



Critical Essays on Dalit Literature

Murali Manohar

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In the context of traditional Hindu society, Dalit status has often been historically associated with occupations considered ritually impure, such as any involving leatherwork, butchering, or removal of rubbish, animal carcasses, and waste. Engaging in these activities was considered to be polluting to the individual, and this pollution was considered contagious. As a result, Dalits were commonly segregated, and banned from full participation in Hindu social life. Social reality in India can be mapped along three axes—caste (social), profession (economic) and gender. Among these, within the social axes, Brahminism plays an important role in the identity and demarcation of Dalits who are still subjected to suppression.

Gender is a key dimension in mapping the social reality but more so in the case of Dalits. Apart from the regular forms of gender-based inequality and oppression, which they face in family, community and society, Dalit women in India are alienated on the basis of caste, class and gender. They are the most vulnerable targets of caste based violence against their community, and are also raped and abused.


Some Dalits, however, have successfully integrated into urban Indian society, where caste origins are less obvious and less important in public life. But in rural India, caste origins are more readily apparent and Dalits often remain excluded from local religious life.

Dalit literature was energized in the modern era by the advent of leaders like Mahatma Phule and Ambedkar in Maharashtra, who focused on the issues of Dalits through their works and writings. This started a new trend in Dalit writing, and inspired many Dalits to come forth with writings in various Indian languages.

The book is an anthology of illuminating articles highlighting various problems Dalits are facing in our society despite the equality they have been given by the Indian Constitution and notwithstanding a ban on untouchability. The exclusion of the Dalits on the basis of caste, gender, religion, etc. has been discussed in detail, besides the impact of globalization on Dalits. A comparison of Ambedkar and Gandhi has been made in the context of *The Laws of Manu*. Some other areas of focus include education and empowerment of Dalit women; Dalits and Hinduism; the contribution of a non-Dalit to Dalit literature; and the issue of untouchability in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*.

The book will find favour with all those concerned with the plight of Dalits in our society and are desirous of bringing a positive change in their lives.

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