Chapter Five

Theoretical Narrative of *Dalit* Politics and Literature
The last quarter of the Twentieth Century reflected tremendous changes in the Indian Political System and represented political assertions by new social forces. We have analysed in the last chapter the progressive direction of the Dalit movement in the country that started with the struggle for recognition of the human personality and moved towards actual sharing of power in the Indian democracy. We have also analysed the impact of the Ambedkar that not only consolidated political consciousness among the Dalits but also guided the very course of the Dalit movement in India. It is important to observe that in northern part of the country, influence of the Ambedkarite movement was felt roughly during the time of Independence, which advocated the Dalit question on political lines rather than on any moral grounds.

In northern India, the Dalit movement was also limited to certain pockets and we also noted absence of any major anti-caste social movement in the region. To understand level of political consciousness and participation of the Dalits, we also analysed thoroughly the origin, nature and strength of the Dalit movement and found that there was much influence of Mahatma Gandhi upon the anti-colonial struggle in the northern region, that shaped the identity of the Dalits and made problems of 'Untouchability' as a moralistic rather than political one. But it also to be noted that a small section of the community rejected Gandhian view under the influence of Dr. Ambedkar towards the end of the colonial period and began to use politics as a means to achieve an equal statue in the Indian polity. Then, since Independence, Dalit movement has passed through a number of phases of strengths and weaknesses, autonomy and co-optation and carved out its own political space with the larger political framework of the region. The Republican Party of India (RPI) in the 1960s
raised some hopes for independent Dalit assertion but proved to be short lived due to lack of dynamic leadership, internal divisions over the strategy for the struggle and the ability of the Congress to consolidate the majority of the Dalits within its fold. But the formation of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) gave a new impetus to the movement and succeeded in breaking down the vertical patron-client relationship with the upper castes and accompanying political mobilisation pattern of the vote banks which was characteristic of one of the largest states with substantial proportion of the Dalit population: Uttar Pradesh, for a long time and has constructed new mobilisational solidarities on horizontal dimensions. Remarkably, political programme and ideological perspectives of the BSP are vague in nature, it has been successful in capturing political power and infused confidence among the Dalits for further consolidation and assertion for political identity. In this way, the BSP seeks to be both a movement and political party with a short-term goal of capturing political power and a long-term aim of social transformation.

Since mid-1980s, we find an overall challenge that is being given to the upper castes' hegemony by the Dalits in every field: political, intellectual, cultural and many more. In this regard, A. Gajendran notes that "when one explores the historicity of Dalits, their ethno-linguistic heterogeneity is manifested in all their socio-cultural features-festivals, religion, music, dance, food habits, medicine system and so on. However, a point to be noted is that traditionally many Dalit communities seem to have accepted Buddhist values and incorporated them in their respective regional cultural features, thereby challenging the conventional understanding of a homogenised process which uprooted all Dalit communities from their cultural milieu and accommodated them within a sub-continental boundary called Hindu India."
Accordingly, there is a process of challenging mainstream hegemony by the oppressed and disadvantaged section of the Indian society at every possible level and this challenge is a result of a long-drawn Dalit movement in the course of the history of the last century. There have been several studies on the roots of the Dalit consciousness during recent past, for instance, Eleanor Zelliott traces the roots of the Dalit consciousness, "which allow pride, self-respect and a vision of the future... in the older movements of the Adi-Dharm of Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, the Satnami of Chhatisgarh, the Narayana Guru movement in Kerala and in the contemporary period the Dalit movement in Karnataka, the rise of a Dalit Christian movement in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, the phenomenon of Kanshi Ram, Mayawati and the BSP in Uttar Pradesh, the new political thrust in Tamil Nadu and, of course, the Dalits of Maharasthtra with their ever more creative forays into the modern world of education and culture."²

We have also discussed in the last chapters, particularly in Chapter three and four, how political consciousness among the Dalits in northern belt progressed on the lines of mobilisation, strategies, politics and identity. It is noticeable in this regard that during 1930s the Dalit question in this region was understood as a 'moral' one and we find its reflection in the creative literature also (for example, works of Premchand) where transformation of heart of the uppers castes was considered as a pertinent solution to this problem. Subsequently, as the political dynamics of the regions get changed, we noticed change of literary syntax, both in terms of form and content. Thus, it could be said that level of political consciousness among the Dalits facilitated literary expression of the Hindi Dalit Literature that portrayed Dalit politics and its issues of self-dignity and identity completely from a different perspectives. We find
obvious parallel to the political trends in literary expression and contemporary Hindi Dalit Literature has opened new vistas for reinterpretation of earlier works by the upper castes on the life of the Dalit community and also makes an attempt to establish their own aesthetic notions of literary expression. In this regard, we would discuss some of the views on theories of the Dalit aesthetics, but before coming to that issue, it is pertinent to analyse some of the recent political trends in contemporary Dalit politics in the country.

