured at such a level that they even forgot their identity being human. Pre-independence was the period where different political movements had attracted common masses. The same political empowerment for Dalits was also pleaded in the poem by Ramteke:

_Bhils, Gonds, Dravids, their Bharat was beautiful,
They were the people, the culture was theirs, the rule was theirs;
The Aryas infiltrated all this, they brought their power to Bharat
and Dravidans were suppressed...
Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, all became owners
Drinking blood of slaves, making the Shudras into machines._(1-9, Ramteke 45)

In this poem, the Dalit poet has criticised the “Congress,” “Hindu Mahasabha”, “Muslim League” because they were working for the rich and no one cared for the depressed classes. At the same time the poet encouraged Dalits to over throw the non-Dalits’ atrocities; and compelled Dalits to rise and build their own empire:
“Congress,” “Hindu Mahasabha”, “Muslim League” are all agents of the rich,

*The “Independent Labour Party” is our true house...*

*Take up the weapon of Janata*

*Throw off the bloody magic of the owners’ atrocities, (15-19, Ramteke 45)*

The poet compelled untouchables and downtrodden to rise and claimed for what was rightfully theirs. He also asked their full emancipation so that they could retrieve their identity and re-established their humanitarian reign in India:

*Rise workers! Rise peasants! Hindustan is ours,*

*Humanity will be built on labour,*

*This is our birth right! (20-22, Ramteke 45-46)*

The non-Dalits had used inhuman and irrational means to prey Dalits. The Dalit poet has urged all Dalits that Hindustan (India) is theirs own home land. So, unlike the non-Dalits, they must reconstruct this India with humanity.

The Marathi Dalit poet Kisan Fago Bansode had written satirical poems. His two poems are depicted in Zelliot’s *Dalit Sahitya: The Historical Background*. One of his poems has a satire on Hindu nation. He has presented the reality of the Hindu nation:

*Look, look, all people. This is my Hindu nation.*

Divided at its root,
a jungle of divisions.

Honour for enmity – this is my Hindu nation.

Nowhere in the world

such segregation as here.

Caste at birth. This is my Hindu nation.

High place to the Brahman,

low to all others. (Bansode 6)

Bansode has compared the Hindu nation with the jungle in which there was segregation which was a distinctive quality of the Hindu nation. Nowhere in the world, according to the poet would this type of segregation be found. The poet has criticised the Brahmins for their superiority complex in the poem.

Zelliot has noted another poem of Kisan Fago Bansode. In this poem, the poet has appealed Dalits to unite and to work together. He strongly believed in strength of unity. In this poem, Bansode has mentioned saint-poet Chokhamela. The saint-poet entered the temple in a time when temple entry was prohibited for untouchables. Thus, Chokhamela had broken the unwritten code of Brahmins for untouchables –not to enter the temple:

Who do you endure curses?

Chokha went into the temple resolutely.

Why do you, ashamed, stay away?

You are the descendents of Chokha.

Why do you fear to enter the temple?

Come, take a stance like a wrestler,
Together let us conquer pollution. (Bansode 7)

Bansode has aggressively appealed to remove the pollution. He has suggested Dalits to overcome their meek submission. According to the poet if Dalits would try hard, they could win the dignity and identity being human.

Guajarati Dalit poets praised Dr. Ambedkar’s movement to empower Dalits and his attempt to give a dignified human dignity to Dalits. Dr. Ambedkar is Dalits’ God. So in most of Dalit literary writings the presence of Ambedkarite ideology and Dr. Ambedkar himself is obvious.

The Dalit poet *Achhutam* had praised the Dalit hero, Dr. Ambedkar in his poem *Dr. Ambedkar*. In this poem, the poet makes the world aware that Dr. Ambedkar is God to the Dalits. He compares him with Hindu gods like Krishna, Rama and other. Thus, he tries to make aware the Hindus that Dalits are having their God too. Dalits devoted their lives to their God because, unlike non-Dalits’ gods, the Dalits’ God is visibly and physically with them to sweep away all their pains, tears, and suffering:

Who asked! me that Who is doctor Ambedkar?

