

ISSN: 0976-8165

Vol.8, Issue-V (October 2017)

THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Refereed and Indexed Open Access eJournal

8th Year of Open Access

The Criterion 

Editor-In-Chief: Dr. Vishwanath Bite

www.the-criterion.com

About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

The Centring of the Marginal in Postcolonial Studies with Special Reference to Dalit Literature

Nirmala Rawat
Research Scholar
Kumaun University, Nainital
Uttarakhand.

Article History: Submitted-21/09/2017, Revised-21/10/2017, Accepted-10/11/2017, Published-20/11/2017.

Abstract:

Marginalization is a phenomenon that has always been existed in society in one or another form. Indeed, the structure of society is manipulated in such a manner that it has always been appropriated as it exists. This is the reason why it is visibly invisible. However the universal declaration of human rights has given the new ways of thinking and understanding the human civilization. Unfortunately, very little attention was paid to it by the intellectuals, scholars, and critics till recently. However it was only after the advent of the postcolonial studies that the study of the marginalized was moved to the centre of the literary circles. As a consequence to it, counter-discourses from the marginalized sections that were hitherto been neglected and denied any participation came into existence. This paper studies how the discourse of caste question has enabled the Dalits to raise the issue of discrimination based on caste in the global context. The Dalit literature today that constitutes the postcolonial protest literature has generated a powerful strategy of resistance which altogether generates a powerful critique of the postcolonial subalternization. Over the years this body of writings has not only tried to answer the famous question 'Can the subaltern speak?', rather created a space of their own to speak that is considered a milestone in the making of a more egalitarian society in the postcolonial world.

Keywords: Marginalization, Resistance, Postcolonialism, subaltern, Dalit literature.

After centuries of marginalization and neglect, we need to cast our own movements, projects, and ideas as a battle for relevancy in the face of historical manipulation, exploitation, and oppression. We need to fight, tooth and nail, for equity in all areas of social life. One point to make clear, ethnic and racial minorities are not looking for scraps or a handout from the old paternalistic system, but an equitable, stable, and levelled playing field.

(Urbina, Martin Guevara,276)

Have you ever realized what it means to be a marginalized, or to be a person who does not have an authority to speak? Have you ever discovered what it is to be on the periphery, to be a subaltern or subordinated, or to be from a minority?

The world today is full of differences, discrimination, and inequalities. Being marginalized is to be the internally colonized within one's country. Marginalization is not only a phenomenon that can be seen as an offshoot of colonialization, rather it is a historical

continuity with changed forms. Marginalization is the process which implies (a) a lower social standing (b) denied fundamental rights (c) a sub-human status is imposed (d) pushed to the edge of the society. The concept of marginality in reality is as old as the history of human civilization. The society has always been divided in such a pattern that a few gained power and others were thrown at the periphery, which created a deep rift in the society itself. This again created a certain psychological condition which resulted in resistance, protest, and the struggle for identity. The concept of marginalization which is an umbrella term to cover all other issues has turned out to be of greater interest to modern literary critics belonging to various disciplines, especially in the postcolonial era. Philosophers and critics like Jacques Derrida, Michael Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, Edward Said, Stuart Hall and many more have played a major role in bringing forth the issues of center, margin, hegemony, subaltern, culture, power, etc.

Marginality or Subalternity is an important Postcolonial subject in its various aspects that may vary owing to different structural patterns of society. With the emergence of the Postcolonial studies there has been a sudden rise in the study of the marginalized. Marginalization is one of the most brutal form of oppression, that lies at the core of social, political, and economic conflicts wherein vulnerable groups are subjected to victimization. Sometimes it is also called as social exclusion; the social process by which a person or a group of people is made marginal or become relegated to the fringe of the society. It is a harsh reality which is affecting millions of people throughout the world. Therefore, the forms of marginalization are very, which may vary from place to place. However, it is true that more marginalized group exists in Third World especially in developing nations. The discourse of marginal always revolves around resistance. Indeed a prominent endeavour in the literary circles is to move to the centre, those works that have been claimed to be marginalized and excluded so far by the aesthetic ideology of white Europeans and Americans. Particularly, the works of women, minority ethnic groups, and colonial and postcolonial writers fall in this category.

