Dalit Literature as a Mode of Mental Rehabilitation of Dalit Trauma and Collective Suffering: A Study of Selected Dalit Autobiographies

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Abstract: Dalit literature has its roots in the perspective of the oppressed. To Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak's now famous question, "Can the subaltern speak?" Dalit writers' theories regarding the necessity, role, substance, and form of Dalit literature serve as their answer to that question (Limbale, 2004). A group of marginalized people such as the Mahars, the Chuhars, the Namasudras and other Dalits like them have been subjected to hardship, miseries, exploitation, and humiliation as it is found in the writing of autobiographies by Dalit writers like Sharan Kumar Limbala, Manohar Mouli Biswas and Omprakash Valmiki. Members of the Dalit community have been subjected to a wide range of trauma, oppression, and prejudice, ranging from horrific physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual assault to everyday micro aggressions, all of which have left a lasting mark on the people's minds. According to Priyanka Singh, “The sheer volume of abuse and suffering inflicted upon this community due to an organised
system of societal stratification at the hands of the ‘upper’ caste individuals has been indiscriminately huge. Privilege allows one to be caste blind, but to deny the suffering and pain of a community that is a perpetual victim of alienation, denigration, discrimination and violence is to shirk away the responsibility of being a part of this society” (Singh, 2020). Here it is discussed how Dalit literature provides a mental rehabilitation to the traumatized Dalits because this literature is completely soaked with humanity's joys and sorrows because this recognition of the human being as a human is important. It believes that humans are paramount and pushes them towards complete revolution. Limbale also writes, “Recognizing the centrality of the human being, this literature is thoroughly saturated with humanity’s joys and sorrows. It regards human beings as supreme, and leads them towards total revolution” (Limbale, 2004).

**Key Words:** Dalit, Akkarmashi, Joothan, Subaltern, Mahar, Mainstream Writing, Trauma, Mental Health, Rehabilitation.

Dalit literature refers to works that depict the Dalits and their hardships, such as enslavement, hardships, and poverty. This writing is a terrible portrayal of suffering. Every human being yearns to be free of the oppression of those in the centre. Dali literature is now expressing these aspects. Arjun Dangle believes that Ambedkar was the inspiration for current Dalit writing. All the Dalits in Maharashtra were roused to action by his revolutionary ideas, and they gained a new sense of self-respect as a result. Because of this growing consciousness, Dalit
writing has emerged as a literary expression (Limbale, 2004). In contrast to mainstream autobiographies, Dalit authors' autobiographies feature a counter-canonical dimension where a single expression spans a multi-dimensional realm. It is important to have Dalit autobiographies because they help define Dalit literature by providing a distinct voice and identity. While keeping their own stories at the forefront of their works, Dalit authors have also portrayed the socio-religious and economic realities that affect the entire Dalit population. Balbir Madhupuri says, “The naked truth is also that the Dalit literature, while keeping themselves in the centre stage of their autobiographies, projected more prominently the social, religious and economic conditions of their entire Dalit community” (Madhopuri, forward 2017).

Instead of using the flowery language of upper-caste writers, Dalit autobiographies rely on daily colloquial expressions to convey the appalling conditions into which they have been thrust. The autobiographies provide as a pivot point for understanding the plight of the Dalit community as a whole. In the self-narratives of the Dalits, who have not yet found a voice, their struggles and sufferings are conveyed. The Dalit life narrative emerges as a form that seeks to mediate the position of a Dalit and his society. Dr. Arpita Chattaraj said in a seminar held in 2011, “The Dalit life narrative emerges is a form that seeks to mediate the position of a ‘Dalit’ vis-a-vis his society, thus transforming the journey of the ‘I (that is central to autobiographical writing) into a discourse of the ‘we’- a transformation of the individual into the collective” (qtd. in Biswas 2017).

There has always been a rich literary tradition among the Dalits that records the struggles and deprivations they have faced since time immemorial. For the most part, this body of work is autobiographical in character. Using personal experiences, the authors create a realistic portrait of the plight of the Dalit people.
as a whole. Dalit literature focuses on caste injustice and questions of otherness as a personal history and a marginalized resistance utilizing an alternative aesthetic. Sharan Kumar Limbale is a Dalit poet and critic in Marathi who wrote in his native language. His autobiographical novel Akkarmashi, one of almost forty he has written, is particularly noteworthy. An English version entitled The Outcast was released in 2003. An Akkarmashi in Marathi language is someone who was born illegitimately, making him an outcast or impure. Being an illegitimate child of his untouchable mother and upper-class father, Limbale has been socially labeled as an Akkarmashi. Because of this, the author was burdened with a sense of inadequacy from birth, as he recounts in his autobiography. Limbale says: “My mother is an untouchable, while my father is a high caste from one of the privileged classes of India. Mother lives in a hut; father in a mansion. Father is a landlord; mother landless. I am an akkarmashi. I am condemned, branded illegitimate” (Limbale, 2003). In this respect it is to be remembered that in the classical definition of trauma, which is defined as the emotional and physical response to a severely upsetting incident, Dalit trauma does not fit into the category. As a result of a series of traumas, the Dalit community has been forced to live in a constant state of vigilance. Trauma from Dalit childhoods is intergenerational in nature, and can be passed down from generation to generation -“ altering their psychological, emotional and physical states” (Singh, 2020).

