

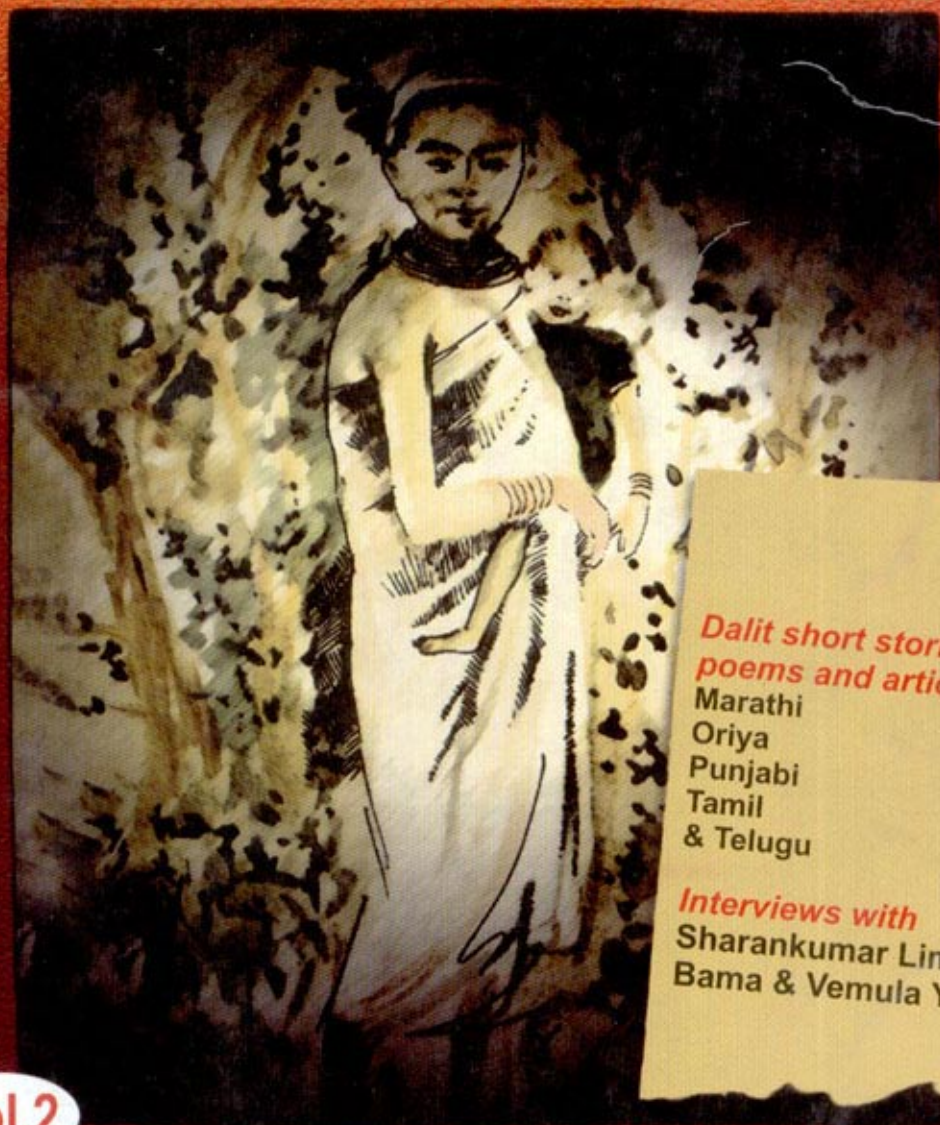
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Special Number on Indian Dalit Literature



*Dalit short stories
poems and articles from*
Marathi
Oriya
Punjabi
Tamil
& Telugu

Interviews with
Sharankumar Limbale,
Bama & Vemula Yellaiah

Vol.2

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Dalit Literature in Punjabi



BHAGWANT RASULPURI

Trans. Dr. Rajinder Singh

A debate is on today about the Dalit literature in the entire Indian literature, which began with Marathi and came to Punjabi through Hindi after the eighties of last century in a big way. At that time many new faces came to the fore in the Punjabi literature. They had unconsciously or consciously been influenced by this debate and they gave expressions to their experiences, which had remained untouched till then. The sharp manner and rebellious nature of Dalit literature in India is not yet seen in the Punjabi literature, but the fine layers of Dalit literature began to be presented by the writers after the eighties. The seeds of Dalit concerns can be traced in the writings of the Gurmat (Sikh), Bhakti and Sufi movements. After that some glimpses can be found in the folk tales in poetic style. About a century before, during the time of Nanak Singh, the novelist, the Dalit characters appeared in Punjabi fiction but their portrayal was just at surface level.

