

## A Brief Project Report

Dr. Preeti Oza

Department of English

St. Andrew's College of Arts, science and Commerce

The project **“Non-Dalit sensitivity for the Dalit literature amongst the students of literature in colleges of Mumbai University”** is an effort to find out the general attitude of the students of literature across Mumbai colleges towards marginal literature in general and the Dalit literature in particular. Dalits were always marginalized ‘other’ side of the Indian society. So when they started speaking after the centuries of silence, about themselves, we have got the writings depicting assertion of human rights, self-pride, revolt against social injustice, chronicles of personal and collective suffering, and hopes and aspirations for a new society devoid of discrimination.

For many years in Indian literature studies across the departments of language and literature, the syllabus, the curriculum, and the pedagogy were strongly rooted in the Western writings, aesthetics, ideologies, and sensitivities. Especially the English departments across the universities in India have prided themselves to be a ‘perfect’ role models in copying the exact writers, the same books, the similar novels and poetry and the similar critical theories of evaluation as their Western counterparts. For them, the literature started in England and ended also over there for all these centuries and whatever is not written in the English language had never been considered worthy of any serious consideration in a literature classroom.

But in India, since last many years, the Dalits and the other margins like women writers, the regional ethnic writers, and the queers have started voicing their issues via journals articles, books, diaries and other public and mass platforms. When Dalit writers started writings, there was no attempt to fit the writings into any Western Aesthetics or to call their writings a ‘Literary piece’ at all. To Dalit writers, history is not illusionary or unreal. They simply make use of the language

of the out-castes and under-privileged in Indian society. Authenticity and liveliness have become hallmarks of Dalit literature. Shame, anger, sorrow and indomitable hope are the stuff of Dalit literature.

In the study of literature across Indian Universities, the traditional selection of texts and the genre are done on the basis of the historical importance and for the advanced level at the post-graduation and further only the popular and well-researched areas of literature are covered. In the wake of the emergence of Dalit literature, it is very crucial to understand the sensitivity of the students who are having a just one-dimensional perception of the literature studies, as that of either the study of the great classics or the popular award-winning literary texts.

This research project was designed in two areas: first was to make the students aware of the existing work done by the prominent Dalit writers and the second was to analyze their response on some of the issues raised in the group interviews done with them.

The project started with the reading of Dalit Literature books and journal articles both in English and other Indian languages, especially Hindi, Marathi, and Gujarati. A short summary about the Dalit literature and important writers was prepared and was used during the primary data collection and interviewing students in various colleges. The brief included the significance of Dalit literature, the historical importance of Dalit writings, important Dalit writers and some of their prominent works. The first visit was an introductory session with a group of students where a booklet of Dalit Literature as an introduction was given to them,

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study is classified as qualitative as the purpose is primarily to describe a phenomenon and a universal problem of marginalization. It would be a qualitative research which tends to be more “in-depth”, focusing and probing deeper into a given problem, the sensitization towards Dalit and other Marginal literature.

- The descriptive research method of research will be used for conducting the present study.
- The primary data would be collected from the interview, questionnaire, focus group and other projective techniques.

- The secondary data source would be the related literature in the form of various reference books, publications and journal articles.

### **Data Collection:**

### **Secondary data:**

Major Dalit anthologies and reference books:

1. 'Dalit: the New cultural context of an Old Marathi Word', Contribution to Asian Studies, XI, 1977-78.
2. 'Indian Literature': 159, 1994. Issue -10
3. Arjun Dangle, ed., 'Poisoned Bread' Translation from Modern Marathi Literature, Mumbai, Orient Longman, 1992
4. Arthur John, 'race, Equality and the Burdens of History', New York: Cambridge university press 2007, p-35
5. Baburao Bagul, 'Dalit Literature is but Human Literature' in Dangle, ed., 'Poisoned Bread', Bombay, Orient Longman, 1992
6. Balakrishna Lakshman Pathak, Chokhamela, 'Abhang Gatha', Bombay
7. Barbara R. Joshi, ed., 'Untouchables: Voices of the Dalit Liberation Movement, New Delhi, Selected Book Service Syndicate, 1986
8. D.Gnanniah, 'Obamas of America and Dalits of India: the saga of two black people', New Delhi, Pragun Publication, 2011
9. D.P.Das, 'The Untouchable Story, New Delhi: Allied, 1985, Introduction, p xi
10. D.P.Das, 'The Untouchable Story, New Delhi: Allied, 1985, Introduction, p xi
11. D.R.Nagaraja, 'The Flaming Feet and other essays- The Dalit Movement In India', ed. Prithvi Datta Chandra Shobhi, Permanent Black, Ranikhet. 2010.
12. Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, 'Castes in India-Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development', Indian Antiquary, IX, VI, 1917
13. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, 'Writings and Speeches, Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra Publication, 1987, Vol-3
14. Eleanor Zelliot, 'India's Dalits: Racism and Contemporary Change', Global Dialogue, Vol 12, Number 2, Summer/Autumn 2010

15. Elenor Zilliot, 'From Untouchable to Dalit', New Delhi, Manohar Prakashan, 1992
16. Elenor Zilliot, 'From Untouchable to Dalit', New Delhi, Manohar Prakashan, 1992
17. Ghosh G.K., Ghosh Shukla, 'Dalit Women', A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1997
18. H.S.Chandalia, 'Dalit Writings: The Question of Representation', Creative Books, 2009, New Delhi.
19. Keer Dhananjaya, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Mumbai, Popular Prakashan, 1964,
20. Keer Dhananjaya, 'Shahu Chhatrapati, Mumbai, Popular Prakashan, 1976
21. M.D.Nalavade, 'Dalit Literature: A Historical background, in N. M. Aston, ed. 'Dalit Literature and African American literature', New Delhi, Prestige Books, 2001
22. N. M. Aston, 'Dalit Literature and African American literature', New Delhi, Prestige Books, 2001
23. N.D.nalawade, 'Dalit Literature: A Historical Background, in ed., N.M.Aston, 'Dalit Literature and African American Literature', New Delhi, Prestige Books, 2001
24. Namdeo Dhasal, 'Ode to Dr. Ambedkar: 1978 – Equality for All or Death or death for India' 1992
25. Narendra Jadhav, 'Outcaste: A Memoir', New Delhi: Viking Penguin, 2003
26. R. Bhongle, 'Dalit Literature and African-American Literature: A Comparative Study', in ed. N.M.Aston, 'Dalit Literature and African-American Literature', New Delhi, Prestige Books, 2001
27. Rai Amod Kumar, 'Dalit Literature: Origin, Nature, Definition, and Scope', Creative Books, New Delhi, 2009.
28. Sharan Kumar Limbale, 'Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature'. Trans. Alok Mukherjee, Orient Longman Private Limited, New Delhi, 2004.
29. Sharan Kumar Limbale, 'Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature', trans; Alok Mukherjee, New Delhi, Orient Longman Private Limited, 2004
30. Shivaji Sergar, 'African American and Dalit Autobiography', 'The Criterion, An International Journal in English, Vol III, Issue II, ISSN 0796-8165
31. Sudarshan Kapoor, 'Raising Up a Prophet: The African American Encounter with Gandhi', Boston, Beacon Press, 1992

32. Zelliott and Puneekar, 2005. Untouchable Saints: An Indian Phenomenon. New Delhi: Manohar.
33. Zelliott Eleanor, 'From Untouchable to Dalit: essays on the Ambedkar Movement, Manohar Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2010

The booklet providing the basic information about the Dalit literature, significance, and prominent writers is prepared and distributed in the sample population as a preliminary step. In the advanced follow up the same groups of students were contacted and interviewed using Depth Interview and projective techniques. This was used as a primary data to be analyzed.

### **Sampling:**

It will be a Non-Probability Convenient Sampling where the samples are the college students from the colleges in Mumbai. Preferably Literature or Mass Media students who have some basic knowledge of Literature study in Indian Literature are right to target for sampling.

