

Conclusion

In the dissertation, “Negotiations of Dalit Identity in Marathi Theatre after the Dalit Panther Movement”, I have undertaken the study to explore how Dalit identity has been perceived differently by non-Dalit and Dalit dramatists in Marathi theatre after the Dalit Panther Movement. I have considered Marathi plays, written by non-Dalit and Dalit dramatists, after the Dalit Panther Movement, depicting the encounter between Dalits and upper caste characters.

I have found that non-Dalit dramatists are looking at caste as class and Dalit activism as opportunist whereas Dalit dramatists stand in contrast to them as they perceive Dalit activism as inclusive in its approach towards upper castes as it accepts views about caste discrimination, expressed by upper caste characters, mainly upper caste women.

Before the rise of the Dalit Panthers, Marathi theatre was dominated by upper caste dramatists who would represent upper caste life, but the Dalit Panthers’ activism and its contribution to Marathi literature made upper caste dramatists take cognizance of Dalit life. As a result, Marathi theatre began to represent Dalit life. Earlier, Dalit life has been depicted in Marathi plays such as *Yugyatra* (Nagpur:1968) and *Kalokhachya Garbhat* (Pune:1996) but such plays remained at the margins because these plays were not performed in proscenium theatres in cities like Pune and Mumbai which were controlled by upper caste dramatists, actors and spectators.

Before analysing how Dalit identity has been perceived differently by non-Dalit and Dalit dramatists alike, an attempt has been made to define Dalits as caste identity. It has been referred to the descendants of the formerly untouchable castes. The equation between the term, Dalit and the formerly untouchable castes came into existence in colonial India and has its roots in the anti-caste movement led by Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar.

Marathi literature produced by writers belonging to the formerly untouchable castes, played a significant role in establishing Dalit identity as a caste identity. Literature, produced by Dalit writers, depicting the life of the formerly untouchable castes reached newly educated people in post-independence India, especially Maharashtra. It was well received by readers irrespective of caste differences because it challenged the prevalent literary norms, set by upper caste writers.

It is the Dalit Panther Movement that popularized the term, Dalit by defining it as a person who is a victim of caste, class, gender and religious discrimination. The definition of the term, Dalit by the Dalit Panthers and their activism might have made non-Dalit activists, especially socialists, to take cognizance of Dalit activism and give them space in periodicals, published by socialist parties and organizations. These periodicals introduced Dalit activism to its readers, who mostly belonged to upper castes. Thus, the Dalit Panthers spread the term, Dalit among upper castes through literature, its activism and periodicals, published by socialist parties/organizations.

Apart from explanation of Dalit as caste identity, a brief introduction to the idea of representation has been given because in the dissertation, a separate chapter has been devoted to the representation of Dalits by non-Dalit and Dalit dramatists. In the analysis of the term, representation, importance is given to how meaning is produced. The production of meaning is influenced by the relationship between signifier and signified which has been maintained by conventions.

It is the conventional perception of Dalits before the rise of the Dalit Panthers as subservient to upper castes that might have made non-Dalit as well as Dalit dramatists to represent them as victims of the caste system. The Dalit Panthers changed the conventional perception of the

Dalit as subservient to upper castes and replaced it with the Dalit as an activist and as aware of his/ her rights in a democratic world.

After the introduction, an attempt has been made to give an account of how high caste hegemony in Marathi theatre is established and how it is challenged by ‘Satyashodhak Jalsa’ and ‘Ambedkari Jalsa’ in colonial India. It is noted that high caste hegemony has been established with the performance of *Seetaswayamwar* by Vishnudas Bhave (1819-1901) which discarded folk performances such as *yakshgaan* and *tamasha* which were mainly performed by *shudra* and untouchable castes respectively.

Even the introduction of English education in colonial India did not make any difference to high caste hegemony as initially English education was received by high castes, who utilised it, especially through English plays to strengthen high caste hegemony by adapting or translating English plays to suit the interest of high castes, especially Brahmins. This kind of hegemony was challenged by a Marathi play, *Tritiya Ratna* (Pune:1855) by Jotiba Phule, in the nineteenth century.

Apart from *Tritiya Ratna* (Pune:1855), it has been also confronted by Satyashodhak and Ambedkari Jalsa but it remained at the margin as these performances were not expected to be performed in high castes’ space. Even after independence, Marathi theatre remained limited to high caste dramatists, directors, actors and spectators, therefore Marathi plays, written about caste discrimination, remained at the margins because they did not enter so-called ‘mainstream Marathi theatre.’

It is the Dalit Panther Movement and its tacit association with left-oriented organizations made non-Dalit dramatists take notice of caste discrimination and depict it in Marathi plays, which were performed in the high caste spaces.