In modern Punjabi poetry, Prof. Puran

Singh, Mohan Singh and Dhani Ram Chatrik write about Dalit concerns. This was the pre-independence era. They raised the Dalit issues in a mild form. The Dalit concern was highlighted in a meaningful way by Gurdas Ram Alam in his poetry. Alam began writing poetry about 1930. He brought out the social, economic and mental distress of the Dalits in the background of Ambedkar ideology. In his collection of poems, 'Je mai mar giya', 'Alle phatt', 'Uddiyaan dhooraan', 'Apna aap', he highlighted the problem of Dalit identity. His outlook with regard to caste system was humanistic.

Near about 1960, the great poet Lal Singh Dil, comes up in Punjabi Dalit poetry. For the first time he gives expression to revolutionary thought about the caste system in his poetry. Lal Singh Dil in his books 'Satluj di hawa' (1971 AD), 'Many a suns' (1982 AD), 'The Nagas' (1927 AD), etc. has given an understanding of the class of Dalits' and their personal life. In addition, Dil

also studies the tribal life, the pitiable and animal like existence of the Dalits which he made the centre point of his study.

Balbir Madhopuru comes up in 1980 AD in Punjabi Dalit poetry. With the publication of his collection of poems "Maroonthal da birkh" (1992), and "Bhakhda pataal" (1995), the discourse on Dalit liberation is built. The hard and bitter realities of life, and the approach to the Dalit suffering gets crystallised through his poetry.

Through his collection of poems in his books "Bhakhya" (2002) and "Nabra di ibarat" (2009) Madan Vira brings to the fore the hardships, the painful life, the aspirations, the yearnings and the dreams of the Dalits, with a crusading spirit. He makes frontal attacks on the cultural stranglehold and Hindu civilization. His poetry has its new poetic face. Sri Ram Arsh, in his poetry, has a dig at the Hindu myths and breaks those myths which are connected with Dalit identity. Dr. Gurmit Kalamajri, in his book "Nadio wapaa parat ayo" depicts the untold sufferings perpetrated on the Dalits and their mental agony through countless symbols. In his book "Hashiai ton bahar" he uses powerful symbols to portray the inhuman conditions in which the Dalits were made to live. The present day condition of the Dalits, their rebellious tone, their suppressed psyche and strong hammering of brahminism have been forcefully dealt with by poets like Dr. Manmohan (Neelkanth), Jaipal (Nazam kadon chup si), Mohan Tyagi (Dhooain da dastawez) Boota Singh Ashant (Chanani do boota), Sadhu Singh Shudrak (Nav manthan), etc. in their books.

Different concerns connected with Dalit life began to be highlighted in Punjabi story about 1920. Nanak Singh Sant Singh Sekhon, Gurbaksh Singh Pritlari, Santokh Singh Dhir, Hira Singh Dard, Sujan Singh and other story writers portrayed memorable Dalit

characters in one way or other. Sujan Singh's collection of stories (Dukh-Sukh) (1939), Sabh Rang (1949), Narkaan da devta (1951), etc. present the pathetic economic and social conditions of workers/Dalits in a very effective manner. He has a sympathetic and considerate approach towards the Dalits. In the first and second generation of writers Sujan Singh rises above all, especially when there was no Dalit movement.

The multi-faceted expression of Dalit life appeared in the stories when in the third generation of Dalits (1980) the learned story writers Kirpal Kazaak, Prem Gorkhi, Atarjit, Nachhattar and Bhoora Singh Kaler appeared on the scene. They depicted the multi-dimensional life of the Dalits. The characters enduring abject poverty, mental slavery and victimization at the hand of the high castes began to be presented in unmistakable terms. They gave a new identity to the Dalit story but in their times no Dalit movement had begun in the real sense. These story writers came from the Dalit class (Chamar caste). Naturally they depicted their heroes who belonged to their caste. They also broke the literary myth of the 'hero'.

When Atarjit's story 'Bathloo Chamiar' (1974) was published, it became the subject of discussion at all levels. It is a very important example of understanding the mental state of the Dalits of that time. In his collections of stories "Maaskhorey" (1972) "Tutde bande rishtai" (1975), "Adna Insaan" (1986), "Kahani kaun likhega?" (1989) "Anhi theh" (1996), "Teeja Yudh" (1999), "Sabootai qadam" (2003) he places before us the different aspects of Dalit life and suffering. Atarjit presents such horrifying details of Dalit misery as also the breaking of Dalit families suffering from penury along with their social tragedy. His stories "Adna Insaan", "Sabootai qadam", "Anhi theh" and "Thoonha" are much talked about

books on Dalit life.

