

UNVEILING THE MARGINS: A SUBALTERN ANALYSIS OF DALIT MUSLIM IDENTITY IN THE LITERATURE

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Introduction

The term 'Subaltern' refers to individuals who are oppressed or hold a lower social status. Throughout history, Subalterns have endured significant levels of humiliation and psychological distress, often at the hands of their oppressors. It is striking to consider the pervasive cruelty they have faced from their fellow human beings. In contemporary times, the concept of the Subaltern is widely explored across various academic disciplines such as cultural studies, Orientalism, post-colonialism, history, politics, anthropology, sociology, psychology, and literature. Literature, in particular, has played a significant role in empowering Subaltern voices, enabling them to confront various forms of inequality and indignity. When engaging with Subaltern literature, one encounters narratives that vividly express their anguish, despair, and suffering, evoking a profound sense of empathy.

Various terms have been used to denote 'subaltern' individuals, including the oppressed, colonized, or those from the Third-World. In the Indian context, the term subaltern comprises the people who have been deprived of liberty, equality fraternity and justice for centuries. They are called Dalits and their writing Dalit literature. As Dalits are deprived of the rights to live, their writing is marked as a revolt against the social system, and the efforts to establish social justice. And, thus, Dalit literature emerges as a platform to represent and advocate for oppressed, exploited, and marginalized communities who have endured social inequality and exploitation throughout history. A central focus of this literature is the liberation of Dalits from the enduring shackles of discrimination.

While the historical roots of the caste system are often associated with Hinduism, Dalit literature focused only in the discriminatory practises that were happening within the Hindu community. Whereas in Indian exclusivity, caste system is not specific to Hindu community alone. Research findings consistently validate the pervasive existence of caste hierarchies, even within non-Hindu religious groups. Consider Islam, which promotes egalitarianism and condemns discrimination among its followers; nevertheless, it has also

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experienced the influence of caste-based social divisions, characterized by inter-caste tensions.

And hence, the paper attempts to bring the Dalit Muslim discourse into the mainstream literature by close reading select literary texts: Shaik Yousuf Baba's *Marfa* (2000) and *Vegetarian Only* (2017), Khaja's *Roots* (2007) and Kavi Yakoob's *Avval Kalima, Let us Speak Out, Who Am I? and Conspiracy* (2014). Further by deploying the theoretical postulates of Limbale(2004) and Spivak(1988), this essay explores how are the poets asserting their Dalit Muslim Identity through literature? And how by the usage of their style of writing Telugurdu construct their new Dalit Muslim identity? Thus, demanding their recognition and separate need within the Indian Muslim community.

Sharan Kumar Limbale in his theoretical text *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations* (2004) talks about the 'experiences of Dalit'. He considers that the experiences narrated in Dalit literature are not conveyed in any other forms of literature. He also posits that, the writings in the Dalit literature conveys the lives of the Dalit writers; they are not just mere writings of imagination but experiences in the daily lives. Accordingly, the chosen poets depicts their lives not just as means of imagination but their real lived experiences. And as Sharan Kumar Limbale reiterates, the Dalit writings constitute in self-search to achieve self-respect; all the poets chosen in this study also profess and advocate for the self-respect, equality and dignity in the society through literature. And as this research tries to address the obvious and significant gap in the representation of Dalit Muslim Identity in the mainstream and Dalit literature. It uses the rhetoric "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Further, if they do speak, will they be heard? Moreover, the intricacies, culture and practices expressed in the poetry are significantly specific to the Dalit Muslim community. Thus, by bringing the Dalit Muslim Identity to the forefront, this paper also tries to break the stereotype of the present Dalit literature in the academic discourse and paves way to define separate aesthetics in the discourse of Dalit literature.

"I am Sayibuby religion, a Dalit by caste": Assertion of Dalit Muslim Identity

Ambedkar emphasised the importance of religious conversion thus:

"to get human treatment, convert yourself, convert for getting organised, convert for becoming strong, convert for securing equality, convert for getting liberty, convert so that your domestic life could be happy" (Louis 2007b , 16).

