

Mulk Raj Anand and Bama's Perspective on the Down Trodden

Mrs. A. LAKSHMI

Assistant Professor, Department of English,
Thiravium College of Arts and Science for Women,
Kailasapatti, Theni, Tamil Nadu, India.

Dalit literature represents a powerful, emerging trend in the Indian literary scene. Preoccupied with the location of Dalits in the caste-based Hindu society and their struggles for dignity, justice and equality. Dalit literature is oppositional by nature. With the growing translation of works by Dalit writers from various, regional languages into English. Dalit literature is poised to acquire a national and international recognition.

Dalit literature awakens the basic perception of human condition. As the Literature of marginality, Dalit literature is destined to become a paradigm of world literature wherein marginality breeds profound awareness of

undying human spirit, struggling with inhuman condemnation of man by man. Today's Dalit literature that occupies a pride of place is actually born out of the heinous system of untouchability and caste discrimination that have been practised in India for the past millennia. And for ages, they have been peddling a complacent justification of the caste system through the belief in 'Karma' and 'sins' of the previous births. The caste system denied education to 'Shudras' and 'panchamas' (the present day Dalits). And the Dalits' anti-caste writing is a way in which the oppressed are retaliating against the oppressors. It is a psychological liberation for the people who wanted to break the system. Like Black

American Literature, Dalit writing is characterized by a new level of pride, militancy and creativity and it seeks to use writing as a weapon.

The word 'Dalit' comes from the Marathi language and it means 'ground', 'suppressed', 'crushed' or 'broken to pieces'. Jyotirao Phule was the first Dalit activist to use this term to refer to the group of people traditionally regarded as lower class. Dalit literature forms an important and distinct part of Indian literature. Madara Chenniah, an 11th century-cobbler-saint is regarded as one of the first Dalit writers and the father of Vachana poetry. In the modern era, Dalit literature received its first impetus with the advent of leaders like Mahatma Phule and Ambedkar in Maharashtra. They brought forth 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 Marathi, Hindi, Telugu, Tamil and Punjab. Dalit writing today has a lot of sound and

fury. It is mostly written by the socially, economically, politically and culturally deprived and disadvantaged. It is a protest literature against all forms of exploitation based on class, race, caste or occupation.

Historical background of Dalit writers in India means an account of the rise of Dalit writers in their native land. The marginalization of the untouchables was beyond imagination. It was a kind of socio-religious slavery imposed upon the Dalit people. They were denied education. They lived the life of unending injustice, torture and heinous treatment.

Emergence of Dalit literature has a historic significance. It covers multiple levels of personal and social experiences. Dalit literature articulates their perceptions on socio-cultural relations and social structures. It has struck a keynote-awakening of their consciousness for forging their identities. Their writings become the autobiographies

of their communities. They celebrate their heritage in their own idiom. They have their own aesthetics in rustic and rudimentary forms. They are harnessing and developing their own aesthetics. They try to reconstruct their image and identity. Their writings mirror the perceptions of life with a social milieu. Dalit literature reveals the collective consciousness of community whose voice has remained suppressed throughout history. There is a new thinking and a new point of view. A Dalit Ideologist attributes this awakening to Dr. Ambedkar. He feels that Ambedkar's thought of every downtrodden person. It does not belong to someone individual but it is the thought of those who are writing and publishing in the entire Dalit society. His inspiration to awaken the Dalit consciousness motivates Dalit literature. They try to instill values of equality, freedom, Justice and solidarity. It is a revolutionary consciousness motivated by the desire to be treated as a human being. Dalit literature is

defining and refining the Dalit conditions.

Dalit literary writing in Tamil, despite its delayed emergence when compared to Marathi and Kannada, flourished through the 1990s and challenged the readers to a new perspective. It became a milestone in the contemporary Tamil literary scene and its genesis coincided with the birth of centenary of Dr. Ambedkar. It helped to refocus the spot light on the Dalit issue. This period marked the political awakening of the Dalits and the creation of Tamil Dalit Literature. This mimetic representation the Dalit Literature is concerned with that of the life of the individual and that of a community. Dalit writers started making attempts to write themselves into history. Due to this, Dalit victimhood received greater space in the media. All these ideas and ideologies are evident in the works of Mulk Raj Anand and Bama, who evoke Dalit Consciousness in their writings.

