



Dalit Literature is Human Literature

Dr. Kambhampati Rajesh

Associate Professor

Department of English

Central University of Jammu

Introduction

Throughout human history, the evolution of societies has been deeply intertwined with the concepts of power, authority, and the distribution of resources. From the earliest forms of governance to the present day, those in positions of power have often employed various ideologies and institutions to justify their authority, leading to the perpetuation of exploitative practices, social hierarchies, and systemic inequalities. Amidst this backdrop, the emergence of religious teachings and philosophical doctrines has provided alternative visions for societal organization, challenging prevailing norms and advocating for principles of equality, compassion, and justice.

In this comprehensive discussion, we delve into the complex interplay between power structures, religious ideologies, and societal norms, tracing the historical trajectory of societies from ancient times to the modern era. We explore the influence of figures like Buddha, Jesus Christ, and philosophical movements like Buddhism and Christianity, examining their responses to prevailing systems of oppression and exploitation. Furthermore, we analyze the role of literature as a reflection of societal values and power dynamics, highlighting the marginalized voices that have been historically sidelined within dominant narratives. From the portrayal of women and lower caste communities to the emergence of Dalit literature as a powerful tool of resistance, we interrogate the ways in which literature both reflects and shapes societal attitudes towards power, privilege, and social justice.

Ultimately, this discussion seeks to illuminate the complex relationship between power, religion, and literature, offering insights into the mechanisms through which dominant ideologies are constructed, challenged, and transformed. By critically examining historical precedents and contemporary realities, we aim to foster a deeper understanding of the forces that shape our societies and the potential pathways towards a more just and equitable future.

Keywords: Power structures, Dalit literature, Solidarity, Religious ideologies, Societal norms.

Discussion

Since the inception of property rights in human societies, those in positions of power have devised various concepts and principles to justify their authority. These notions have often perpetuated exploitative practices, leading to widespread suffering, slavery, and the imposition of arbitrary religious beliefs such as ideas of heaven and hell. Consequently, ancient ideals of a republic gradually waned, allowing the exploitative state to govern all aspects of culture and society. Amidst this backdrop, the rise of autocratic regimes coincided with the emergence of Buddha's teachings, or Dhamma. Buddha, a compassionate figure, keenly observed the accumulation of wealth, the conflicts arising from the pursuit of power, and the resulting violence and inequality plaguing society. Through his teachings, he identified the roots of suffering and prescribed methods for its eradication, denouncing exploitative principles and the social structures that upheld them.

However, despite Buddha's teachings, the autocratic state persisted, wealth and power remained concentrated, and slavery endured. Efforts towards wealth and power redistribution were thwarted, and conflicts escalated, leading to a proliferation of servitude. The entrenched social order perpetuated divisions based on caste and class, exacerbating inequality and social unrest. Amidst this turmoil, the Sangha of Bhagwan Buddha stood out as a beacon of democratic principles. Within the Sangha, individuals from diverse backgrounds united, transcending caste and class barriers to live harmoniously in a semblance of social democracy. This inclusive community offered a stark contrast to the prevailing societal norms, which were marred by inequality and exploitation. The exploitative state possesses a distinct trait: it fosters only those ideologies and institutions that perpetuate its exploitative essence, while stifling or dismantling constructive principles and dissenting opinions. It thrives on inequality and social stratification, actively nurturing and propagating systems that maintain these divisions while suppressing any notions that challenge them. For the exploitative state, doctrines promoting anti-spiritualism and atheism are detrimental as they undermine the authority of religious institutions that uphold the existing power structures. These ideologies erode the notion of divine hierarchy and the sanctity of religious and punitive systems tied to it, thereby threatening the state's autocratic grip. Conversely, such principles align more naturally with a republican state, where meritocracy and achievement are valued over inherited privilege. Buddhism, with its inherent opposition to inequality, appears incompatible with the exploitative state. Despite its potential to inspire change, Buddhism could only exist as an ideal within such a society, attracting individuals disillusioned with the prevailing order. The Sangha, composed of individuals from all societal strata, provided a glimpse of casteless and classless harmony, challenging the entrenched social norms. However, the exploitative state, firmly entrenched in its power, vehemently opposed Buddhist principles, fearing their potential to disrupt the status quo.

