

Chapter II

DALIT MOVEMENTS & DALIT LITERARY WORKS

The earliest known Dalit reformer was Lord Gautama Buddha, who preached the abolishing of untouchability. The earliest known reform motion within Hinduism happened during the medieval period when the Bhatia movements actively engaged in the participation and inclusion of Dalits. In the 19th century, the Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj and the Ramakrishna Mission actively participated in the emancipation of Dalits. Saint Kabir, Mahanubhava sect, and Varkari sect in Maharashtra rejected the term untouchability and embraced Dalits as brothers. Maharashtra state was the key state in the reformation of Dalits or of the transformation of untouchable to touchable. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Rajashri Shahu Maharaj, V. R. Shinde and the towering figure Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar were the prominent social reformers in Maharashtra. In the 1950, Ambedkar turned his attention to Buddhism and converted thousands of untouchable people in Buddhism with himself. In west Bengal, Chaitanya Prabhu initiated a movement called 'Namo Shudras movement' (bow to Dalit) which changed an attitude towards untouchable community. Overall, Dalit reform movements had been in India since ancient period right from Gautama Buddha. Still it is in course of reforming state by creative efforts of social reformers. (Qtd. in *From Untouchables to Dalit: Essays on Ambedkar Movements* 96)

Dalits experience an exceptionally high dependence on manual wage labor for their source of income due to restriction in access to fixed capital assets, low level of skill due to restrictive access to education and high unemployment, underemployment and low wage rates due to discrimination in the labor market. Research indicates that in the post liberalization period (1999-2000), 35 percent of Dalits in India were living

below the poverty line, as compared with 21 percent among the non-SCs/STs, termed in the data as 'Others'.

Empirical evidence indicates that children from the Scheduled Castes suffer from exclusion and discrimination as well as in terms of education and access to health services. A child's well being with respect to her health, nutrition and education is a consequence of complex interactions of multiple determinants. With respect to health and nutrition, 'dietary intake and infection' are some crucial determinants. These two, in turn, are governed by the level of food security in the household, access to health resources and the adoption of 'appropriate child care behavior'. One of the basic aspects that govern the level of household' food security is the economic capacity of the household.

However, in India, the position of a family within the social caste hierarchy also determines its access to capital assets, income, employment, education and health services.

In the present time caste based customary laws relating to property rights, employment, wages; education has been replaced by a more egalitarian legal framework, under which the untouchables have an equal access. However, despite this change in property rights the access of untouchables to the income earning assets, such as agricultural land and other capital assets has not improved much.

(Doobay 49)

In specific terms, empirical evidence is provided on the following indicators of discrimination and exclusion in economic and civil spheres that Dalits and their children suffer in rural India. The present research attempts to study the access to

capital assets like agricultural land, nature of occupation, level of employment, level of poverty, level of literacy and education of Dalit parents and their children, relationship between poverty and status of school attendance (attending, drop-out and never attended), health and nutritional status of Dalit children and mothers, level of access to health services and programmes initiated by the government/public institutions, level of basic amenities, e.g. housing and drinking water etc.

Ambedkar's exhortation brought desired results when Dalits started realizing that the selfish mechanism of the aesthetic concept of '*Satyam, Shivam, Sundram*' was to be reinterpreted in a democratic way and therefore they stressed upon the replacement of this concept with the one which is material and social. It was under the influence of Ambedkar that Sharan kumar Limbale redefined the literature as medium to declare human freedom. He defines the concept of '*Satyam, Shivam, and Sundram*' in the light of the idea that human beings are the first and foremost humans. This is - Satyam. The liberation of human beings is – Shivam. The Humanity of human being is – Sundram. (Qtd. in *Shankar*)

Before Ambedkar, even expecting Dalit consciousness among them seemed unreasonable. Among Dalits, consciousness building can be divided into two phases. In the first phase, Dalit thinkers tried to provide for the ideological background upon which an independent Dalit identity could be built. According to their interpretations of history, Dalits were autonomous inhabitants of the country. Some thinkers claimed that Dalits were originally Buddhists i.e followers of egalitarian religion which was quashed by Brahmanism. In the second phase, the efforts were extended from reinterpretation of history to other spheres as well, and mainly to contemporary period. Dalit leaders began to assert Dalitism not only by its origins but also in terms of art and culture. They laid emphasis on the point that their culture has a lot of

remarkable aspects which should be preserved. They tried to transform some of the practices which had been hitherto considered polluting into positive ones.

