

IN SEARCH OF THE SELF:

A CRITICAL STUDY OF NEERAV PATEL'S *MESS*

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Abstract

Unlike other literature Dalit literature deals with the real life experience experienced by the writer or by the people in the community. It portrays the real life suffering faced by the lower caste men and women in the form of religion, caste and gender and class. As Dalit don't have a personal life as their life is constrained with the community and anything affects them as a whole they voice out for their well being. The Dalit men face the domination of the male from the upper caste and they act as a slave to them and Dalit women face the domination and inequality from the upper caste men and from the men from their own community as women and as Dalit women. The humiliation, tormentation, suffering, depression which the Dalit have faced all these years have burst out into the form of writing and through constructing their own literature the Dalits express their rights and identity through various genre and one among them is poetry. The proposition of the present paper will deal with the poem "Mess". It brings out the long silenced feeling of a Dalit of how he is being treated by the caste Hindus in the society.

Keywords:

Dalits;
Humiliation;
Untouchability;
Suffering;
Depression.

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Nimbalkar in his books Nature and role of Dalit literature states that the advent of Ambedkar bore two mellifluous fruits which brought about social revolution in India during the 20th century they are Dalit literature and Dalit Panthers. In his view Dalit literature is nothing but the human literature as for the first time he claims that literature about the human was written in a realistic way and Dalit literature is nothing but a medium to express the thoughts of Ambedkar. According to him “Being a Dalit and to possess Dalit consciousness are two different things. Literature that is created with Dalit consciousness about Dalit life is Dalit literature” (35-Nimbalkar, 2006)

Gujarati Dalit literature started with the Dalit movement initiated in the state. Gujarat Dalit movement received no attention from the main stream writers. Though there were lot of classical battle between purists and utilitarian then the fury downed and Gujarat Dalit literature set itself the task of a new form content dialectic. When the Gujarat Dalit Panther movement was launched by Rameshchandra Parmar in 1975 marked the advent of the Gujarat Dalit writing. After that many publications started coming into the light such as *Akrosh*, *Kalo Sooraj*, *Garud*, *Dalit Bandhu*, *Nayamarg* and *Disa*.

The Dalits of Gujarat in 1988 established the *Gujarat Dalit Sahitya Academi* that academi published the quarterly magazines like *Hayati*, *Samaj Mitra* and *Dalit Chetana*. To encourage the Gujarat Dalit writers the government of Gujarat gives two awards in an annual they are Kabir Award for the literary work and Dasi Jeevan award. Dr. Pathik Parmar is a dedicated scholar he has contributed gazals and lyrics and he was awarded Kabir award for his contributions. *Bahiskrit* in 2003 is the collection of the Gujarat Gazals. Ganpat Parmar and Manishi Jain published the first collection of Gujarat Dalit poetry *Dalit Kavita* in 1981. Series of poetry collection followed to be published Visphot by Balkrishna Anand and Chandu Maheria in 1983, *Asmita* by Gujarat Khet Vikas Parishad published issues from 1981-1983. Yoseph macwan and Mangal Rathod are essentially modernist in their writing and wrote new themes in their poetry. Dalit poetry has drawn its extensively from the Dalit folk literature. It gives difficulty in translation of the rustic rhythms and tunes of folk songs. In Indian literature Dalit writing is considered to be the manifestation of the postmodernism.

During the first phase of the evolution of the Dalit poetry from 1975-1980 the Dalits became inclusive and not exclusive. Many poets contributed poems the poets were not only from untouchable sector but were even from other community. The first ten years after the anti-reservation movement in Gujarat marked the development of the poetry the search of self-identity, self-articulation, the pain and anger of deprivation, oppression, exploitation, marginalization and humiliation were expressed in their anthology of poems called *Asmita* (Identity). Early poets like Nirav Patel and Dalpat Chauhan weaved the literary and folk elements together, Pravin Gadhvi fused the classical language and the civilization metaphors, Sahil Parmar spoke the idiom of the urban-ghettos.

In Indian constitution the Dalits come under the category of ‘scheduled caste’. They are given different names like asyu, Dasa, Atisudra, Panchama, Tirukulattar, Adikarnataka, Adi Dravida Pariahs, Chamars, Mahars, Bhangis etc. State wise they claimed different name as Mahars in Maharashtra, Malas and Madigas in Andhra, Holeyas in Karnataka, Chamars in Western North India, Pallar and Paraiyans in Tamil Nadu. Through the poems the poets expressed a deep grief of the suffering and exploitation.

