

Vol 4 Issue 11 Aug 2015

ISSN No : 2249-894X

*Monthly Multidisciplinary
Research Journal*

*Review Of
Research Journal*

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RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595

ISSN No.2249-894X

Review Of Research Journal is a multidisciplinary research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi & Marathi Language. All research papers submitted to the journal will be double - blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial Board readers will include investigator in universities, research institutes government and industry with research interest in the general subjects.

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OORU KERI: A TRACT OF DALIT MOVEMENT



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ABSTRACT

A cultural revolution like Dalit movement has immense impact on literature. In turn, literature has kept on reckoning the events of the revolution from time to time. Because, both the literature and history are interwoven, they influence each other. Autobiographies, in particular, have successfully registered the events of the Dalit movement with factual substance. The paper makes an attempt to investigate Ooru Keri, an autobiography by Kannada Dalit poet Siddalingaiah, in order to find how the movement is reflected in it. The autobiography has proved its presence in the mainstream literature due to its objective analysis of

the movement from a downtrodden perspective. The narrator of the text hails the triumph the Dalit movement as well cautions the readers about the possible threats to the course of the movement by referring to minute details carefully.

KEYWORDS : *Ancient, Medieval, Gender, Development, Women's Movement, Modern Indian Society Regarding Equality, Political Participation, Education And Marriage etc.,.*

INTRODUCTION :

The Dalit movement of 1960's and 70's has been a phenomenal success in India. It has brought different oppressed classes together, and has led to a mass movement; a movement that has got sociopolitical dimension. It has inspired many young Dalit minds to register their experience in different forms of literature. Among those forms, poetry and autobiography gain spotlight. Poetry gives opportunity to outspoke one's anger brilliantly, and it has received immediate response of the readers. Autobiography helps Dalits to register the harsh truth of life with substantial facts. It is the autobiography that has uncovered the other face of Indian society. The wrath of human history is captured brilliantly in this form of literature. Therefore, one can say that Dalit autobiographies are historical documents of subhuman experience.

Here is an attempt to see how the Dalit movement, a historical event, is reflected through Ooru Keri, an autobiography by Kannada Dalit poet Siddalingaiah. There are only countable Dalit autobiographies in Kannada literature, but they have been effective in grabbing wide attention. Ooru

Keri is much read not because it is written by a Dalit or it deals with Dalits, but for its objective approach in recording the narrator's contemporary society. The work has fetched Sahitya Academy award for its unbiased and frank expressions. Ooru Keri, unlike other autobiographies, narrates the historical events from a subordinate's point of view, which is uncommon in Indian literature. It gives minute details of the Dalit movement which have been manipulated by mainstream writers. The autobiography narrates the triumph of Dalits as well as warns us against possible threats to the movement in future. Siddalingaiah carefully weaves all such facts with light humour, sometimes with irony. He shows his commitment towards his community by portraying the history unbiased.

RECIPROCITY

A Dalit autobiography and the Dalit movement have been reciprocal in their deeds. Dalit movement, as it is mentioned above, inspires and provides Dalits to write their life stories. In turn, autobiographies protect the interests and the root cause of the movement. Raj Kumar believes, "The principal philosophy of Dalit literature is to bring 'total revolution' in society" (Raj Kumar, 147). The literary works keep the philosophy of Dalit movement alive. Thus Dalit literature brings brightness to the revolution, and revolution keeps inspiring through its ideals. Ooru Keri reflects such ideals effectively. The narrator Siddalingaiah's undying spirit to fight is fueled by Babasaheb Ambedkar and his contemporaries Dalit activists. His public speeches are full of Dr. Ambedkar's life and achievements. He often quotes different people from Maharashtra who recognize themselves with Dalit movement. His rationality is completely based on the outcome of Dalit movement. At the same time, he propagates the philosophy of the Dalit movement through his literary output. His furious poems are still recited on various occasions.

