

A STUDY ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE TELUGU DALIT LITERATURE

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Abstract

Dalit literature considers man as its nucleus. It becomes one with the joys and sorrows of human life and takes it forward to Samyak revolution. It preaches a group of human being that forms society, equality. It considers man noble. Dalit literature spreads love and not enmity among human beings. 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. Dalit literature as a literature of protest advocates human liberation, glorifies man, opposes staunchly the supremacy of lineage, race and caste. Dalits had only pen to fight back they used it as a weapon to express their feeling. The proposition of the paper will deal with the emergence of the Telugu Dalit literature as the Dalit writers through various genres express their pain, discrimination, poverty, pitiful life, and the domination.

Keywords: Dalits; Revolution; Discrimination; Domination; Equality.

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Thummapudi Bharati states in his writing for the cause of the emergence of the Dalit literature is “There is a long past in the creation of Dalit consciousness in Telugu Literature. Perhaps the exploitation of life, reaction, pleading, protest, reform, progress and revolution are the causes in the creation of Telugu Dalit literature”. (61) The Telugu Dalit literature gained its origin with the Karmchedu incident as it gave birth to many critical events, it produced leaders, activists and the agitation changed the attitude of Dalits. It laid the foundation for social, political and intellectual domain in Andhra Pradesh. It was the rift between the Kammas (upper caste in Andhra) and Madigas (lower caste) in this massacre six men killed and three women were raped and 300 Dalit families left their village and sheltered in the nearby church. TDP (Telugu Desam Party) was started in 1982 by N.T.Ramarao a film actor and Kamma by caste and he was elected as chief minister in 1983. He introduced 44% reservation for the Backward castes (BC). There are 59 Scheduled caste groups in Andhra among them the majority are the Mala, Madiga and Adi Andhra. The political desire of the Kammas can be seen in the election and they want to have the power in hand. Lakshamma tells the Kamma chief minister M.T.R when he visited the hospital when among other her son was being treated “Why do you bring us fruits to eat? You are the people who eat these. We are poor people who drink gruel. After you became chief minister, every Kamma man began to think that he too was the chief minister. Did they not massacre us because they enjoyed your protection?” (xxii)

Later when the Dalits fail to support the TDP and voted for the Congress the Kammas were upset about it and a series of incidents led to the Karmchedu massacre. Katti Padma Rao points out the historical foundation of the Telugu Dalit literature as “The hold of caste remained intact; Dalit localities became killing fields, habitations of landless poor Dalits were attacked, burnt and looted every day, in a routine manner. But the heroic Dalits rebelled. Dalit literature was born out of this oppression, this caste violence”. (14). Two Telugu Dalit journals were established in the years of 1980’s they are *Nalupu* and *Edureeta* which helped the Dalit scholars to articulate their views.

Though the target of the upper caste over the Dalits is for a long period but it gained its peak through the massacre from 1980’s Karmchedu (1985), Neerukonda (1987) and Chundururu (1991).

Karamchedu was a historical turning point for the costal Andhra people and a beginning of the self-conscious Dalit movement. Madigas formed the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha (DMS) in 1985. Bojja Tharakam was the forst president of DMS and Katti PadmaRao became the first general secretary of it. After the arrival of Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra they gave up the word harijan and termed themselves Dalits, in Karnataka after Basavalinappa's agitation they shed the word harijan and adopted the word Dalits and now in Andhra after the Karamchedu massacre they created a own space for the lower caste people and denounced harijan and called themselves as Dalits.