Anand firmly believes that it is the purpose of the novelist to depict reality. He believes in the principle that confrontation of reality shapes the individual. He is so close to his characters as he had encountered them directly and indirectly. His major characters can be traced to real life human beings. Bakha the protagonist of Anand's *Untouchable* is closely linked to his life. Anand had a firsthand experience of Indian society. Therefore, he depicts his protagonists with his personal experience. He wants to bring out the personality of his protagonist.

Anand used all the experiences of his life in his writing. His personal experiences with caste distinctions, religion and class arrogance gains universal dimensions when it comes through his pen. He expresses his views in very truthful and straightforward manner. He describes the men with hollow chicks, beggars, whining for alms, labourers who are shedding

their sweat to feed themselves, naked children, weak and starved. Anand has sensed the pain of life in every sufferance of dirt, filth and oppression. He does so, not because of just pity, but because of his awareness, his anger at the ignorance of the underprivileged, their fears, discontent, ritualistic prejudices, all which has bent them with age — old burdens of traditional beliefs and which does not let them go beyond it. Anand projects his protagonist not with disgust but with a sense of revelation and shock. He is amazed at the dignity and self — respect of ordinary coolies, labourers, peasants, who have continued this kind of hard labour since generations, with great humility and sense of binding.

Anand wants to write about human beings and their known reality, which was ignored and taken for granted. His protagonists are such people who are shadows in the lives of those who are well off in life. He wants to tell the story of

Bakha, whom the society does not want to make his story harshly poignant, forcing a greater realization, though he knows very well that no Bakha will ever read his story. His story meant for the well — fed who knows about the living hells, people lives in just around the corner, but do not want to think about them. Anand wants them to hear the voices of those who live in unbearable conditions, created by one man for the other. He holds the mirror before the people who are different to upliftment of the downtrodden. He wants the life of justice and equality for the poor and backward section of the society. He believes that a novelist should depict the social milieu in which he lives in.

Anand is very much concerned to tell the truth of social conditions in India. He wanted to bring forth the pitiable condition of the Dalits, untouchables and downtrodden people of India, which form the larger section of the

society. In fact, the major themes of Anand's novels are present social conditions and their settings greatly contribute to give it a realistic touch. He highlights, social discrimination, poverty, hunger, social conditions, social practices and attitude of different communities towards dalits in his novels.

Anand's characters are from the low-class of a society. They are coolies and menials. They suffer from the society which nullifies their desires. Anand's novels are sensitive documents of the theme of exploitation. The plantation workers in the novel, *Two Leaves and a Bud* reveal a growing psychological stamina to survive in the face of exploitation. The Coolies indomitable spirit stoically accepts the ceaseless pains and strains of existence. Not only Gangu but innumerable poor peasants walk into the trap of the labor recruiting agent, Sardar Buta Singh, who is cheating the Coolies. Anand points out the pitfalls in the society. He becomes a

crusader and a bitter critic of a society. He satirizes the false practices of the society, sexual inadequacies, religious malpractices and the status of the Dalits in India. He opposes all false practices in the society and religion. Anand seems to be a Crusador in his early novels. He is a rebel not because he wanted to be treated differently rather he is a critic of false notions, practices and orthodox ideas. His fulminations against taboos are the vivid realization that man has to undergo in the light of changing times and situations. He rebels to reform. His rebellion is identical. It has no humor but pictures the very naked reality. He worked his way through philosophy and ideology, through doubt and belief, through a weighing of priorities between the individual and society in order to arrive at a concept of humanism which was an enabling one based on the principles of freedom and sharing.

In *Untouchable*, the three solutions: religious conversion,

change of mindset of the society and flush sanitary system reflect Anand's missionary and socialist zeal to eradicate untouchability. *Coolie* provides an exploration of the limits of pains, central to existence. Munoo, a weak and helpless person, is subjected to a degrading society offering only hostility. *Untouchable* is both s realistic descriptions of the travails and miseries of untouchables in the hands of high-caste Hindus who practises inhuman atrocities against the poor and the downtrodden people who sunk in poverty and superstition Bakha as an Untouchable seeks his freedom in the infallibility of caste discrimination with its hypocrisy, cruelty, deceit and inhumanity. He stands passive and bewildered at the immensity of horror hoping for a change. Bakha, thus is a symbolic victim who had been doomed to suffering since times immemorial. Bakha feels that his caste is responsible for all his problems. Munoo feels that his poverty is responsible and it is the root-cause