PROGNOSTICATOR

The narrator in Ooru Keri keenly observes every happening around him. He reads every pulse of his society in order to tackle with any possible threat, and warns us to see through it. The book cautions by referring to few incidents that would force to dire situations. In Basavalingappa's episode, the narrator elaborately discusses the "bhoosa" (cattlefeed) incident. Then State cabinet minister Basavalingappa criticizes the mainstream literature for its hypocrisy. He has said that literature which does not speak of bottom level the society cannot be called literature in true sense, it is a lie. It should go to garbage as it is a "bhoosa" (cattlefeed). This criticism leads to his resignation from his portfolio. This event draws widespread reactions from various kinds of people and opens to new debates. The narrator admires and advocates the deeds of Basavalingappa. Simultaneously, the narration expresses disappointment over the unexpected withdrawal of Basavalingappa from public life, and laments over his decision to regret his earlier deeds. The narrator observes that Basavalingappa depends on power to act on. He says, "Basavalingappa was ambitious. He aspired to become president of India. He wanted play the role of Rama, but society pressed him to play Anjaneya. He did not like Anjaneya's role. Being a rebel, he chose the role" (Siddalingaiah, 96). The text tells how this incident leaves Dalits morally discouraged and skeptical; skeptical about leaders' credibility and accountability in future.

CONFLICT OF IDEAS

Ooru Keri exposes hard realities by juxtaposing sundry ideologies that existed during the Dalit movement. It also unveils the internal conflicts of different ideas. Siddalingaiah is not among those "propagandist" writers who conceal the truth by adopting 'all-is-well' attitude. He is candid in writing, and explicit in thoughts. He anecdotes his meeting with Communists, "During the summer holidays, I

attended a camp of the Communist Party of India at Krishna Bhavan in Malleswaram. The speakers were all worshippers of Russia. If we delegates asked critical questions about the Soviet Union, they exploded in anger" (Siddalingaiah, 99). This bewrays the ideals of the Left wing bigwigs who conducted meetings in 'A' class hotels, whereas other organizations struggle to work under the slum hatches. This tiny reference reveals how Dalit movement is set back due to such pro-Dalit activists who would never know the first hand experiences of Dalits. The text alarms against these fake pro-Dalits who may damage the integrity of Dalits' cause. Having understood this plight, Siddalingaiah initiates "Vicharvadi Vedike" (Rationalist Society) to spread awareness through debates. He travels across the state to lead the movement.

INVISIBLE DAMAGE

We have failed to recognize right things at right time in our history. We regret later for the blunders that have already done greater damage to our morale. Along with Bandaya (Rebellious), Communists and Rationalists, even ardent followers of Babasaheb formed a pervading gloom over Dalit movement. The autobiography hints at inability of some key Dalit personalities like Devraj Urs who could not deliver on. Bheema Sena in North and D.S.S. in South Karnataka are not supported by political powerhouse. Veteran journalist V.T. Rajashekhar Shetty mourns, "Revolutionaries like Shyamsunder are seldom born in Hindu India... But senseless as we are, we curse them when they live but worship them after they die" (Shetty, 19). Political power always divides Dalits due to the confusions fanned by orthodox politicians who never want to lose their stronghold on our society. Siddalingaiah ceases the power-politics of post-independent India where British are replaced by Brahmins.

A HALT

Today the Dalit movement has come to halt. The narration ends as though the Dalit movement is personified in the form of the autobiography. On one hand the author ends it with himself being 'located' in Bangalore University as a research assistant. On the other hand the text foresees the halt of a high-spirited cultural revolution. After achieving a cozy place in the university he gradually loses his charm in the public life. Likewise, Dalit movement too has lost its vigour due to the lack of ideological consensus and a spearhead to lead the mass. So, both the author and the Dalit movement have come to a halt, but it is not dead.

In its own limits, Ooru Keri depicts the different shades of Dalit movement and becomes a tract of the movement. The narration carries out the whole text so smoothly that none is offended but thinks of the pitfalls in our misdeeds in the past. Its light humour makes the readers more sensible in handling the future course. Human suffering is presented objectively without any preoccupations. Therefore, it stands as a historical document to any researcher.

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