In the autobiographical novel, a group of subaltern individuals - the Mahar community - experience hardships, misery, exploitation, and humiliation in a polyphonic text. Little Limbale, like thousands of other Dalit youngsters in his neighborhood, must first deal with hunger. To the author's regret, the denial of fundamental human needs like food led these poor people down the wrong path.
God equipped man with a stomach. Since then, people have been attempting to find ways to fill their stomachs and keep them full. It was difficult for him to fill even a single stomach. Limbale can remember, “He survived by swallowing his own saliva. He went for days without eating anything. He started selling himself for his stomach. A woman becomes a whore and a man a thief. The stomach makes you clean shit; it even makes you eat shit” (Limbale, 2003). The sheer volume of indiscriminate torture and suffering inflicted upon this population as a result of an organised system of societal stratification at the hands of 'higher' caste persons has been enormous. While privilege permits one to be caste blind, denying the misery and sorrow of a community that is constantly subjected to estrangement, denigration, discrimination, and violence is akin to shirking one's role as a member of this society (Singh, 2020).

Dalits were suffering from widespread starvation, which had taken on worrisome forms, turning them into the victims of "hunger politics" (Rathee, 2017). Dalits who were malnourished were forced to subsist on the discarded food of the upper caste. They gobbled them up like honeybees. Human hunger and its socio-cultural consequences render him so weak that he had no idea what life was like "beyond bread" and "beyond hunger" until getting his job after finishing school. According to Dr. Manjeet Rathee, the burden of inferiority is so tough to carry for the writer since he entered college with seventy generations of complete poverty behind him (Rathee, 2017). During several social events, the author recalls the memories of swallowing his own saliva while waiting for his turn to come near the end of the meal. The Dalits achieved this by putting their stomach above their dignity and honour. Worse yet, they were often forced to eat Bhakari, a dish made from cow dung jawar.
A meta-realistic account of the author's suffering as a member of the Mahar community, *Akkarmashi* can be applied to anyone in that group. Limbale's autobiography is different from the mainstream authors' in that it is not a eulogy for the author. This novel is about a life that's on a par with a beast's. Because it covers all Dalits from his group, *Akkarmashi* is a kind of anthem for those of them who live in a caste-based society. In spite of the fact that the author himself is the key role, his personal identity is masked by the collective one of the Mahars as a group. In other words, the emphasis is shifting from "I" to the communal "We." To develop testimonies about cast-based oppression, anti-caste struggles, and resistance that offer a distinct world vision, writers turn to their experiences of exclusion, both of the individual and of the community. “The experiences of exclusions of both the self and community are the creative and critical sources used to create testimonies of caste-based oppression” (Rathee, 2017).

To fight the absolute societal marginalization of Dalits, their movements, iconography, experiences and worldview, the Namasudra writers and poets play a vital role in Bengali Dalit literature. In Bengali Dalit literature the Namasudra authors and poets play a significant role “to counter the total social exclusion of the Dalits, their movements, icons, experiences and worldview.”(qtd. in Biswas,2015). Dalit Namasudra authors recently authored many autobiographies and memoirs, some of which have been translated into English. They aid us in reaching a fresh vision full of the Dalit Namasudras' inner experiences and buried sorrows, which were previously unreachable via traditional historical archives and texts. Among them mentionable are Manohar Mouli Biswas’s *Amar Bhubane Ami Benche Thaki* translated as *Surviving in My World*, Manoranjan Byapari’s *Itibritte Chandal Jiban* translated as *Interrogating My Chandal Life*, Dr. Manoranjan Sarkar’s *Ekjan Daliter Atmakatha*, Jatin Bala’s *Sikar Chenra Jiban* and so on.
During his youth, Biswas struggled to acquire an education since he was a Namasudra. In his autobiography, *Amar Bhubane Aami Benche Thaki* (2013), translated as *Surviving in My world: Growing up Dalit in Bengal* (2015), Biswas recounts his struggles. A bond was created between him and the others in his newfound group of friends. The Namasudras' fight for survival in the face of caste prejudice is documented in order to dispel the myth that caste discrimination does not exist in Bengal. He has made incalculable contributions to Bengali Dalit writing, without a doubt, and is a literary Titan in that field. His accomplishments extend well beyond his work as a creative and analytical writer. He is also a Dalit activist working for Dalit emancipation via the Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sanstha.

