

# TITLE OF THE PAPER- “IDEOLOGICAL TRAITS OF KANNADA DALIT POETRY”

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**Abstract-** Paper analyses the importance of Kannada Dalit poetry in Indian literature history, in general, witnessed a tradition of resistance to centuries old inhuman practice of untouchability in particular, Kannada Dalit Poetry tradition has a significant place in articulating the satanic practice of untouchability in the human history. It has consistently upheld democratic values. Kannada Dalit Poetry, as the inheritor of this tradition has extended the vistas and has immensely contributed to the world of Literature. Kannada Dalit Poetry has a long cultural history. From Folk to vachana to modern Kannada literature, protest poetry tradition has extended and culminated in the new Dalit poetry genre. Dalit poetry imbibed and internalized the great tradition of Kannada, and began to articulate forcefully after its exposure to modern era, especially the second half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Kannada Dalit poetry was heavily influenced by American Black movement, Marathi Dalit Panthers movement and Digambara literary movement of Telugu. It identified itself with all the exploited and marginalized communities, though it began chiefly as a movement of Untouchable Dalit. Paper also explores the impact of various ideologies of individuals on Dalit poetry, and how social movements are influenced by Dalit poetry and vice versa, in particular become a new folk poetry in society.

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## INTRODUCTION

Kannada Dalit literature has a distinct place in the history of Indian literature. It has created a milestone in literary history. The depressed classes/castes of Karnataka were active in Vachana movement during 12<sup>th</sup> century. Mystics like Male Mahadeshwara, Manteswamy triggered a religious revolution against caste discrimination and untouchability in fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Sufi saints too continued this process of resistance against the caste system subsequently. But it was only in 1970's that the suppressed classes began their vocal articulation through Dalit literature. It broke the centuries of silence and began to represent the community's articulation. The silence broke into words, words into songs, songs into resistance and thus born Dalit poetry. Secular, humane and democratic values became the kernel of Dalit poetry. By introducing the world of marginalized communities to the mainstream literary world it extended the dimensions of human experience. It also greatly influenced the intellectual understanding of Kannada. It transcended gender and caste. It raised crucial issues and thereby enriched Kannada literary history and thus contributed to the world literature.

## BACKGROUND

“Black Americans, Africans, Burakamins of Japan experience the same sense of social discrimination Their articulation is against an oppressive social system that treated them as inferior. Thus Dalit literature should be considered as a part of global articulation.”(Urikandaya, P-35, 2009) Kannada Dalit literature influenced by American black literature, Marathi black panthers' movement, introduced a new dimension to the poetry of resistance. It imbibed the

thoughts of Ambedkar, Basavanna, Marx, Gandhi Lohia and Periyar and vibrantly articulated socialist, egalitarian and feminist concerns. It was an inclusive literary movement of exploited, women and have-nots of all the religions. The core concern of Dalit poetry is to question the caste based exploitation and usher in a society without caste, gender and class based discrimination. In a way Liberty, fraternity and Equality are the mottos of Dalit literature too.

The Ideological Basis of Dalit Poetry:

The ideological moorings of Dalit literature encompass a vision of humane society. Mogalli Ganesh, a leading Dalit writer has elucidated this conceptual framework. “It recreates the past in the present and consciously tries to build a future based on this. Cultural and historical memories are the chief sources of Dalit ideology. It becomes clearer when one puts the Dalit Literature in the frame of Dalit Culture. “Dalit culture meditates over nonviolent anger; thus it has no hatred. it has no manifestations of violence. It does not have the discriminatory policy; nor does it cognize the superior-inferior concept. Dalit culture manifests the quality of mother earth; thus even when heaped with dirt, humiliation and violence it has the innate strength to sprout. The very fact that none could destroy Dalit culture is a proof of its instinctive power of resistance and creativity” (Jatimeemamse p-313-314)

Kannada Dalit Poetry- Social and Cultural Identity:

Dalit poetry, born out of Dalit struggle is also a dossier of cultural history. A meaningful study of Dalit poetry can reconstruct the history of socio-cultural struggle of Dalits. Formally one can attribute the birth of Dalit poetry to the publication of “Hole Maadigara Haadu” published in 1975. However, one can trace the Dalit articulations in Tatvapada, vachanas, Dasa Sahitya and in the works of Bhakti poets like Tukarama, Kabir and Chokhamela.

Dalit poetry has simultaneously made two impacts. It stirred a sense of assertion among Dalit communities and impelled them to offer resistance in an organized manner. Secondly it created a sense of fear among the exploitative class about Dalits and made them introspect.

Dalit poetry is considered as a new genre in Kannada literary tradition. It changed the poetic expression hitherto prevalent and brought newness in the subject, expression, metaphors of poetry. It interrupted the text based poetics and constructed a poetics based on the experience of grass root level vision of Dalits. Dalit poetry and Dalit struggle inspired and complimented each other simultaneously. Dalit poetry has influenced several social struggles and that social struggles have shaped Dalit poetry.

