Dalit Feminism & Dalit Women Narratives

An Anthology of Critical Essays

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Edited by
Abhisarika Prajapati

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Acknowledgement

Brain like heart goes there where it is appreciated. Appreciation and acknowledgment create culture, culture shapes values and values determine the future of humanity and human family.

I am grateful to the Almighty and omniscient for kindling a thought in me to undertake a work like this where I could compile the collective voice and concerns of the scholars, academicians and writers towards Dalit women. Violence against women and violence against Dalit women have become frequent lines in the newspapers if not the headlines. I am indebted to all the contributors who worked on this burning issue of Indian society and articulated their perspectives to understand the lines of enquiry in every facets of Dalit Woman's life.

A society and the entire humanity can only survive on the mantra of equality, fraternity and liberty without which we will keep on chasing a wild goose in the name of scientific advancement and technological growth.

I would like to extend my heartfelt thankfulness to Dr Beena G, Controller of Examination, REVA University whose humanitarian approach towards every problem and issues encouraged me to take this challenge and many more. I appreciate and value her support and encouragement from the bottom of my heart. REVA university is a place which inculcates in its scholars, students and in teaching fraternity as well an everlasting attitude of commitment, involvement, ownership and ethics in all the ventures of life.

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counselled me with her vision and pampered me with the luxury of unconditional support and affection. Her vast and pragmatic knowledge and empathetic approach always boost my morale.

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At this juncture I would also like to convey my humble gestures to all the contributors and authors of the insightful and very informative papers and articles which would definitely be fruitful and useful for students, scholars and academicians who are interested in Dalit voices from India.

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Preface

Dalit writings should be considered as trauma literature and Dalit feminism focuses on double marginalization of the traumatized community. Dalits are considered to be the lowest in the hierarchical Indian caste system and subjected to systemic oppression. They are a subaltern community who experience the trauma of persecution in every sphere of social and political life. Even psychologically Dalit writings offer a window of insight into their lives. The Dalit feminism provides narratives of anger and helplessness, on the part of the women and violence and dominance of male patriarchs not only of the Dalit community but also of the general one. Their writings are an odyssey of, more pain and sorrow than humour and hope, in fact more despair than hope.

Women who are victims of oppression and persecution inside and outside home approach from the perspective of 'trauma literature' when they emerge as writers. Although their writings have more of subjective flavor yet these writings are spontaneous flow (not overflow) of their genuine feelings and passions which are the outcome of their tormented lift. The autobiographies of four eminent Dalit writers: Baby Kamble, Bama Faustina Soosairaj (known simply as Bama), Omprakash Valmiki, and Sharan Kumar Limbale were the starting point but gradually other also came out from the Dalit community. Bama's *Karukku* was originally written in Tamil and translated to English by Lakshmi Holström, Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* was originally written in Hindi and translated to English by Arun Prabha Mukherjee, Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* was originally written in Marathi as *Jina Amucha* and translated to

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English by Maya Pandit, and Sharan Kumar Limbale's *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi* was originally written in Marathi too, and translated to English by Santosh.

In the 1990s, there were several independent and autonomous assertions of Dalit women's identity; a case in point is the formation of the National Federation of Dalit Women and the All India Dalit Women's Forum. Dalit feminist standpoint refers to a spectrum of knowledge consisting of individual testimonies of marginalised women's experiences within the larger social structures. Dalit feminist standpoint, therefore, refers to a spectrum of knowledge consisting of individual testimonies of marginalised women's experiences within the larger social structures. A Dalit feminist standpoint gives prime importance to "difference" as a factor. Dalit women face different challenges than women in higher castes in these countries. They are more likely to be poor, uneducated and socially marginalized. Dalit feminists advocate and have advocated for equal rights for Dalit women based on gender, caste and other issues.

The assertion of autonomous Dalit women's organiz-ations in the 1990s threw up several crucial theoretical and political challenges, besides underlining the Brahmanism of the feminist movement and the patriarchal practices of Dalit politics. While initially they promoted serious debate among both left party-based women' s groups as well as autonomous women's movement, they seem to have come to rest today. The apparent absence of a revisioning of feminist politics only suggests an ideological position of multiple/plural feminist standpoints. Within such a framework of 'difference' issues of caste become the sole responsibility of the Dalit women's organizations. This absence of an exploration of different positions hinders dialectics, both of a revisioning of contemporary feminist politics and a sharpening of the positions put forth by autonomous Dalit women's organizations.