Pronounced proudly (our) “Hero”, (and) who are you?

To wipe our tears powerful Bhim has born.

Krishna is backbone of Jadava, like Bhim (Dr. Ambedkar) is to us.

We will worship him ever (because) he is solicitous about our suffering.
Our life is he, he is Shiva, and this body is also he,

We will die on his words (because) he is solicitous about our suffering. (1-4, 9-10, Achhutam 280)

Because of the great contributions of Dr. Ambedkar for the welfare of Dalits, the Dalit poet on behalf of the Dalit community, in his poem praises him as a God.

Dr. Ambedkar fought for different evil and irrational social customs of the orthodox Hindus. One of such customs was a restriction on temple entry for the Dalits. This very theme is commonly found in the Dalit literature. Gurram Joshua, Telugu Dalit poet has presented the sufferings and pains of Dalits into his poem *Gabbilam*. It is divided in two parts which were published 1941 and 1946 respectively. In the first part of poem, the untouchable protagonist has presented his anguish through the bird bat. He wishes to tell his agonies to God; but he could not do so as the Dalits are not given entry in the temples. He uses bat as his messenger to narrate the untouchable protagonist’s sufferings. In the second part of the poem the poet has mentioned that because of the efforts of social activists, the restriction on temple entry of the Dalits was thrown-away. As an out come the untouchable can now enter the temple:

Thiruvarur temple, is thrown open to the untouchables,

Many other temples follow suit

The Gods themselves regret
That untouchables were denied access all these centuries. (Joshua 67)

Thus, the narrative poem is an example of the sufferings and neglect of the Dalits in the orthodox Hindu society. At the same time it also presents the victory of the Dalits in the form of the temple entry. It was the victory of Dalits and an attempt to retrieve human identity.

Jashuva, born by upper caste father and lower caste mother, was a harsh Telugu critic of the orthodox upper-castes. According to him, the worst conditions of the Dalits were created by orthodox, the shallow-minded Hindus. He has satirised the orthodox upper-caste Hindus for their caste-based prejudices. In one of his poems, he has satirised the shallow-minded Hindus who have exploited Dalits economically, socially, culturally, and politically. In his poem, the Dalit poet has compared the orthodox Hindus as poisonous cobra snake:

By swallowing the blood of the wretched (dalit)

Lives the iron ankleted Mother

Upon smelling his air hisses with vengeance

The four-hood Hindu Cobra. (Satyanarayana 90)

Kusuma Dharmanna.’s We do not want the Rule of Black Landlords is a stark Telugu Dalit poem. The poet has harshly satirised the orthodox Hindus in the poem. At the same time, the miseries of Dalits are also presented authentically. The orthodox Hindus have forced Dalits to live like alien in their own motherland:
(We have) only small huts outside the village

We do not have big houses

Air, light do not trifle

(We have) no delicious food, curry

To wear (we have) no Saree, Loin cloth

(We have) no tail, ornaments

(We have) no land to plough, eat food

(You have) no sympathy on our poverty. (Dharmanna 88)

In the poem extreme poverty of Dalits is presented. The first hand experiences being Dalit is faithfully presented in the poem. Such an authentic presentation is impossible for the non-Dalit writers.

Dr. Ambedkar had earnestly appealed to Dalits to be educated, if they wanted to remove inequality and injustice from the Indian society. This teaching of Dr. Ambedkar has found place in Dalit writings. Ambedkarite ideology is one of the popular subjects for the Dalit writers. One of the best examples of it is Telugu Play Paleru.

