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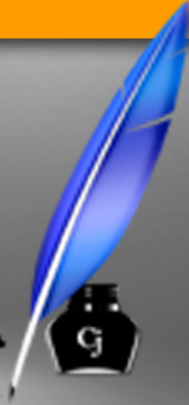
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Discourse on the Theme of ‘Self-determinism’ in Fourth World Literature

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Fourth world nations are obviously conscious reflections of the unfinished history which continues to assert the spirit of self-determinism of the millions of the displaced ones who constantly engage themselves in a struggle for justice and freedom in order to gain such a degree of sovereignty over their own national homeland for restoring their right to dignity and self-respect. These nations are conveniently called ‘internationally unrecognized’ nations. The term ‘fourth world’ which came into being in 1974 with the publication of George Manuel’s *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* tends to accommodate all sorts of indigenous peoples descended from a country’s aboriginal population and who are today completely or partly deprived of their right to own territories and its riches. The struggles taken up by such peoples who are aboriginal and indigenous for the sake of restoration of their rights predominantly occupy the center stage of discussion in Fourth world literatures.

Of the themes which dominate the representative writings of the fourth world literatures include the theme of resistance, rebellion, opposition, assertion, challenge, sacrifice, suffering and displacement. All these general ideas are interconnected with the common concept of ‘freedom’ and an aspiration for which is truly a driving force for the indigenous people. In this paper an attempt has been made to look into the theme of resistance and how it contributes to the development of the spirit of self-determinism as it is reflected and re-presented in the Fourth World literatures with special reference to dalits’ writings in India in order to appreciate and advance the common cause of freedom in the larger interest of Humanity.

The representative writings of the Fourth World Literatures echo the consciousness of the suffering masses in the hands of the machineries promoted and supported by the state which are all out to silence the voice of the indigenous people in order to establish a structure which not only damages individuals’ identity but also torments the souls so deeply. The de-humanized and deprived lot forming themselves as ‘a nation’ through forging unity of purpose stands up to speak in a language of assertion and self-determinism. Silence, for them, is guilt when fearless speech is the basic courage. It is this spirit of conviction which flows through the powerful words of expression of experiences in the Fourth World Literatures towards asserting individuals’ identity in the face of multiple threats from the existing power structures.

Dalits represent a community of more than 170 million in India. Despite the historical fact that they constitute around 17% of the total population of the nation, they are largely under-represented and made politically invisible. The voice of the dalits in India has long been suppressed by a system which is sponsored by the high caste Hindus. The economically disadvantaged dalits were forced to do menial jobs and carry with them loads of insults and worries as part of their daily life. Though there are ample provisions in Indian constitution preaching equality, equal rights before law, equal opportunities, and fair treatment all these glittering words of promises are only on empty paper. There is a dichotomy between the values that Indian constitution preaches and the ground realities what the under-privileged are subjected

to. The political system which operates the country tried to re-define the idea of nation according to a theory of convenience promoted by Brahminism and while doing so it ignores and neglects a larger population which itself has the potential to become a nation of its own. These ignored, neglected, displaced and uprooted people who have formed themselves 'a world', within the broader envelope of the State, continually engage themselves in negotiations with the political power demanding their due share. These people are broadly categorized as inhabitants of the fourth world along with other aborigines and natives elsewhere in their respective lands. The commonality of purpose and continuity of suffering bring them as one strong nation of hope.

It is very important to note how the dalit community has attempted to engage itself in multiple activities of interaction with the members of other caste and political bodies in their fight for space: political, social, economical, cultural and intellectual. A cursory glance of the dalit literature of India will lead one to conclude safely that the most impressive battle that the dalits have taken up is to restore their questioned honour by rejuvenating their thinking and rekindling their consciousness. In this process a dominating theme which is recurrent is the theme of 'self-determinism'. This theme has been closely connected to the multiplicity of Identity issues. A nation, against which unspeakable injustice is done, finds new ways asserting itself in the process of re-construction through synthesizing what is common among the sufferers either to mitigate their sense of pain or to re-establish their sense of consciousness towards seeking justice through ways accessible to them.