During that period, Kirpal Qazaak with his collection of stories "Kala Ilm" (1979), "Soorajmukhi puchhde ney" (1981) "Addha pul" (1983), "Hummas" (1990) enters the realm of Dalit stories. He writes about Dalit labour, farm labour, artisans, daily wagers, etc, who become his characters from the Dalit point of view and opens new vistas in this regard. Then he presents the inner truth, characterization, dramatic depiction and satire through his characters.

Prem Gorkhi, born in 1947, presents the Dalit problems in greater and minute details. He writes about the Dalit exploitation at the hand of prosperous farmers, landlords and mill owners with a missionary zeal in his collections of stories "Mitti de rang" (19974) "Jeen maran" (1981), "Arjan Safedi wala" (1994) and "Dharti puttar" (2002). He comes to the fore with new dimensions of class and caste economy. His stories depict socially and economically depressed, trampled underfoot Dalits groaning under atrocious conditions. He unfolds the social realities layer after layer. During this period Bhoora Singh Kaler also with his collection of short stories "Panchhiaan de alhnai" (1978) and "Tuttai patte" (1992), enters the field of Dalit stories and presents the hardships and sufferings endured by the Dalits. Kaler highlights the problems of Dalits living below poverty line.

From 1980 till date, has come up the fourth generation of writers. This can be regarded as the golden age of Punjabi Dalit story because the Dalit story writers have come up in very large numbers during this period. They consciously accepted the influence of the Dalit movement and wrote Dalit story in a very effective manner. Pure Dalit story collections were published during this period which provided a solid ground for

Dalit story which came to be taken note of at academic level in the Universities and research began to be conducted on Dalit story. Another development also took place during this period that the stories written by the Dalits and for the Dalits have become an integral part of literature. This also began to be recognized that the agony of the Dalits can be felt by the Dalits themselves in a much better way rather than by non-dalits. The scholars cited the example of Ambedkar's writings in support of this.

Two story writers Mohan Lal Philauria and Sarup Sialwi came up during the period. They wrote pure Dalit story only and attained a distinct identity. Mohan Lal Philauria's collections of stories "Sarkari vardi" (2000), "Laagi" (2001), "Mitti da bojhi" (2002) are purely Dalit stories. In these stories he has highlighted different aspects of Dalit life. Instead of inferiority complex, he develops the pride of caste in his stories.

Saroop Sialvi in his two story collections "Pind ajai jionda hai" (2001) and "Nherai de vaasi" (2009) talks of the past and present of Dalit life in the context of political and social concerns. He is a powerful and authentic story teller of the Dalit society. He depicts the position of Dalits who became enlightened on getting educated. He writes his stories in the light of Ambedkar's social philosophy.

The next story writer in Dalit literature is Bhagwant Rasulpuri who takes up untouched and specific points worthy of note in Dalit life. He throws light on those dark nooks and corners of Dalit suffering which have hitherto remained outside the concern of Dalit writers. In his collection of stories, "Chanan di leek" (1992), "Main shaita te Indumani" (1996) "Teeja netar" (2005) and "Rehmat Masih Mattoo's biography" (2009) Bhagwant brings to the fore the inner conflict

of the Dalits. His stories present the vibrant Dalit society in an effective manner. "Qasoorvaar", "Faisla", "Rehmat Masi Mattoo's biography" and "Jarranh" are the stories in which the aspirations of the Dalits, so long kept hidden in darkness, their desires, their serious problems, etc. are seen highlighted for the first time.

Gurmit Kariavali, a fourth generation Dalit story writer, also presents Dalit life and society in his collections of stories, "Akk da boota", "Oonai", "Atu khoji" and "Sarjit" (Book - Tarlo machhi, Qainaat), Makhan Maan (Book- Boiling waters), Des Raj Kali (Books- Katth Kali, Faqiri) Balinder Basra, Soma Sablok, Baljit (Book - Sau gallan) and Harnek Kaler. All the story writers gave such details in the Punjabi stories as had not been brought out by the story writers of the mainstream or they had talked of such things in a very casual and hazy manner. There have been some widely discussed stories by non-Dalit writers, of which Prem Prakash's story "Lachhmi", Manmohan Bawa's "Naag Munda", Maninder Kang's "Kutti Vehda," and Bajjinder Nasralis's story "Hadda rodi" and Kesra Ram's "Lash" are leading stories.

