

## The Invisible Presence of OBC: A Literary Voice

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### ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the writing on OBC literature to contribute, presumably in a bit of way, toward opening up a dialogue among them regarding what constitutes meaningful literary efforts and selecting OBC literature because OBC has not much mattered yet, not in the aura of postcolonial, cultural, and subaltern studies. In order to initiate a dialogue about the underside of the literary world, the term OBC literature appears as one of the mechanisms for producing social, political, and educational consciousness in society. The existence of this consciousness, shaped by the backward commissions, is easily understood for the constitutional facts of pre- and post-independence societies. To investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes and the difficulties in which they labour for years, the variants of Other Backward Classes from history remain the same in order to establish a favourable literary voice for their marginalization and oppression.

The representation of the backward classes is susceptible to the dominant groups' exploitation, oppression, harassment, discrimination, and violence that define vulnerability due to their status over which they have no control. The Indian Constitution makes use of the concept of socially and educationally backward classes of people in Article 5(4) and applies specifically to the backward class of citizens in Article 16(4) (Pillai, 2007, p. 44). Since the enforcement of the Constitution, some commissions have been set up to define backward classes, including Kaka Kelkar in 1953 and Mandal Commission in 1978 in India. Both commissions are furthered in their approach toward the backward classes with specific unemployment, poverty, and reservation issues. The first Backward Classes Commission was established in 1953 to "investigate the conditions of socially and educationally backward classes and the difficulties" (Galanter, 1978, p. 1817). The terms of references were to:

Directed to determine the criteria to be adopted in considering whether any sections of the people (in addition to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes) should be treated as socially and educationally backward classes; and in accordance with such criteria to prepare a list of such classes. (Galanter, 1978, p. 1816).

In view of determining the Backward Classes, the Janata Government created the second Backward Classes

Commission in 1978, its chair being B. P. Mandal, to precede the traditional Indian society and social backwardness that was a direct result of caste status and other forms of backwardness. The second commission remarked:

The pace of social mobility is no doubt increasing and some traditional features of caste system have inevitable weakened. However, what caste has lost on the ritual front, it has more than gained on the political front. In view of this, it will be unrealistic to assume that the institution of caste will wither away in the near future. (Maheshwari, 1991, p. 125).

It was meant to be a significant moment for the Shudras in the early 1990s while implementing the Mandal Commission recommendations. This commission identified Shudra's historical backwardness to highlight their social and political disparities and competing interests and create a separate reservation category for OBCs. By the Brahminic ideological forces, the upper-castes have greatly humiliated the large communities of Shudras, who come to be known as the Other Backward Classes in the post-Mandal era. Bringing economic and political roles, "the politicisation of caste identity and the use of caste as a vehicle to represent and to organise interests in the political arena is confirmed as a major trait of the post-Mandal era" (Basile, 2013, p. 97). The measure reserved places for

the Other Backward Classes in government jobs and public higher education, predominantly of disadvantaged Shudras typically castes labourers and artisans. As is the case withholding the lowest place in Indian society, OBC delayed far behind the better-off castes on multiple social, economic, and measures and excluded from the literary world system. This becomes positive discrimination to autonomy for the Dalits and Adivasis –authoritatively, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The variants of Other Backward Classes from history remain the same to establish and record a favourable literary voice for their marginalization and oppression.

OBC has undoubtedly had a tremendous impact in shaping a literary voice over the years to the extent that the foundations of literature itself are presently being investigated. The purpose of writing on OBC literature is to contribute, presumably in a little way, toward opening up a dialogue among them regarding what constitutes meaningful literary efforts and selecting OBC literature because OBC has not much mattered yet, not in the aura of postcolonial, cultural, and subaltern studies. OBC literature means to run into apparently innumerable problems, the first of which relates to the argument itself. Is there such an incredible concept as OBC literature? Assuming this is the case, in what manner would it be advisable for us to define it? Are we entitled to define it being OBC or Non-OBC? Do we articulate about the fundamental ambivalence it is representing? These questions underpin the study in this article, hoping to initiate a discussion, far from being conclusive, might generate further arguments for debates in the end. Bahujan literature represents the new political consciousness among the oppressed. Within which OBC literature is also an emerging genre. This literary movement aims to raise the consciousness of the exploited castes as a resistance to the dominant community. Dalit literature, OBC literature, and Bahujan literature are discourses that demarcate the oppressed society's terminology, thoughts, and perspectives. OBC writing in Indian languages is a long tradition, focusing on the downtrodden and the deprived sections. For example, Jyotiba Phule of Maharashtra and Periyar E. V. R. Ramasamy of Tamil Nadu "had advocated the idea of a non-Brahmin unity or a unity of the Shudraatishudras to challenge the hegemony of the Brahminical elite" (Menon & Nigam, 2007, p. 22). One reason for this was that the writers came from the same background and had personally experienced the pain that they went on to depict their works.