The poet Challapalli Swaroopu Rani says that it was only after the Karamchedu incident many Dalit writers became active and started to contribute their work to Dalit literature before that also there were writers but their writings were not as powerful after this incident a ferocious form of writing came into existence and the writers started writing from 1980's to 2000. Dalit activist in Andhra emerged in three formations Christianity, rationalist movements and ML activism. K.Srinivasulu quotes that "If a Dalit movement has a caste[ist] perspective, instead of doing well, it would in fact do harm. Such a social revolution movement would end up inciting casteism. In the process of resolving social contradictions, we must formulate a class perspective, those who want to destroy caste cannot hang on to caste, to annihilate caste, the existence of caste should only be recognized". (31)

The DMS became active group with the close association with Ambedkar writings and ideologies. They established Ambedkar youth organization in 1960's when Ambedkar announced for the mass conversion to Buddhism many people from Andhra participated and converted themselves. In the year 1936 Untouchable Youth conference was held in Poona then Dalit activist who were in touch with Ambedkar in Andhra attended it and they later formed Youth League of Ambedkarites. B.S.Venkataroa known as 'Hyderabadi Ambedkar' was elected as a president and Venkataswami became the secretary. Kusumu Dharmana an important leader in Andhra movement initiated many activities and gave his support to the Dalits. *Jayabheri* was the weekly started by Kusumu Dharmana and he became popular for his poems *Nalladoratanamu* it was the first revolutionary Dalit poem in Telugu. In the beginning he was

associated with the Gandhian principles later he adopted Ambedkarite philosophy. The first wave of the Ambedkarite movement faded after 1940

The second wave started in 1960's with the formation of the Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangham in every villages and it help them to arrange meeting and have activities which will enhance the lifestyle of Dalits. When Katti Padma Rao read the biography of Ambedkar in English and Telugu his Christian personality changed into an Ambedkarite personality he went to the Ambedkar Jayanthi meetings and gave speeches. He even followed the caste annihilation and the five principals like writing, reading, building institutions, setting up libraries and practicing what is advocated.

The third phase started in 1990 as the Dalits felt that there was a need to start a state-level organization that would bring the Dalits forums, activist and social group together to get the Dalit force to fight against the atrocities in the society. Two proposal signify the importance of Ambedkar any literature written from Ambedkarite perspective is Dalit writing, but writing from non-Ambedkarite perspective cannot be considered Dalit writing and secondly the writings of Dalit from Marxist perspective was rejected as Dalit writing in the 90's. The Dalit women were ill-treated they were force to walk nude in a temple festival the female police officers were stripped off. The Dalit women faced the double oppression Vasanth Kannabiran and Kalpana Kannabiran considers Dalit movement and poetry as aggressive and they want to object the language used in the poem by the other writers about the Dalit women body parts. The silence of Dalit women was seen palpable in the Dalit literature.

Madiga the scheduled caste in Andhra Pradesh formed Madiga Reservation Porata Samiti (MRPS) in 1994. They fought for the SC reservation it was known as Madiga Dandora movement. In Andhra Pradesh there are two untouchable communities they are mala and madigas they form the 80% of the population in the state. In the ancient pre-caste Puranas they are called as Jambavapuram of the Madigas and Chenna Puranam of the Malas. The Adi Hindu movement initiated in Hyderabad in the first decade of 90's brought out change in Hyderabad and Telugu speaking region in Madras Presidency. Jana Mitra Mandal was formed by Bhagya Reddy Varma in 1906 and M.L.Audaiiah established the Manya Sangam in 1907. The

first conference of the movement was held in 1917. Bhagya reddy along with Katta Ramakha and Audaiah started 23 schools for the Dalits and imposed the value of the educations for Dalits. He travelled to different places from 1906-19016 and he gave awareness to the Dalits to be clean and not to eat beef and importance of education was given to them. He attracted people by his assertive tone of speech

“We are seven crore people, beware?

We are now empowered...

the stream of reform flow swiftly in favour of the scheduled castes.

Who can swim against the tide?

You should adjust yourself like the reeds do in swift currents,

Or else you will find it difficult.” (xv)

Bhagya Reddy organised the first provincial Panchama Mahajana Sabha in Vijayawada in 1917. Active Dalits took part in it and they renamed the term Panchama which means the original sons of the soil and termed themselves as Adi Andhra. Kusuma Dharmanna’s poetry puts forth the conditions of Dalits even after the independence in India.

“Fighting the government for self-rule

they ask for independence. But

they do not give us independence,

they do not allow us into temples and shrines,

they do not allow us to stay in choultries.