As the exploitative state reached its zenith, inequality and untouchability became deeply ingrained in society, making it nearly impossible for individuals from oppressed classes to rise. Even in folklore like the Jataka tales, where heroes emerged from various backgrounds, those from oppressed classes were conspicuously absent due to systemic barriers. This illustrates how untouchability became ingrained in every facet of society, accepted as a natural order by both rulers and the ruled. Property rights, as understood in the context of Varna and caste in ancient societies, were intricately tied to birthright. This was a deliberate construct engineered by the ruling class to secure their dominance over wealth, power, and social standing. By rigidly associating one's social status with birth, the ruling elite ensured the perpetuation of their privileges while preventing the oppressed from escaping their plight. Birth was construed as the culmination of past deeds (karma), divine judgment, and an unchangeable determinant of one's place in society. This manipulation of property rights was a Machiavellian scheme, designed to maintain the status quo and prevent any challenge to the existing power structures. Society became deeply divided along lines of inequality, with the privileged classes monopolizing wealth, comfort, and spiritual proximity, while relegating others to lives of suffering and servitude. The entrenched system thwarted social progress by stifling any changes in the means of production and ownership. Concepts such as rebirth, fatalism, and divine will were propagated to justify and perpetuate the oppressive social order. The true oppressors remained obscured, as the oppressed were led to believe in the inevitability of their condition and discouraged from collective action.

The ideology propagated by the ruling class further exacerbated the plight of the oppressed, fostering a nihilistic worldview that negated the value of life itself. Social consciousness and solidarity were suppressed through propaganda and manipulation, ensuring that dissent was quashed and the ruling elite remained unchallenged. Hindu feudalism, operating through a hierarchical caste system, maintained its grip on power by co-opting religious and military institutions to suppress any dissent. The fault, therefore, lay not with any particular caste but with the overarching Hindu feudal system, which was founded on principles of monarchy and divine authority. Throughout history, whenever dissenting voices emerged, such as in Buddhism, they were either co-opted or crushed by the ruling elite to preserve their hegemony. This pattern underscored the systematic oppression embedded within the social and political structures of the time, perpetuating a cycle of inequality and suffering. In Hinduism, the portrayal of heroes as divine figures often masks the reality of their pursuits for power through warfare. These conflicts, glorified in holy scriptures and commemorated in festivals, have shaped the cultural narrative. Rulers defeated in these battles are vilified, while victors are deified, perpetuating a cycle of violence and power dynamics. Traits like jealousy, hatred, and vengeance are elevated as cultural ideals, indicating the prominence of warfare in Hindu values. The perpetuation of this narrative serves the interests of the Brahmins and Kshatriyas, who retain power and influence. Consequently, heroes who may have committed questionable acts, such as dishonoring Sita or burning down the Khandava forest, are enshrined in temples and scriptures. This narrative dominance allows the ruling classes to shape societal norms and literature in their favor, sidelining values like love, compassion, and equality. Ultimately, this perpetuates inequality and fosters a culture that celebrates aggression and superiority while marginalizing empathy and cooperation.

Jesus Christ introduced the concept of God and the Heavenly Kingdom, presenting himself as God's beloved Son. According to Christian beliefs, Adam and Eve's Original Sin led to their expulsion from Paradise, with the relationship between man and woman seen as tainted by sin. However, Jesus preached that by following him and embodying virtues like love, compassion, service, fraternity, equality, sacrifice, and tolerance, individuals could receive God's love. Repentance and prayer were also pathways to experiencing divine love. These principles form the foundation of Christian society, culture, and literature, fostering inclusivity despite socioeconomic divides. In contrast, Hinduism historically marginalized groups like the Shudras and Atishudras, excluding them from religious and secular literature. Hindu gods and scriptures often portrayed the downtrodden and weak unfavorably, perpetuating discrimination. This lack of inclusion stemmed from religious texts promoting hatred, malice, scorn, and pride,

making it difficult for marginalized groups to find representation in society and literature. Consequently, concepts like liberty, equality, fraternity, rationality, democracy, and socialism hold little significance within Hindu society and literature. These ideals lack a firm footing in Hinduism, with even the literature of saints failing to incorporate them. Instead, themes of racism, fascism, and perversion often dominate Hindu literary and societal narratives.