For the marginal writings gained importance only in the post-colonial era, which refers specifically to the period after a state or people cease to be governed by a colonial power, such as Britain or France, and took administrative power into their own hands? But as far as the term 'Postcolonial' is considered, C. L. Innes in *The Cambridge Introduction To Postcolonial Literature* says that it tends to embrace literary, cultural and sometimes anthropological – studies, which is more often used to refer to the consequences of colonialism from the time the area was first colonized. Therefore, she remarks that postcolonial literature in a way seeks to understand history, that is, the colonial period and simultaneously looking forward towards a more just, and egalitarian society. It is a literature of resistance, anger, protest, and hope. Helen Gilbert's definition of 'postcolonial' captures the various aspects of the term: "postcolonial' has become a convenient . . . term to describe any kind of resistance, particularly against class, race and gender oppression." (1)

With this came the consciousness and understanding of the concepts like suppression, marginalization, oppression, and thus preparing for a counter discourse. As a consequence, multiple counter-center critical discourses came into existence in the form of discourses from

the marginalized sections who were hitherto been neglected and denied any participation. For example, Feminism, Gay-lesbian, Dalit writing, and Afro-American literature emerged as prominent fields of study. But the limited nature of the literary canon always prevented these voices to register its presence in the literary circles. However, it was only after the advent of postcolonial studies, that a unifying tendency could be seen among all the marginal groups under one category. Despite the underlying differences among different marginal groups, an attempt has been made in the postcolonial studies to conglomerate all such writings under one umbrella concept. The idea beneath is based on the premises that all the marginalized literature together can produce a powerful strategy of resistance by generating a number of discourses.

Postcolonism is actually a theoretical wing, which itself is marked by transformation or change. The Postcolonial therefore aims to deconstruct the older concepts and reconstructs new meanings such as the nation, culture and identity which are in a constant process of transformation. Therefore, 'Postcolonial' according to P. K. Nayar, is a whole new experience of political freedom, new ideologies and new agendas. It generally refers to a mode of reading, political analysis and cultural resistance that specifically deals with the history of colonialism and at the same time also the present neo-colonial structures. It naturally invokes ideas such as social justice, emancipation, and democracy in order to oppose oppressive structures of racism, discrimination and exploitation. The Postcolonial literature also has to undergo different phases since it came into existence. The first of the major significant theorization about 'postcolonial literature' as defined by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin:

We use the term 'post-colonial'... to cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. We also suggest that it is most appropriate as the term for the new cross-cultural criticism which has emerged in recent years and for the discourse through which this is constituted. (2)

Robert Young rather proposed 'tricontinentalism', an alternate for the term postcolonialism, and has argued that since colonialism has not been completely disappeared and therefore, 'postcolonialism' does not make any sense. Although emerged in the mid of twentieth century in the writings of Franz Fanon, AimeCesaire, Albert Memmi and the like. It moved beyond addressing the 'Third World' cultures and colonial histories to include some of the critical issues such as immigrants, refugees, blacks and other ethnic minorities in 1990s. This marked a shift in the nature of the postcolonial itself. Gradually, it has broadened its view to discuss the issues, and narratives, of all the marginalized classes. Thus, it seeks to understand how oppression, resistance, and adaptation occurred during colonial rule. For example, Nationalism, Cultural alienation, and retrieving histories are some of the significant themes in the postcolonial interrogation of colonialism. One of the significant ideas to note here is that the nationalist literature in a way is considered as the origin point of almost every postcolonial literature.