Yet another significant event in 1967 was the literary meet held in Bombay on behalf of Maharashtra Buddha Sahitya Sabha. This meet brought together people from Sholapur & Nasik, who were involved in the literary movement. It was the period when several collections of short stories by Dalit writers were published one after another. Between 1978 & 1986, a number of Dalit writers received state awards for their contribution in serving the cause of Dalit awakening. Dalit Literature came to be included in school as well as university level text books, and it was being translated into various Indian & Foreign languages.

During the struggle for Indian independence two different approaches emerged for the improvement of the situation of the people now known as Dalits. The first was led by Mahatma Gandhi, who believed in raising the status of Dalit people (or, as he preferred to call them, Harijans) while retaining elements of the traditional caste system but removing the degrading stigma and manifestations of 'untouchability'. The other approach was led by Dr. Ambedkar, a lawyer and himself an 'untouchable', who believed that only by destroying the caste system could 'untouchability' be destroyed. Ambedkar became the chief spokesperson for those 'untouchables' who demanded separate legal and constitutional recognition similar in status to that accorded to Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. However, this was opposed by Gandhi and eventually Ambedkar gave up the demand. After rejecting Hindu values, in 1956, he converted to Buddhism and was later followed by a large number of converts. After independence, the Indian constitution abolished untouchability in law. Today, Dalit politics largely centers on the just dispensation of the affirmative action benefits granted to them under constitution. Various laws were made that were

derived from Constitution like the Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955/1976 and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989. However, these laws remain ineffective in their implementation.

Despite the oppression experienced by Dalit individuals, they do not accept themselves as abject individuals. Dalits view themselves as an oppressed nationality. Dr. Ambedkar, known as the father of the Dalit Movement, coined a slogan, “Educate, Unite, and Agitate” to orient the Dalit population to perceive education as a liberating force. Uniting meant converging in numbers. ‘Agitate’ represented the perseverance needed to fight for egalitarian status within the Indian society. Dr. Ambedkar spent his time advocating for the Dalit population and tried to inspire this population to speak out aggressively for change. As a Dalit himself, Dr. Ambedkar felt that increased access to education, in conjunction with a united front of social protest by the Dalit population, could represent a clear cut solution towards Dalit enfranchisement. The prolonged social struggle that burdened the Dalit population for centuries continues to filter into the day to day struggles of this population. Education, upward mobility, and opportunities that might be available for other levels within the social hierarchy of contemporary India are still inaccessible to this group. Day to day survival and lack of education in terms of social awareness, however, precludes participation by the majority of Dalits. Change, when it has come to the Dalit population, has come slowly.

To explore Dalit issues, it is pertinent to discuss what Dalit Literature is and who Dalit writers are. The history of Dalit Literary movement started with the first vachana poet, Madara Chennaiah who was a cobbler. However, Dalit literature in Maharashtra flourished due to the effort of Jyotiba Phule (1828-90), Prof. S.M. Mate (1886-1957) and Dr. Ambedkar (1891-1956). They highlighted the various issues

concerning Dalits in a better way. Since its inception, there had been debates whether Dalit literature is the Literature of only those born in Dalit caste. Dalit literature is generally perceived as one which acquaints people with the caste system and Untouchability in India with its appalling nature and its exploitative system. In other words, the term 'Dalit' connotes not a caste but a realization and is related to the experiences, joys & sorrows and struggles of those belonging to the lowest stratum of society. It matters with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion, assertion and resistance, and therefore happens to be revolutionary; Sharatchandra Muktibodh highlights the importance of developing a Dalit point of view as the prerequisite for a Dalit writer. He remarks:

A Dalit writer is bound to have a Dalit point of view, but this is not enough for a literary artist. It is essential for him to experience a Dalit insight of his own. It is an intellectual cartography of an aspect of life, which it illuminates & elucidates. There is as much difference between a Dalit view and a Dalit vision as there is between having a look at the map of a city & actually in that city. (271)

In modern times, because of the legacy of Mahatma Phule and Babarao Ambedkar, Dalit literature got impetus in Maharashtra. But before the name came into being in the 1960s, such people as Baburao Bagul, Bandhu Madhav, and Shankarrao Kharat were already creating Dalit literature. In its formal form it sprouted out of a progressive movement called Little Magazine which was a kind of rebellious manifestation of the educated youth of those days against the establishment. These Dalit youths found inspiration in the movement of blacks in the distant land of North America, their black literature and Black Panther became the role model for them. This protest gained its first expression in the form of a new literature called Dalit

Literature. Poems, short stories, novels and autobiographies written by Dalit writers provided useful insights on the question of Dalit identity. Now the subaltern communities found a new name by coming together with the perspective 'Dalit is dignified' thereby rejecting the sub human status imposed on them by the Hindu social order.