In Sanskrit religious and literary texts, the protagonists primarily hail from the ruling classes and those sections of society that upheld Hinduism's value system, supported it, and fought for its cause. These revered figures were often elevated to divine status and worshipped in temples, with their life stories becoming popular themes in literature. Conversely, individuals who were marginalized or condemned by religious and ruling authorities never attained divine, heroic, or even sub-heroic status in Sanskrit literature. This illustrates the deep-seated allegiance of Sanskrit religious and imaginative literature to the established religious and ruling orders. Sanskrit literature, characterized by its abundance, extensively glorified kings, emperors from the upper echelons of society, and celebrated deities. Apart from the Brahmins and Kshatriyas—the two dominant social classes—other societal groups received scant representation in Sanskrit literature, with rare exceptions. The control over wealth, power, and education was firmly held by these privileged classes, consequently limiting Sanskrit literature's scope largely to the prescriptions of the Smritis, or sacred texts. This narrow focus contributed to a sense of monotony within Sanskrit literature. Given its deep-rooted alignment with the caste system and the intellectual framework that underpins it, Sanskrit literature lacks the breadth and inclusivity necessary to serve as the foundational mythology and tradition for Dalit literature. During the period of Islamic invasion in India, significant shifts occurred in the socio-political landscape, which also left a profound impact on the cultural and literary realms. As Islamic power gained ascendancy and Hindu authority waned, a notable emergence of saintly literature took place. This literature primarily aimed to bolster the declining Hindu governance while resisting the spread of Islam. However, its efforts inadvertently perpetuated the hierarchical vama system, reinforcing the existing societal structure.

Amidst the chaos and disorder of this era, a diverse array of voices began to surface, representing various segments of society including Shudras, Atishudras, and women. The weakening of Hindu dominance under Islamic pressure allowed for the empowerment of these marginalized groups, fostering a brief period of societal creativity. Yet, as Muslim states stabilized, Hindu rulers either submitted to Muslim authority or retained their sovereignty, leading to a resurgence of the oppressive varna system. Muslim rulers, recognizing the utility of the pre-existing Hindu social framework for their own governance, opted to preserve it, further entrenching caste-based oppression. Consequently, even within Islamic society in India, the caste system and its underlying values became deeply ingrained. Despite the expression of devoutness (bhakti) by Hindu saints, their attempts to advocate for social equality largely failed, as the caste ideology remained firmly entrenched.

The literature produced during this tumultuous period, particularly that of the Hindu saints, was deeply entrenched in the prevailing vama system and its associated intellectual and literary norms. Sanskrit conventions, concepts, and heroes were upheld, further consolidating the exploitative social structure. Even as bhakti became widely accepted, devotees remained steadfast in their adherence to caste-based ideologies.

Belief in fatalism, karma, and rebirth, along with the acceptance of one's predetermined fate, permeated society, aligning with the needs of the Hindu feudal state. Consequently, the intellectual and social systems in place were sustained, hindering the spread of egalitarian ideals despite the fervent expressions of devotion by the saints. The arrival of the British in India marked a significant shift in the cultural, social, and intellectual landscape of the region. Their conquests led to the subjugation of the Hindu and Muslim communities, but also brought with them a wave of new knowledge, science, technologies, and economic opportunities. This influx of Western ideas and advancements sparked a transformation in the traditional social and economic structures of Indian society.

As the British Enlightenment began to influence Indian minds, it fostered a spirit of self-critical thinking. This newfound intellectual freedom encouraged a departure from the traditional focus on metaphysical and religious themes in literature, towards a more socially conscious literary expression. Previously, the elite classes, known as the varnas, held significant sway in society due to their religious status and accompanying economic and political power. However, with the advent of British influence, these same varnas found themselves at the forefront of social movements, grappling with their own domestic issues and engaging in public discourse. This shift also necessitated a critical reevaluation of Hinduism, marking a resurgence of introspective analysis and calls for reform. This period marked a significant transition in Indian society, as the influence of Western Enlightenment encouraged critical thinking, social awareness, and a reevaluation of traditional norms and beliefs.

For centuries, women were notably absent from literature, but over time, they started to emerge as significant subjects. Their portrayal took on various forms, representing the challenges and struggles they faced within society. Whether depicted as child-widows, child-brides, or as married women constrained by the authority of their in-laws in the traditional joint Hindu family system, literature began to capture the multifaceted experiences of women. The rise of new advancements in science, technology, occupations, businesses, as well as evolving literary and intellectual ideas, provided writers with the courage and inspiration to delve into the lives of women and present their stories with greater depth and complexity. In a similar vein, the portrayal of the Shudras and the Atishudras, akin to the oversight of women in the past, faced no significant obstacles. The dominance of the Peshwas had waned, and a progressive empire championed liberalism vigorously. Both the state and social reform movements supported this ideology. Unlike in the past, where Brahmins could influence censorship against writers depicting women

unfavorably, the new rulers were more tolerant. Furthermore, the Brahmin class itself had undergone changes, with divisions emerging between reformists and traditionalists. Despite these conducive circumstances, the Shudras and the Atishudras still struggled to find representation in literature. This begs the question: why were they sidelined? Was it due to writers prioritizing aestheticism over social commentary? Or perhaps they lacked the desire for enlightenment? Alternatively, could it be that depicting the suffering of the marginalized was beyond their linguistic capabilities. It's not a matter of lacking skill among writers; they too desired social reform and enlightenment. However, their cultural conditioning, psychological barriers, and mythology hindered them from portraying the downtrodden.