It has been discussed earlier in this study that the Dalit movement in the northern region started as a reformative movement that attempted to purify Hinduism of its evils, and fought against the tyranny of the Caste System. Egalitarian preaching of the saints like Kabir, Ravidas and other shaped Dalit consciousness during this period and played important role in the awakening of Dalit consciousness. There were also attempts for internal reformation within the community and with proliferation of the Ambedkar movement emphasis was given for new self-image and identity based on education, political mobilisation and assertion. There were numerous problems faced by the Movement, for instance, weaker organizational strength and financial resources, but with the unleashing of new mobilisational plank, the community asserted with great political force that was largely consolidated by the BSP. Further, it has also been observed that rejection of Brahminism and Hinduism became important political component for the sustenance of the movement. In this direction, Dr. Ambedkar embraced Buddhism to build an alternative equitable and egalitarian society and became the torchbearer for posterity.
Coming to the contemporary *Dalit* discourse, we find that *Dalit* politics has carved out its independent political space and endeavouring to Consolidate its assertion in different parts of the region. Underlining quest for identity remains most important issue along with several others for the *Dalit* discourse, as has been observed by Ghanshyam Shah, “there has not been a single, unified *Dalit* movement in the country, now or in the past. Different movements have highlighted different issues related to *Dalits*, around different ideologies. However, all of them, overtly or covertly, assert a *Dalit* identity, though its meaning is not identical and precise for everyone. Identity is concerned with the self-esteem and self-image of a community-real or imaginary- dealing with the existence and role: ‘Who are WE?’ ‘What position do we have in society vis-à-vis other communities?’ ‘How are we related to others?’ Notwithstanding differences in the nature of *Dalit* movements and the meaning of identity, there has been a common quest- the quest for equality, self-dignity and eradication of untouchablity.”

Here, it is to be recalled that level of political consciousness performs the task of ‘a functional catalyst' for shaping identity among the *Dalits*, particularly its subjective understanding of the self and objective cognition of the socio-eco-politico-cultural conditions. We have already discussed catalyst role played by the political consciousness in chapter three of this study. Hence, question of identity becomes central to the *Dalit* discourse, which means a dignified human life with equality, liberty and solidarity as the cherished principles with a visionary transformation of society towards egalitarian social system.

In addition to identity building, the *Dalit* discourse is also making efforts to highlight caste based discrimination at different international forums like the United Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance held at Durban during 27 August to 7 September 2001. This Conference was used as a
forum to bring to notice the prevalent social discrimination based on caste status to the international community and at the same time, provided an opportunity to debate this issue afresh internally by different developmental actors of the civil society in India. The official position of the Government of India “was marked by an effort to keep discussions related to caste and caste based discrimination out of the inter-governmental forum” but it becomes pertinent due to the efforts made by many Dalit and human rights activists to restart an internal debate on the issue of race, caste and caste based discrimination. There was an attempt through the participation in the Durban process with the “hope that concerted external pressure would impel the Indian state into more effective implementation of the existing laws and schemes as also radically reform the social space to usher in genuine equality as citizens...and all these have once again brought the Dalit question to the fore. Whatever our position on the academic or political implications or caste and race, or of the emergence of new forums and new actors using new language and strategies, the longstanding questions of exclusion, discrimination and oppression based on caste remain.”