Dr. Jugal Kishore Mishra also discusses a 'content analysis' of select Dalit writings to acquaint the reader with some of the dominant and non dominant themes recurring in them. The important writers whose writings find a place are in Dalit literature: Mahasweta Devi, Namdeo Dhasal, Daya Pawar, Arjun Dangle, Sachi Rautray, Rabi Singh, Basudev Sunani, Bama, Abhimani, Poomani, Imayam, Marku, Mangal Rathod, Neerave Patel, Perumal Murugan, Palamalai, Sudhakar, D. Gopi and others.

While dealing with the trends of Dalit literature, the writer makes a humble attempt to point out the core issues of its ideology. In this context it can be said that Dalit literature questioned the mainstream literary theories and upper caste ideologies and explored the neglected aspects of life. Dalit literature is experience based. This 'anubhava' (experience) takes precedence over 'anumana' (speculation). Thus, to Dalit writers, history is not illusionary or unreal as Hindu metaphysical theory may make one to believe. That is why authenticity and liveliness have become hallmarks of Dalit literature. These writers make use of the language of the outcastes and under privileged in Indian society. Shame, anger, sorrow and indomitable hope are the stuff of Dalit literature. Because of the anger against the age old oppression, the expressions of the Dalit writers have become sharp. In their search for alternatives, Dalit writers have rediscovered the low caste saint poets of the Bhakti movement. Even they found relevance in Buddhism. Referring to folk lore, they make an

assertion that Dalits were members of an ancient primitive society and were uprooted by the alien Brahminical civilization. These writers make a fervent plea for a complete overhaul of society. As Arjun Dangle, the Marathi Dalit writer puts it, “Even the Sun needs to be changed.”

Limbale, best known for his autobiographical novel *Akkarmashi*, says that Dalit movement has moved on from fighting caste Hindus to take on a new avatar-administrative casteism:

The government has reserved seats for Dalits, but few take notice of the discrimination that happens after they get in. They are forced to sit separately, often denied promotion, transferred frequently and suspended on flimsy grounds. (158)

Limbale points out the limited number of Dalits who occupy senior positions in the government. He pinned the blame on the country's political parties:

Our political system is only strengthening and reinforcing the caste system. They are validating the rot by distributing caste certificates. It just goes on to show that despite making great strides in breaking the shackles of caste, people still continue to discriminate in their minds. (161)

Dalit literature with the same criteria is used for mainstream literature. “The criteria should not be the same as our style, our problems; our ideology is different from the mainstream. It can't be judged by a person belonging to a different class”. (163)

In the words of Sharan kumar Limbale,

Rejection and revolt in Dalit literature have been birthed from the womb of Dalits' pain. They are directed against an inhuman system that was imposed on them. Just as the anguish expressed in Dalit literature is in the nature of a collective social voice. (31)

They present a harrowing picture of Dalit exploitation denying essential human dignity, identity, space and representation to the people belonging to the lower castes in Indian caste system. Being the narratives of suppression, torture, discrimination, deprivation and denial of 'self', these tales depend on an altogether different aestheticism. Besides being the stories of assertion and awakening, these are the unpleasant and unsavory accounts of the neglected beings where the essential meaning of 'beauty' seems to be defined differently. Most of the Dalit autobiographies show the past and the present coinciding together in such a way that if past signifies darkness, present generation is all set to demonstrate enlightenment.

The English translation of Limbale's work, titled *The Outcaste and Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature* are considered among the most important works on Dalit literature. On the progress made in the Dalit movements in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, the author said he was averse to sub categorizing Dalits.

