
An Insight to Dalit Literature with Reference to Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name*

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ABSTRACT

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The paper makes an attempt to make a comparative study of Dalit Literature with reference to Yvonne Vera's writing. Women have always been struggling for their true position in society. 'Women' is a general term that is not restricted to any boundaries. But unfortunately most of the women are facing common problems in this world. Boundaries fail to define the roles of women. Their sufferings, problems and struggles are the same. The paper tries to make an attempt to study the features of Dalit literature in comparison to the works of African women writer Yvonne Vera. Yvonne Vera is an award winning writer from Zimbabwe. Her writings focus on the issues of women in African society.

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Literature has always been a mirror of society. Writers use literature as a medium to give voices to the unsaid and unexpressed issues of the society. Struggle has always been an integral part of any journey. World has witnessed this journey to a great extent. Struggling nations like India, Africa has many stories to narrate. Literature gives voice to it. One such form of Indian literature is Dalit literature, which focuses on oppression. Writers see this world full of follies and foibles. This literature represents a continuum of a variety of struggles against the caste system. In other words it is the literature of the oppressed class. The word Dalit itself means Oppressed. And thus it narrates the suffering of these people.

Suffering should be the same for people as one but unfortunately suffering is gender based. The suffering of men and women are not the same. In a society people are discriminated against on the basis of color, caste, religion, financial status etc. But what is witnessed is that being a woman adds on to their sufferings. The position of women in Dalit literature has also faced the same

“We have to labor in the fields as hard as men do, and on top of that, struggle to bear and raise our children. As for the men, their work ends when they have finished in the fields. If you are born in this world, it is best you were born as men. Born as women, what good we get? (Bama 7). These lines are from *Sangati* by F. Bama. These lines show the struggle of women and the disparity faced by them. *Sangati* was written by Bama in Tamil. She was concerned about women in society and *Sangati* talks about not just one woman but the women of all the community. Dalit literature gives voice to the pathetic condition of women in society. The traits

portrayed in Dalit literature are similar to the traits portrayed by Yvonne Vera. Yvonne Vera is an award winning writer from Zimbabwe. Her works are known for difficult subject matter. Her writings also focus on the sufferings of women in Africa. Africa had been a land of suffering. It had a huge past of struggle and suffering. And as already mentioned the journey of men and women is not the same in different aspects of life.. They have their own stories to narrate. A part of African literature and the Dalit literature have themes in common .Both the literature focus on the journey of pain and struggle. They share the stories of suffering and oppression.

The literature has deeply addressed the issue of subject and object. The time eternal has witnessed that the one who is oppressed has in turn further oppressed the weaker one. Instead of fighting against the wrong, they themselves turn out to be suppressors. This trait is commonly noticed in both African and Indian culture and so in their literature. Africa was fighting against colonialism and thus was a victim of it. Men who were sufferers and oppressed, began to be suppressor and tried to impose their power on women around them. Thus the women were dual sufferers, Being African, being Black and being a part of that society they were already suffering. But it added to their suffering. They were the victims of these men too. Vera has portrayed these sufferings and oppression in her novels like *Butterfly Burning*, *Without Name* etc. Characters like Phephelaphi, Mazvita, and Nonceba were examples of dual suffering. Men around them were victims of colonization. They have lost all their powers and the only object left to them was women to impose their power on.