English writers, inspired by the compassionate example of Jesus Christ, recognized the dignity and worth of the weak and the poor. Christ, despite his divine status, treated them with respect and love, rejecting notions of hierarchy based on birth or social status. This acknowledgment of the downtrodden as equals resonated deeply within Christian societies, shaping their values and literature. Even revolutionary movements found inspiration in Christ's message of love and compassion. In contrast, Hindu writers failed to recognize the suffering of the Shudras and Atishudras, as the revered figures and sacred texts of Hinduism ignored their plight. The Hindu caste system, devoid of notions of love and compassion, marginalized these groups, leaving no room for their representation in society or literature. The perpetuation of values that upheld caste hierarchy prevented any attempts to uplift or empower them. To challenge this system was deemed unthinkable, as it was deeply entrenched in Hindu society's intellectual and social fabric. Thus, Hindu literature and society remained indifferent to the struggles of the marginalized, perpetuating a cycle of exploitation and exclusion.

If Buddhism had persisted as a dominant influence in Indian society, it would have deeply embedded principles of love and compassion within the cultural fabric. Institutions akin to Christian establishments, such as schools, homes, hospitals, and religious organizations, would have proliferated, focusing on serving the vulnerable and impoverished. These institutions would have fostered various humanistic ideals, fostering a society where empathy and care for others were paramount. Furthermore, the philosophical underpinnings of Buddhism, which include anti-spiritualism, atheism, and rationalism, would have catalyzed continuous advancements in both the sciences and social structures. This dynamic and progressive nature of Buddhism would have propelled societal development, leading to advancements in fields such as medicine, chemistry, law, philosophy, and art. Buddhism's revolutionary stance, coupled with its atheistic principles, would have provided a fertile ground for the emergence of democracy. By internalizing democratic values, society would have been compelled to address economic inequalities and ensure that even the marginalized sections received due attention and respect.

In the realm of literature, the influence of Buddhism would have reshaped narratives, offering new perspectives on societal norms and challenging established hierarchies. However, the Indian intelligentsia, deeply entrenched in the existing power structures, failed to embrace such transformative ideologies. Despite the potential for enlightenment and social reform offered by thinkers like Mahatma Phule, the intelligentsia remained loyal to the status quo, perpetuating the dominance of established norms, particularly those favoring the Brahminical order. The absence of dissenting voices within the Brahminical intelligentsia stifled intellectual exploration and hindered the emergence of figures akin to Voltaire, who challenged oppressive religious and political authority. Instead, writers and intellectuals remained confined within the confines of the Manu Smriti, reinforcing existing power dynamics and societal inequalities.

During the national enlightenment period, there was a significant awakening among the various castes in India, which directly challenged the deeply entrenched Hindu caste system. This awakening was particularly critical of the Brahmins, who held religious authority, and the Kshatriyas, who wielded political power, attributing to them equal responsibility for upholding an unjust social order. Instead of assuming leadership roles in guiding these emerging movements towards a unified struggle for economic and political liberation, the intelligentsia, or Indian national leadership, chose to divide the liberation movement into two distinct factions: a political movement and a social reform movement. Furthermore, those advocating for social change and critiquing the caste system were labeled as collaborators with British colonial rule, facing severe backlash and marginalization. In stark contrast to the European Enlightenment, which ushered in new ideas, scientific inquiry, and social progress, the Indian intelligentsia remained steadfast in their reverence for a mythical past, where certain castes enjoyed supreme status. This fixation on tradition stifled the potential for a revolutionary upheaval aimed at dismantling class and caste distinctions. Figures like Phule, Agarkar, Gokhale, and Ranade, who vocally championed the rights of marginalized castes and called for sweeping social reforms, encountered vehement opposition and ostracization.