Enter the authors, as part of a consciousness-raising movement that has emerged in the past few years and opened many artistic and political avenues. As with any new literature, the works to emerge were poems, short stories, and other literary productions. Some works, *OBC Sahitya Vimarsh*, *OBC Sahitya Ke Vividh Aayam*, *OBC Sahitya Ka Darshnik Aadhar*, *Why I am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy*, *OBC Sahitya: Naya Pariprekshya*, and *Post-Hindu India: A Discourse in Dalit-Bahujan, Socio-Spiritual and Scientific Revolution*, map this swift development and show the measure of the

task for writers to speak for their people. OBC people have been, as many argue, a product of upper-castes thinking and ignored as a feature of the political and social texture of the society that exists a substantial assortment of criticism demonstrating the significance of their literature in its rights and results from a persistent inattention to them in every field. The social realities of the OBC, mainly the most uneducated, have traditionally avoided the aggressive and theatrical politics on which the ambiguous phenomena rely economically.

There are several approaches, given the thoughts and philosophies of OBC wisdom, in evaluating a literary voice of various parts of a society facing social, educational, political, and marginal deprivation. In *The Case for Bahujan Literature*, Rajendra Prasad Singh claims that what chiefly marks "the purist pedant will condemn OBC literature for corrupting the holy notion of literature through this casteist division. And, much more will follow. But this much is clear that OBC literature is the literature only of the socially and educationally backward classes" (Singh, 2017, p. 19). But to speak only of the social and educational issues, the number of people working on OBC literature and its characteristics appears to increase due to the horrendous health, jobs, and education situation of OBC people. This situation cautiously emerges from the conviction that OBC literature encompasses it to reflect more ethical considerations committed to their specific concerns of illiteracy, social discrimination, and poverty. In that spirit, they are still liable to be ignored or marginalised by most of those with employment and educational power to enter the fields of public health, medicine, and nursing, substance abuse, and unemployment counselling.

Objecting the suspicious attitude towards the OBC literature, there has been and still a continuing struggle and resistance to hierarchical thoughts, philosophies, and theories which are aligned with the first terms of those binary sets such as lower and upper castes, oppression, and suppression, marginal and dominant within common practices. By being active participants on writing committees and in conferences and promoting OBC literature, the older and more established authors continue to encourage new OBC writers and writing. OBC literature considers various works by authors, including Sanjeev, Shiv Murti, Chandra Kishor Jaiswal, Madhukar Singh, Premkumar Mani, Dinesh Kushwaha, Subhash Chandra Kushwaha, Pankaj Bisht, Uday Prakash, Priyanand, Asgar Wajahat, and Motilal Menania. Believing in the possibility of communication across social boundaries, the writers of the OBC literature offer major themes that tend to be a political struggle, cultural survival, the importance of recovering and sustaining their traditions and the plight of family and people in modern society and focus on the demonstration of understanding to address and equate a global readership (Yadav, 2017, pp. 58-59). These moves towards the thousands of productions annually, the burgeoning fiction, poetry, autobiography, drama, and essay on how literary voice includes names and authoring by short stories, prose writers, and critics.

These and other earlier writings by names like Mahatma Phule, Periyar Ramasamy, Jagdev Prasad, Ramaswarup Varma, Lalai Singh, B.P. Mandal, Bhartendu, Maithlisharan Gupta, Jaishankar Prasad, Phanishwarnath Renu, and others give literary genealogy, a lineage of voice, to the generation of which Kancha Ilaiah, Bhalchandra Nemade, Raghuwair Chaudhary, Premkumar Mani, Rajendra Prasad Singh, Hare ram Singh, and other contemporary authors have been a part and relied on their cultural customs and aesthetics, especially OBC literature. These are the ancestral and contemporary literary voices that had come before us whose writings paved the way for what OBC authors can do today. Their literary voices are the beginning of OBC literature as a group of voices that speak from a wide range of aesthetic, community, and experimental perspectives. The voice of such authors was prevailing; it made viewers, both OBC and Non-OBC, and assisted in formulating literary discourse. Most approaches of the OBC authors have theorized about issues related to their problems, in particular, to indicate the development of the literary voice that has grown up around such a critic endeavour.