It is astonishing to see the way Dalit poetry has influenced both literate and illiterate classes. one reason for this may be the ability of Dalit poetry to include the exploited classes of every caste and religion and represent them ably. Innumerable number of people from marginalized communities would sing these 'Dalit songs of struggle' in social struggles as if they composed them. These songs have been part of the farmers' struggle, women and labor movements. Thus there are enough evidences to demonstrate that Dalit poetry has transcended its original social source and become part of the larger struggle groups, thereby becoming universal, for example:

My People (By- Siddalingaiah)

“They carry stones for building sites  
 They get kicked until they swoon  
 They die from hunger, My people.  
 They excavate gold, but they don't get a meal;  
 They weave cloth, but they go naked, My people.  
 They plough the field and they sow the seeds  
 They cut the crops and they are baked in the sun, My people.  
 They come home empty handed  
 They have a deep deep sigh  
 They live in misery, My people.  
 They build the shops and they raise the bungalows  
 They get into heavy debts, My people.  
 When they collapse on the street, they don't cry for  
 Help, they suppress their cries, My people  
 They pay interest through their noses,  
 They become ash in the fire of fiery speeches, My people.  
 For the God-loving men who eat their fill  
 They prepare foot-wear, My People.  
 They fall at others' feet, and they get kicked  
 They are so devoted, My people.  
 They listen to anything said to them  
 They live on air, My people.”

(My People, Siddalingaiah, Translated by- Sumateendra Nadig, Ten Years of Kannada Poetry 1974-83, P-61)

Dalit poetry was born as a response to certain immediate incidents of violence and oppression. The murder of a Dalit at Tumkur, massacre of Dalits in Belchi found expression in Dalit poetry. Hundreds of people were variously inspired by these songs of struggle. I would like to draw attention to a case wherein a bonded labor managed to free himself and work as a volunteer to Dalit struggle committee. He even managed to contest an election for a local body and win the! A mendicant singer threw away his conch and bell and began to work as an activist. There are any numbers of such examples of transformation.

**Dalit Poetry as New Folk Poetry:**

Dalit poetry, due to its unique mode of expression, emerged as the voice of the community; individual expression spoke for the universal. Thus Dalit poetry transformed in to new folk poetry. As it was woven in to the emerging social struggles, people simply forgot the individual poet and appropriated these songs as their own. This can be considered as an important cultural shift achieved by Dalit Poetry. “Revolutionary poetry should transform itself in to folk. A revolutionary poet should absorb the folk spirit and pay back to the community what he owes. People should accept these songs as their own. Poets' signature should be erased and our poetry should become truly folk” (Urikandaya, P-30)

Even in the preface of Holemadiagara Haadu, Siddalingaiah, writes, “ I am repeating, these are songs, the purpose of these poems will be understood only when you sing it”( Hole Madigara Hadu, P-4) Dalit Poetry is essentially created to sing with certain rhythm and meter is obvious from these assertion.

As folk was closer to Dalit experience, dalit poetry easily merged with folk tradition and became the modern voice of folk. The tone of Folk poetry influenced the Dalit Poetry and the metrical compositions of Dalit poetry was appropriated by the communities steeped in Folk tradition. As both folk and Dalit poetry are the expressions of marginalized/ oppressed communities, it is but natural that thee merged seamlessly. It should be noted that those who recite folk songs and epics are from lower caste and oppressed classes. Even the protagonists of many Folk epics belong to marginalized communities. Madeshwara is a Madiga, Manteshwamy is a Holeyaya.

In this backdrop Dalit ideological traits can be defined as socially inclusive ideology? Dalit community humiliated and discriminated for centuries is responding humanely socially. Dalit Poetry is enunciating certain universalization by its resolve to be include every community. Only an oppressed community that has experienced humiliation can understand and empathize the agony of another community. Liberating oneself from the sense of humiliation is the essential feature of Dalit

poetry, thereby it can be considered as its ideological trait too. Humanizing a humiliated soul is what Kancha Ilayya calls Dalitization.

Reviving the sense of plurality to the concepts of society, community or collective and to merge the marginalized sections in these entities can be considered as ideological preoccupations of Dalit poetry. Thus it effectively transcends the caste nomenclature associated with it and transforms in to an ideological position of humanity. In the process it enlarges certain secular and democratic values to include the marginalized. It resonates the idea that all the exploited of the world are Dalits. In a way this can be termed as the success of Dalit poetry in the context of poetry in general and quasi success in the social context. Yet one could see certain reader groups still treating Dalit Poetry as that of Untouchables. This is plain prejudice, nothing less. Hence Dalit poetry is not able to free itself from the caste tag. Whether this is due to the genre, or the caste of the poet or the readers who read this from a caste angle- is difficult to conclude.