The Durban process also brought to the notice the issue of entitlement that who is entitled to talk about the Dalits both at the national and international level? We have already discussed this issue while analysing the course of the Dalit movement (Gandhi-Ambedkar divide) and also development of the Hindi Dalit Literature (who would write literature on the Dalit issues?). Here also we find a close relationship between literary expression and political discourse. That Dalits themselves enjoy the natural right to speak on the issues concerning their lives is being critically advocated by Dalit litterateurs and much vehemently during the recent past. In this regard, Gopal Guru argued that “the Dalits claims for being legitimate representatives of their issues,
including at Durban, can be justified on the grounds that it is they who took the initiative to bring caste into forefront of the public domain, however elitist and limited the framework of this domain may be. Thus, at an epistemic level, privileging the Dalit voice on the Dalit question can be justified. Second, the representation of Dalits by non-Dalits becomes problematic since it accords to the claimant a kind of morally superior position without realising that it sustains itself on the basis of a permanent exclusion of Dalits from the intellectual domain. It reproduces new forms of intellectual hierarchy, thus making difficult the democratisation of intellectual representation. It marks the continuation of Dalit submergence into the language of the alien. It is primarily in this sense that a Dalit speaking for the Dalits can be justified; it helps the historical recovery of the Dalit voice.6 It is being observed that active participation in the Durban process is the result of increased level of political consciousness among Dalits forcing people from almost all walks of life to pay serious attention to their issues and working together for accomplishment of liberty, equality and solidarity for the upliftment of the Dalits and oppressed.

Another significant event that happened in the Dalit discourse having impact on the very expression of political consciousness among the Dalits is the Bhopal Conference: Charting A New Course For Dalits For the 21st Century, held at Bhopal on 12-13 January 2002. The Conference, attended by many intellectuals and activists, deliberated "the issues concerning the welfare of and justice to the 250 million Dalits".7 Declaring belief in Dr. Ambedkar’s ideal for social democracy and endorsing “the ideals of civil society enshrined in the Constitution of India, particularly its Preamble that declares the Indian State’s commitment to Justice, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity”8 the Conference recognised “the for Dalits to make common cause with other liberation and
human rights movements in and outside the country.\textsuperscript{9} The Conference adopted a visionary 21 point Action Agenda for the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century that addresses each and every aspect of the life of the Dalits very comprehensively and demands for concerted efforts and positive contribution by all for equal opportunity, democratisation and civil society. It would be pertinent to mention 21 Point Action Agenda\textsuperscript{10} here that would provide a comprehensive view of the major issues in the contemporary Dalit discourse:

1. Ensure that each Dalit family will own enough cultivable land for socio-economic well-being. The government should pursue all possible measures including the distribution of surplus land, government revenue lands and temple lands within a specific timeframe. If the need be, the government should purchase cultivable land and distribute it among Dalits.

2. Enact legislation and enforce it stringently to enable Dalits have an equitable share in the appropriation and use of the rural and urban common property resources. The law must be amended to ensure that lengthy litigation, with the ulterior motive of denying Dalits of legal redressal, is not resorted to.

3. Enact legislation and enforce the right of Dalit agricultural labourers to living wages, to gender parity in wages, to job security, to better working conditions and welfare measures, and to ensure punitive measures against offenders.

4. Appoint Statutory Committees at the national and state level to identify within specified timeframe all the Dalits lands occupied by non-Dalits, to assess the quantum of compensation to be paid by non-Dalits for their illegal utilisation of lands, to identify the original owners and their nearest kith and kin for restoring these lands back to them, to expedite legal proceedings in courts specially appointed for this purpose against the illegal occupants and to ensure punitive measures against them.
5. Ensure the restoration of the alienated lands to the tribals, restore their rights over forest and forest-produce, provide them with compensation and rehabilitation measures, extend resources and capacity building measures for gainful utilisation of their lands and forests and make those Dalits displaced due to construction of dams/developmental projects and mining as shareholders of such enterprises.

6. Democratise Capital so as to ensure proportionate share for SCs and STs. Make budgetary allocation for SC and STs to enable them enter the market economy with adequate investment resources, and develop their capacities and skills for such market enterprises.

7. Enforce with stringent measures the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976 and abolish forthwith child labour to ensure freedom with dignity for all Dalits, and accordingly make suitable amendments in the appropriate legislations.

8. Amend Art. 21 of the Constitution of India so as to include the following rights for all citizens, with special emphasis on SCs and STs, and on the basis of two criteria: namely, low-economic income and without religious discrimination: the rights to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of women and men equally, including food, safe drinking water, clothing, housing, public health and medical care, social security and social services; the right to living wage and the right to own 5 acres of cultivable land or to gainful employment.

9. Implement compulsory, free and high quality education for all Dalits immediately, make allocation of funds proportionate to their number and level of the illiterates, ensure compensation to those families which forfeit their income from child-labour, increase the number and amount of scholarships, and provide
better infrastructural facilities in SC and AT schools and offer market-oriented vocational and technical education.