After partition, Biswas shows the suffering of the Namashudra people by portraying identity politics of the Namashudra people as the most notably horrible survivors of partition. According to him, the Namashudra ethnic minority resides in a separate yard, on the other side of the city limits. Biswas observes such an identity dilemma in his short poem “A Separate Court Yards”: "Why are we here? “ (Poetic Rendering As Yet Unborn, 2010).

As far as Bengali Dalit writing goes, Manohar Mouli Biswas is the banyan tree. His contributions to the field are unfathomable. In addition to creative and analytical writing, he has made a significant impact in other areas as well. Since joining the Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sanstha, an organization that supports and promotes the Dalits, he has worked tirelessly for Dalit emancipation. Dalit Mirror, a bi-monthly journal edited by Manohar mouli Biswas, provides a venue for Dalit writers to air their long-suppressed cries for justice and equality. To quote Biswas: “since no man can be away from the influence of the environment in which he lives. The man I was in untouchable society in my early life has undergone a total change by the influence of society in which I have been present for a long time.
(What) happened is really due to sanskritisation and acculturation” (Biswas, 2015). Despite being raised in the bhadralok tradition, he is committed to the Dalit cause and does not shy away from advocating for them. A part of him believes that his advocacy and unwavering support for the Dalits will eventually lead to their independence. He is adamant: "Activism and writing have been equally important in my life... I can't help but be involved in social activism (Biswas, 2015). He has no intention of giving up his fight for Dalit identity against caste-class tyranny.

Omprakash Valmiki was a Dalit from the Chuhra community, one of the lowest. The author saw how upper caste people like Tyagi Brahmins exploit this group in his hometown of Barla, Uttar Pradesh, where he grew up. These people were forced to perform menial tasks such as sweeping roads and cleaning cow stables. Because they are lower caste, untouchable, and helpless, they are frequently subjected to abuse and torture at the hands of the upper caste. When abused, they were referred to as "oye chuhre" or "abey chuhre," both of which are degrading terms for them. Due to their precarious situation, they didn't get compensated for their labour and instead was shouted at and abused. Their condition was such that they: “Didn’t manage to get two decent meals a day, not the least because they often didn’t get paid for their labour and instead got sworn at and abused” (Valmiki, 2003).

An actual and first-person account of the suffering of the Chuhra community, the lowest in the social hierarchy of India's caste system, may be found in Joothan: A Dalit's Life. Post-independent India's exploitation, hardship, social invisibility, and humiliation are documented in this book in realistic detail. Discrimination on the basis of caste affects the author in more ways than one. As he recalls: "Untouchability was so rampant that while it was considered all right to touch dogs and cats or cows and buffaloes, if one happens end to touch a
Chuhra, one got contaminated or polluted. The Chuhras were not seen as human” (Valmiki, 2003).

When it comes to the Chuhra community, there is no one to give voice to the frustrations that Joothan does. By documenting the misery and exploitation Valmiki encountered as both an individual and the representative of the stigmatized group as an adult, he has created Joothan a priceless source of information on Chuhra's life struggles. 'Joothan' in Hindi refers to food scraps that are either given to animals or thrown into the garbage can after meals are finished. English words such as leftover and leaving, on the other hand, are not equivalent to joothan. When someone other than the initial eater consumes the leftovers, they turn into joothan. People from the Dalit caste ate joothan like honey out of desperation. As a result, the novel Joothan alludes to the community of Valmiki's anguish, poverty, and suffering. Trauma that is passed down through generations begins with the first generation that is directly affected by dangerous situations and suffers post-traumatic stress. For example, secondary dramatization is passed on to future generations through emotional deregulation, chronic anxiety and high stress, intra-community violence as well as unhealthy attachment styles, as well as higher levels of both physical and mental health issues (Singh, 2020).

Autobiography, more than any other form of Dalit writing, becomes the most effective means of communicating Dalit experiences and the sense of Dalitness that comes with them. For authenticity of expression, we can look to Dalit autobiographies more often. Using a focus on pain and suffering, Dalit literature tries to expose the traumatic experience as a kind of struggle against the dictates of caste. It takes on a representational dimension while narrating the genuine image of life and sharing it with other Dalits. While seeking a way of mental rehabilitation of the traumatized Dalits this article highlights the
psychological effects of caste-based structural violence and intergenerational trauma that they have endured for thousands of years. The psychological effects of structural violence and intergenerational trauma may be impossible to address in full. For the sake of their long-term well-being and social advancement, we must first acknowledge the psychological and socioeconomic harm caused by caste violence. Many of their mental health issues can only be addressed if they are aware of their history and the impact of their collective memories. In the words of – Shaima Ahammed “Any attempts to address their psychosocial concerns require this historical consciousness and awareness of collective memories that incapacitate them in many ways”( Ahammed, 2019). We may conclude with the words of Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela, “Without the integration of traumatic events into cultural discourses, individuals as well as society in general stay traumatized.”(qtd. in Ahammed, 2019).

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