The above narrative talks how people can avoid caste discrimination by converting to other religion thus referring to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's call in 1956 to abolish the caste discrimination in Indian society. Ambedkar emphasized this because of the cruel treatment

of the people born below the Hindu caste system, which includes four primary castes: Brahmins (priests), Kshatriya (warriors and kings), Vaishya (landowners and merchants), and Shudra (artisans and servants). They were labelled as 'untouchables' and 'Harijan', Ambedkar disliking this idea wanted to call them with a name 'Dalits' to make them politically progressive and reformative.

Now after the conversion did the people attain the equality? Did they socially regarded? Or the Dalit identity marked by only religion? Can Dalits be viewed as a monolithic group, as unaffected by religion, or as merely a portion of Hindu society? By close reading the chosen poetry of the poets, This section of the paper takes up these questions, tries to elucidate whether the conversion of previously called untouchable community to Islam has eradicated discrimination and maintained equality.

The assertion of the Dalit Identity is one of the prominent problems, the poets discuss in their respective poetry. There has been a long tradition for the construction of Dalit identity in the Indian mainstream society. It has been a kind of revolt to assertion of Dalit community to find a separate place in the society. A large number of personalities have contributed a lot in the formation of Dalit identity. Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar have sacrificed their lives for the sake of the community and establish its separate identity. All these eminent personalities struggled for the cause since the discrimination of Dalits from the Hindu religious doctrines are evident.

But, the casteist notion is not found in Islam as it preaches homogeneity and egalitarianism, there is no significant focus in the definition of Dalit Muslim Identity and their plight. Although there are poets who were expressing their voice for the assertion of Dalit Muslim Identity and resisting against the discrimination they were undergoing inside and outside of the Muslim community.

For instance, Khaja in his poem *Roots* (2007) describes on his acceptance of Islam as he is enduring harsh caste discrimination in the Hindu society.

Darkness all around.... blinding darkness...revenge...attack...

look here, only after this Sayibu touched me on my shoulder

did my fear disappear

... Though I am a Sayibu by religion I assert that a dalit by caste (n.p)

The question raised here is that after embracing Islam the poet still claims himself as a Dalit which is confusing according to the religious concept where the casteist notion of Hindu rules and codes are not applicable. And it creates further complication and exhibits dual identity of a person. And his lines satisfies to a notion that Dalit Muslims exist in the

society.

Yakoob in his poem *Who Am I?* (2021) Very explicitly defines the assertion of identity, as one of the problems Dalit Muslims face. Their identity always remain questionable as the society does not accept their single unified identity. Rawat and Satyanarayana, in the introductory section of their book titled *Dalit Studies*, express that the term 'Dalit' is employed today to portray the endeavors for dignity and resistance against caste-based inequality, referring to those who were previously considered as untouchables in India (2016, pg 2). And most of the population of Muslims in India are converts from the untouchable caste. Even after embracing Islam, Yakoob feels discriminated in the form of untouchability, he reiterates:

I need a little space to sit amidst the people,
I long for a loving soul.
I require a morsel of food to douse my hunger.
I want a few drops of water to slake my thirst.
I belong to the religion of birds and animals
No energy now to detail further. (48)

These lines give a complete contrasting picture to the doctrines of Islam and contradicts Khaja's notion of embracing Islam. Equality, brotherhood and acceptance become questionable among the Muslim community. In *Avval Kalima*(2021) too he questions the upper caste Muslims:

Sheikh, Syed, Pathan - referring to your proud ancestry, status and lineage
where have you allowed us to come anywhere near you? (33)

Avval Kalima in Islam is *Laa ilaaha illal Lahoo Mohammadur Rasool Ullah* which means "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah" once this Kalima is recited a person is considered he has entered Islam and all the principles of Islam bestowed upon him. So the poet uses this *Avval Kalima* as title in order to ironically criticize the distance, the space, and the gap that exists as a form of untouchability between the Dalit Muslims and the upper caste Muslims.

