

THE EXISTENTIAL FIGHT OF VOICELESS PEOPLE
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(WITH REFERENCE TO *DALITHA JATHULA DHARMA YUDDHAM*)

Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry (TOJQI)
Volume 12, Issue 4, Month 2021: 1767-1776

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Abstract:

In the modern Telugu literature, the Dalit literature has been a great wave during 1990-2010. It has been the navigating light for the existential fight of Dalits. But in fact, Dalit literature can be traced in Telugu from a long time back nearly ninety years ago. The problem of casteism and the fight against it are as ancient as the civilization in the history of India. India is the nation in which the society has been configured based on the occupation/professions of the people especially caste wise occupations. Any of these occupations is dependent on the physiological work. In the Indian caste system there are four main castes, and apart from that, there is a fifth group - the Dalits treated as the untouchables in the society. Even some decades back Dalits were considered as the insignificant part of the society. These people have been remained as second class citizens who are severely exploited, and downtrodden. There has been no significant difference in these circumstances anywhere in the Indian subcontinent.

But it can be remarked that where ever there are fertile lands and fruitful resources there is a possibility for exploitation of the working class population. And simultaneously there is possibility for revolution through ways. In Andhra Pradesh, East Godavari district is the richest in agricultural prosperity. The same is the place well known for the prolific writers in Telugu Dalit literature. Kusuma Dharmanna, Boyi Bhemanna, Savera (Sarella Venkata Ratnam) are the warriors with pen to fight against the social evil of casteism. This paper focuses on the literary work of the contemporary poet SAVERA who has been considered as the mighty poet with a great impact on the existential fight of Telugu Dalits.

Keywords: Savera's writings- Telugu Dalit literature- Social impact

Introduction:

The literature produced on the Indian subcontinent is referred to as Indian literature¹. After the independence The Republic of India has 22 officially recognised languages, in which Telugu is highest spoken local language with more than nine crore people speak it according to 2011 census of India². Telugu literature can be traced back to the

early 10th century period during 850-1000 CE followed by 11th century period when *Mahabharata* was first translated to Telugu from Sanskrit by *Nannaya*³. Then onwards it has been flourishing and influencing a major part of the society. Amongst so many branches of the telugu literature in the post independence era, Dalit literature is has a significant role. While oral Telugu literature dates back 1,500 years, written Telugu dalit literature goes back hardly 300 years though it was not necessarily known by the same nomenclature. It may be traced back to the 17th century saint poet Potuluri Veerabrahmam⁴, a sudra social reformer who used to go through *dalit wadas* (settlements) educating the people against caste and untouchability. Challaplli Swarooparani⁵ mentioned in her research paper about dalit literature that, dalits denied learning and respect, have now crafted self-respect from their humiliation, strengthening their castes and destroying 'sanatana' values and traditions. People who have been denied a basic humanity and have been outcasts for centuries, have now stormed into literary avenues, roaring. Today 'untouchable' voices rule Telugu literature. That is the fierce wind of dalit poetry.

Regarding the question about who dalits are, Swarooparani⁶ pointed out and explained that, “there was recently a wide ranging debate on 'who are dalits' among literary friends. Some people argued that along with the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and backward castes, minorities and women should also be considered dalits.”

Dalit literature is literature written by Dalits about their lives⁷. Dalit literature emerged in the 1960s in the Marathi language, and it soon appeared in the Hindi, Kannada, Telugu, Bangla and Tamil languages, through narratives such as poems, short stories, and autobiographies, which stood out due to their stark portrayal of reality and the Dalit political scene⁸. Telugu dalit literature entered a significant phase when dalits began writing about themselves. During the independence struggle, dalit writers, under Gandhian influence, touched upon casteism and untouchability but imitated mainstream writing in form and content. From the mid-1980s, however, dalit angst, protest and an alternative vision started reflecting in Telugu literature⁹. In the modern Telugu literature, the Dalit literature has been a great wave during 1990-2010. It has been the navigating light for the existential fight of Dalits.