Kancha Ilaiah's writings, including *Buffalo Nationalism: A Critique of Spiritual Fascism*, and *The Weapon of the Other: Dalit-Bahujan Writings and the Remaking of India Nationalist* are an excellent introduction to the OBC literature. He forged an intellectual discourse, originating from a frontier condition of OBCs and embracing a dialogical approach toward OBC literature to put it called OBC criticism for literature that remains to be worked out to contribute the feeling of group consciousness among OBC people. He shows his authority in weaving a subject with many strands, comprised of many voices trying to represent OBC identity, and juxtaposes social and political thoughts to move away from the critique of upper-castes. In his *Buffalo Nationalism: A Critique of Spiritual Fascism*, Kancha Ilaiah (2019) equates that "OBC unity began to crystallize, while the fractured social structure remained disunited. The post-Mandal period created a new consciousness and new social relationships began to emerge which have had the potential of transforming society in a positive direction" (p. 66). OBC people have gone under assault in the entire public sphere accessible to the upper-castes, used as a tool of humiliation and historical meritlessness. In the contemporary era, OBC is the term and concept referred to the people of Indian society that assumes a vital role in the narrative of colonial, revolutionary, and early India. Writing in this approach marked the opening of OBC literature that completely negated the Brahminic ideological forces and moved towards a society of social, economic, cultural, educational, and political.

Hareram Singh handles similar subjects- self-awareness, the identity of the OBC people in a different positive mode. Adding to his outstanding collections of essays, particularly OBC Sahitya Ka Darshnik Aadhaar, he has produced an outlook and language, starting from premises similar to Rajendra Prasad Singh has, which are stunningly original, and clearly express an OBC perspective. He has created a form of expression in which narration merges

collective consciousness and encapsulates themselves in their self-awareness and direct action that embraces culture as a crucial point in understanding OBC literary texts as an assertion of identity within the upper caste society. Hareram Singh's identifiable voice has examined how OBC authors have sought to challenge dominant representation by speaking back to the centre and analyzing the lives and relationships of OBC, Dalit, Bahujan, and upper-castes people. His literary voice is a victory of OBC struggles that have lasted both in:

Pre-independence and post-independence India and so has its literature, which is both oral and written. What is needed is its compilation and preservation. There are brilliant OBC writers who remain unknown and whose works are yet to see the light of the day. OBC literature is written by the OBCs. It is opposed to the adherents of Manu. It seeks to expose pseudo-leftist Savarnas and weak-kneed OBC litterateurs. It talks of those castes groups that were tailors and producers but were kept away from power and deprived of social and justice. The OBC literature will take along this section of people. (Singh, 2017, p. 11).

By re-energizing this anti-brahminical tradition, OBC leaders and activists created a sense of history, sense of hope in the future for the Other Backward Classes. Their realization that Mahatma Phule, Ramasamy Periyar, Jagdev Prasad, Ramaswarup Varma, Lalai Singh Yadav, and B.P. Mandal had developed philosophies and thoughts of reasoning to empower them, inspire them to write, and encourage them to speak loudly. OBC understand this as their voice against tradition, castes, inequality, social evils, and injustice. These voices vary in quality, but they rise from a historical reality wherein OBC people are excluded from discourse concerning their rights, and OBC people must be heard. Using their philosophies and thoughts as an instrument of transition, OBC authors interweave narration questions with a wide-ranging exploration of social, political, economic, and cultural spaces on the themes of oppression, discrimination, and identity that internalize the trope of the conflictual frontier zone. OBC authors, in their writings, however, mechanize to intervene on behalf of the discriminated and bring them equality and justice that present a philosophical, social, and political based theoretical model to conceptualize the more significant role of OBCs by examining the role of self-motives and comparative engagement in literary discourse.