Hence Dalit Muslims face double-discrimination, they are discriminated by the caste Hindus as expressed by Khaja and are not welcomed by the upper caste Muslims. The harsh experience of identity crisis is that neither the caste Hindus nor the upper caste Muslims consider Dalit Muslims as a part of their community. They wander here and there to find their group and can settle without any discrimination or restriction. Out of exhaustion, Yakoob resorts himself to the religion of birds and animals where he feels like discrimination

might not exist there.

The question of identity is an integral part of the lives of Dalit Muslims as they suffer from the fractured identity. The quest of identity of Yakoob becomes more complicated when he finds fractured identities leaving him completely clueless. He is uncertain to choose one identity for himself. This is again emphasized through the repetitive questions in the poem. He questions:

...In a world where my birth line remains unknown
every dust bin owns me.
... With no available proof, tell me honestly
which kind lady gave me birth under some roof? ,
how I was flung into some dustbin. (48)

Sharan Kumar Limbale in his autobiography *Outcaste* (2003) raises the same pertinent question on the issues of the identity crisis of the Dalit communities. He finds himself suffering from a fractured identity. Being an illegitimate child, Limbale is helpless in claiming his caste. He too like Yakoob is in a dilemma and unsure about his identity to be chosen for himself. He question:

How can I be high caste when my mother is untouchable? If I am untouchable, what about my father who is high caste... who am I? To whom is my umbilical cord connected?
(39)

Tell me correctly, whether you bury me or cremate.

Draw a line or picture on my face
... I just don't know who I am
Dear friends, you have your estimates
Correctly evaluate who I am!
... which religion relates to my birth
How far I know? (48)

'Whether you bury me or cremate', 'draw a line or picture on my face', 'which religion relates to my birth' the symbols and questions emphasized here depicts two different and opposite practices of Islam and Hinduism. When Muslims die, they bury the bodies and when Hindus die they cremate. Drawing line or picture on the face symbolizes the practice of Hindus whereas it is not followed in Islam. And hence the Muslims who embraced Islam aren't given space in both the religions, the poet leaves the evaluation to the people who fit him in the religion as they estimate.

The intricacies, culture and practices expressed in this poetry are significantly specific to the Dalit Muslim community. Thus, by bringing the Dalit Muslim Identity to the forefront, this paper also tries to break the stereotype of the present Dalit literature in the academic discourse and paves way to define separate aesthetics in the discourse of Dalit literature. Like Ambedkar emphasizes in his text *The Annihilation of Caste* (2014) that more than religious and political reform, societal reform is necessary; it is attained through educational empowerment. Yakoob exhibits it through his writings and when he begins to talk, he begins how long their suffering have been neglected and has never been addressed for generations. In his poem *Avval Kalima*(2021) he explains:

You may not believe me
But nobody gives expression to our suffering.
Here too, once again, those of the tenth or eleventh generations alone
are talking about the thoughts about their lost glory
as though they were everybody else's. (33)

And he also feels accused of speaking and discussing the problems of caste and discrimination in the society. He considers himself he is confusing the present status of the community by creating an imbalance in the practices of the Muslim community while, he is trying to speak the truth but nothing. It is evident through his poem *Who Am I?* (2021) where he says:

I know how to imagine
but not how to confuse
whoever offers me food when I am hungry is my man
I can place my bonds and brethren.
Answers to my questions unfold slowly
my decisions, my life---
all emerge from my thoughts now on! (49)

One of the reasons, the researcher understands to be on the denial of the discussion on Dalit Muslims in the mainstream academia could be the hypocrisy of the upper caste Muslims. They consider these kind of discussions might result in picturing Islam in a bad manner, as Arora claims in respect to Dalit Christians in her article "Writings from the Margins: Dalit and Muslim women's narratives" from her book *Writing Gender, Writing Nation* (2020):

* Question mark is added by the researcher for the emphasis

The upper caste Christians too reject the claims of Dalit Christians to have an equal access to resources, resulting in the distortion of the Christian message of love, service, charity, and brotherhood. (166)