of all his troubles. Daya Ram, Mr. and Mrs. Nathu Ram, Ganpat, Chimta Sahib and Mrs. Mainwaring have only contempt for Munoo. They slap, abuse and kick him. Munoo becomes a victim of society. He is forced to become a kind of aimless vagabond having no control on his destiny. 'Gangu's' death in Bud is a triumph of virtue over villainy. He emerges as a martyr. Gangu is subjected to the ferocious fury of misfortune in pursuit of the ever-receding horizons of better life. The Macpherson Tea Estate is an inferno for Gangu and other coolies as Sham Nagar, Daulatpur, and Bombay for Munoo and the streets that he sweeps for Bakha. In Bud also poverty plays a vital role. Anand in Bud denounces the evil of poverty and cruelty. It is a fierce denunciation of cruelty to man by man.

Anand has presented social evils in myriad manifestation and has unveiled many different layers of human experience in his novels.

He attacks inhuman caste system, exploiting class system, irrationality of education, intoxicating religious bigotry and the torturing predicament of women. His interest lies in exploring the stresses and strains general in Indian society as a result of the developing economic structure, expanding commerce and political change which necessarily demand new class arrangements in the society. Anand's attacks on political as well as social and economic institutions are carried out mainly on behalf of Indian poor, in the efforts to destroy forces inimical to their development, and to build a world of freedom and equality where human potential can flourish. Anand has made an extensive and intensive study of human life in all its perversions of violence, hatred, avarice and envy.

Coming from a low social position, Bama has to fight hundreds of odd battles. She was born at Wathirayiruppu Puthupatti in Virudhunagar District in Southern

Tamilnadu in 1958. Her elder brother Raj Gauthaman is a famous Dalit ideologist. Her father Susairaj spent all his money for the education of his children. Through hard work and perseverance, she becomes a teacher. Being inspired by the life of Jesus Christ, she becomes a Catholic nun and prepares herself to serve the poor and destitute. After entering into the religious order, to her great shock she finds out that even there obstacles exist for people from the lower castes and they are deliberately discriminated. Because of her bitter experience, she decides to give up convent life and goes back to her village to join the community life. In spite of her education, and her experiences at the convent, she is treated as an ordinary Dalit woman by the upper caste people in her village. She is treated as an outsider by her fellow members. Bama feels more alienated. The fact that she is a Dalit woman and that too a spinster makes her social position still more vulnerable. Out of job and

condemned by the society and the church alike, Bama is distressed. In order to cope with her tension, she starts writing her life-story *Karukku* in 1992. Her yearning to be part of the community and a burning desire to share its pain and pleasure takes a shape in the form of her autobiography *Karukku*, which is narrated in spoken Dalit Tamil. It is only after resigning her job that Bama realizes what it really means to be a poor person. Bama feels that apart from scratching and tearing *Karukku* — the double edged palmyra leaves, it has also other functions like challenging their oppressors. Bama's *Karukku* signifies both Dalit oppression and Dalit struggle to get out from such an oppressive state.

Sangati (1994) the second work of Bama moves from the story of an individual struggle to the perception of a community of paraiya women — a neighbourhood group of friends and relations and their struggle. *Sangati* is uniquely placed in contributing both to the

Dalit movement and to the women's movement. It has no plot of a novel in the normal sense. It has only the powerful stories of a series of memorable protagonists. It is a book of interconnected anecdotes. 'Sangati' means news, events and happenings. Sangati provides a startling insight into the lives of Dalit women who face the double disadvantage of caste and gender discrimination. Through the stories of these women, Bama projects before our eyes the violent treatment of women by fathers, husbands and brothers. She explores the psychological stresses and strains of the Dalit women. Bama displays the indomitable courage of the Dalit women to withstand the different social pressure.