They do not allow us to draw water from the wells,

they say that mala’s have no rights.

Oh God!

If we have no rights,

What is the meaning of independence? “. (xviii)

When the left Marxism failed to address the caste issue the importance to start the own Dalit organization was aimed K.G Satyamurthy launched his own party Andhra Pradesh Bahujan

Samaj Party in 1995. Ambedkar considered that the practicing of caste is the great obstacle to revolution and he says that “If Lenin had been born in India he would first eradicate casteism and untouchability from among workers for without this they could get no concept of revolution”. (xx) It was only after the karmachedu incident that Dalits gained the strength to fight out Katti Padma Rao says that “it [karmachedu incident] developed several original forms of agitation; it produced some leaders and many activists [writers and singers]. In fact, there is a sense in which the Karmachedu struggle is the foundation for all the recent changes in the attitude and stance of Dalits. Karmachedu massacre is the bench mark in Telugu Dalit literature.

Dalit literature started getting importance in the literature many genres like Dalit poetry, short story, song, novel and essay emerged into the Telugu Dalit writing. The first anthology of the Telugu Dalit poetry Chikkanavutunna Pata 1995 edited by G.Laxminarsaiah and Tripuraneni Srinivas was launched and later Padunekkina Pata 1966 edited by G.Laxminarsaiah followed the limelight. Both the anthologies did not only confine with the Dalit writing it also had other collections to. Many works followed this anthology they were *Vidi Aakasam* 1999, *Nishani Dikkara Kavita* 1995, *Veliwaada* 1995, *Meerevutlu* 1998, *Chandaludi Chatimpu* inn1996, *Maa oori Maisamma* 1997, *Malle Moggula Godugu* 1999, *Hindu Mahasamudramu* 1996 are the poetry work in the 90’s.

Women Dalit writers like Gogu shyamala, Joopaka Subhadra, M.M.Vinodini, Jajula Gowri Jally Indira also contributed much to the Telugu Dalit writing in the 80’s. Gogu Shyamala published an anthology in 2004 named as *Black Dawn* which has the works of fifty-two Dalit women got much appreciation, *We are making history* in 1986 portrayed the Telangana peoples struggles, *Blue clouds* in 1993 is an anthology of poetry and *Womanscape* in 2001 is about the gender and caste. The main focus of the woman Dalit writing is not on the family , motherhood, body or sexuality. It focuses on the caste based Hindu society. Feminist writer joined together to form a forum and they named it as *Manalo Manam* (Among Ourselves) when they failed to liberate the women many other forums emerged like *Matti Poolu* (Earth Flowers), and *Maalo Memu* (We, among ourselves). The writings of the Dalit women are more powerful and real than the works of the Dalit men and non-Dalit women. Challapalli Swaroopa Rani writes that “The poetry by Dalit women from the Dalit women’s perspective and experiences as Dalit women is far more

powerful and has far greater impact than the poetry of the Dalit men or dominant caste women”. (xxix) Sivasagar answers to the question that if non-Dalit writers work can be considered as Dalit writing or not for which he opines

“ It is meaningless for a man to write on feminism and for a non-Dalit to write about Dalits ... A Brahmin, instead of writing about Dalits, can serve the Dalit cause by writing how they [Brahmins] ill treated the Dalits; about the narrow mindedness of the Brahmins that they are so familiar with; how they subordinated the Dalits”. (xxxiii)

Dalit writer use the English language to communicate it through the world and that is how the works of Ambedkar reached the national politics and created great impact. Chandrabhan Prasad shares his experience as a Dalit if he communicates things in English people hear him and give feedback but if he speaks in his mother tongue Hindi people don't even react to his speech and the English people also dress up well which gives courage to face the people in the society. There are four dialects in the native land of the Telugu they are the Kalinga of north, Andhra, costal Andhra, Rayalseema and Telangana.