In this context, there has been a plethora of attempts among the most disadvantaged lot in India, the dalits, in their common pursuit of developing consciousness which is a precondition to assert a certain degree of 'self-determinism' to draw inspiration and strength of morality for a commonly agreed cause of empowerment. There are different sorts of ways that dalits in India resort to for the reasons connected to the contexts of exploitation. Those ways, which may be termed 'as strategies', are analyzed in this paper in both historical and scientific perspectives.

The very first attempt the oppressed dalits obviously have made is something connected to their inner world. They have tried to find ways and means to 're-introduce' themselves to one another in a manner which entails them to become one in suffering. This effort consolidated their cause and gave an opportunity to one another to identify by means of differentiating one from the other and to relate one with the other 'as members of the nation of the lost and inflicted'. This nation, though largely unrecognized for political convenience, overflows every map that exists in the world. These people have faith in their destiny, guts in their nerves and hope in future.

Towards establishing a certain degree of self determinism the dalits adopted the strategy of Sankritisation of their habits as it is evident from the writings of Shah Ghanshyam whose 'Anti-Untouchability Movements' provides us with an insight remarkable towards understanding dalits' resilience movement. The term 'Sanskritisation' has been used in a special sense to denote all sorts of habits, activities and patterns of behavior which are purposely imitated so as to either appropriate what is generally considered to be elite or to assume a certain level of prestige attached to such labels. In other words, it obviously refers to the efforts of the low castes to adopt habits and values of high caste people in order to improve their position and move up the ladder within the society. These efforts, though perceived to be reactionary, have resulted in causing a certain degree of mitigating efforts in the mind of dalits for the reasons connected to assumed characteristics. But, notwithstanding the stated effect, this has caused a deep wound in their psyche by instilling in them a sense of confusion about their own cultural values which define their life in totality.

The process through which dalits in India establish their identity is the same process through which they challenge the order set up the elite and caste Hindus. The transition in their daily habits in the initial stages include adopting certain characteristics associated with the so-called elite such as adherence to the rituals of the upper caste, worship of higher gods, becoming vegetarians, changing caste names and imitating what used to be 'upper' and 'higher' in their considered estimation. These attempts, though done in open defiance, do not in any way bring out any change in their daily lives. But, on the other hand, it resulted in losing dalits' core identity which defines the culture of courage, openness, vivacity and accommodation. This kind of devotion to imitation further has caused damage to their own sense of self-worth.

In this course of self-determinism dalits have resorted to different strategies to assert themselves. One such attempt is to do away with the way of life or religion which has made them become what they are known for. They wanted to move away from the stigma attached to them by the high caste Hindus and attempted to convert themselves to other religions wherein 'birth defined elitism' is disapproved and equality among the practitioners of the faith is stressed. In this journey they found Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and Sikhism attractive and meaningful. But it is unfortunate most of the dalits who thought conversion as 'a solution' were to feel the shock when, even on the other side, the issue remained the same. But there were cases wherein relatively dalits have found their identity in these options of way of life as different from the ones defined by Hinduism.

It is in this context the scholars who are working on dalit issues tried to involve in serious soul searching discourse on 'what defines dalit identity', 'what confines dalits in their pursuit of freedom' and 'what strategies the dalits have to adopt' so as to reach their rightful place in destiny by defying the dictates of the those who have long dehumanized them on various grounds including those connected with their births. The dalit ideological background has been brought to the center stage in order to build an independent dalit identity. The dalits in India have long been suppressed to such an extent that they have been made to feel 'ashamed' of their own ancestors, history, values, and themselves. This sense of 'inferiority complex' has worked on their minds and influenced them to the core. As a result of this damaging impact they have been reduced to mere 'bodies' without 'souls'. They have started thinking of ways to make concession with life as and when required rather than deciding what sort of life that they need to make for themselves and for their generation next.