### **Sample Universe:**

Sample Universe will be from Mumbai city colleges from both the University of Mumbai affiliated colleges and the SNDT University colleges. The colleges having Arts stream, Mass Media Department and the Literature Department are preferred.

### **Sample frame :**

Total ten Mumbai colleges' students are targeted as sample frames. These colleges are selected from the Mumbai city as well as western suburbs and the Central suburbs.

### **Sample unit:**

Each selected college was approached twice. First, a group of students, approximately seven to ten students in a group was selected and they were approached with a simple oral questionnaire about the types of literature and writing they know and their awareness about the various aspects of Indian literature. Then they were given the introductory

booklet about the Dalit literature and in the second round, they were asked in-depth questions about their understanding of the Dalit writings.

### **Demographic:**

Demographic of the target sample is as follows: Mumbai city-based students studying in an undergraduate BA ( Bachelor of Arts) and BMM ( Bachelor of Mass Media) as well as postgraduate MA students of the university departments.

### **Psychographic:**

Psychographic of the target sample is as follows: students from English medium as well as a vernacular medium having some knowledge and exposure in Literature studies. Also, mass media students who are aware of the problems of marginalization in the society are selected as samples.

iii. Has the progress been according to the original plan of work and towards achieving the objective? if not, state reasons :

Yes, the project is progressing as per the original plan of work. The following colleges are approached and the sampling and data collection is going as per the projection.

- UPG College and Mithibai College
- Sophia College, Mumbai
- Vaze-Kelkar College, Mulund, Mumbai
- M.D. College, Dadar Mumbai
- KES Shroff College, Kandivali, Mumbai
- Patkar Varde College, Goregaon, Mumbai
- National College, Bandra, Mumbai
- Sathe College, Vile Parle, Mumbai
- Mumbai University, Kalina Campus
- SNTD University, Juhu Campus
- S.M. Shetty College, Powai, Mumbai

Each college was visited twice and the interview was conducted with the group of students who have read the introduction to the Dalit literature. the questions asked

were as follows:

1. Have you heard about Dalit literature before this introduction?
2. What do you think is the need for the Dalits and other marginal and downtrodden to write?
3. Do you think we can call these writings as literary writings?
4. What kind of literature you study as a part of curriculum usually ? do you think that more indigenous and local writings should be included in the university classrooms?
5. How do you perceive the Dalit writings? What is the tone? what are the themes?
6. What is your opinion about the medium and the language of these writings? Do you justify it being written in the vernacular language? why? Do you think it should be translated more into English and other world languages? Why?
7. Would you like to read more about Dalit literature? What makes you like this genre?
8. Do you think the other marginal literature like Black American literature, Women's Writings have some similarities with the Dalit writings? If yes, what are the commonalities?
9. What is the most important difference between the other canonical literature and the Dalit literature?

These questions were discussed in the panel interview format and the major arguments were collected to analyze.

The project was envisioned with some basic hypothesis and the data collection was planned accordingly. Some of the major limitations and difficulties were as follows:

- Many students were not ready to go through the introductory booklet which was provided for their basic orientation on the major study area of Dalit literature. They relied more on the online information.
- The questions were answered collectively sometimes and lacked the individual perception or reflection.
- The books and journals available in Dalit studies are strongly rooted

in vernacular and rural or semi-urban base which made comprehension difficult for the city raised students.

- Many of them have done schooling in English medium and so lacked the understanding of Indian Literature, Indian themes, and background at times.

The following questions were asked in the depth interview method of data collection. The responses varied from group to group.