This kind of denial eventually leads to Spivak's rhetoric "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Further, if they do speak, will they be heard? And Yakooob according to Ambedkar's slogan 'Educate, Agitate and Organise' in his poem Let us Speak Out (2021) does speak. He calls people from his community to hear him and stand together at this moment as he isn't trying to organise this for himself but for all. He wants to diminish all the discrimination and stratification that are being followed among his community. He says:

Yes, this is the time to speak out-
awaited this moment all these years avidly;
Not for me alone
but, for all of us, this is the moment!
Time to dismantle demarcations
come dear
let us speak out freely! (47)

Re-reading history: Are all the Muslims Nawabs?

Sky Baaba in his research article "Caste differences among Muslims in Telangana and their status" (2022) Written originally in Telugu and translated into English by Zeenathfar Azmi Syed in the newspaper The Siasat Daily writes:

Before the advent of Nizam's rule in Deccan these Muslims worked in caste-related jobs. However, when the Nizams ruled, they began to take pride in the fact that the ruler was a member of their community and began claiming to be nawabs or jagirdars and that their religion is the religion of the Nawabs. They gave up their caste based professions for menial administrative jobs. After giving up their professions the other Muslims started cultivating agricultural lands. And in the course of time illiteracy and poverty levels increased among them leading them to finally sell away their priced possessions to the erstwhile landlords like Reddys, Velmas, Kammas, and Brahmins in the villages. Therefore, the plight of Muslims started to worsen because, on one hand, they have lost their caste occupation and, on the other hand, they have lost their lands. Literally, this community entered into the vicious cycle of poverty. (n.p)

Yet, there is an inherent conception in India that all the Muslims hail from the royal, nawab and kings families since the political history of India is vast with the Muslim emperors ruling the country. Eventually, this perception leads to the maxim that all the Muslims are

economically privileged. This stereotype is broken down by Yakoob and Baaba where they try to demarcate the differences between the caste and class of the Muslim community. They write history with a rhetoric tone where they educate through poetry that they do not belong to those advanced and privileged classes and their states are of impoverished in nature. Yakoob in *Avval Kalima* (2021) writes:

In fact-nawabu, muslim, sayibu , turaka -
the terms by which each one is referred is nothing but their class, their caste.
Even among people who have lost their pride of having once
had the status of rulers and jahgirdars ,
held the positions of nawabs and patels
there are some at least who retain some vestige of their lost luxuries.
We are those caught in a hand to mouth existence.
We are those who have nothing ever to store.
What's left for us to talk about? (33)

Baaba uses the rhetoric "Where's jagirdari in us" (42) in his poem *Marfa* (2015) which specifies to the historical implication of the jobs and status of Muslims during the Mughal period. So both the poets consider they are not equivalent to the status of those Muslims who held the positions of nawabs and patels. Yakoob reiterates that though the legacy and pride of being nawabs and patels has been lost by many still some carry the remaining of the materials or the name and fame. But as far as Dalit Muslims are concerned they have nothing left to store and nothing to talk about the pride and vanity.

The same rhetorical questions are asked by Yakoob in his another poem *Conspiracy*(2014). In this poem Yakoob uses an angry, steady and direct tone in questioning the misrepresentation and misleading history of Muslims. Like Baaba in his poem *Marfa* (2015) questions "Are these the Charminars we have inherited?" Yakoob also says:

You talk about only
The inherited, empty, abandoned palaces and
Call them Navabs is a conspiracy
Their history through your word is a conspiracy
Can you give them back their old good life?
Which was exposed only by their false prestige
...Branding them as Navabs
covering them by the religious mask of muslims

is it not the hatched conspiracy
They lost the glorious past and the
present day consideration as back ward people
Flattering of their Charminar,
Showing the Tajmahal as symbol of love and cease off love towards them
Talking of Lalkhila, Fatepur sikri, Buland Darwaj, Gumbazas and Minars
Not talking of their hunger and gloomy life
Is a great conspiracy (n.p)

