

BOOK REVIEW

Dipak Giri, *Perspectives on Indian Dalit Literature: Critical Responses*, Booksclinic Publishing, 2020, pp. 270.

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Perspectives on Indian Dalit Literature: Critical Responses is an important contribution towards understanding the role of caste as an agent of discrimination in Indian society. The book is an anthology of critical essays which has compiled the essays of twenty six writers from different parts of India. The variety of essays in this volume represents different important dalit writers' writings and their significance in the field of Dalit Literature. This volume raises key questions that speak issues in the existing criticism of dalit writers and their representations in their writings. Today's scholars and readers place great importance on dalit authors whose lives are often sparsely documented or given any importance in the historical narratives. The book claims to cover almost all eminent dalit writers across time and genres (fiction and non-fiction) as also non-dalit writers who have sought to strive for the cause of the dalit subalternization with no less ardour. The book attempts to look at the role of Dalit literature in re-defining and enlightening the extent and tenor of Indian literature today. In the Indian context, class, caste and patriarchy are three axes of social structure which are crucial to the understanding of cultural spaces and gender relations. In this context, too this volume makes important contribution to the critical field as the essays included look at the oeuvre of Dalit literature from varied critical stand points, ranging from linguistic analysis, feminism, postcolonialism, subaltern studies, new historicism, cultural materialism, anthropological investigation, questions of human rights concerns, of hegemony and status quo, of dalit aesthetics and subject formation. They also undertake inquiry in line of binaries, namely that of subjectivity/objectivity, self/ other, inclusion/ exclusion, centre/ periphery, pollution/ purity and haves/ have-nots. Dipak Giri, the

editor of this anthology has given a useful compilation of all the key ideas and sketched a brief note of all the essays in his introductory note.

This is a first rate book: well-researched, carefully documented, and artfully written. Tracing the concept of ‘Dalit’ to its point of origin in the Rig-Vedic era, the introduction aptly vouches for Dalit literature as an essentially political terrain that overlaps literary and existential concerns, where the supposedly unalterable status of dalits stands to be challenged by dalit intellectuals, writers and activists. It introduces Dalit literature, discusses its history from the pre independence era to the present, as it makes significant transition from regional to national and global levels, the latter owing mostly to wide-scale translations of the regional texts into English.

The first essay “Mapping Dalitness in Omprakash Valmiki’s *Joothan* and Baby Kamble’s *The Prisons We Broke* in the light of Limbale’s *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature*” which is written by Rafseena M. seeks to comprehend the texts like Omprakash Valmiki’s *Joothan* and Baby Kamble’s *The Prisons We Broke* in the light of the yardstick of dalit aesthetics by Limbale’s *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature* where she is trying to depict the pains and humiliations that dalit people suffer in the hands of upper caste Hindus. Aswathy Mohan’s paper “The Rise of the Falcon from the Limbo of Non-existence: A Reading of Bama’s *Karukku*”, reflects on the marginal existence of the dalits in Indian society and culture and through Bama’s *Karukku* tries to critique how Christianity in Indian society is not spared from hierarchical divisions. Milan Mondol’s paper “Marginality: A Curse against Survival in Bhimrao Shirwale’s Short Story “Livelihood””, presents multiple instances of marginalization through Bhimrao Shirwale’s short-story “Livelihood”. Shirwale’s story points out the crisis of survival and the sexual exploitations in the lives of dalit woman, Kashi. Jyotsna Bidave’s paper “Reconnoitering Dalit Feminism through Dalit Literature and Autobiographies in Maharashtra” tries to show how patriarchy works as an ideology and a social system that has legitimized and institutionalized gender-based differentiation, domination, and discrimination. She has tried to locate the sociological or historical perspectives of dalit women’s lives and how they have narrated their lived experiences in their narratives. In her paper she efforts to chart in a comprehensive manner the dalit women’s movement and its theorization in Maharashtra. Debasis Samaddar in his paper, “Representation of the Dalit Mahar Community’s Life Struggle

in General and the Struggle of the Mahar Women in Particular, in Baby Kamble's autobiography *The Prisons We Broke: A Critical Scrutiny From Feminine Perspective*", throws light on the rise of the dalit women writers like Baby Kamble who got inspired by Babasaheb Ambedkar and displayed in her novel the lives and plights of Mahar women who are subjugated not only by the upper caste people but also by their own men folk. Irshad Ahmed Dhar in his article "Indian Dalit Literature: Intersection of Caste and Gender Discrimination" and Naseen Ud Din Sofi in his article "Treatment of Dalit Women in India", have focused on the gender power relations and women's oppression in Indian society. Dalit women's gender oppression is situated at the intersections of caste, class and patriarchy which articulate power relations in the socio, political and cultural domains.

Anik Sarkar's "Subjugation and Resilience in the poems of Meena Kandasamy" deals with the issues of "intricate hardships and complexities that a certain portion of society faces. Her poetry emerges as a sharp, piercing voice that cuts through the blindness surrounding the atrocities and violations of body, spirit and mind, surfacing across the lives of Dalit men and women living in the shadows due to shame, embarrassment, illiteracy and powerlessness. Her poetry reflects those voices that cannot speak or are too afraid to speak for themselves" (36). Almost a similar theme resonates in Bhaskar Ch. Sarkar's article "A Critique of Regimentation in Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You or a Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife*" where the author is trying to show the social, mental, physical regimentation of a married woman whose dream to become a writer gets shattered in the hands of her educated elite intellectual husband.