The play Paleru (A Farm Boy) teaches the importance of education for the Dalits. Besides, it presents the worst condition of Dalits as bonded labour. It is written by Boyi Bheemanna, a versatile Telugu Dalit writer. The pain being Dalit is at the centre of the Dalit creations. This pain is realistically and authentically presented in play through the central
character Venkanna, a Dalit Deputy Collector. The father of the protagonist wants Venkanna to be a *paleru*. But the Dalit protagonist gives importance to study. The Dalit boy wants to get education and for the same he goes to near by town Rajamundry. This action of the Dalit boy is not least liked by the orthodox Kuberaiah, upper-caste landlord. To satisfy his anger, Kuberaiah scolds the father of the Dalit boy who works as a bonded labour in his fields. The landlord wants the Dalit boy to have the profession of bonded labour like his father. The inhuman and irrational practices of the shallow-minded Kuberaiah are presented by the playwright in the play. Following dialogue is cited from Satyanarayana’s *Dalit Protest Literature in Telugu: A Historical Perspective*:

KUBERAIAH (landlord): O, son of a he buffalo!

Did anybody go to school in your family?

PULLAIAH (Dalit): Yes sir, Ah Ah is it? No sir no.

KUBERAIAH: Is not it is a sin for you to read (and write)?

PULLAIAH: Big sin lord. Very big sin indeed. Neither during the time of my grandfather, nor my father, myself, nor even my son Yenkadu…

KUBERAIAH: Stop. It is alright until your time. With your son Yenkadu the tradition of your family is destroyed.

PULLAIAH: No my lord. I swear, I pledge my life. My son is not like that.

KUBERAIAH: You son of a donkey. Why does a son of a slave need education? (Bheemanna 91-92)
The landlord abuses Dalit Pullaiah because his son goes to school for education. The orthodox landlord fears that if Dalits get education than who will work in the fields. The character of Dalit father represents the Dalit folks who are meek sufferers at the hands of the non-Dalits. They never think of raising their voice against atrocities of the orthodox Hindus. Rather they try to bully who raise their voice of protest:

K[UBERAIAH]: He is not doing any work. He always sings and reads books. Stop him from doing agricultural labour. Educate and make him a collector. Get lost.

P[ULLAIAH]: We are your slaves my lord. Save us my lord. I will kick that son of a donkey. I will bury him. What stops you my lord? You should have broken his bones.

K[UBERAIAH]: Well. I did something. If you can teach him good manners and behaviour keep him here or else look for some other way. As you are dependent on me since your childhood I am just thinking. OK you can go. (92)

Against all odds the Dalit Venkanna is firm enough to get education any how. Thus, with the help of his school teacher Upadesi and the non-Dalit woman Vanabala, the Dalit protagonist goes to the town for education. After completing his study, the Dalit boy becomes a Deputy Collector. The importance of education for the Dalits is presented in conversation taking place between the Dalit protagonist and Upadesi, the teacher. Following two dialogues quoted here are from Thummapudi Bharathi’s *A History of Telugu Dalit Literature*: 
VENKANNA: Master! All due to your blessing. You are the important person among those who worked for my development. I cannot repay your help. I pray to you to stay with us from now onwards.

TEACHER: That will be selfish. I have to make many people as collectors like you from these Dalit associations.

VEERESAM: This jati will be better if each teacher make one collector. But they should be like Venkanna.

TEACHER: Not just a collector! Any student that enters the school can become an engineer, a professor, a lawyer, a judge according to his desire and will. One need not violate the law. It is enough if one keeps up justice. (Bheemanna 69)

But the Dalit protagonist becomes victim of injustice and tragedy. Even after having education and acquiring the post of Deputy Collector the Dalit protagonist is thinking of committing suicide. Through the play, the playwright has narrated the pitiless and slavish life lived by a bonded labourer. The pain and sorrow of a Dalit is represented in the dialogue of the Dalit protagonist Venkanna, when he is thinking about committing suicide:

VENKANNA: Death is the only alternative for me. I cannot live as a paleru. I cannot become an educated man. I shall put an end for this slavish life by jumping into the well. My untouchable, awkward life is a black spot on this independent, cultured race. I cannot bear this, (goes to well with folded hands) Oh, God! I am sacrificing my life by jumping into the well... (Bheemanna 68-69)
Here the weakness and limitations, both are not with the protagonists but with the orthodox society. The rigid and orthodox society is not ready to see Dalit Venkanna as a Deputy Collector. Venkanna’s social rejection becomes the major force for his negative thinking i.e. to end his life.