Yakoob, in this poetry challenges dominant narratives calling it as conspiracy, he calls for a more honest and inclusive representation of the community by re-reading the history of their struggles and identity within the broader societal discourse. He begins by condemning the misrepresentation of the Muslim community's heritage and history. They challenge the labelling of inherited, empty palaces as "Navabs," highlighting how this portrayal is a conspiracy to erase the true narratives of oppression and marginalization. He critiques of how the Muslims are branded as "Navabs" and covered with a religious mask, implying that their Muslim identity is used to conceal their marginalized status and deny them agency and recognition within society.

The poem also highlights the loss of the Muslims' glorious past and their current relegation to the status of backward people. The reference to Charminar, TajMahal, and other architectural symbols of grandeur serves to contrast the community's historical significance with their present-day struggles and deprivation. With this, Yakoob condemns the selective representation of Indian heritage and history, which focuses on architectural marvels while ignoring the hunger and gloomy reality faced by the Muslim community. This selective narrative perpetuates a conspiracy of silence and erasure regarding their lived experiences like erasure of Dalit Muslims' representation.

Bismillahhir Rahman Nir Raheem: Caste discrimination and language disparity

In Andhra Pradesh, a field study conducted in 1987 found hierarchically arranged endogamous groups among Muslims. At the top of the ladder were those claiming foreign descent-Syeds, Shaikh, Pathan and Labbai (descendants of Arab traders who took native wives). At the lowest level were groups with 'unclean' occupations-Dudekula (cotton cleaners), Hazam (barbers) and Fakir-budbudki (mendicants). (Sachar 2006, p.193)

The historical roots of the caste system in India are often attributed to Hinduism.

* Sayibu (from saheb) is the term commonly used in Andhra Pradesh to denote Muslims.

* * Turaka (derived from Turk) is a derogatory term used to denote a Muslim.

* * * Jagirdars were the revenue collectors during the Mughal period.

However, over time, this social construct has transcended religious boundaries and found its presence within other faiths as well due to 'acculturation' as expressed by Ghouse Ansari. His seminal work, *Muslim Caste in Uttar Pradesh: A Study of Culture Contact* (1960), stands as a significant reference on the issue of caste among Muslims. For several decades, Ansari remained the solitary voice providing insights into the existence of caste hierarchies within the Muslim community, even though empirical evidence supporting this claim was somewhat limited. According to him "Muslims in India are divided into three broad categories, which he calls Ashraf (noble born), Ajlaf (mean and lowly), and Arzal (excluded) (Ahmad, 2009, p.64).

Yakoob in his poem *Avval Kalima* (2021) reiterates the same kind of caste hierarchy as highlighted by Ghaus Ansari (1960) and Sachar Committee Report (2006) and Sky Baaba (2022) that is followed in the present day Telangana i.e., Andhra Pradesh before bifurcation in 2014. He writes:

Laddaf, doodekula, kasabu, pinjaree-
we have become symbols of the serpent-like time which made
castes out of our occupations.
In your houses we have become benistees when we collected water
dhobhis and dhobhans when we washed your clothes
hajjams when we gave you a hair cut
andmehters and mehteranis when we cleaned your toilets.
We have remained symbols like this of the serpent-like time
which made castes out of our occupations.
As you say, we are all Mussalmans!
We don't deny it, but what about all this discrimination? (34)

Yakoob, with the metaphor 'serpent-like' symbolizes how venomous the caste system is and it has intertwined in Islam by the course of time, thus polluted the brotherhood, the Islamic doctrine preaches. He questions to the upper caste Muslims, when everyone is a Muslim then why there is a caste discrimination? Another form of discrimination the poets discuss is the language disparity; linguistic discrimination. In the book *Vegetarians Only Stories of Telugu Muslims* (2016) written originally in Telugu by Sky Baaba, translated and edited by Suneetha and Uma Mahewari in English records that:

In his forward to the Telugu edition of these stories, writer and scholar Mohammed Afsar names the language used by Sky Baaba 'Telugurdu'. As Sky Baaba himself notes,

5 Refer <https://www.siasat.com/caste-differences-among-muslims-in-telangana-and-their-status-2365207/>

most Muslims in Telangana speak Deccani at home, Telangana Telugu mixed liberally with Urdu words in the social sphere, and use standard Telugu in public writing and writing for the media. (pg.9)

And, hence the poets write poetry in Telugu with a mixture of some Deccani, Urdu words. For instance some of the Urdu words used by Baaba in his poetry Marfa (2000) are bazaar, kurta-pyjama, jawani, chandni, chameli, doodh, roti, and in Avval Kalima Yakoob uses abbu, abbujaan, ammijaan, haveli, char deewar, qilwat, purdah. These usages explain that the Muslims who embraced Islam in the Telangana region speak both Urdu and Telugu. The poets still consider that they are pushed to a level that the language they speak must be as standard, as pure as the upper caste Muslims speak and the rituals like performing namaz (Obligatory prayers in Islam) must be as disciplined as the upper caste or Urdu speaking Muslims do. Yakoob writes:

We don't know that we are supposed to call
our mothers ammijan whom we address as oyamma⁶
and our fathers as abbu, abbajan, or pappa⁷ -
How do we know-even our ayyalu⁸ haven't taught us any of this.
Haveli, char deewar, qilwat, purdah⁹ -
How do we who live in bamboo palaces know all this?
My grandfather used to tell me that namaz meant only to kneel down and get up,
but I never learnt the language of Bismillah hir Rahiman, Allaho
Akbar, jihad. (33)

Though for this claim there is no proper experimental evidence, the researcher will try to do in the near future. Yet, the researcher when interviewed these poets Baaba and Yakoob found out that within the Muslim community they find this disparity in language. As the preaching in the mosque, the scriptures of Islam, books with the composition of laws of Islam; all these are either in Urdu or Arabic. And hence, when the poets try to talk, they eventually speak in Telugu which they were speaking before the embracing Islam. Urdu Muslims or the Upper caste Muslims look them down in a lowly manner which the poets see as a kind of linguistic discrimination.

Thus Yakoob, who considers Urdu and Arabic to be of foreign languages, he declines calling those languages to be their mother tongues. He fears they might lose their mother tongue if these languages start to acquire the prominence in the community. Hence, he

6 Oyamma is the way by which ordinary people address their mothers in Telugu. Ammijan is the Urdu word for 'mother'.

7 These are different ways in which Muslims refer to their fathers in Urdu.

8 Ayyalu is the term used by the common people to refer to their fathers in Telugu.

9 These terms suggest living places in high class Muslim households.

proclaims that he dreams in Telugu, he speaks Telugu and asserts that he will continue to do the same. He says:

Wonder of wonders-the language we know is not ours,
I believe
The language which is supposed to be ours, we don't know.
In the end, we are caught in the difficult situation of not having
a mother tongue.
We have been excommunicated for speaking in Telugu.
"Hey, you speak good Telugu being a Mussalman!"(34)

The last two lines expressed here ironically depicts the condition of Dalit Muslims. These lines specifies to the condition that the problems of Dalit Muslims are not spoken either in Urdu or Arabic which is mostly dominated by the upper class society of Muslims. Hence Yakoob advises the people to retain their mother tongue so that Telugu helps in addressing their issues and bring out their suffering to the lime light.