But in fact, Dalit literature can be traced in Telugu language from a long time back nearly ninety years ago. The problem of casteism and the fight against it are as ancient as the civilization in the history of India. India is the nation in which the society has been configured based on the occupation/professions of the people especially caste wise occupations. Any of these occupations is dependent on the physiological work.

In the Indian caste system there are four main castes, and apart there is a fifth group - the Dalits treated as the untouchables in the society. Even some decades back Dalits were hardly considered as the significant part of the society. These people were remained as second class citizens who are severely exploited, and downtrodden. There has been no significant difference in these circumstances anywhere in the Indian subcontinent. But it can be remarked that where ever there are fertile lands and fruitful resources there is a possibility for exploitation of the working class population. And simultaneously there is possibility for revolution through various ways. Dalit literature is again can be classified in to that which is written by dalits and written by non-dalits. Rejecting the general notion that only born dalits can write good literature on their community due to their personal experience, even non-dalit writers have been eloquently presenting the agony and exploitation of

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dalits because of their empathy for downtrodden¹⁰.

History of Dalit literature in Telugu:

To bring the problems of the Dalits into limelight has been started a long back in 1930s. *Kusuma Dharmanna* had structured a right platform to fight against the social repulsiveness through his *shathaka sahityam*. The most prolific writers of Dalit literature have inaugurated the Dalits' problems empathically from the roots. *Gurram Jaoshuava* in his write up *Gabbilam Mangipudi V*, *Sharma* in his *Niruddha Bharatham* are the pioneering literary works in the Dalit literature in Telugu¹¹. *Kathi Padma Rao*, *Bojja Tharakam* are influential poets from 1980s.

K Purushotham¹² remarked that, in the post-independence period, Telugu litterateurs became complaisant and self-serving. It was at such a time that a group of Telugu poets, who christened themselves digambara davulu (naked poets) and included Cherabandaraju, Bhairavaiah, Jwala mukhi, Nagnamuni, Nikhileshwar and Mahaswapna provided the much-needed jolt to Telugu literature. Their contribution lies in re-linking literature to society. This was apparent in the way they chose their themes such as poverty, unemployment and political indifference in respect of upliftment of the downtrodden.

As in colonial times, in the post-colonial period too, our poets have written nationalist poetry. This was followed by new trends in progressive poetry in Telugu ranging from Abhyulivaya Kavityam, Digambara Kavityam, revolutionary poetry, feminist poetry to dalit poetry. Joshua wrote the poem 'Gabbilam' during the freedom struggle. After Joshua's time a number of movements grew to strengthen dalit poetry. The sharpening of focus and perspective in dalit writing which increasingly came to be seen as a tool to dismantle brahminical traditions is a result of a multi-dimensional history. Alongside the inspiration given by the various Ambedkarite anti-caste movements, incidents of upper caste violence against dalits like those at Karamchedu, Chundururu, and Padirikuppam led to the direct use of dalit poetry as a weapon against oppression. While dalit poetry in Andhra has its roots in the dalit movements in the state, it has also drawn inspiration from the Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra, spreading out in the process. To date there are about 30 dalit poetry anthologies in Telugu (among them Chikkanavutunne Pata, Nisari, Bahuvadasau Valivera, Padunekkina Pata, Gunde Dappu, etc), are important¹³.

From 1990s the literature has been highly intensified and a number of voices on behalf of the voiceless dalits have been raised and the environment has been made the dalit literature as the need of the hour. The new economic policy of Indian government with Liberalization, Privatization and especially the globalization have given the repercussions like spoiling the value for labour as there was an easy substitute of mechanization. With the wide efforts of the government to give education to all, and as the fruits of those efforts educated women, Dalits, and tribes have started deliberately expressing their experiences through the poetry in their own ways after 1990s.