While Europe saw movements challenging oppressive authorities in favor of progress, Indian intellectuals, deeply entrenched in a caste-based worldview, resisted embracing democratic socialism and instead advocated for incremental reforms within the existing hierarchical system. The emergence of figures like Dr. Ambedkar, who spearheaded movements for social revolution and democracy, posed a direct challenge to the prevailing status quo. Despite facing vehement opposition and isolation, Ambedkar's advocacy for social justice ignited a grassroots movement that fundamentally reshaped the landscape of Indian literature and

politics. The struggle for social reform in India, led by figures like Ambedkar, underscored the enduring and deeply ingrained caste divisions that persisted despite the country's attainment of political independence. Despite constitutional measures aimed at abolishing untouchability, caste-based discrimination continued to thrive alongside the facade of democracy. Indian capitalism, closely intertwined with feudal structures and religious hierarchies, perpetuated economic inequality while hindering the emergence of a unified class consciousness necessary for systemic change.

In this complex socio-political milieu, Dalit literature emerged as a potent force, confronting social injustices head-on and advocating for a comprehensive restructuring of society. Inspired by figures like Ambedkar, Dalit literature integrated itself with the struggles of the masses, embodying a leftist perspective and offering a visionary blueprint for a more equitable future for India. In the complex tapestry of Indian society, Hinduism has long held sway as the dominant religious and cultural force. Its influence permeates every aspect of life, from governance structures to social hierarchies and artistic expressions. With the decline of Buddhism, Hinduism emerged as the primary ideological bedrock shaping the collective consciousness of the Indian populace.

At its core, Hinduism encompasses a rich tapestry of mythological narratives, philosophical treatises, and religious practices that have endured for millennia. Concepts such as karma, dharma, and moksha form the bedrock of Hindu thought, offering a framework through which individuals perceive their place in the universe and their moral responsibilities. Within this religious landscape, the caste system has played a defining role, stratifying society into rigid hierarchies based on birth. At the apex of this hierarchy are the Brahmins, followed by Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras, with Dalits relegated to the lowest rung, often subjected to discrimination and social ostracization. While the Indian Constitution enshrines principles of equality and social justice, the reality on the ground often falls short of these ideals. Deep-rooted prejudices and systemic inequalities continue to perpetuate the marginalization of Dalits, denying them access to education, employment opportunities, and social mobility.

In response to this pervasive injustice, Dalit literature emerges as a powerful tool of resistance and empowerment. It seeks to challenge dominant narratives that reinforce caste-based oppression and reclaim agency for marginalized voices. By amplifying stories of resilience, resistance, and resilience, Dalit literature serves as a catalyst for social change, inspiring collective action and solidarity among oppressed communities. Moreover, Dalit literature transcends mere storytelling; it serves as a conduit for political consciousness-raising and advocacy, demanding accountability from those in power and envisioning alternative futures grounded in principles of justice and equality. Through its critique of entrenched power structures and its celebration of the resilience of the human spirit, Dalit literature offers a vision of a more inclusive and equitable society. In essence, Dalit literature represents a radical departure from the entrenched norms of the Hindu literary tradition, offering a counter-narrative that challenges the status quo and imagines new possibilities for social transformation. By centering the experiences and perspectives of marginalized communities, it redefines the boundaries of Indian literature and expands the discourse on identity, power, and resistance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the historical trajectory outlined underscores the pervasive influence of power structures and dominant ideologies on societal norms, cultural expressions, and literary traditions. From the inception of property rights in human societies to the emergence of autocratic regimes, exploitative practices have been perpetuated under various guises, leading to widespread suffering, inequality, and social unrest. The rise of Buddha's teachings, advocating for compassion and the eradication of suffering, offered a stark contrast to prevailing exploitative norms. However, despite Buddhism's potential to inspire change, the entrenched exploitative state fiercely opposed its principles, fearing disruption to the status quo. Throughout history, dissenting voices challenging oppressive systems, such as in Buddhism, were either co-opted or crushed by ruling elites, perpetuating cycles of inequality and suffering. Hindu feudalism, operating through a hierarchical caste system, maintained power by suppressing dissent and marginalizing marginalized groups. The arrival of colonial powers marked a significant shift in Indian society, introducing new ideas and fostering a spirit of critical thinking. Yet, despite opportunities for reform, the entrenched caste system persisted, hindering social progress and perpetuating inequalities.

In this context, Dalit literature emerged as a powerful tool of resistance, challenging dominant narratives and amplifying marginalized voices. By centering the experiences of oppressed communities, Dalit literature offers a vision of a more inclusive and equitable society, advocating for social justice and systemic change. Ultimately, the trajectory of Indian society and literature reflects the enduring struggle against entrenched power structures and the quest for justice, equality, and liberation. Through continued advocacy, solidarity, and collective action, there remains hope for a future where all individuals are treated with dignity and respect, regardless of caste or social status.

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