Dalit folk art is the important and popular form of art which is known as Pani –Paata (work and song). It deals with the nature, labour, Dalit Goddess, sufferings with rich imagery and metaphors. This tradition of using the song started in the seventeenth century and the people like Virabrahmendra swami, Siddaiah and Yogi Vemana went along the country side by singing revolutionary song and educating the Dalits. Dalit poem is dense and blended with the Dalit myth, imagery and ideas and Dalit song is sung with the Madiga drums. Works like *Jambavapuram*, *Maalavaadra Paata*, *We Decry This Brown Supremacy*, *We Decry this White Supremacy*, *The Village is ours*, *The Pyre of Dowry* and so the list go on for the collection of the Telugu Dalit Poems.

Only after the Pre-independence period the Dalit writing began *Vetti Madiga Kathalu* the anthology of Bhagya Reddy Varma in 1932 is the first collection of the stories of the Madiga Bondage. The language in the short story is free from burdens of Sanskrit and classical mode of writing. With the original form of writing in people's Telugu language started with Dalit story

Oorabaavi. After that Boya Jangaiah and Chilukuri Devaputra started using the common man's language in the Dalit writing. While the Dalit short stories portrays the dialect, sociolect, orality, culture, and diction. It represent not only the life of the Mala and Madigas but also about the other people like the Chindu's , Dakkalis, Byagaris and so on. Some of the notable short stories are *Beware* 1984, *Turum Khan* 2009, *Hunger* 1992, *Bathukamma* 2006, *Our Convent* 1989, *Gurudakshina* 2001 and *Gundelakka* 1997.

Dalit plays are very popular form of genre as they are well versed in enacting and for generations they have seen people doing in on stage with a revolutionary spirit. The first Dalit play written by Boyi Bhimanna's *Raagavaashistam* was enacted in the year 1959. All the play of the Dalits portrays the humiliation, tormentation and the suffering faced by the Dalits in the society. *Munivahanudu*, *Nirbhaya*, *Ratnagarbhamlo Nithya Daridrudu*, *Harijanoddranam*, *Paleru* and *Cooli Raju* are the notable plays. *Paleru* was first staged in 1940 and it became very successful by creating the virtual social revolution and it transformed the lives of many Dalits. Telugu Novels were written even before the decades of Independence Jala Rangaswami published *Raitupilla* and Dunnevaniki *Bhoomi* in 1920's itself. G.Kalyan Rao's *Untouchable* spring brings forth the seven generations of the Dalit life to the readers and Vemula Yellaiah's *Kaka* deals with the Telungana dialect, orality and Dalit diction is Portrayed in the novels and both the novels were published in 2000 which are note worthy novels in the Telugu Dalit Literature.

Personal narrative the autobiography is the important form of Dalit writing as it portrays the reality of the Dalit life with the vivid Dalit experience. It tells about the story of suppression, exploitation, discrimination, oppression and protest. Telugu autobiographies are originally written in English as Yelukati Satyanarayana's autobiography *My Father Baliah* 2011 narrated a bitter experience of the Dalit and the another autobiography which is forth coming is *Ants among Elephants* it is from the US based Telugu Dalit women's experience. Dalit essays bring about the mystical, cultural, literary and historical ideology in the writings. The Dalit essayists are successful in creating the debate about the real life incidents and report then happenings to the readers.

There are many people who fought for the Dalits in Telugu region the first phase of the Dalit movement started with the activist like Bhagya Reddy Varma, Valthati Sheshaiah, Vundru Venkataiah, Jakkula Muthaiah and many others who were radical and ferocious to take part actively in the movement. Bhagya Reddy fought for the oppression, Ramaswamy voiced out for the education and self-respect for the Dalits, Kusuma Dharmanna had a vision about the pre-Independent India and asked the Dalits to beware of the Brahmin and asked them to convert to Islam, Venkataswamy wrote about the division of the Dalits as sub-caste likewise the writings of the Dalits in Telugu literature is vast and the collection of the writing according to genre is compiled in polemical books such as *Steel Nibs are Sprouting* 2013 and *The oxford Indian anthology f Telugu Dalit writing* 2015. The back ground study of the Telugu Dalit literature, movements and writers can be seen in *The History of Telugu Dalit literature* 2008 by Thummapudi Bharti.

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