It is rightly mentioned by C.L.L Jayaprada¹⁴ in her review on a research paper that "The last decades of the past century witnessed an unprecedented outpouring of Telugu poetry and a radical postmodern challenging of the conventional modes in the earlier post-independent decades. This factor along with editor's own radical choices makes for a number of Dalit, feminist, leftist, minority and anti-globalisation poets being represented in the

anthology. Dalit voices are heard very strongly in Andhra Pradesh specially in poetry and every known perspective is represented in the anthology from the pens of a wide range of poets such as Salandra's "Dalit Manifesto," Boya Jangaiah's "Ambedkar," Sikhamani's "Benumbed Childhood," Satish Chander's "My Ocean Laughed," Madduri Nagesh Babu's "Panchama Geetam," Yandluri Sudhakar's "I am the Forward to Tomorrow's History," Kopparthi's "Tracing History" which celebrates the Dalit as the true native of India, the original inheritor of the subcontinent. C.R. Kurme's poem in conversational tone "Stop Recognising him" - in which the last word starts with a small letter uses every stylistic device in pleading with Dalits not to be covered by the domineering presence of upper caste intellectual. Katti Padma Rao's "Caste (Colour) less" celebrates the black skin and Dalit castes and Challapalli Swaroopa Rani's Dalit feminist poem "Prohibited History" questions the custom of stamping the Dalit woman unchaste before even the birth and asks "in which canto of your country's flawed history/will you write it down, my story?". Kalekuri Prasad's "For a Fistful of Self-Respect" subverts mythical images of the downtrodden Sambhuka and claims future glory of Dalits whereas Pagadala Nagender's "The Globe under my Wings" expresses fantasies of power over the international arena. "The Blazing Dalit" by Gowtham glorifies Dalit's imagined overpowering of elements of nature itself; H.R.K, makes a powerful statement about tragedies created by human hands, the riots which leave dead bodies all around. Ambati Venkamma's "Community-safety" Chitram Prasad's "Gurudakshina," Banna Illaiah's "The Storm that Crossed the Coast," Sunkara Ramesh's "Murder of a Dreamer," Nakka Vijaya Bharati's "Caste-College" and Masterji's "Who Do You Think He is?" are powerful Dalit poems that question prejudices in educational institutions, social ostracism of Dalits, political exploitation, historical wrongs and offer powerful subversive images for a glorious Dalit presence and future.

In the period of this fourth world literature it is apt to go through the literary work of the contemporary writers. In Andhra Pradesh, East Godavari district is the place well known for the prolific writers in Telugu Dalit literature. *Kusuma Dharmanna, Boyi Bheemanna, Savera (Sarella Venkata Ratnam)* are some of the warriors with pen to fight against the social evil of casteism. This paper aims at the critical evaluation on the literary work of the contemporary poet SAVERA as the existential fight of voiceless people in his book *Dalitha Jathula Dhramayuddham*¹⁵.

About the poet SAVERA:

Sarella Venkata Ratnam (SAVERA) is well known for his splendored personality and many sided contributions to the literature as a committed writer, an eloquent speaker, a committed teacher, an able administrator, a social activist, a true follower of *Dr. B. R. Ambedkar*, a staunch Buddhist, a commendable commentator, founder of *Dalita Chaitanya Vedika* and publisher of the first Buddhist monthly in Telugu language *Dhamma Prabha* means The shine of ethics. One Ph.D. and two M. Phil degrees have been awarded for the literary research on the literature of SAVERA.

SAVERA is a writer of all branches of Telugu literature. Dalit consciousness, Child and women welfare along with *Buddhism* and *Ambedkarism* are the significant areas in his literature. In the branch of poetry, *Dalitha Jathula Dhrama Yuddham* which has been a Text for M.A. Telugu students in Andhra University, Nethuti mantalu, *Velugu Baata, Ee modulu Chigurinchali, Saaiikya Bharathi* which is financed by Telugu University, *Savera Padya*

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Manjari; in prose *Dalita Chaitanya Lahari* (A collection of aboriginal's eassays), *Harijan ane padanni Nishedhinchandi* (he succeeded in getting this word banned); in translations *Dalithule Aadi bharathiyulu* (A report to UNO), *Naaga Bhumi* (history of aboriginals), *Dr.Ambedkar mudu Agjnalu*(Three commandments); in the category of autotrophies *Bahujana Netha Kanshiram*, *Adarsha Loksabhapathi GMC Balayogi* are the major and highly influential Dalit literature write-ups besides tens of books on Buddhism and Dr.BR Ambedkar.