Thus, the play presents Dalit Venkanna’s struggle against orthodox society. Dalit Venkanna raises his status by acquiring education and government job. But his struggle and sufferings are rewarded with humiliation and rejection by the orthodox upper-caste Hindus.

U. M. Solanki, a Dalit poet has presented his experiences of being Dalit into his poetic compositions. He wrote a *gazal* in Hindi language which is a praise of Dr. Ambedkar. He compels the Dalits to awake and arise to get their rights which were taken off from them since thousands of centuries. In the course of time, even Dalit’s human identity has been removed. He compels Dalits to retrieve human identity. On the other hand, he admires Dr. Ambedkar and his extraordinary contributions to empower Dalits. His great contribution makes him the hero:

The victory bell of Untouchables

has been rung by the Hero Ambedkar in the world

“Get up, and give up idleness” that is taught to us by the brave Ambedkar.

Untouchables . . . . (1-2, Solanki 156)

Further the poet praised Dr. Ambedkar for his great mission of equality and identity in the poem. He honours Dr. Ambedkar by addressing him as the ‘King of kings’: 
By winning the hearts of million oppressed, this dearer became the King of kings for Dalits

The victory flag of Dalits flutter so high by the brave Ambedkar. (15-16, Solanki 157)

Here, the poet urges to the Dalits that they have to fight for their human rights. And in this great task they have with them the great hero Dr. Ambedkar. The appearance of Dr. Ambedkar in the political scenario of India has provided a very powerful hope to Dalits that they can win the fight of their human rights and identity.

The psychological support that the Dalits are having in Dr. Ambedkar, is very effectively presented in the poem *Pushpanjali* by Swami Chetananand in Gujarati language. The poet has alerted the world that the Dalits’ hero Dr. Ambedkar is there to remove all pains of theirs. Poet has presented optimism in the poem. The poet is of opinion that Dalits also have equal status. He warns the non-Dalits that Dalits are not afraid of the non-Dalits’ atrocities and inhuman approaches. The poet praises the Dalit hero, Dr. Ambedkar:

Rose this God to spread the light to all worlds,

Dr. Ambedkar is there to remove our pains (1-2, Chetananand 174)

Swami Chetanananda, a famous Dalit poet in his poem praised Dr. Ambedkar’s contributions to empower Dalits. The great hope of equality and human status was given to the people by Dr. Ambedkar that made him the greatest hero and champion of the Dalits. The poet clearly, loudly, and fearlessly sings on behalf of the Dalits that the torch given to the Dalits by Dr. Ambedkar must be reached to every part of the world.
Another Gujarati Dalit poet, Jivram Gangera has given the heartfelt pain and agonies of Dalits in his poem *Antar Vedna (Inner Anguish)*. Here, poet is the spokesmen of Dalits. The poem presents inner anguish being Dalit of the poet:

O Ma, in your lap, today, I am miserable.

degraded by the names Antyaja, Untouchable Dalit.

I am in distress. (1-3, Gangera 93)

The poet complains to mother India that the Dalits are unhappy as they are treated worse than animal. In this great land there is a life for the animals but Dalits has none. The poet is tormented because of the anti-social treatments to Dalits:

I am internally uncomfortable owing to disturbance

caused by Untouchability.

I am weakened by the hateful dismissal; thee life is like

the life of animal.

To be born in Hind- India- is that my mistake? (9-13, Gangera 93)

The poet also remarks that in Vedas or Vedantas there are no such distinctions among the men. Inhuman exploitations of Dalits let Dalits to convert to other faiths. So the poet complains about the irrational and inhuman treatments to mother India:

(Then) O Mother! This blind rigidity of custom in

Hind has come from where?

