

Abstract

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Title of Ph.D. Thesis: **Assertion of Dalit Identity in Dalit Fiction**

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The present thesis focuses on the **Assertion of Dalit identity in Dalit Fiction** in the writings of Iyamam's *Beasts of Burden*, Joseph Macwan's *The Step Child*, Bama's *Sangati* and *Vanmam* and P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*. Dalits have suffered brutal

untouchability, economic poverty, cultural slavery and politically they have been marginalised prior to independence. In ancient times Dalit passively submitted to their repression and exploitation. They regarded it as unethical to protest against the atrocities of the upper castes. However the capacity and desire to learn and to improve as in the case of Shambook and Eklavya was always there. During Vedas period, the Shudras were not allowed to attain education and to perform other rituals like the upper castes. Shambook, a tribal was killed by lord Rama for his study of Vedas. During *Mahabharata* period Eklavya excelling Arjuna in archery, Dronacharya got his right thumb cut off. So history tells that Shudras/Dalits were exploited in one way or the other. They were and are considered untouchables. In this horribly unequal and undemocratic, socio-political context where the upper castes imposed subjugation domination and dehumanisation, the Dalits feel like being second class citizens. They were the people without history. But Dr. B.R. Ambedkar took giant steps for the upliftment of the Dalits. He tried to organise them and encouraged them to fight collectively against the injustice and sub-human treatment of the upper castes. The efforts of Bhakti Movement, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, and Dalit Movement in the South raised the level of awareness of Dalits and developed in them a desire to assert their human dignity. It was Dr. Ambedkar's efforts and teachings that have equipped the Dalits with courage for liberation from the clutches of centuries subjugation. They started asserting for their identity and dignity and started demanding their due place in society as human beings. Today Dalits as individuals and collectively have become politically aware and their social awareness is steadily rising.

The first Introductory chapter is titled **Socio-Historical Perspective of Assertion of Dalit Identity in Dalit Fiction** analyses the pitiable conditions of the Dalits from Vedic period to the present time and it also covers up the struggles of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Periyar and Dr. Ambedkar for the

emancipation of the Dalits. This chapter also focuses on the views of certain historians like Romila Thapar & Sudha Pai and sociologists like M. N. Srinivas regarding Dalit exploitation and assertion.

The second Chapter is titled **Assertion of Dalit Identity within the System in Imayam's *Beasts of Burden*** paints a collage of pain and suffering of Arkkoyam, a washerwoman and her family and their struggle for liberation from injustice and oppression.

The third chapter is titled **Articulating Resistance through Linguistic/SelfExpression in Joseph Macwan's *The Step Child*** expresses graphically the ethos, fear, and aspiration of the Vankar community. Joseph Macwan's *The Step Child* graphically explores the ethos, fear, and aspiration of the Vankar community. *Angaliyat* in Gujarati means a child whose mother brings him to his step-father's house. Metaphorically Vankar, a Dalit community, holds this social position. The Vankars are kept in external and internal forms of domination and are oppressed by the more powerful upper castes, the Patels. The novel is a fine critique of internal colonisation which exists within the Hindu caste system.

The fourth Chapter is titled **Mapping the Trajectory of Assertion of Dalit Identity in Bama's *Sangati* and *Vanmam*** represents the multi-level exploitation of Dalits in general. *Sangati* particularly deals with the exploitation of women and shows how they assert their identity at different levels by questioning the injustice meted out to them at every step and how they succeed even though partially when they assert their identity through acquisition of education and economic empowerment. *Vanamm* is quite different from *Sangati*. It points out to the evil of untouchability and upper caste's brutality. This novel presents the prevailing intra-Dalit conflicts in Tamilnadu.

The fifth chapter is titled **Forging Identity through Subversive Struggle in P.Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*** presents multiple sections of Dalit society at different levels of development, facing different kinds of repression, exploitation, injustice and different ways of asserting their human dignity. The sixth chapter is titled **Conclusion** gives summing up ideas of the thesis and all the works cited are found in the **Bibliography**.