The influential work of the poet – Ethical Fight of Dalits (*Dalita Jathula Dharma Yuddham*):

This paper tries to bring out the quintessence of the literary work in the book of *Dalitha Jathula Dharmayuddham* of the poet SAVERA in the major branch of poetry goes as a singing poetry with Dalit literature as the central theme. And also this paper throws light on how the poet has described the ground level bitter realities of the society along with inspiration he infused in the minds of the *Dalits* through his voice in this book. The limitation of this study is that, the study is confined to the above book only.

In the Indian subcontinent the history never considered Dalits as human- socially, politically, culturally, economically and legally. For the past thousands of years the Dalits are being the depressed classes. Though the 'Depressed classes Mission society' had submitted a memorandum in Calcutta in 1886 itself, even now there is no prominent change in the living standards and the social inclusion for the Dalits. As a man belong to that category, he experienced this unpleasant situation many a time, and hence with a deep sense of this agony he declared the war against the system on behalf of the Dalits through this book.

The beginning words of the poet in the book express the history of the fight for liberty and equality to the downtrodden population of the society for centuries together. The poet wishes to bring awareness among the Dalits and hopes the near future is of the Dalits to rule their native nation. The line which really inspires the readers begin as

Dalit Lion has awaken and

It rules Indian subcontinent

It fires the evil forces

It eradicates the social un-pleasantries¹⁶.

Dr. B.R Ambedkar quoted once – “continuous fight is the only way to get back your rights but not the negotiations and requisitions”. In re inforcement and in the lines of the *Ambedkar*'s ideology it is written as

Aboriginals and native sons of the soil

Plucks the eyes and hits the tops of

Exploiting greedy demons for power and food

And Change the trends of begging¹⁷

The poet expected the Dalits to become Lions because in the culture here they are being made as scapegoats are but they are not supposed to be the scapegoats. Dalits' flames from their eyes makes the sky red bloodshed, Dalits' marching makes the entire globe shivered with sounds shows the severity of their immediate liberty. The poet has mentioned various situations when the dalits were brutally burnt, murdered and women were raped in an inhumanly way and expressed his sheer anger.

The Indian political system and the irony of the practices here has been elucidated by the poet and how the Dalits are being punished even their innocence is crystal clear, this system is ashamed by the poet.

Either ... not sold for currency as voters
Or whose party not won;
Either demanded hike in wages
Or questioned the manipulated ledgers¹⁸;
.....
To the so called upper caste's brutality
Dalits have been the scapegoats¹⁹.

The favoritism of the system towards the administering and fascism are criticized.

Lets join hands dear Dalits
Let's establish the unequivocal law
As ...
Goddess of Law is blind now
Goddess of ethics is blind now²⁰

The problems and the struggle of the tribal people and *how they are exploited* also have been remarked by the writer as

Land exploiters ate away
The own wealth of Aboriginals like
Tribes, natives who are true innocents
and the forty million real sons of the soil.²¹

The bitter reality here described about is land mafia, sand mafia and exploiting the natural, human resources especially of dalits for low wages and ill treatment at work places.

SAVERA has given a wake-up call to all intellectuals, youth and women to end the social evils and it is the need of the hour. The poet strongly believed that in any Nation, if youth and educated were passive, that nation

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(WITH REFERENCE TO *DALITHA JATHULA DHARMA YUDDHAM*)

never reaches its desired destination. So he has given a wakeup call to all the intellectuals, youth and women to fight with the social evils and try to offer a beautiful society to the next generation.