Our pains and problems are the same. They compel us to come under the common umbrella of being a Dalit irrespective of whether we are Tamil, Marathi or Punjabi. Language is often a barrier, but our problems help us surmount the hurdle. (Qtd. in *Akkarmashi: The Outcaste*)

Dalit Autobiographies under Consideration

Omprakash Valmiki begins his autobiography by asserting:

Dalit life is excruciatingly painful, charred by experiences. Experiences that did not manage to find room in literary creation. We have grown up in a social order that is extremely cruel and inhuman and compassionless towards Dalits. (In Harlow 85)

These lines of Omprakash Valmiki apparently prove the fact that Dalit autobiographies are “narratives of pain”. It is this pain which binds individual Dalits together. *Joothan*, corresponding to the narrative agenda of contesting untouchability, focuses on events that highlight the pain of experiencing caste discrimination. For example, in *Joothan*, Valmiki contests the basis of caste discrimination by asserting:

Being born is not in the control of a person. If it were in one’s control, then why could I have been born in a Bhangi household? Those who call themselves the standard bearers of this country’s great cultural heritage, did they decide which homes they would be born into. (38)

Dalit autobiographies constitute a challenge to the institutional narrative that caste no longer functions as a significant force in the public sphere of modern India by presenting what they claim are factual experiences of untouchability from the writer’s own life. Valmiki, for instance, does this by repeatedly narrating his experiences of pain as exclusion due to the continued practice of untouchability. He writes:

I was kept out of extracurricular activities. On such occasions I stood on the margins like a spectator. During the annual functions of the

school, when rehearsals were on for the play, I too wished for a role. But I always had to stand outside the door. The so called descendants of the gods cannot understand the anguish of standing outside the door. (133-34)

In another instance, Valmiki relates how he was continually kept out of the Chemistry lab on one some pretext or the other, and despite protesting to the head master of the school, nothing was done to enforce the equality of every student regardless of caste to use the lab. He writes: “Not only did I do poorly in the lab tests in the board exam, I also got low marks in the oral, even though I had answered the examiners questions quite correctly”. (16)

Sharan Kumar Limbale, in his autobiography quotes upper caste people saying, “*We do not want to rent the house to Muslims and Mahars*” (a Dalit Caste) Why? Because they are dirty, they do not care about cleanliness.

Sharan Kumar Limbale writes that:

I bathe with soap every day. Clean my teeth with toothpaste. There is no uncleanness in me anywhere. Then why am I untouchable? Here a dirty high caste man is touchable and of pure character, an outcaste with a clean lifestyle is untouchable”. What a big affliction it is of a Dalit’s life, who being a human being wants to live it with the rest of the society. But in the Indian social system this is not possible for Dalits the reason being that “every city is casteist, every village is casteist, every house is casteist, caste has here broken the people so much from the inside that there is no human being left anywhere. (161-3)

Narendra Jadhav in *Untouchables* brings to the fore what is the place of a Dalit in the eyes of policemen and upper caste people. He writes:

Walking home slowly, he (Damu) was looking forward to some that tea and bhakris, homemade millet bread, when a policeman came looking for him: “*Eh Damu Mahar, I have been looking all around for you. Where have you been wandering around, you son of bitch?*” (3)

The constable seemed flustered and Damu sensed that something terrible had happened. He told Damu that a dead body had been found floating in the broken well by the Mangroves.

You will sit guarding the body till the Fauzdar and the police party comes to inspect the scene and write a report, the constable ordered. Nobody should be allowed near the well. Remember, if anything happens to the corpse, your body too will end up in the well. (163)

This clearly indicates that Dalit’s duty was to carry the corpse and to listen to the orders of policemen. The policeman did not care the least whether Damu was hungry or not. When Damu told the policeman that he had not eaten since morning, he lifted his baton as if to strike him. “Do you see my baton? He asked, brandishing it, I’ll stick it up your ass and you will see it come out of your throat. I’ll beat you up so badly that you’ll forget the name of your father”. (4)

This clearly shows a picture of exploitation, fear, terror, repression and oppression of a Dalit by a policeman.

Sharan Kumar Limbale in his autobiography *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi* rightly gives an answer to the question: what is it like to grow up as an impoverished outcaste in modern India? Perhaps the best way to find answer to this question is to

hear it through the words and emotions of those who have lived through the experience which Limbale has unquestionably articulated in his book. Limbale tells us that the caste of a Hindu Indian determines everything about his life, including the clothes he will wear, the person he will marry, and the food he will eat. Limbale describes the life of a man who suffered not only through this caste system but also through the pain of not even being allowed into the caste system: he was an outcaste, below everyone else. He is able to obtain a house on rent in a clean and tidy colony by hiding his caste. The one thing that controlled his life from the time he was a child was hunger, he knew that a man was no bigger than his own hunger and that there was no escape from it. Not only did he physically suffer from his deep, insatiable hunger, his entire life he lived under the course of not having “pure blood”. Because his mother had him out of wedlock with the chief of the village, he belonged nowhere and no one would accept him.