Dalit feminism is a feminist perspective that includes questioning caste and gender roles among the Dalit population and within feminism and the larger women's movement. Dalit women primarily live in South Asia, mainly in Bangladesh, India, Nepal,

Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Dalit women face different challenges than women in higher castes in these countries. So, this makes study of Dalit feminism a very important issue in Dalit literature not merely in India but also in the South Asian literature in general. The present volume on Dalit Feminism is expected to meet the challenge with a multi-dimensional focus on the subject. The papers included in the book will provide more an illumination rather than a mere accumulation of facts and general discussion. Dr Abhisarika Prajapati, an eminent academician and writer on the theme of Violence in literature is expected to explore all the facades of violence perpetrated on Dalit women in this volume. The book will surely be a pioneering document in the literary history of Dalit Feminism.

Ratan Bhattacharjee

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Academician and Trilingual Columnist Cum Poet
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Dalit Feminism- An Introductory Note

Dalit feminism aims to redirect and reorient Indian Feminism for inclusion and attention to the serious issues and atrocities faced by Dalit women in Indian society. Dr Ambedkar critiques the essentialisation of caste and points the evolution of performative force of caste hierarchy and patriarchal machinery that victimises women from Dalit community in a systematic way. Specifically, he seeks to understand intermarriage restrictions, social relations, and the re-rooting of caste structure in new spaces. The exclusion and diluted concern towards Dalit women are realised now and there is a surge of Dalit women writers who are coming forward and raising their voice to be heard. Dalit women narratives tell shocking and surprising facts pertaining to social pyramid of caste system where women are subjugated and relegated to secondary position in society. Dalit feminism recognises gender equality and more social justice as well.

Nevertheless, Indian Feminism dismisses the need to include the intricacies of Caste as a major issue which problematises many other areas and issues specifically for Dalit women and their lives on the margin of the margin. The misfortunes of Dalit women in everyday life and challenges to face double patriarchy have been overlooked by privileged Indian feminist as Caste is not their problem and they have included all women in their ideology theoretically and politically. Dalit women's lives are entwined in the intersectionality of caste, gender and class as Black feminist points the juncture of class, gender and race. Intersectionality provides a

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space where one can easily identify the issue lying deeper which is causing the problem. This intersection has created a tussle in the mind of Dalit women who face different experience being a Dalit woman and have started entering into the world of articulation. In fact, their expression provides us a space where the very issue of Caste can be analysed from Dalit women's perspectives which aggravates their plight and position in mainstream Indian society.

> Feminism advocates of women's rights on the ground of equality of sexes and question gender predefined and preconceived roles and responsibilities too. It also talks about liberation of women from patriarchal Machinery and women empowerment for social, economic and political rights.
> So why do we need Dalit feminism? There is need to canonize this discipline as serious approach to supplement Indian feminism and to reorient and redirect Feminism for gender justice. 'Caste privileged' feminist represents all women in Indian context. Women cannot be homogenised. We need more discussions about Dalit feminism to problematise the intersectionality of caste, gender & race. Dalit feminism is in fact primarily a gender and caste-based enquiry which highlight the lacuna and ideological flaws in Indian feminism It also intends to include Dalit woman's point of view.

Sharmila Rege says: "Caste determines the division of labour, sexual division of labour and division of sexual labour." Mary E John & Meena Gopal: state, "*There is binary opposition between caste politics and feminist politics. Historically and practically Dalit women have been triply burdened subjects whose issues can thus only adequately be understood within an intersectional framework.*"

Dalit feminism is a movement which points out double patriarchy and overlapping patriarchy of 'upper caste' men and women. It questions the hegemony of Indian feminism bypassing the issue of caste and highlights the joint oppression of Dalit women on the basis of caste,gender,class and race as well. Dalit women have been victims of several futile cultural, social and religious norms and practices. Devdasi, Jogin and trafficking of Dalit women are everywhere available stories about the miseries and suppression

of Dalit women. Dalit feminism considers all women as Dalit in its modern view as downtrodden and broken. It aims to develop a canon to include the issue of caste to visualise the intricacies of Indian society and its patriarchal machinery. It also demands gender and caste elimination and condemns discrimination for more social mobility and nation building with surmountable concern for women in general.

Editor
Dr. Abhisarika Prajapati
(A woman & a human being)

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