Oh! Dear elderly and intellectuals of the nation!

Dear youth of the society!

Great women of the population with self respect

Let's gather for Dalit battle!²²

SAVERA, he agonized about Dalits in rural areas because 90% of Dalits live in rural India where caste system is strongly rooted. Most of the rural dalits are marginal farmers or landless labourers. Throughout their entire life they never enjoy any kind of financial freedom, social equality etc., another important issue focussed by the poet is the debt taken from the land lords in villages. The debt passes on to next generations. So, the forced labour extended from generation to generation.

The poet has paid his tributes to all those who fought against the casteism and who spent their lives in bringing light lives of *dalits*. Thripuraneni Ramaswami Chowdhary, Padmasri Boyi Bheemanna, Gurrām Jashua, Dr. EV Chinnayya, BV Ramanayya, SriSri, Kathi Padmarao, Cherabanda Raju, Bojja Tharakam are a few among them.

In Hindu Mythology, there are some highly reputed personalities like Valmiki, Vedavyasa, and Arundhathi. The poet strongly opposed the attitude of denying the value of these figures just because they are *Dalits*.

Poet has condemned the non inclusion and the hatred towards Dalits who are serving in sanitation and cleanliness. Those who are praised as the half in the sky, those women also are also being exploited and it has been deeply criticised.

In this selfish society

In this male dominated world

The half in the population

*The dalit women fell as the slaves*²³

The contribution of Dalits in each and every facet of the existence of the system and people is applauded as there will be no food to eat, no roads, no wealth unless the Dalits work hard and sacrifice their lives. Irrespective of the political party all the public representatives are ignoring their roots and the needs of the society and it is an embarrassing situation on their behalf, it is ashamed by the poet.

The Hindu caste system has been criticized because of its division in society is to the core of the hearts.

The poet questioned the constitutional guarantees of equality and affirmative action for lower-caste Indians. He deeply observed how the lower caste people are limiting the opportunities available at all stages of life. He mourns that nearly 300 millions of lower caste people in our country still face discrimination, prejudice, hostility

and even violence on each step of the social ladder. He said that we have been seeing the descending order of contempt for thousand years manifested in the worst manner possible in the practice of untouchability.

Hindu religion in India is

Like a serpent with four heads

With thousands of vicious tongues

The casteism is being blasted²⁴

All the evils of the society can be eradicated only with the committed fight against the issues and the poet expressed his optimism with the involvement of all the stakeholders and the intellectuals along with all the dalits.

A new dawn has been dreamt as

India is the earthly heaven

A beautiful and serene place

The victory of Dalits is the Indian victory

That is the real freedom of population

That is the happy morning of India

That is the new dawn in India ²⁵

He also suggested that Education is the key to lift all the down trodden people from harassment and abuse they face in society. We make women more visible in public life and create awareness among the people that India's growth is for the benefit of the many, not the few. He also advised to the common man who belongs to down trodden community that not influenced by the political leaders because they simply use the caste system to convert as a vote bank to enjoy the power.

Conclusion:

It is really a spectacular creation of the poet SAVERA. The entire 72 pages long poem has been written in the same literary style *Muthyalasaraalu*- a poetic style which is suitable for singing and could be read in the most inspiring and thought provoking manner. A high concern towards downtrodden people and social responsibility of the poet is appreciable and must be followed by every human. In fact such books give a realisation to all the intellectuals. It's not the sympathy but the oneness and empathy is the need of the hour. Even though the Indian culture always directs everybody to treat equally, but the society has been failing in maintaining this value.

However as Purushotham²⁶ mentioned that, the dalit writers need to grow from being written about to writing themselves. In this respect, Telugu dalit writing has a long way to go. Let us hope, such a very fine morning soon comes and everybody is happy with no exploitations. Then only the purpose of the Dalit literature would be fulfilled.

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IN THE WRITINGS OF SAVERA
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