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“ARUNTHATHIYAR LITERATURE” WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO

M. MATHIVANNAN’S POEMS: AN APPRAISAL

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The suffering and agony of untouchability is effectively portrayed in dalit literature. Originated from Maharashtra, dalit literature was fast spreading throughout India. With the publication of Pama’s *Karuku*, Tamil literature had to give way to dalit literature. But Arunthathiyars claim that unfortunately their concerns are neglected in Dalit literature written by non-Arunthathiyar dalits. Therefore Arunthathiyars themselves have started writing about themselves. M. Mathivannan, an Arunthathiyar scholar, has published three poetry books namely *Nerinthu*, *Namakideiyilaana Tholaiivu* and *Eathiliyai Thodarnthu Varum Nila* which explicitly speaks about the problems of Arunthathiyars. The first part of this article suggests the need for “Arunthathiyar Literature” as their life and problems are ignored in dalit literature. The second part culls out the ethnography and the concerns of Arunthathiyars as gleaned from M. Mathivannan’s poems. In the last part, “Arunthathiyar Literature” is reviewed.

Forgotten Concerns of Arunthathiyars in Dalit Literature

The line of demarcation between novel and ethnography is breaking down nowadays. Some novels can be categorized as ethnographic novels. Ethnographic novels deal with the people of a particular set of people belonging to a race or caste or sub-caste. Both ethnographers and ethnographic novelists write about ethnography of a community. Yet ethnographic novelists are in a better position to write about the disputes, anger, hate and other such emotions which are generally ignored by ethnographers. It is a misconception that the first ethnographic novel in Tamil is Joe de Cruz’s *Aali Sool Ulagu* which deals exclusively with the *parathar* (fisher folk) of Tuticorin area. But ethnographic novels have a long history in Tamil literature. Way back in 1968 Neelapathmanathan wrote *Thalaimuraikal*. It is an ethnographic novel about the life of Iraniyal Chettiyar caste. M.V. Venkatram’s *Velvithee*, Ragunaathan’s *Panjum Pasiyum*, Rajam Krishnan’s *Kurinchi Then*, Hephzibah Jesudasan’s *Puththan Veedu*, Sivagami’s *Palayana Kalithalum* are some of the significant ethnographic novels in Tamil. Actually the list is long.