The subaltern studies which is one of the main subdivisions of postcolonialism, seek to discover, the history from below. P. K. Nayar again says that under the rubric of postcolonial studies, thus there has been an on-going attempt to retrieve histories that have been silenced or erased by both colonial and nationalist powers. Associated broadly with the writings of Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakraborty, David Arnold and other historians, it has been accurately defined as the history defined from below.

One of the marginal groups which have caught the attention of the scholars in recent decades is the *untouchables* or the *Dalits* in India. The word 'Dalit' literally translating to "oppressed" or "broken" is generally used to refer to people who were known as 'untouchables'; those occupying the lowest rung of the ladder in the social hierarchy. These people are the victim of the brutal caste system; a closed system of stratification, which means that a person's social status is obligated to the caste in which, they were born into. In other words, it is a form of power that invisibly controls society and sanctions graded inequality. Hence the literature which emerges out of the experience and suffering of the untouchables or the 'Dalits' came to be known as the Dalit literature. The Dalit literature is a literary movement that genuinely documents the pain, discrimination, protest, and identity of the dalits. And to retrieve the history of the dalits that has been silenced for years is one of the continuous attempts of it. Thus, like Black literature and Women's writing, it is also engaged in a way in the search for the self. As a matter of fact, it is a literature which deals with the question of humanity. It is also an assertion towards the notion of being a human.

Today the Dalit literature constitutes a significant part of Postcolonial protest literature. Dalit literature is the literature of experience that has emerged out of the consciousness of the so far forgotten 'self'. The 'unexpressed sensibilities' in the form of literary manifestations, gave the world some of the best texts, the world has ever read. Dalit writing thus represents a subaltern perspective that has been neglected so far by the mainstream Indian writing. In the past few decades Dalit writing has been successfully managed to change the map of the Indian writing in English. Under the postcolonial studies, Dalit writing is treated as an inseparable part of it because it seeks (a) social transformation (b) justice for the oppressed (c) to create a history of its own (d) a more egalitarian society. Hence the Dalit literature aims at dismantling the existing structures of exploitation and restructuring the society itself. Influenced by the post-modern literary movements, it also questions mainstream literary tradition and explores the neglected aspects. This literature puts more emphasis on the lived reality of the socially oppressed masses. Moreover, it has turned into an identity struggle, searching for justice in an intrinsically unjust social system.

The Nationalist consciousness that generally helped in the making of India as a nation, appeared completely different in the post-colonial period. For the elite group took the charge this time and acted more cruelly than the colonial masters. Subaltern Historians described this as 'nationalist history', which excluded the histories of the diverse sections of the Indian people in the making of India as a nation. Although literature is always considered as a powerful instrument of the liberation of humanity, yet Dalit writing in India has always received step fatherly treatment by the mainstream or canonical literature.

Like other marginalized literature especially, Women's writing, and Black literature, Dalit literature also started up as 'protest literature'. Alok Mukherjee, a literary theorist and a human rights activist articulates: "Indian literary history and theory, as well as the teaching of Indian literatures are spectacularly silent about Dalit literature. Yet, Dalit cultural and critical productions make a significant critical intervention in the thinking and writing about Indian society, history, culture, and literature."(1)

With the emergence of Dalit literature in India in both the regional languages as well as in English, the Dalit writers interrogated the nature and formation of Indian writing in English for its elitist, upper caste and male bias. Hence it became necessary to redefine the nature of Indian writing in English as a discourse that represents the multiple identities of the Indian people in the post-colonial context. Therefore, to situate 'caste' as one of the crucial concerns became the need of the hour.