10. Make the reservation quota applicable in all the public and private educational institutions from primary to technical and professional levels. Every SC/ST child with low income-base must be given quality free-education at the State’s expense. And every English medium school must implement Diversity in Admissions.

11. Recognise SC and ST women as a distinct category among women, and accordingly make segregated data on Dalit women available in census reports, action taken reports and progress reports, evolve nation and state level perspective plans for mainstreaming SC and ST women in developmental programmes, market enterprises, financial allocation, reservation facilities in education, employment and health facilities, and mandate the National and State Commissions for SCs and STs for Women to study and report specifically the status of SC and ST Women in their annual reports.

12. Implement effectively in letter and spirit the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 and Rules, 1995, especially with regard to atrocities against Dalit women, and accordingly prosecute the dominate caste leaders and their unions who stoke the fire of caste clashes and the police officials acting in connivance with them. In cases of atrocities against SC/STs, a system of collective punishment has to be evolved as oppressors enjoy community’s support and protection and escapes the law.

13. Ensure Diversity or SC/STs’ due representation in all public institutions of India, whether universities of academic or autonomous or registered bodies. Those institutions, which do not abide by the principle of Affirmative Action, must lose
recognition and state funding. All private industry/corporate houses must accept and implement Diversity in workforce immediately.

14. Ensure that in all state and national budgets allocations are made as per the proportion of SC and ST population and penal action taken against unutilisation or diversion of funds meant for these sections.

15. Every government and private organisation must implement Supplier Diversity from socially disadvantaged businesses and Dealership Diversity in all goods and services.

16. The State must assume sole responsibility in protecting the SCs and STs. The State must identify those atrocity-prone areas and deploy forces. In addition, provide arms licences to the SCs and STs as stipulated in the Atrocities Act for self-defence purpose, make the setting up of Dalit self-defence groups from village onwards mandatory, and specially train Dalit women to handle weapons in self-defence against the perpetrators of crimes and atrocities.


18. Make it statutory for Parliament and state assemblies to debate on the annual reports of the national and state level Commissions for SC/STs and Safai Karamcharis within the following year, and ensure that these annual reports and the action-taken reports are make public. And ensure that the action is taken under clear statutory stipulations.

206
19. Make affirmative action mandatory in all private institutions, including industries and corporate sectors, which receive State patronage in any form—from land at concessional rate to tax benefits etc. and also develop the capacities and skills of Dalits to help them meet the demands of these different sectors.

20. Implement the policy of reservation to SC/STs at all levels of Judiciary and defence forces. And make transparent appointment process in Judiciary by doing away with the nomination system.

21. Bring out a Truth Paper in two years on the status of reservation during the past 25 years and place it before Parliament and state assemblies for debate, and on a war-footing fill immediately all the backlog posts meant for Dalits and that, too, only with Dalit candidates.

Thus, we find that the Bhopal Declaration addressed each and every issue concerning the welfare of the Dalits in India right from the land reforms, common property rights, right to work, democratisation of capital in the market economy, implementation of reservation policies at all levels of administration and governance, women's empowerment to right to a standard of living with dignified human existence. This Declaration manifests high level of political consciousness among the Dalits, who are challenging discrimination in all spheres amidst globalisation and liberalisation of Indian economy.

It is to be noted with serious attention that this Declaration is not restricted to demand justice, equality and freedom in the government offices but also addresses private and market institutions, making it evident that equality only in the government offices and that too of a very formal nature would not curb/eliminate social and
economic discrimination that is prevalent in all walks of life in our society. Hence, it demands for effective implementation of the existing, statutes, Acts, policies and rules and also evolution of new systems for Diversity that could ensure maximum representation and participation of the Dalits and their contribution with democratic social transformation of society. Thus, it can be said that the Bhopal Declaration demands for democracy, decentralisation and transparency in the administration and governance of the country.