Though non-Dalit dramatists represented caste discrimination, they, to some extent fail to understand Dalit identity. They portray it as a class identity and besides they depict Dalit activism as biased against upper caste characters and opportunists. In order to respond to such representation of Dalits, Dalit dramatists turned to writing plays which were received by upper caste spectators because these plays came into existence as a response to the representation of Dalits by non-Dalit dramatists.

Though non-Dalit and Dalit dramatists differ from each other in representing Dalit identity and Dalit activism, they are similar in the perception of inter-caste marriage as a failed attempt to dismantle the caste system. They agree that inter-caste marriage does not function as a remedy for caste discrimination if it is not based on scrutiny of the caste system. Nevertheless, they are different from each other because non-Dalit dramatists consider Dalit characters representing Dalit activism as responsible for the failure of inter-caste marriages. It is noted in the play, *Kanyadaan* (New Delhi: 2011) whereas Datta Bhagat in *Wata-Palwata* (Pune:1997) hold both, Dalit as well as upper caste characters responsible for the failure of inter-caste marriage to challenge caste hierarchy.

Apart from these differences, they are also seen to be similar in representing linguistic identity of Dalits. They portray educated Dalit characters speaking a variety of the Marathi language, spoken by upper caste characters. They also portray uneducated Dalit women characters speaking a dialect that is not accepted by the upper castes and within the play by the upper caste characters. They also show Dalit women as victims of their linguistic identity as they are not allowed to enter public places, dominated by the standard Marathi language, spoken by upper castes and educated Dalits, mainly Dalit men.

Besides these similarities, Dalit dramatists such as Datta Bhagat and Sanjay Pawar stand in contrast to non-Dalit dramatists in representing Dalit characters using a variety of the Marathi

language of uneducated Dalits to irritate upper caste characters/persons and prove that Dalits are linguistically different from upper caste characters/persons.

Along with all the differences mentioned above, they stand in contrast to each other in the representation of rural Dalits. Non-Dalit dramatists such as Ratnakar Matkari in *Lokkath* 78 (Mumbai:2000) represent rural Dalits as subservient to high castes. However, Dalit dramatists such as Premanand Gajvee in *A Sip of Water* (New Delhi: 2013) portray Dalit characters as aggressively against caste discrimination.

Apart from the difference in representation of Dalits, an attempt has been made to portray Dalit women as distinct from upper caste women. They are shown as uneducated and victims of epistemic and systemic violence besides brutal physical violence. They are also shown as victims of Dalit patriarchy. This is marked by the absence of Dalit women as educated and as social activist. Dalit male characters in the plays, taken for this study. In all the plays, Dalit women are either shown as victims of epistemic, systemic or brutal violence.

As the study is limited to select Marathi plays after the Dalit Panther Movement, I have not covered folk performances like ballads by Sambhaji Bhagat, a balladeer and Dalit activist who has been challenging casteism, neo-imperialism and capitalism through his songs. I have not considered the contribution of Ambedkari Jalsa and *Tamasha* to Dalit activism after the Dalit Panther Movement, though I have touched upon these performances briefly as a part of a historical account of how upper caste hegemony has been challenged by these performances in colonial India.

My study has largely relied on dramatic texts rather than performance texts. I would agree that there is a lot of work to be done taking the performance text into account. However, I hope that this work has opened a rather important area of culture and life of the Marathi Theatre. It is important to note that the Post-Dalit-Panther Marathi plays happen when there is a scramble

for stage space and we have movements and experiments which perhaps influence this genre of Marathi plays. My reading of the plays has been interdisciplinary which focuses on culture, language, political assertion, identity and history.

As a movement, one of the organs is theatre/drama. This reinforces the insights of the political movement so as by repeating the theme it also brings about awareness. The awareness of the feminists and Marxists is not alien to this movement as in many ways this movement has gained form these movements. However, I have showed how drama differs in the hands of different dramatists who are educated by the movements of the twentieth century. Post-Dalit Panther drama has a place in movements of identity across the country and is not a movement that one could take lightly as it was a cultural movement which also involved the rethinking of positions of marriage.

Thus, a rethinking of cultural practices and spaces have been examined in the plays I have analysed. It is not just the Dalit identity which is at stake but there are at least two worlds within the culture of the Maharastrian ethos. Of course, the plays focus on the differences and similarities that are present in embarking upon writing of these plays and putting them up. It is also not just the political in a dry and academic manner that informs these plays but that there is a section of the populace that has a living and thinking dalit presence which these plays refer to. However, they are not only in the plays but outside the play as well that the concerns of the plays draw us into. That the Dalit is a living presence just like all other human beings, with all the desires of other human beings and a lot of thinking which is questioning caste, religion, marriage etc. That a complex matrix is woven about the status of the Dalit with these plays to make one conscious about these cultural markings.

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