Dalit literature was written with the purpose of bringing changes in society. Writers were sufferers or have witnessed the suffering. So they wanted to bring a socio-cultural change in society. Yvonne Vera also had a similar vision. The vision of Act for life sake was a vision of both Dalit and African writers and they worked on it. Identity was the major issue of Dalit literature. It was the struggle for identity that both the writers of Dalit and African literature were struggling for. Vera's novel *Without a name* is a story of a young girl Mazvita. She was raped by a soldier and in search for identity she leaves her village and moves to city. Vera's has portrayed the struggle and pain of Mazvita in her journey. It was the struggle for identity that forced her to face extreme difficult challenges in life. In spite of being a rape victim, she was forced to move to city for her identity. Similarly in Dalit literature, the main purpose of writers is to be a part of mainstream society. Dalit community was alienated from society. The tag itself was painful for them. They had to face many challenges in life to give voice to this discrimination writer's pen down it in the form of Dalit literature. These literatures were not to entertain or delight but were written with a purpose. 'Universal freedom' was one of the important characteristics of Dalit literature. It was promoting Dalit sensibility and Consciousness. The term universal freedom aimed at equality and growth of all. It was against the discrimination not only on basis of racism but was also for promoting united consciousness, a platform which can bring oneness for all. Yvonne Vera's writing also aimed for such oneness. Her writing was not just focusing on one individual but it aimed at creating a consciousness for all. Through one she was fighting for all. It was not for comparison but for expression of individual pain. In *Without a Name* nowhere Vera compares her characters with other people of society or men but was a means of creating oneness for all. Ambi culture practices by African Black Women were an example of differences faced by these women. Black women had to go through painful treatment to lighter their skin tone so that they can stand one with white women of the society. They practiced this to be safe from further discrimination. Similarly Dalits were

victims of dual sufferings. As African women were struggling, so were Dalit women. The character Mazvita was a loner who had to leave her native place in search of her identity. She wanted to be an independent woman. But even for this simple desire she had to struggle a lot. She became a victim of colonialism, racism, gender issues and many others. Same was the condition of women in India, especially Dalit women.

The life of all the women in India was not same. The life lived by women of upper class was entirely different from those of lower caste women. And it was more challenging if they were Dalit. The upper class women were living a free life. They were free from boundations they were focusing on modification of self. Whereas Dalit women were struggling for community upliftment, they were not just struggling for themselves but were focusing on all. Baby Kamble in her autobiography *The Prison we broke* focuses on two major problems. She raised the issue of exploitation of Dalits, how they were exploited by upper Hindu class and secondly she draws the attention of readers towards the discrimination faced by women not only due to caste but patriarchal system. She has shown how these Dalits were struggling to live a prosperous life. It was almost a dream for these Mahar communities. She has shown how the people of community were struggling. Mahars were uneducated and superstitious people who failed to question the tag of untouchability given to them. They were forced to eat leftovers. The women of the family were forced to starve as they had to feed her children and other members of the house. This became one of the reasons of poor health condition of Mahar women. Early or rather childhood marriages also affected the condition of the women of the community. Her autobiography also gives an insight to Dr. Ambedkar who motivated her to raise her voice against the odds faced by Dalits in society.

Dalit literature writers like Bama Faustina and Baby Kamble focused on women emancipation. Through these women characters, they aimed to raise issues of all women in general. They not only aimed at raising current problems but also aimed at making the new generation aware of the sufferings and suppression which lower class women went through. How upper class women keep adding to the suffering of these women. Like African women these Dalit women were too suffering because of their ignorance. They had unheard voices which needed a medium to express. "If the Mahar community is the 'other' for the Brahmins, Mahar women become 'other' for the Mahar men (Kamble xi). These writers even talked about the double oppression of casteism and patriarchy.

Dalits suffered a lot before being a part of Dalit community. Forming a community gave them a vision to strengthen themselves and raise their voices against the odds. Later Dalit literature acted as a means or weapon to speak about their issues and was demanding equality. African literature also came up with the same vision. It too aimed at creating an awakening and fight for their rights.

Both Dalit and Black African people went through the same suffering. They were denied education. They were facing gender discrimination. Male children were given priority and were preferred over female children. Both literatures focused on these issues. Both Dalit and African women faced these problems and the writers were using this literature to create awareness in the society. They were struggling for identity and independence. What Yvonne Vera was communicating through her character Mazvita, the same issues were raised by writers of Dalit literature.

Women writers have major contributions in Dalit literature. Not only had this but they

also opted for the medium of self expression. They wrote autobiographies to portray the true and detailed picture of Dalits, especially Dalit women. They have mentioned in their narratives how badly these Dalits were treated by upper class people. One of the writers Mukta Sarvagod has mentioned how she was badly treated during her school days. As a child she was not allowed to touch water to clean her slate nor was her slate touched by her teacher. She was forced to drag it on floor so that the teacher can have a look at it from distance.