Like Rajendra Prasad, Hareram Singh, and Kancha Ilaiah, Vilas Sarang in his *Vangmaiyeen Sauskruti ani Samajik Vastav*, tells of the OBCs. They have begun to develop speculative philosophical visions and to write their thoughts and discourses on their stagnation in the literary world of Marathi after the 1960s. One can see Bhalchandra Nemade, a prominent OBC writer of this period, remained close to the identity politics of Grameen writing and sub-culture that opposed the war-mongering divine images created (Ketkar, 2016, p. 106). His works are distinct from the primarily rural stories produced in the 1970s and 1980s. They aim to express identity and the coherence of a rural setting and



emphasize the harmonious interaction between their people and society. In order to recover the profound significance of upper-caste mourning practices, it fits in the wake of weaving OBC writing in the Marathi literary world. Having traversed on a much more difficult road and remaining outside the conventional literary discourse, the thoughts and philosophies of OBCs were innovative as well as humanitarian and integrative to look through their identity, voice, and status for the social scenario (Ketkar, 2016, p. 106). OBC literary movement is a call for self-determination for OBC authors and a demonstration of a practical new approach to examining OBCs works that engage the literature and the discourse on farmers, peasants, and laborers.

OBC literature sought to liberate oppressed people's minds and force them into self-recognition to use a logical structure that opens up the possibilities to resist hegemonic culture as acts of the author's approach. Authors further OBC literature in their approaches toward the "discourse on farmers, peasants, and labourers to which agriculture is the main occupation of the backward classes. Yet, unlike Dalits and women, there is no tradition of this debate" (Singh, WIOBCL, web) in the literary world. As portrayed by Premchand in *Godan*, the peasants' struggle is passive resistance to the oppression of the hegemonic class. *Godan* is a living description of farmers, farm-labourers, and exploiters such as the village mukhiya, the purohit, Datadeen, Jhinguri Singh, Nokhhey Ram, and the moneylender Mangaru Sah. The oppressed peasants in Premchand's novel recognize their oppressors but show no desire to fight back. Premchand finds opposition in the most marginalized and ignored classes, such as OBCs, Dalits, and women. Traces of the peasant's problems and lifestyle are also depicted in Premchand's other novels, *Seva Sadan*, *Rangbhumi* and *Karmbhumi*, but not as the central theme (Singh & Pratap, 2000, pp. 925-26). Phanishwarnath Renu and Madhukar Singh, like Premchand, portrayed the farming community's everyday life, customs, and culture in their unique styles (Singh, WIOBCL, web).

Premchand's and other authors' writings seem retrograde rather than progressive, but they went beyond the bounds of fact in their descriptions in marginalized groups of society. It is important to note that Anuplal Mandal, a member of the backward Kaivart caste, gave "importance to the revolutionary Nakshatra Malakaar, a central figure in Phanishwarnath Renu's *Maila Aanchal*. The misery, struggle, values, and interests of the working classes were vividly depicted by these OBC novelists" (Singh, WIOBCL, web). The hero and central character of Madhukar Singh's novel *Arjun Zinda Hai* is Arjun Mahto, a Koiree. Master Jagdish Mahto's life is consumed by the fight against the exploitation of agricultural laborers, and Arjun is his alter ego. In Madhukar Singh's second novel, *Manbodh Babu*, the main character Manbodh Babu dedicates his life to the Kurmichak, a backward-class enclave. Singh was known for depicting struggling poor people as heroes in his works, and he mainly wrote in support of the downtrodden classes, workers, and farmers (Singh,

WIOBCL, web). The authors' efforts owe a great deal to the organized literary movement of OBCs in India. Despite the challenges, OBC literary movement has remained closely linked to backward-class activities and has emphasized educational and economic growth. As is the case with backward-class movements, Premchand, Madhukar Singh, Anuplal Mandal, Phanishwarnath Renu, and other authors have clarified the regular life of the OBC people through the perspectives of poverty, sentiments of loss of culture and identity and depicted to prove that their characters deal with the same issues as OBC people confront today. These critical practices privilege culture, traditions, experiences, and perspectives as the source of their knowledge and narrative strategies in which OBC authors and people have exercised self-representation to renew neglected texts, authors, and traditions and advance both marginally specific and comparative approaches to fiction, short stories, essays, and other forms.

Finally, as OBC writers, their resistance to establish a substantial body of critical discussion surrounding OBC literature and inclination to delegate the duty to outsiders, those who write a critique, demonstrates how absorbed OBC is in Indian literature. OBC criticism written by authors is part of identifying the right to present their extant literature, writing new ones, and claiming the right to justify them is a step towards nationality. The continuous articulation of an OBC voice, through imagination, language, and literature, contributes to keeping identity alive in the citizens of a nation and gives self-recognition a meaning that would define within the community rather than by external sources. The OBC literary movement encourages OBC authors to reconsider their positions and use content from their communities in their artistic endeavours. There may be several points of view, but they should all be discussed to better OBC literature.

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