Neerav Patels poem “Mess” is about the suffering of a Dalit. When we talk about the sufferings of Dalits its not only about an individual, anything that a Dalit face is faced by their whole community. Dalit literature always represents the community itself. In this poem the author brings out the suffering of how a caste Hindu treats the Dalits. The poem opens with the mark of feeling and brings out the grief of exploitation, alienation, discrimination and inequality imposed on them by caste Hindus. The Dalits are spread all over the country they are just defined with different names in different states and are treated as Dalits no matter where ever they go they face the discrimination. Likewise when a caste Hindu call a Dalit dher the author expresses his feeling that he is hurt and he feels like kicking hard in the belly but unable to express it as there is no space for a Dalit in the society to express his anger and feeling. In these lines one can get to know what a Dalit feels when he is treated low

When you call me an untouchable
i am offended
and wish to slap you

when you call me harijan
i am humiliated
and wish to spit upon your face
when you call me a member of a scheduled caste
i am insulted
and wish to make faces at you. (33)

The poet burst out with the emotions and is intolerable by the way the Brahmin people treat Dalits. As Nimbalkar also considers P.L. Deshpande's statement to amplify his comment on Dalit literature he states in 1976 *Dalit Sahitya Sammelan* that "The tears that spring up in the eyes of a person in anger while protesting against injustice are most precious. It is agonized feeling or waspish cursing in the parlance of others. A sublime expression of that waspish cursing is Dalit literature" (34, 35 Nimbalkar 2006). The Dalits don't want to be identified as low caste people as they are the original inhabitants of the land. The minority Aryans settled and occupied the Dravidian land and they termed the original inhabitants as uncultured, uncivilized, rustic, barbaric, and unclean. Lack of knowledge made the Dalits to believe the Brahmins and the Brahmins made them believe that the only God who will help them attain salvation is Brahmins so they have to obey them and follow their words and should consider them equal to God. Dalit are denied to enjoy the mankind's basic needs and rights such as food, shelter, clothing and they have to depend on the dominant class to do all the agricultural and other labour work in order to have their livelihood.

The dominant caste created the rule in the form of religion and they considered themselves high and the sight, shadow, touch of the Dalits were considered as impure but the Dalit did all the odd works in their field, cleaned the household, brought firewood to cook, washed their clothes etc in spite of all these things the Brahmins considered them as untouchables. The poet expresses his grief that when any one calls him as dher, untouchable, harijan and scheduled caste he feels hurt, humiliated, offended, insulted, wants to kick on their belly very hard and wants to spit on their face. When he is called as black he feels like scratching his skin and showing that he is red. It reminds about a African poem written by Agra Gra

When I was born I was black

When I was sad I was black
When I was hot I was black
When I was sick I was black
When I was scared I was black

When you was born you was pink
When you was sad you was blue
When you was hot you was red
When you was sick you was green
When you was scared you was yellow

And you call me colored. (1)

The white people occupied the land and they termed the original inhabitant of Africa as black people. In the poem the poet express the grief of being called black when he is called coloured. In this poem Neerav Patel also express the same feel when he is called black he feel like questioning back the caste Hindu. When a person calls him white he feels like his mother slept with a savarna and wishes to be an Oedipus. When called as brother or friend he feels that he never fits into any of the category. When called as man he feels a sarcastic note that there is an implied meaning that the person calls him as woman or animal. As the Dalits are always treated low and compared to animal by the casteist people.

When you call me neerav patel
I am annoyed that you neglected me altogether
And wish to call you back to call me something
When you ask me what to do
I look blank and throw the question back at you
And wish to be interred like sita
Yes, its all a mess since the very beginning
Like the tale of the seven- tailed mouse. (33,34)

Dalits are the people who are ignored and exploited as a community and are alienated to live aside from the savarnas. So when the caste Hindus don't term them anything and utter a word he

feels himself neglected. The poet connects the story of seven-tailed mouse by Bapsi Sidhwa and Sanjay Sarkar. As the story starts with a mouse born with seven tails and it wished to go to school and it was birthday time then the mouse grandma gave a boon of seven wishes. The mouse was happy with boon it has and it went to school happily. First day in the school was not happy as the mouse came home and complained to its mom that the friends teased about the seven tails. Then the mouse used the first boon to get rid of one tail. As the days went the friends started making fun of its tail and each day it kept using the boon to get rid of its tail likewise seven days it used the boon and got rid of the seven tails. Finally it lost all the tails and went to school and again the mouse friends made fun of it by saying no tail mouse. It felt very bad and it wept but no use. It didn't appreciate the difference which it had and kept wasting the boon and finally changed itself for other but lost its own identity. As the story of the mouse so is the fate of the Dalits as they are being tormented in terms of caste and religion. This situation has to change and equality has to come in the minds of the humans. A human should be treated as a human and a fellow human has to understand this logic to live a peaceful life. A day when a human can live with the fellow human without the preconceived thoughts about caste, creed, race, religion, gender and identity then equality will be born and the nation will develop.

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