Some women writers also observed and mentioned in their work as Dalit life was easy for men in comparison to women. They were struggling but it was less when compared to women.

Antasphot written by Kumud Pawade questions the dual position of women. The community itself was discriminating among its people. She disliked the concept of the term Suhagin. Women were not considered as women. The so called 'Suhagin' women were enjoying more privileges than other widows. She also rejected accepting the status of her husband as God. For her, husband was just a man and not a God.

The Dalit literature had its roots from Maharashtra. Many women writers through autobiographies raised the voices against the odds. But with time Telugu Dalit women writers also began to express themselves. Their works were in the form of poem, short stories, essays etc. The Telugu Dalit literature focused on the paradox, the hypocrisy which was being practiced at that time. These women writers too were fighting against the discrimination, exploitation and sufferings the Dalits were facing.

These writers were focusing on the other aspects of the suffering. Initially these thought it was the ignorance and lack of education that was root cause of suffering. But later they realized they were so badly trapped in the clutches of casteism that in society their education has no importance. They are still discriminated on the basis of caste. This truth added to their sufferings. The story writer Gogu Shymala also draws the attention of readers towards the other side of the sufferings. Her story 'Raw Wounds' talks about the dual mentality of upper class people. The story was based on Jogini system. A daughter was forcefully asked to be a jogini of God who was then available to all men of society for sexual pleasure. When her father tried to save her daughter, he was addressed with following words.

"If you don't do your duty and I mine, we are doomed. We have to follow what is written on our foreheads. Who are we to change our destiny? You know that the fingers of the hand are not equal, don't you, my man?" stem which was prevailing in villages.

The fingers of the hand represent the discrimination and the caste system prevailing in society. And Father being an untouchable belongs to the little finger. The above lines also question the mentality of the society. The father is termed as Dalit which is not touchable and on the other hand the daughter of the same person is considered touchable as she is made jogini who will be used for sexual pleasure by other men of the village who are non Dalit.

The writers on one hand show the pathetic condition of women in society but they also question the mentality of such people who discriminate among men or rather human being. The writings of these women gave strength to Dalit community. It also gave them an identity. This duality or hypocrisy was also seen in African literature. The most cherished motherhood was all conditional. A single mother has no place in African society. Mazvita being a single mother had to suffer a lot and the societal conditions forced her to perform infanticide.

These communities were already suffering on basis of caste and color but the dual standard of the country men made their life worst, especially those of women. Many Dalits became Christian and some also adopted Buddhism to escape from the discrimination and other social issues. The Dalit literature especially women literature also gave birth to Dalit feminism. It aimed at empowering women and to free them from the clutches of society in all forms. So again somehow both Dalit and African literature were focusing on same issues. Both the writings were with a purpose and not just to delight.

Yvonne Vera has dual purpose of writing. On one hand she wanted to give voice to the unheard problems and exploitation faced by African women. And second she aimed at giving at emancipation of women. She wants to make her women bold to face atrocities of life and be bold and search for their identity. The same is seen in Dalit literature. For example in *Sangati* the women are initial portrayed as despairing and wretched but in the later part they are presented as independent and wants to enjoy power. Thus a significant shift is seen the women characters of Dalit literature too. Om Prakash Valmiki's *Jhoothan* also shows a shift in personality and position. It is based on the personal experience of Dalit. It is the journey of a boy from worst conditions to a prominent writer.

Thus these literatures were portraying the true image of society and were with a purpose, and not just for entertainment. Both have a long journey of struggle, especially the women who were the victims of multiple sufferings. They were considered secondary in their own community. Thus they lacked any kind of support. But these women were strong enough to fight for themselves and were not ready to settle for less. Thus these women characters in both literatures were giving hope to other women of the society. Both the literature talk about the negative aspects of society but simultaneously are preparing for a positive future. Thus it can be seen that both the literatures were on the same journey, with a common purpose to bring about a positive change in society, especially for women.

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