Revival of dalit ideology started way back in the beginning of the 20th century and during that period a great deal of intellectual energy was spent on re-introducing dalit ideology and values to the largely ignorant dalit community. In these attempts at re-interpretation, it was brought to light to what extent dalit identity as such was obliterated through a system sponsored by the high caste hindus to preserve and retain their control over the already victimized community. Dalits history and culture which were once a great source of inspiration for the whole of Humanity was re-introduced and their values were re-instilled in the heart every freedom-loving person. Dalits, according to reliable historical documents, did have an egalitarian society based on great human values that we celebrate after our assumed understanding human rights in the present century. The model society which was founded on the principle of equality and mutual respect was damaged when Aryans invaded this land. The power-hungry Aryans devised strategies to damage that egalitarian model systematically and tried to put in place a caste order which vindicated the illogical theory 'birth defined elitism' and subdued the dalits and finally made those dalits lose their own identity in their own soil. This displacement is recorded in annals of history as the worst injustice ever imagined and done to the native people.

The scholar Gail Omvedt in 'Understanding Caste. From Buddha to Ambedkar and beyond' dilates on the process of transition in dalit movement. During the earlier part of twentieth century dalit movement witnessed a remarkable revival in terms of their identity. They were found re-introducing themselves in common interest to create dalit consciousness. Dalits were told, as evident from the records of the past, that theirs was a past which was glorious which included great figures in human history such as Nandanar, Ravidas, et al., who forthrightly advocated principles then which define modern day civilizational values. Such great dalit figures in history initiated a historical process of restoring dalits' identity and consciousness through their progressive interpretations which not only challenged the Brahminical order but also reclaimed what was originally due to them

The re-interpretation of history alone, in the considered estimation of the dalit thinkers, will not yield the desired result of forging dalit unity. But, this beginning is a phenomenal phase in Dalit history as it witnessed a series of flow of thoughts questioning 'the order' in existence and aspiring to place in 'a new order' based on re-defined dharma of equality and mutual respect. In this productive period in Dalit history, the concept of ethnicity was re-visited. It was felt then that the dalits had to take pride in their origin to draw strength from it. Theirs was a remarkable history, theirs was a glorious past, theirs was a marvelous civilization and they had a great literature too. But, now they had to reclaim that past to carry with them a force of rejuvenation to the future.

The re-construction of Dalit identity obviously started with the deconstruction of all sorts of images which shroud what was perceived to be Dalit identity. Dalits' art, culture, history, literature and practices were re-interpreted in order to re-discover what was lost and forgotten through what was gained and reminded of. In this context, the dalits strived to deconstruct within their limited means all sorts of polluting and negative meanings of their identity and re-constructed them with newer meanings by evolving counter myths which portrayed them positively. This revolutionary exposition is well-recorded in the writings of Joe C.Arun and particularly in his book 'Constructing Dalit Identity'.

The revival of dalit art was viewed as a significant milestone towards establishing justice in furtherance of common interest. The dalit artists who have long been silenced by the majority people got an opportunity to stand up in public for a cause in order to promote a cultural understanding defining common values which Humanity celebrates and challenging all sorts of myth, tailored stories and doctored facts which ran against dalit sentiments and consciousness. The role played by those artists in bringing about social transformation through their educative shows effected a silent revolution in the minds of the larger public. These arts placed a pivotal role in eliminating 'stigma' attached to dalit life through its attempts at eradicating the caste system which grades and compartmentalizes human beings in categories not only unreasonable but also illogical. In short, just as every society has achieved liberation through contributions from art, literature and politics, Dalit society too has gained a great advantage of highlighting their case of subjugation, suppression, suffering, ill-treatment and sacrifice through such popular arts.

The theme of self-determinism as explored in the larger canvas of dalit literature has been a reflection of a strong conviction with which the dalits engage in their continuous fight for their legitimate rights. This theme is closely connected to their larger aspirations for freedom. For dalits in India, redefining themselves in a language which reaches the people cutting across the imposed limitations of time and space and challenging the 'unreasonable' hierarchy established by the high caste Hindus are the two immediate tasks before them in order to re-

discover 'the space' which is originally theirs and restore human dignity which is violated. In this long fight, the disadvantaged community which has been totally ignored and neglected by the political system and social agencies, finds remarkable source of inspiration from their own conviction to dalit ideology which gets demonstrated in multiple forms in collective struggles. This spirit of self-determinism as manifested even in the face of all sorts of political, social and cultural challenges inspires and encourages the suffering Humanity to have pride in the past, purpose in the present and hope in future.

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