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TITLE OF THESIS: - IDENTITY AND CONSCIOUSNESS: REFLECTIONS IN THE
DALIT CULTURAL DISCOURSE IN NORTH INDIA

ABSTRACT

The quest for an identity is vital for any movement .Dalit identity formation is firmly rooted in its historical development since nineteenth century. It strives on distinct and equal identity for them and challenges supremacy of brahmanical hindu order. It opposes social hierarchy based on caste and varna identity. Dalit movement is not new, for centuries the Shudras and Atisudras had been revolting against the caste oppression and they used different means such as Bhakti tradition, poetry, conversion and others. They developed and preserved their ideology and culture which is based on equality, simplicity, labour oriented and love to nature it is juxtaposed to the dominant brahmanical order which is based on the inequality between individuals (chaturvarna) and religious texts not only sanctions this inequality but tells this varna-jati to be maintained to preserve hindu religion. From Mahatma Phule to Dr. Ambedkar and onwards Dalit movement have not only mobilized for political and social rights but it also created spaces for its cultural aspirations. The cultural heritage of Dalits is as rich as other social groups. For Dalit movement politics and culture go together. The issue of distinct cultural heritage of Dalits was raised by Adi-Dhrama, Adi- Andhra and Adi - Hindu movement. Dalit started to write about them, writings became one of their strong weapons to claim their rights and in due course of time dalit literature has evolved as a different craft. After 1980's in North India Hindi Dalit literature has got strengthened and this writing has become a successful means for dalit mobilization and assertion. Dalit literature is creating a space for the sharing of memories of pain and suffering, the struggle to claim history and hope for creating a just society.

Dalit writings gained in strength along with the emergence of Dalit consciousness in politics. Thus, a large group of Dalit writers such as Dr. Dharambir, Om Prakash Valmiki, Kanwal Bharati, Jayaprakash Karam, Shyraj Singh Bechain, Mohan Das Naimishroy, or N. Singh emerged, when Kanshi Ram and Mayavati appeared on India's political scene. Autobiographies has become powerful way of narrating one's story. Worldwide marginalized groups are using narratives, poetry history writings as a means of political assertion. These writings could be perceived as the actual site of the power struggle, where the voice of the marginalized individual contests the institutionalized narrative of the dominant group.

The thesis looks at the development of Dalit narratives in Hindi literature. It tries to locate dalit writings in the whole paradigm of Dalit political, social and cultural assertion. It inquires how this is creating a Dalit self and explains that subaltern speaks and speaks differently.