The Outcaste clearly shows how the lives of India’s lowest citizens are completely controlled by the society around him. The dominating theme throughout the book is Dalits’ constant battle with hunger. Although Limbale is allowed the privilege of going to school, he had to watch the higher caste children eat lavish meals and could only hope that they would be generous with their scraps. His grandmother would eat bhakari made from the corn she had dug out a pile of manure so that her grandchildren would have what little good flour she had left. She made incredible sacrifices, but her house still want hungry until they were able to beg on a market day or until a good friend received the contract to remove a dead animal.

Another nearly impossible hurdle that the narrator suffered through his entire life was the fact that he had no identity, no home or place of belonging. Limbale was

born with a Dalit mother and a father who was the chief of a village. He could not get certain papers signed for school because he could not properly identify his caste by his mother or father, and they would not accept his grandmother as his guardian because she lived with a Muslim. When the time for marriage came, he could not even get married to an outcaste girl because his blood was not pure; he was not wanted anywhere. Eventually, a drunkard who had offered Limbale his daughter would not allow her to leave after the wedding because of Limbale's background. The clouds of doubt and identity hung over this poor outcaste boy through his entire life.

These instances are suggestive of the fact that Dalit writers like Om Prakash Valmiki and Sharan Kumar Limbale and others have attempted to negotiate the challenge of securing narrative authority by emphasizing the experience of discrimination and Dalit identity as two necessary criteria for writing. Dalit autobiographers also negotiate the issue of authority to represent the Dalit community by presenting their autobiography not as a result of this desire for personal recognition, but as a response to the requests from the Dalit community for representation.

Dalit autobiographies are not simply the narration of life stories. They are also used by Dalit writers as a means of political assertion. For example, Narendra Jadhav in his book *Untouchables* speaks about Dr. Bhimrao (Babasaheb) Ambedkar leading thousands of Dalits to the Chavdar Pond in Mahad in a peaceful agitation for water rights; and soon he will launch a Satyagrah demanding entry for Dalits into the Kala Ram Temple in Nasik. There is an incident described in the text where Damu, the chief protagonist of the story, is seen as rebelling against the whole traditional society when the fauzdar turns his foul tongue on Babasaheb Ambedkar. For Damu, that is blasphemy. Babasaheb is his god. That very night Damu decided that he had enough.

He would throw away the miserable crutches of traditional village duties that had been saddled with and return to Mumbai. The bitter opposition of Ambedkarites to Mahatma Gandhi's description of untouchables as Dalits finds no place in Damu's story. Where as in Moon's autobiography even the anti-Gandhi demonstration during his visit to Nagpur, forcing him to turn back, is debated and described. Vasant Moon's *Growing up Untouchable in India* is comparatively more political. Though Damu works for the Dalit cause, sporadically in the early years and more consistently later, he does not discuss issues of political debate as Moon does.

Damu's guts and sinews are too strong, his response to Ambedkar's call to Dalits to "Educate, Unite, Agitate" too complete and all consuming to allow him to live in the past. His story lives in the present. (Qtd. in *Untouchable* 39)

The recent spurt in Dalit literature in India is an attempt to bring to the forefront the experiences of discrimination, violence and poverty of the Dalit. Often, with religious and social sanction, these experiences have for long been silenced and marginalized as unliterary. More recent is the trend to deny their existence altogether. The growing corpus of Dalit texts, poems, novels and autobiographies, however, seeks to ratify this while describing the nuances of Dalit cultures. Although Dalit literature comes in all genres, the autobiographies are the most popular. This phenomenal growth in Dalit writing is part of growing need of the Dalits themselves to articulate their experiences. We can see that these texts which have for centuries been relegated to the margins, offer a challenge to literary aesthetics which, with its caste and gender bias, have for long been masquerading descriptions of the traumas of being an "Untouchable" and the target of upper caste ideology and machinations,

these voices question the institutions and ideologies that have placed them at the margins.