The ideological moorings of Dalit poetry clearly suggest that only when poet gets Dalitized, his poetry could become universal.

'Protest- Self-respect- Introspection- identity are central to Dalit consciousness. Introspection is a simultaneous action enacted from within and in public space. Thus D.R. Nagaraj's, "in solitude, alone, meditative, in a mood of confession, critical, introspecting philosopher could be wrestling at academies, temples." (Uri Chammalige, P-28) are appropriate. Dalit poetry expects the fusion of intellectual activity and physical activism. Incidents of Social humiliation, initiatives to overcome inferiority complex and stir self respect, to stir guilt in the mind of the perpetrator should be the reference points of poetry. The symbols of humiliation should be transformed in to symbols of protest and transcending." (Uri Chammalige, P-46)

#### **Kannada Dalit Poetry and Individual Ideological Perspectives:**

Several ideological schools have influenced Kannada Dalit Poetry. Initially, Dalit poetry was influenced by Ambedkar and later it came under the influence of Buddha, Basavanna, Phule, Marx, Gandhi and periyar. It should be noted that except for Marx, the rest were Indian social reformers. Ambedkar's thoughts are central to Dalit consciousness and the rest are complimenting dimensions. Socially each one of these thinkers has a different approach to a social issue, yet their core concerns are Dalit issues. Dalit poetry believes that synthesis and integration of ideas are crucial for social transformation. 'The middle path, mercy, cooperation' of Buddha; 'the idea of caste annihilation' of Basavanna; 'woman liberation and access to education' of Phule; 'class struggle' of Marx; Gandhi's 'transformation at individual level; Ambedkar's issues of 'social justice' became the

major concerns of Dalit poetry which can be synthesized so that a humane society can emerge.

For the ocean of struggle divergent rivers of movements should merge and move. This can be called the concept of Bahujana, the core preoccupation of oppressed classes. These are the issues of production relationships; this can also be called the spiritual materialism (Dalitva P-1,2)

Dalit poetry examines these ideological dimensions critically. Though here and there one could see the glorification of individuals, generally it accepts any of these schools of thought after serious critical examination. However, Dalit Poetry is rooted in the thoughts of Ambedkar, "Ambedkar is a burning Fire and rebel. Though at times Dalit poetry seems to imbibe Marxist or Lohiya thoughts, it is essentially the outcome of the vision of Ambedkar. Hence the Dalit writings are flush with dignity and self-respect". (Uri Chammalige P-72, 2002)

Ambedkar's 'annihilation of caste, critical attitude towards tradition and culture, demand for social justice, following of Buddha's preachings to liberate the exploited communities' have been the strands through which Dalit poetry has expressed a well woven poetry. Sidhalingayya's poem, "Ambedkar" makes such a nuanced critical study of Ambedkar's thoughts.

The issue of which communities do Dalit poetry represents often suggests the social dimension of the ideological trait. Though Ambedkar was born in to a particular caste, this poem records the process of Ambedkar transforming in to a champion of every suppressed community. Dalit poetry is careful not to manifest the same attributes it rejects ideologically.

However, many of the poems written on Ambedkar are essentially hagiographic in nature. It is rare to find a piece that dwells on the issue of status of Dalits who are yet to imbibe the thoughts of Ambedkar. Historically the debate between Gandhi and Ambedkar are important, Gandhi emerges as a symbol of one who annihilates the caste arrogance, while Ambedkar, that of one who overcame the caste inferiority complex and achieved a high degree of self-respect. Initial Dalit Poetry saw Gandhi as a symbol of sacrifice, while later Dalit poets consider Gandhi as one who destroyed the power politics of Dalits by opposing Ambedkar's demand for separate electorate. Dalit poetry sharply asks a pertinent question about Gandhi- 'If he could drive out British through his nonviolent means, why he was unable to do the same to remove the caste system.' One can see a partial acceptance of Gandhi among the First generation Dalit poets. But the second generation Dalit poets entirely reject Gandhi.

Next to Ambedkar, Marxism influenced the Dalit poetry immensely. But the problem with Marxism and its proponents is that this school has failed to consider the caste discrimination as a social issue. However, the concerns of Marxism towards working class have found resonances in Dalit poetry. The

struggles of Mandela and Benjamin Molais too have inspired Kannada Dalit poetry.

## CONCLUSION

All in all, Dalit poetry became the voice of deprived community by bringing consciousness, self- respect in making unity among the depressed communities. And also enabled the people to know the injustice in democratic set up at the end it made the people educate organize, agitate against the social evils, exploitation, inhuman practices in society. Dalit poetry has assimilated different philosophical ideas and their philosophies and thus gave a proper direction both to Dalit consciousness and Dalit movement. In particularly main aim of this Dalit poetry is to establish the inclusive society by eradicating the caste, class, gender, religion hierarchy, to upheld the humanitarian values in society.

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