Marfa's¹⁰ beats: Vocals of self-respect, dignity and reform

The poets do that by invoking the brotherhood in the community, demanding self-respect and asserting their presence in the community like Yakoob in Avval Kalima (2021) says:

As you say, we are all Mussalmans!
We don't deny it, but what about all this discrimination?
We would also like-the accounts from times immemorial
Which have not been tallied, being dug up now
if they are going to be settled now, why won't we be happy?
We are not concerned now about the common enemy.
The hidden truth of our mutual friendship must be brought into the
open.
All those oppressed are Dalits, we don't deny.
But the definition of the different kinds of oppression must be spelt out. (34)

He questions to the upper caste Muslims that, despite being labeled as "Mussalmans," why there is this discrimination and he demands recognition of the discrimination and oppression faced by their community in a rightful and assertive tone. Yakoob considers, this kind of discrimination has not been addressed so far in any form, he tallies the sufferings Dalit Muslims have undergone so far and wants it to be eradicated with mutual friendship. When he says Dalits are oppressed, he tries to convey that there is an acceptability to talk on the injustice and oppression happening to Dalits from Hindu community. Yet, there is

denial in narrating the sufferings of Dalit Muslims whose oppression hasn't spelt out as the researcher in this paper tries to question the same.

While demanding the oppression to be spelt-out, he demands for the self-request as well as Satyanarayan (2014) has expressed in his paper "Dalit reconfiguration of caste: representation, identity and politics"

The common-sense explanations missed the rise of dalits (public presence, appearance and assertion) and also the new meanings of caste as humiliation ('belittle and denigrate') and as people with 'self' and 'respect'. (47)

Similarly, Yakoob in (Avval Kalima 2021) these lines

Self-respect is the dastarkhan¹¹ spread in front of everyone.

It's not a right only the well-to-do shall enjoy.

Playing with a fellow-being's self-respect,
whoever does it, is treachery.

Robbing people of their experiences is even more treacherous. (35)

Sounds like an empowered Dalit who is confident, assertive and educated questions of dignity and self-respect. He uses the cultural symbol significant to the Muslim communities, the dasterkhan. It is a cloth spread to sit and eat where everyone will be given equal share of food and none shall be denied. He wants self-respect to be like that where everyone can sit and stand equally with each other.

Similarly, Baaba uses Marfa as a cultural metaphor, which is a musical instrument specific to Muslim community that resembles similar to the drum (dappu) that Dalits use during festive occasions and death ceremonies.

Untouchable musical instruments

Open up a resounding note....

An alava¹² smoulders

In the hearts of fire-trotting feet

Not we the silent crescents any more

We are turning the full moon itself into a marfa (16)

With Marfa, he conveys the idea of the community's voice being heard loudly and clearly. It implies a sense of agency and empowerment, as the marginalized assert their presence and demand recognition. The mention of "an alava smoulders" suggests a simmering fire or passion within the hearts of the marginalized. This imagery evokes a

11 Dastarkhan is a cloth spread out on the floor around which people sit and share a meal.

12 Alava is the bed of lighted coals that Muslims carrying the alam (effigy) walk upon in a state of devout fervour during the ten-day mourning period at the start of the month of Moharram.

sense of resilience and determination, as the community refuses to be silenced or subdued by their circumstances. "Not we the silent crescents anymore, We are turning the full moon itself into a marfa." This transformation from a silent crescent to a full moon symbolizes a shift from invisibility to visibility, as the marginalized embrace their heritage and reclaim their voice.

Conclusion

Thus we can say that Baaba, Yakoob and Khaja through their respective poetry have drawn the attention towards the inclusion of Dalit Muslim Identity as well as their sorrows, suffering, discrimination and humiliation. The poets, all of them depict the present status of Dalit Muslims and fight against all the suppressions which put the life of Dalit Muslims in a pitiable condition. Through their poetry, they demonstrate the experience of hardship of being a Dalit Muslim in a society which does follow a caste hierarchy though the religion rejects. Through their texts they give voice to voiceless 'subalterns' and oppressed section of the society. As the poems are all of the biographies of the poets, their lives have raised the question on the caste system followed within the Muslim community that paralyses equality, egalitarianism and homogeneity of the community. Further, this study as it deals with the significant custom, tradition, language and culture of a distinct community thus have paved way to the emergence or consideration of separate aesthetic to the Dalit Muslim literature. Also, this study being not conclusive in this paper, further initiates discussion and generates arguments for the debate concerned to the Dalit Muslim identity and Dalit Muslim literature.

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