Even more distressing are the stories of Dalit women; for if men have it bad, the women have it worse. Bama's autobiographical novel, *Karukku*— the first Tamil Dalit text deals with the experiences of a Dalit woman in a variety of social institutions like the village, the family, the education system, the church and the clergy. The caste system has been so deeply ingrained in the Indian psyche that institutions that ought to promote egalitarianism or awareness are propagating the same distinctions. The stories of individuals such as these function as voices of entire communities of people who have undergone similar experiences of discrimination. (Qtd. in *Bama's Karukku: Dalit Autobiography as Testimonio* 83)

Karukku is a poignant subaltern novel that speaks of the childhood experiences of the author, Bama. The significance of it comes from its social message. The author's childhood is interspersed with events that repeatedly bring to the fore the harrowing experiences of a Dalit child. It is a sincere attempt to tell a story about ill treatment in the name of class, caste and religion. The story is that of poverty, pain and neglect more than that of anger or aggression, which creates awareness more than anger. Constantly reprovved for being a member of a lower caste, the Dalit children go through severe abuse and torment. It is not just the story of the author alone; it seeks to expose the plight of thousands of Dalit children. She finds that several of her own people have internalized the inferiority that is imposed on them by the upper classes. She wants her novel to be a "two edged sword".

While on the one hand it challenges the oppressors who have enslaved and disempowered the Dalits, on the other hand it reiterates the need for a new society with ideals such as justice, equality and love". It

seeks to establish a better society for the Dalits part from questioning the oppressors. It does not retaliate violently to injustice. (Nayar 83)

On the contrary, it seeks to emphasize on the importance of education, moral values and unity. During severe oppression, her people sought to dodge the law temporarily and escape punishment than work towards them.

She believes that a lack of unity among Dalits will make it easier for the upper castes to subjugate them:

A hundred times a second there are scuffles among them. Shameless fellows, of course the upper caste men will laugh at them. Instead of unity together in a village of many castes, if they keep challenging each other to fights, what will happen to all these men in the end? (Nayar93)

We can see here that this autobiography has undoubtedly been used as a means of political assertion. This is not localized in individualism but links the individual to his entire caste community as a way of gaining power and support in a group struggle against similarly experienced oppression. Manoj Pande has rightly claimed about Dalit autobiography which is perfectly suitable here that: “If it is an autobiography, then it is not of an individual but of a community. Putting community in place of the individual the past and present of the community itself becomes the plot of the story”. (Bama 41)

In this autobiography, it is evident that the protagonist’s own subjective autonomy is bound up in a close relationship with her caste community. She faces personal discrimination and is also deeply sensitive to the pain of other oppressed Dalits, with whom she identifies to such a great extent that she seems to experience

their pain herself. She repeatedly talks about the importance of education for the Dalit child.

In Annan's words: "Because we are born into the Parayajati, we are never given any honor or dignity or respect. We are stripped of all that. But if we study and make progress, we can throw away these indignities". (46)

She also stresses on the need for the Dalits to demand better wages for heavy physical labor. There are places where she is proud and happy the way she is, but is angered by the treatment given to her: "Are we not human beings? Do they not have common sense? Do they not have such attributes as a sense of honor and self respect? Are they without any wisdom, reality, dignity? What do we lack?" (Qtd. in *Karukku* 15)

It can be explicitly noticed that *Karukku* is not merely a militant voice seeking to liberate the Dalits from oppression; it gives an identity to the Dalits by proudly recollecting the cultural significance of being a Dalit, in the remnants of memories. It seeks to decentralize the established structures and most importantly it becomes the harbinger of an awakening and a reiteration of the Dalit's freedom to question, rebel and reinterpret.

Thus, the Dalit autobiographies can be described as:

Narratives of pain, a pain which stings one narrative event to the next the pain that binds individual Dalits together into imagined community of fellow sufferers. Yet the experience of oppression does not imprison Dalits in eternal victimhood, but rather is then used by the Dalit community as a tool mobilized against this cruel and inhuman social order which supports caste based discrimination. Dalit autobiography

transforms an experience of pain into a narrative of resistance. (Singh
6)

For Dalit autobiography, the entire life narrative is based on the idea of the communal identity and in it the self belongs to the people, and the people find a voice in the self. Subjectivity in these autobiographies is thus complicated by the deep connection between the individual self and the communal self. For the Dalit community, like many other marginalized communities such as Aboriginal community, autobiography is not singly a kind of literature but is a form of assertion and resistance in its own right.

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