B. R. Ambedkar who has been hailed as the leader of the Dalit movement in Maharashtra, is also considered as the pioneer of this movement in India. He was the first to foreground *Untouchability*, as the evil which grows out of the Hindu caste system. It was he, who argued for the real independence of the internally colonized in the post-colonial era. A beautiful message from Dr. Ambedkar, that is the great inspirational force behind the Dalit literary movement is that, first of all he encouraged the dalits to educate themselves. As it is a powerful instrument for any change. Then he requested to integrate themselves and finally to agitate against the injustice. Babasaheb Ambedkar always acknowledged the power of literature as an instrument to liberate humanity from the age old shackles of untouchability. He valued literature that was realistic and committed to humanity. Hence Dalit literature, he believed is the literature that holds human being to be the centre point. It represents a different perspective with a different consciousness that needs to be addressed globally.

Dr. Ambedkar created awareness among the Dalits about untouchability, Caste system, and the Brahminical structure and emerged himself as a symbol of change in the post-colonial India. Arjun Dangle one of the prominent Marathi Dalit Writers, and a famous leader of the Dalit Panther movement traces the history of the term 'Dalit Literature' to the first Dalit literary conference held in 1958 in Bombay: "The 1958 conference discussed Dalit Literature in detail ... the literature written by the Dalits and that written by others about the Dalits in Marathi be accepted as a separate entity known as 'Dalit Literature' ..." (242)

However, as an identity marker, the term 'Dalit' came into prominence in 1972, when a group of young Marathi writers-activists founded an organization called Dalit Panthers. It is one of the most important literary movements to emerge in post-independence India. The Dalit writers unravelled the complexities about the atrocities and discrimination that they underwent. Dalitness therefore is the identity and consciousness of an oppressed people desirous of liberation, and expressive of striving for the emancipation of their denied or thwarted self. Arjun Dangle in *Poisoned Bread* defines 'Dalit' as: "Dalit is not a caste but a realization and is related to the experiences, joys and sorrows, and struggles of those in the

lowest stratum of society. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary. (264-265)

Literature has always been an efficient medium in mirroring the real picture of the society. To some extent Dalit literature has honestly played an active role to check the discrimination. However, the nature of the Dalit literature itself underwent drastic changes. For example, the literature produced before 1975 was the literature of Dalit sympathizers, but the literature written after this was quite rebellious in nature. And there was also a collective consciousness that visibly that gave a new strength to the Dalits.

Unfortunately, not many of the novelists writing in English cared for the authorial responsibilities. It was Mulk Raj Anand, who first realized the need to address the issue of untouchability and also other such issues related to the marginalized group in the traditional framework of the social hierarchy in India. His novel *Untouchable*, a classical text in the history of Indian literature is perhaps the first major fictional representation of the Dalit issue in English language. But in Hindi language, unfortunately it started very late, that is, after 1975. Sooner or later, the pain, anguish and humiliation of the dalits was started given speech through the medium of literary creations that registered itself as a new literature which came to be known as 'Dalit literature'.

Dalit literature specifically is the literature of the marginalized section of India known as untouchables, which aims to represent the atrocities of caste oppression which is still prevalent in Indian society. Saharan Kumar Limbale, a renowned Marathi Dalit writer traces the most important fact that the Dalits' subalternity is not situated in a colonial context. Rather, it is based on the caste-based social, cultural and economic structure of Hindu society where village becomes the metropolis and Dalits exist on the margin. The nature of the Dalit's subalternity, then is different from what is produced by colonial rule says Alok Mukherjee in this context:

Dalits are the upper caste Hindu's Other. But this Other is not only separate and different, like the member of another ethno-cultural, religious or linguistic group. This Other is a part of Hindu society, and yet apart from it. Inscribed in that apartness and difference is inferiority. Dalits occupy the lowest place in the Hindu hierarchical order. (2)

At present, Dalit writing is a powerful emerging trend in the Indian literary scene. Realizing its importance, the universities and the other literary organizations have also given it the proper place which it was seeking. Dalit writing in native languages and the translations increasingly available in English, altogether generates a powerful critique of the postcolonial subalternization.