Coming to the literary expression of these trends, one finds numerous parallels in Hindi Dalit Literature, which are narrating these trends. We have discussed in the last chapter how issues of identity, mobilisation, land reforms, dignified human existence, women’s issues and activism for social transformation for equal opportunities and democracy are being depicted in literary works. Here, it is pertinent to mention that recent works in literature, (largely from mid-1980s) particularly by Mohan Dass Naimishray, Om Prakash Balmiki, Suraj Pal Chauhan and others are portraying different aspects of the life of the Dalits and also resolved entitlement issue (Who would write Dalit Literature?) on political lines. These trends in Hindi Dalit Literature reflects enhanced level of political consciousness that works as a functional catalyst for the organisation and mobilisation of the Dalits to continue their movement.

Associated with the above observation, another significant issue needs to be discussed briefly so as to provide holistic picture of the contemporary Dalit politics and literature in Hindi. This is the issue of the evolution of aesthetics within Hindi Dalit Literature. We would very briefly elaborate on some of the views in this direction.
Kanwal Bharati\textsuperscript{11} considers three major streams in Hindi Dalit Literature, viz., first stream represents literature written by the Dalits themselves (which is experiential); second stream is of "the Hindu authors"\textsuperscript{12} (for whom portrayal of Dalits is a matter of pleasure); and the third stream is that of the progressive writers (who view Dalits as proletariat). In his view, the Dalit literary discourse is guided by the Ambedkar movement and above two streams except the second one, are attempting to highlight trauma of the life of the Dalits. He also finds progressive writers' contribution very significant to the cause and further elaborates, "Dalit discourse in the contemporary Dalit Literature is representing social revolution and it has to move towards economic revolution. There has to be convergence of social and economic revolution and only then the Dalit community in India would emerge as a strong political force".\textsuperscript{13}

These remarks make it very clear that the Hindi Dalit Literature endeavours for social and economic revolution and these principles are becoming very foundation of the new sense of aesthetic with this discourse. Based on these two principles with guiding force of the Ambedkar movement, the Dalit Literature envisions progressive and revolutionary transformation of society that could definitely ensure justice, equality, and liberty to all. In this way, aesthetic values of the Hindi Dalit Literature are political in nature and make this stream of literature the political one.

Sharan Kumar Limbale, who advocates sociological aesthetics of Dalit Literature, considered that "Dalit litterateurs have done objective and realistic critique of literature as well as make attempts to evolve sociological aesthetics...which means that Dalit authors have rejected conventional aesthetics carve independent space for their own sphere of aesthetics."\textsuperscript{14} He raised a pertinent question that how convention/traditional sense of aesthetics (which is largely pleasure driven) is compatible with Dalit Literature.
and consciousness among Dalits, which is primarily "revolutionary mindset"?¹⁵ Realising the need for autonomous and independent sense of aesthetics, Limbale further elaborated that it has be based on the principles of equality, independence, justice and fraternity, hence, changing traditional aesthetics, which stands rejected with the development of the Dalit Literature. It draws its inspiration from the preaching and works of Buddha, Ravidas, Mahatma Jotiba Phule, Dr. Ambedkar, Sri Narayana Guru, E.V. Periyar Swami Naikar and Swami Acchutanand. This repository of distinguished personalities enriches the Dalit Literature that inspires us for making attempts to change discriminatory social system.

Thus, political consciousness among the Dalits as expressed through the Dalit Literature becomes objective, realistic and progressive that analysed subjective understanding of the self, objective cognition of socio-politico-cultural condition, relationship within community and vis-à-vis other communities and envisions transformation of society with a visionary movement. It also emphasises on transmission of knowledge from one generation to other so as to build capacities of the future generations for an exploitation free society.

Therefore, we find that literary expression of political consciousness among the Dalits has gradually evolved its autonomous political space and challenged upper castes' hegemony in all spheres of life: social, political, economic, cultural and literary. In fact, it is due to the political changes taking place at the grassroots level, which are making Dalit politics and literature progressive and literature becomes best tool for the expression of not only of the feelings, emotions, torture and exploitation but also empowers Dalits to rise against exploitation and contributing for the establishment of an equal and equalitarian society.

210
Notes


2 Zelliot, Elanor. 'The Roots of Dalit Consciousness' in Seminar, ibid, p. 28-29


4 Please see Introduction and other articles of the Special Issue of Seminar (December 2001) on Caste, Race and Dalit Question for further detail

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid. p. 31-32

7 Please see the Bhopal Document and Declaration 2002 published by the Government of Madhya Pradesh for further detail

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.


12 Ibid.

13 Ibid. p. 135

14 Limbale, Sharan Kumar. Ibid. p. 29

15 Ibid. p. 112