

After centuries of oppression, as the literacy rates of Dalits increased in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an increasing number of educated Dalits have been entering the literary field to express their anguish and struggle to climb up the social ladder due to caste discrimination on account of being born in a low-caste family. The writings of Dalit authors are largely characterized by a sense of negation, suffering and revolt at the discrimination and exploitation they experience. However, these literary works are imbued with the hope for social change, with the establishment of democratic socialism. The 14 essays in the book "*Towards Social Change: Essays on Dalit Literature*" attempt to capture the essence of different forms of literature by Dalit authors during the last century and identify its unique characteristics which distinctly differ from mainstream literature.

At the outset, the editors situate Dalit literature from the viewpoint of the theory of minority writers, where authors from religious, ethnic and linguistic minorities begin to gain recognition in the mainstream in spite of their social impediments. The revolutionary literature of Dalit minority writers are considered to be on par with writings of other oppressed peoples in the world, like the Afro-Americans. From early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Dalit writers first emerged from Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and Punjab. After Independence, Dalit authors arose from different parts of India writing in various languages, such as Marathi, Hindi, Bengali, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, among others.

The epistemology of Dalit literature has been outlined by Panchanan Dalai in the essay on his comparative analysis of Dalit and Holocaust literatures as both deal with experiences of subjugation, exploitation, discrimination and suffering. He brings to attention several points of convergence between these two literatures including the language used to express marginal experiences, which is often non-standard and non-canonical with a style that lacks prestige or authority.

Many early Dalit authors came from humble backgrounds with little knowledge of English and consequently most of the Dalit literature is in regional languages which have limited readership. The challenge of translating the literary works of Dalit authors is therefore the main theme of five articles. G. K. Das' article, "The Petty Done, the Undone Vast" explores the difficult task of translating Dalit literature by dwelling into the politics of inclusion and exclusion during translation. From his own experience of translating a Santali poem, Dr. Angshuman Kar dwells into the debate of 'literal' and 'free' translation and his preference for a translation that celebrates heterogeneity which includes the unconventional style and expression of subaltern authors. Raj Kumar examines Dalit sensibilities articulated in Dalit literature in different languages throughout India as a counter-culture to elite literary standards. According to him, the act of translation furthers the cause of Dalits and is a source of enrichment to Dalit literature and aesthetics. Harish Narang illustrates the challenges a translator of Dalit text confronts in communicating expressions that are culture and community specific through a comparison of two stories. In addition, Raju Basu's article highlights the problem and politics of representation that subaltern literature are subjected to while interpreting the translator's dilemma in Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide*.

Dalit authors have used the genre of autobiography to give a first-hand account of the mental and emotional trauma caused by the caste system. Priyanka Srivastava's article examines the aesthetics of Dalit autobiographies with the help of Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* and Sharan Kumar Limbale's *The Outcaste*. Asis De analyzes the language and identity politics in Narendra Jadhav's *Outcaste: A Memoir*, which outlines the journey of three generations of a "low-born" family from bitter memories to better dreams.

Poetry has been another form of literary expression of Dalits of their existential situation. Manohar Mouli Biswas provides an historical overview of Dalit poetry in Bengali, while emphasizing the different nature of Dalit aesthetics. Tajuddin Ahmed dwells deeper into perception, the negative tone and tenor of Bengali Dalit poetry, which according to him accommodates a whole range of feelings from anger to tolerance.

In addition to the two articles on Bengali Dalit poetry, there are two more articles on the writings of Dalit authors in Bengal. G.N. Ray's essay tries to understand the cultural politics of Rajbanshi community and its literature which is in variance with Dalit literature as it does not deal with caste discrimination and atrocities in any form. The other essay by Achintya Biswas looks at Dalits from the post-modern perspective by examining two paradigms reflected in the writings of two Bengali intellectuals, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and Hara Prasad Shastri.

A couple of essays by women authors bring to the fore literature on the experiences of marginalized women. Indranil Acharya's essay on Anil Gharai's *The Almond Flowers* discusses the dynamics of the intimate relationship between ecological concerns and gender concerns in the context of the violence against Dalit/Adivasi women and the destruction of the environment. The other essay by K. Suneetha Rani documents the journey of Dalit women in Andhra Pradesh towards solidarity to address caste and gender issues as well as political issues such as the creation of a separate Telangana State.

This collection of essays on various forms and perspectives of Dalit literature is a valuable resource on the writings of Dalit authors in different parts of the country as well as some prominent Dalit literary pieces.