The third novel of Bama Vanmam (2002) is just a narrative of events involving two Dalit castes in one small village in the southern part of India. It is a microcosm of a bigger world, a sort of inset to the big picture. This is not the usual

novel of atrocities against Dalits. Bama deals with intra-Dalit rivalry leading to animosity and the deft manipulation of emotions and prejudices by upper-caste landlords. Beginning with a deceptively calm description of the characters, the novel tries to establish the caste hierarchy- which lies at the heart of our culture-which express itself at the structure of the different states of the village. It plays a decessive role in their social life. The culture of the street, field and cha'ad, constitute the culture of the village. A simple thing of people passing through the street of the other caste people becomes an achievement or considered trespass. The educated youth like Saminathan and Jayaraj resent their backward status. To bring the amity between the Parayas and the Pallars, they organize joint sports events and they even take part in the celebration of each others' festivals. The storm clouds soon arrived and they begin to feel the strain of jealousies. It culminates in the murder of a Parayar by a Pallar.

Retaliations and the counter retaliations follow and the result is a bloody caste clash. The normal life gets affected and they have to live a tense life. At the end, they realize the loss on both sides. They understand that the dominant caste has been following 'divide and rule' strategy to keep the fire of Vanmam or Vendetta go on burning. They decide to put the past behind them by sinking their differences and show a united front in the panchayat polls. Their victory in the election is a history for them.

Bama feels united with writers all over the world when she writes for social justice with social responsibility. She finds a uniqueness among the writers from the margin in their concern for humanness, human dignity and equality. Dalit writers make their personal experiences the basis of their writings. They write out of social responsibility with the emotion and commitment of an activist. As a testimonial

autobiography, Karukkku enables Bama to share her tale of pain and it becomes an accurate historical witnessing of a social structures of traumatic oppression. Through Karukkku, Bama traces her development from passive endurance to affirmative awareness and finally to a definite and positive determination towards life. She assures that through education, the Dalit community can become empowered and can gain human dignity. She aims at breaking the aesthetics of silence around issues of caste oppression, social inequality and the biases of the legal system.

Bama's *Sangati* is a portrayal of a part of the lives of the Dalit women who dare to make fun of the power that oppresses them. The undaunting spirit of the Dalit women becomes the driving force of Bama. She wants to break the image of the suppressed, tear — filled Dalit women with the image of women, who can threaten and ridicule their adversaries. She wants to project them with their passion to live life

with vitality, truth and enjoyment. Bama relies on the strength and resilience of Dalit women. The later part of *Sangati* moves away from the state of depression and frustration and renders a positive identity of Dalit women. She appeals for a change which can be achieved only through education and collective action. The various anecdotes express Bama's wish to perpetuate a change in the society.

Vanmam conveys the message that the people in the margin should put aside their internal enmities if they are to reclaim their self — respect and their rightful place in society. After elaborating the struggle, violence and vendetta, Bama brings her novel to an end with an optimistic note. She requests her people to put aside their sorrow and asks them to work with new vigour to live together in mutual tolerance. She tries to educate her people the need to stand united for a peaceful tomorrow. She envisions a change which can be brought out only through education and their united effort.

Although, this dissertation, does not concern with dalit literature in general. It certainly deals with the social injustice, utter poverty and physical, mental and cultural atrocities done with the Dalit protagonists in the selected novels of Anand and Bama. However, of course, while the concern in this study is about dalits. Those who reflect this concern are dalits driven with the dalit ideology of compassion, protest and human values. Anand, Bama are not social reformers, but they are basically artists. Their outlook towards their protagonists is governed by human outlook of compassion, pity and sympathy. The readers empathize with sorrows, sufferings, joys and happiness of the fictional characters of these writers.

References:

- Ramanathan, S., & Muthiah, K. (2016). Women in Subaltern Perspective A Critical Study of Mulk Raj Anand's Sohini and Bama's Chellakkili. *International Journal Of English: Literature, Language & Skills (Ijells) Issn 2278-0742 www.ijells. com Volume 3 Issue.*
- Hanumanthaiah, V. (2014). The Portrayal Of social Evils in Select Works Of Mulk Raj Anand Narendra Jadhav and Mahaswetha Devi.
- Singh, V. (2012). Aesthetics And Sensibility Of The Oppressed: Writing On Or From A Dalit Perspective. *SubalternSpeak*, 106.
- Thirunavukkarasu, K., & Varalakshmi, S. Negotiation Of Caste And Gender In Dalit Literature.
- Vardhan, J. V., & Gholry, M. K. S. Literary Works By And About Dalits: Contribution To Fourth World Literature.
- Vashisth, D. (2016). Dalit Literature: An Insurrectionary Voice. *Contemporary Literary Review India*, 3(3).