- When they were asked about ‘Have you heard about Dalit literature before this introduction?’, many of them were not aware of the term. In the colleges like Sathe College and Vaze-Kelkar College in Mumbai, students were little more aware of the term and also had read some Marathi Dalit writers. The students from the colleges like KES Shroff College, S.M.Shetty college students were completely ignorant about the term and also not very keen to know more about it. The PG students in the University campus of the Mumbai University and the SNDT University, the students had some exposure of Dalit writing in their undergraduate study, especially in TYBA-English and Marathi department students.
- When they were asked about ‘What do you think is the need for the Dalits and other marginal and downtrodden to write ?’, many of them could sympathize with the plight of Dalits in India and they justified their voice in literature. The students were not specifically informed about the Caste problems and its systematic conditioning in the Indian society in general and the literature in particular. Students from the colleges like the Sophia College, M.D.College, Patkar-Varde College and Vaze –Kelkar college were more vocal and supportive of such writings and also shown interest in knowing and studying more about these issues. In the SNDT University, the students were more interested in other Marginal writings like Women Writings.
- In the question and discussion on ‘Do you think we can call these writings as literary writings?’ the students were more concerned

with the form of literature than the content. The students from M.D. College and Vaze-Kelkar college, as well as the English department in the University of Mumbai, were liked to know more about the simple language and extreme themes of Dalit writings. But many students felt that the explicit language and the themes used in Dalit writings are not suitable for the classroom studies. Also, the students from the English department were more into the Western aesthetics and other canonical literature so they were not able to consider Dalit poems or short stories into the literary genre. The Mass media students were more open about accepting Dalit writings into the mainstream literary studies.

- In the question of ‘What kind of literature you study as a part of curriculum usually ? do you think that more indigenous and local writings should be included in the university classrooms?’ many students were of the opinion that the bigger part of their syllabus is made up of non-Indian writings like the British, American and other English literature, critical theories, Language tools and other literary areas. The students from the postgraduate departments had a bigger choice in the form of elective subjects but the undergraduate programme hardly gives any option or the choice to students. Most of the students were of the opinion that first, they would like to know about the Indian writings and then want to gradually progress towards the Western literature studies.
- In the question on ‘How do you perceive the Dalit writings? What is the tone? what are the themes?’ many of the students replied from the handbook which was given to them for an orientation. The students from the colleges like M.D. College, UPG and Mithibai college, National College and Sathye college were more into the reading of Marathi / Gujarati Dalit writings but not as a part of their curriculum. For them, Dalit writings are more about giving a voice to the angst of the centuries and they also appreciated the brutal honesty about these writings. The tone of the Dalit literature as per these students is more of a rebel and protest

against the system and assertion of their denied rights in the Indian society. Many students read Namdeo Dhasal's poems and Bama's stories for the first time and they were intrigued by the sharp reaction and the tone of these writings.

- In the question and the discussion on 'What is your opinion about the medium and the language of these writings? Do you justify it being written in the vernacular language? why? Do you think it should be translated more into English and other world languages? Why?' most of the Marathi speaking students were of the opinion that the medium or the language doesn't matter as far as the quality and the sincerity of the literature is maintained. But the majority of the Mumbai colleges students were from a cosmopolitan background and had exposure to only English language for any reading or education and they were more keen to get these writings in English only. But they all justified the Dalit writers writing in their own vernacular language as a medium to reach out to the public. The Mass Media students were more of the opinion that these writings should be available freely on the digital platforms like the internet to get the easy accessibility. And almost all the students interviewed agreed to the fact that there are not many good translations of the regional Dalit literature available to them.
- When asked about 'Would you like to read more about Dalit literature? What makes you like this genre?', they relied more on the library of the colleges to get their books. The students from the Vaze-Kelkar college, M.D. College, Patkar College, University Departments and Sathye College confirmed that their college libraries had books on Dalit and other marginal literature. The other college students were not aware of any such books in the college libraries and also were not aware of its availability in the open market. Most of these students relied more on the online resources for books and articles and other related help.
- When they were asked about 'Do you think the other marginal literature like Black American literature, Women's Writings have

some similarities with the Dalit writings? If yes, what are the commonalities?', the postgraduate department students were more vocal and they could find some similarities between the themes and the style of writings. Most of them could identify with the genre like autobiographies in almost all the marginal literature. The undergraduate students had some exposure in the American Literature and the Indian literature as a part of their syllabus but not many of them could find many similarities in these writings. Many of them studied these papers as an individual unit without any extended link or similarities known to them.