In the field of Punjabi novel, Dalit concerns have been brought out with great vehemence. The Punjabi novelists have presented the Dalits from the traditional point of view. They highlighted their economic plight or the exploitation of their women. In fact, the physical exploitation and helplessness of Dalit women have been specially highlighted in Punjabi novel.

Novelist Jaswant Singh Kanwal in his novel "Haani" shows, through his characters Biro of low caste and her love for a high caste Jat lad Labha, the discrimination in the name of castes, the social inequalities and economic disparities. Novelist Gurdial Singh in his novels studies the Dalit life from a

scientific angle. In his novels, "Marhi da diva", "Athan uggan", "Annhe ghorey da daan" he gives minute details of Dalit life in all its aspects. Novelists Nanak Singh (Chitta Lahoo) highlights the pathetic condition of Dalits, and Sohan Singh Sital in his novel "Jug badal gaya", talks about a dalit farm labour in the context of inferiority complex. Describing the illicit relations between Lakha Singh and Rajo, he brings to the fore the physical exploitation of woman. Karamjit Singh Kusa, in his novel "Agg da geet" presents the Dalit problems in a very realistic manner. He has painted a Dalit character, Deboo, who, in spite of being a hard worker, full of determination, handsome and honest, leads a wretched life of penury. Dalit woman 'Giro', who has been presented in the novel, falls in love with a high caste boy but she is left broken - hearted when she comes into conflict with the caste consideration.

Novelist Gurcharan Singh Rao presents the ironical fate of the Dalit society and he is himself a Dalit. In his novel 'Mishalchi', he has depicted Dalit society in its different aspects. The Dalit problems, illiteracy, poverty, exploitation, inferiority complex based on caste have been highlighted simultaneously. Dalit writer Des Raj Kali, in his novel 'Praneshwari' has depicted the Dalit reality in the context of Ambedkar's thinking. He presents the Dalit exploitation at the social and economic levels. A flood of light has been thrown on the history and mythology in the context of Dalits, in a novel for the first time. Besides, in Karamjit Singh Aujala's novel "Ooch-neeche" and Ninder Gill's novel "Dasta Dalit di" Dalit problems have been dealt with at greater length.

Very few autobiographies have been written in Punjabi Dalit literature. After the Academay award to the Marathi writer, Sharan Kumar Limbale's autobiography

"Akarmashi", though the writing of autobiographies had become very popular in Marathi, this has not been the case in regard to Punjabi writings. However, till date, Lal Singh Dil's autobiography "Dastan" (1998), Balbir Madhopuri's "Chhangya rukh" (2006), Prem Gorkhi's "Ghair hazir aadmi" (2007) and Gurnam Aqida's Kakh kanda (2008) have been published. All these writers have very effectively highlighted the Dalit agony. "Dil", in his autobiography presents the caste-based discriminatory behaviour in his neighbourhood school, Naxal party and the police force. The caste discrimination and pride inflict deep injuries which become festering sores. Balbir Madhopuri's autobiography "Chhangya rukh" depicts the Brahman-Jat discriminatory behaviour and the life of economic exploitation led by the Chamars. In his autobiography "Ghair hazir aadmi" Prem Gorkhi highlights the point as to how a person comes out of the swamp of poverty and caste discrimination and rises to the position of sub-editorship of a leading Punjabi daily. Atarjit's autobiography is going

to be published very soon.

The playwrights also have depicted the Dalit concerns in their plays. We have only two playwrights, one the winner of Indian Sahitya Academy award Charan Das Sidhu and the other, Harbans Lal Badhan. In his plays, "Baat Fattu Jhir di", "Ambiaan noon tarsengi", "Baba Bantu", etc. Charan Das Sidhu describes the caste division in Punjab and satirizes the caste based discrimination. Harbans Lal Badhan in his plays and books "Rut phiri van kambya" (2003), Kood phirai pardhan (1996), Manas ki jaat (1999) attacks Brahminism.

After this brief survey of the Punjabi literature, insofar as it relates to Dalit writings, we easily come to the conclusion that the Punjabi Dalit literature has a very bright future. Dalits are being made an integral part of Punjabi literature by the new generation writers. From the point of view of artistic quality, Dalit writing equals or even excels other writings. But still many more aspects of Dalit life need to be highlighted.