With the cruelty of your (other) children (these) children of yours are shaken.
Giving up tuft of hair and a sacred thread, those dear to me have embraced other faiths.

Now limits of endurance are crossed. I am unable to maintain patience. I, a child of yours, appeal to you:

save us O Mother India! (16-24, Gangera 93-94)

Thus, the poet shows that Dalits were exploited in every field. Even the life of Dalits was nothing but disgust and hatred for orthodox Hindus. Dalit poet Jivaram has presented inner anguish of Dalits being untouchables. Such a faithful creation can not be composed into words by the non-Dalit creators. The poet is happy as he is born as human but unhappy as he is not treated so by the non-Dalits. On the contrary the Dalits are treated as alien in their own motherland.

The Gujarati Dalit poem *Antyaj (Dalit) Reformers* is in form of *gazal*. It is written by Dalit Deshguru Samrsing. The poem is translated by me. In it, the poet tries to spread message that Dalits were suffering since ages. He also complains about the atrocities of the non-Dalits. The teacher and *guru* are also ineffective and insensitive against inhuman practices of the orthodox Hindus towards Dalits. Besides, poet has delivered the message to empower the Dalits:

O *Antyaj* (Dalit) reformers listen to my message

Pains of this poor community, I tell to you.

.............

Many are unhappy in the country, enemy has vacated many

*Antyajo* (Dalits) have heavy pains, listen to my message.
Became Guru of this religion, doesn’t give true knowledge

Opened the window of selfishness, listen to my message. (1-2, 5-6, 9-10, Samrsing 139)

The poet reminds their duty to the saints. He also asks them to practice their duty. He reminds the saints to lift up the social status of Dalits being human:

For to lift up the caste, (you) have the body of saint

Why to forget that beautiful religion then, listen to my message. (17-18, Samrsing 139)

The Dalit poet has presented his inner anguish that in the name of religion, teacher, guru and saint, Dalits are humiliated and tortured. So he compels to the Dalit reformers to concentrate on humanity and empower Dalits. Because, according to the poet, it is the only beautiful religion.

The Telugu Dalit poet Jala Ranga Swamy’s long narrative poem *Who are the Untouchables* is a satirical poem. In the poem the poet has presented the ancient characters of the aboriginal Indians who were forced to live life being Dalit. For this purpose, the orthodox Hindus have used a systematic scheme and controlled all fields of society, economy and religion. Further poet has criticised the upper-caste Hindus for the caste-based discrimination. Anger, sufferings and sorrows being Dalit is also presented in the poem:

Some occupations were created and assigned to us
We were named as serfs

Caste discrimination was introduced, we were suppressed

We were troubled with slavery/serfdom

Occupational difference were imposed, we were alienated (1-5 Swamy 87)

In the poem, Ranga Swamy has praised the glory of the original inhabitants of the India. He has also criticised the Aryan invasion. Further the poet has condemned the Aryans because they had enslaved the original inhabitants of India. The poet glorifies the great ancient Dalit saints and heroes–Vashistha, Valmiki, Vedavyasa, Parasara, Hanuman, and Sugreeva. The poet has also praised the virtuous Dalit women–Arundhathi, Sabari, and Matangi:

The great Warriors of Puranas were our people

Vashistha, Valmiki etc. belonged to our dynasty

Vedavyasa, Parasara were our people

Hanuman, Sugreeva were our brothers…

Did not the great mothers of Heros born amongst us

Did not they observe chastity

Is not Arundhathi, the daughter of our caste

Sabari, Matangi were our women…

A caste in which such great people were born being alienated

We were made lowly people, excommunicated (6-15, Swamy 87-88)
Thus, a few pre-independence Dalit writings were chiefly dominated by the Ambedkarite ideology, socio-cultural realities and Dalits’ condition. The Dalit writers of the different regions of India had presented realities of the Dalit world authentically in their literary writings. Dalit literature of this period was also inspired by the Black literature and Marxist literature. Dalit literature of the pre-independence time was a firm step towards creating Dalit identity in India.

Works Cited