Dr. Giri Prasad Vidudhala's paper "Caste the Social Apartheid Poison and Revenge Hatred Form in India" gives a richly researched account of the political structures of the "caste system" in India. Vidudhala's archeology of 'the caste system' at the political levels comes alive in his exploration of individuals like Mahatma Gandhi, B.R. Ambedkar and Periyar and their roles in constructing the dalit movement and arising consciousness among the dalits, the downtrodden of the society. The most well researched and illuminating paper in the collection Chandraboti Chakraborty's "Annihilating the Wall of Dalit Seclusion: A Cognitive Study, Aided by the Vedantic Discourse" gives minute details of the birth of 'Jati' and 'Varna' in Indian caste

system and brings into focus different instances from Upanishads which proves how caste discriminations prevailed in Indian society and how the birth of Dalit Literature has gifted the oppressed people voice to unify and formulate their voices and protests against all kinds of atrocities of the upper castes.

Dr. K. D. Sonawane's article "Anand's Concept of Untouchability" shows how Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* talks about the concept of untouchability in Indian society and highlights the material humiliation, exploitation and ill-treatment of the lower castes in the hands of upper castes. Anand in his another novel *The Road* shows how after twenty five years the condition of the untouchables remain unchanged. In his paper "A Brief Overview of Dalit Consciousness in Indian Writing English" Jugabrat Chowdhury discusses Mulk Raj Anand and many other prominent non-dalit Indian writers who analytically show in their novels the deplorable condition of the untouchables and the atrocities of the upper caste Indian society. Parimal Kumar in his paper "Depletion of Moral Value and the Role of Women in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*" shows the contrasting image between the characters of Sohini and Gulabo in the novel. Sohini is the sister of Bakha, the protagonist of *Untouchable* where as Gulabo has an illicit relationship with a Brahmin therefore she thinks herself as superior than untouchables. Sohini's self-respect, morality and determination make her a strong character despite her belonging from the lower strata of Indian society.

Dr. Mohd. Azam's "Indian Dalit Literature: Exploration for Identity to Communal Impartiality" tries to explore Dalit Literature as a new dimension in Indian literary canon. He analyses different phases of Dalit movement in Maharashtra which begins with Jyotirao Phule's *Gulamgiri* and later with the publication of Arjun Dangle's *Poisoned Bread* is extended widely as dalits from different parts of India participate in this movement and share their testimonies and lived experiences leading to a more assertive dalit consciousness. While Dr. Mohd. Azad focuses on the rise of Dalit Literature in Maharashtra, Vinod Parmar in his essay, "A Silver Line in Dark Clouds: Gujarati Dalit Literature" is concerned with the anti- reservation agitations in the year 1981 in Gujarat that is also symptomatic of the beginning of the Gujarati Dalit Literature. It also addresses the various magazines like 'Panther', 'Aakrosh', 'Kalo Suraj' and many others that have voiced against different forms of atrocities on dalits. On the other hand Jyoti Biswas

and Madhabi Karmakar's paper "Portrait of the Massacre Two Dalit Poems on Marichjhampi" focuses on the rehabilitation of the refugees in Dandakaranya and the poor conditions of refugees who settled at Marichjhampi and faced the severe attacks from government and police who wanted to uproot them. In this backdrop the author shows the development of the marginalized minority narratives of West Bengal. The editor of this anthology Dipak Giri's paper "Dalit in Premchand's Select Short Stories" discusses how in Hindi Literature Munshi Premchand has brought up the issues of dalits and their oppressions in the hands of the upper caste Hindus.

Dr. Sapna Dogra's paper "Irony and Eloquence as Devices of Polite Dismissal in Hira Bansode's 'Bosom Friend'" brings forth the pains of friendship of a dalit girl who gets invited to dine with her upper caste friend where she faces humiliation and maltreatment. "Dalit Literature: A Ray of Hope for the Dalits" by Ratna Biswas has highlighted the lives and plights of dalits who have coped up with all the atrocities and reached eminent positions in the society. In his paper "Representation of Cultural Marginality in Indian Dalit Literature with Special Reference to Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi*" Prosenjit Ghosh primarily deals with Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* (1956), an autobiography which depicts the situation of dalits in post-independence period. The concepts of impurity and sexual exploitations, illegitimacy all become poignant themes in this writing. Limbale like other dalit writers asserted that education is the only way out and ray of hope to escape from all these atrocities. Manas Barik's paper "An Exploration into Namdeo Dhasal's Poem 'Ambedkar, 1978: Equality for All or Death for India' as a Tribute to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar" shows how Namdeo Dhasal, the poet, Panther and the ardent follower of Babasaheb Ambedkar in his poems gave his tribute to the messiah of dalits. Dr. Sugandha Rani's paper "A Critical Insight into Dalit Literature" and Rizwana Nazir Khan's paper "A Survey to Indian Dalit Literature" both have echoed the rise of the Dalit Literature in the writing of dalit and non-dalit writers and the birth of the dalit consciousness.

The book may serve well as an important addition to the critical scholarships done till today on dalit literature. However an attempt to organize the individual critical essays along more relevant thematic lines would have been of greater help. The essays from diverse perspectives are bound to be source reading for teachers, scholars and students alike. There are some typographical errors. This book will serve for many years as a standard comprehensive

work on Dalit literature with particular emphasis on dalit women and their self-assertions through their narratives. The price is student friendly. With *Perspectives on Indian Dalit Literature*, Dipak Giri has tried to secure a rightful place for dalits in Indian culture and with his own book he has attempted to continue a legacy of literary excellence.