Dalit literature has emerged over the years as an important postcolonial protest literature. The subaltern perspective that has been ignored so far, thus created a set of

writings that can be considered a milestone in the making of a more egalitarian society in the postcolonial world. Using forms as diverse as poetry, fiction, and autobiography, Dalit writers have been successful in exploring the social injustices based especially on caste, and gender. The artistic manifestations of realism make these writings more revealing which automatically appeals to the larger masses.

Dalit autobiographies in English translations have set a new standard in the literary world. P. K. Nayar argues in a paper that Indian Dalit autobiography should not be simply read as a life-writing, more than that it should be read as a testimony, as it also seeks to gain the participation of the readers in the act of transformation. Generally, a testimony is more concerned to achieve the goal of a more just future. Therefore, calling it testimony confirms to the fact that more than a life-writing it provides a spectacle of trauma, pain, resistance, protest and social change. Bama in *Karukku* has made a powerful plea to bring change thus “We who are asleep must open our eyes and look about us. We must not accept the injustice of our enslavement by telling ourselves it is our fate, as if we have no true feelings: we must dare to stand up for change...” (25). This is the call she makes to the Dalits, exploited or deprived class to stand up for their cause, because by remaining silent they are just participating in their own exploitation.

Dalit is the believer of Humanism, which is the ultimate ideology of human beings. In the postcolonial context, the term ‘Dalit’ does not mean only one category of caste, rather it refers to the human being who is exploited economically, socially, politically and from all the spheres of life, by the tradition of the country. Furthermore, the universal declaration of human rights has given new ways of thinking and understanding the human civilization. Also the internationalization of caste question has enabled the Dalits to raise the issue of discrimination based on caste in the global context. Although in the post-colonial era, the word ‘subaltern’ is used as it incorporates all kinds of subordination based on class, caste, gender, colour, and so on. But in the Indian context, the term, ‘Dalit’ has gained a new significance and is widely used in the literary circles since it has become more flexible to incorporate the subordinated from almost all the sections of society. It is not simply a battle against inequality, injustice and discrimination. Rather, as part of the Postcolonial studies it altogether makes an effort to analyse the issue of caste from different perspectives and thus it aims to make an egalitarian society.

Although, the form of different narrative techniques and use of language are altogether make it a highly innovative and creative literature. But owing to the lack of promotions and resistance by the mainstream, it is still beyond the reach of the wider audience. However, Dalit writers such as Arjun Dangle, Om Prakash Valmiki, Sharan Kumar Limbale, Laxman Mane, Baby Kamble, Bama, Narendra Jadhav and many more with their writings have not only answered the famous question ‘Can the subaltern speak?’ raised by Gayatri Spivak, rather created a space of their own to speak and thus it seeks to raise the consciousness and brings hope for the social transformation.

Works Cited:

- Abram, M.H. and Geoffrey Galt Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms. Tenth Edition.* Andover: Cengage Learning, 2012.
- Ashcroft, Bill and Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back.* Second edition. New York: Routledge, 2002.
- Bama. *Karukku.* Translated from Tamil by Lakshmi Holmstrom, Chennai: Macmillan, 2010.
- Dangle, Arjun. Ed. *Poisoned Bread: Translations From Modern Marathi Dalit Literature.* Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1992. Ibid (P-242)
- Gilbert, Helen. Ed. *Postcolonial Plays: An Anthology.* New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Mukherjee, Alok. "Reading Sharan Kumar Limbale's *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: From Erasure to Assertion*" in Sharan Kumar Limbale, *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature.* Trans. From the Marathi by Alok Mukherjee, Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2004. Ibid (P-2)
- Nayar, Pramod, K. *Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction.* Pearson Education India. 2008.
- Urbina, Martin Guevara. *Twenty-First Century Dynamics of Multiculturalism: Beyond Post-Racial America.* Illinois: Charles C. Thomas Publisher Ltd. 2014.
- Young, Robert. *Postcolonialism: An Introduction.* London: Blackwell, 2001.