



# The Creative Launcher

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## **Mute Existence: the Consciousness of the Dalit Life in Dalit literature and the form of rebellion**

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### **Abstract**

India is one of the fastest developing countries in the world; yet it is notorious for its rigid caste system. The present paper deals with the conditions of the suppressed, the real agony of the dalits represented in Dalit literature and above all, the form of rebellion the dalit writers are representing in their literary creations. The whole paper tries to seek out the true Dalit consciousness and the responsibility that a Dalit writer takes to overcome the obstacles of Varna system, the caste system. It is widely believed that all Dalit literary creations have their roots in the Ambedkarite thoughts. Therefore, I shall also try to show the ideas of Ambedkar and how those ideas are iconic in Dalit literature.

**Keywords:** Dalit, Untouchable, Oppression, Rebellion

In the second half of the twentieth century, a new literary movement burst on the Indian literature scene, especially in Marathi language, called Dalit literature. It was accompanied by an oppressed group was called themselves Dalit Panthers. The movement spread all over India. The poets and writers of the movement used the word 'Dalit' which replaced the earlier name Untouchable or Harijan. Suppressed class movement started on India in 1958 after the death of great thinker Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar and earlier inspired by Mahatma Jyotiba Phule.

Dalit literature is the literature produced by the Dalit consciousness and in common human freedom is the inspiration behind it. In India, there is a multiplicity of endogamous and mutually exclusive caste and sub-caste groups. They are hierarchically structured, in a graded inequality. Dalits are politically marginalized communist who are abused, even now, as inhuman. Dalit literature is a new discourse which represents the real agony of the Dalits



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as well as rebellion is built through it against the authority, suppression and humiliation. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in his 'Speech at Mahad' on 25 December 1927, which is still considered to be the starting point of revolt against the caste system, argues:

We must uproot four caste system and Untouchability, and set the society on the foundation of the two principles of one caste only and of equality ... Our work has been begun to bring about a real social revolution. No one can now arrest it. I pray to God that the social revolution which begins here today fulfil itself by peaceful means. (Dangle, P 68-69)

Ambedkar called himself the Mahad Satyagraha the beginning of the 'Untouchable liberation Movement.

Through this paper, I shall focus on few Dalit short stories and poems and try to analyze the real existence of the Dalits and how do they rebel against social, political and cultural oppression that create Dalits the most marginalized people in India. Dalit writers are bound to uphold the consciousness of the Dalit life and at the same time, they form rebellion through literary creations so that Dalits can have their own right in their own homeland. Langston Hughes, the most celebrated African American writer of the first half of the twentieth century, argues on his seminal essay entitled "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" that the Negro artists are bound to have a special responsibility to uphold their own reality. He point out, "A very high mountain indeed for the would-be racial artist to climb in order to discover himself and his people." (Leitch et al, 1193-1194). Similarly, Dalit writers are bound to have Dalit insight, a Dalit point of view; but this is not enough for a literary artist. There must be an intellectual cartograph of an aspect of life, which it illuminates and educates.

Dalit literature is the literature of revolt against this mute existence. This is to quote Ambedkar, "A struggle in order to raise ourselves; hence we are bound to undertake it, so as to remove the obstacles to our progress." (Dangle, 266) to form rebellion against such oppression, a Dalit writer must experience a Dalit point of view. This is true of any point of view. A Marxist view, for instance, would not necessarily produce a Marxist work of art. That can not come into being unless the view is transformed into the artist's vision. The Dalit point of view constitutes a clear diagnosis of a particular social reality and a sanguine hope for its desirable transformation. Sharankumar Limbale suggests certain pivotal traits to discern the form of Dalit literature and has also assayed to explain some of the basic reasons behind this paradigm shift in the literary sphere of Indian literature. He argues, "Rejection and revolt in Dalit literature have been birured from the wombs of Dalits pain. They are directed against an inhuman system that was imposed on them. Just as the anguish expressed



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in Dalit literature is in the nature of a collective social voice, similarly, the rejection and revolt are social and collective...The Dalit consciousness in Dalit literature is the revolutionary mentality connected with struggle. It is a belief in rebellion against the caste system, recognizing the human being as its focus. Dalit consciousness is an important seed for Dalit literature; it is separate and distinct from the consciousness of other writers. Dalit literature is demarcated as unique because of this consciousness.” (Limbale, 31-32)

As the society is built on the four caste systems, the bottom class is dependent on the upper class not only for work but also to earn their bread. Ironically, what they get is return is but the ‘poisoned bread’. Bandhumadhav, a renowned Marathi Dalit writer, has shown in his short story “The Poisoned Bread” that the bread, symbol of life, is turned to a poisoned bread due to social inferiority. He has also shown that the cause of their dog-like existence is due to not only social inferiority but also due to the fact that the Dalits are so much oppressed that they forget their own identity. Yetala Aja, the Mohar in the story “The poisoned Bread” has internalized himself the notion of being a slave to the upper class. He says:

Why do you say that, Ana? I am your slave. I have come to you on hearing of the operations at your threshing floor. My lord is our bread-giver and we find it a privilege to beg for our share of corn, master. I am your bagging Mahar and feel proud to be so. (Dangle, 167-68)

Yetala has internalised the oppression of casteism but the grand son of Yetala revolts against such oppression and the prevalent inhuman systems created by the upper Hindu Brahmins mouthpiece of the Dalit writers when he violently and logically argues:

Patil, will you kindly tell me what you meant when you accused us of forgetting religion, abandoning our caste and polluting the God? And if a religion cannot tolerate one human being treating another simply as human being, what's the use of such inhuman religion, and if our mere touch pollutes the gods, why were the Mahars and Mangs created at all? And who, may I know, who indeed, create them? And would you please tell me the name of God whom the Mahars and Mangs can claim as their own? (Dangle 168)

These lines clearly manifest various social phases from culture, caste to religion from which Dalits are taken outside. What they have is only their mind and body but they do not get proper nourishment. Like the grandson, Dalits must question and through questioning the authority they can attain their identity. But the question still remains of how does one escape from the fix of this hereditary structure. Bandhumadhav gives solution of this problem through the grandson: “By abandoning it. There's no alternative.” (Dangle 172)



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Even in the phase of education, Dalits are not allowed to mix up with upper-class Hindu society. Dalits, if they get well-education, can uproot the casteism and they don't have to depend on the age-old bread associated with social inferiority. Through Dalit writing, we can observe that they are continuously trying their best to climb up the social ladder avoiding cast-systems and to gain their identity. Education can be a form of rebellion which will bring their consciousness of present situation and hopefully they can change their position radically. The grandson of the above mentioned story is city-bred and has learnt to read and write. We have paradoxical nature of speech between Yetala and the grandson : one is illiterate and the other, has learnt to read and write. One is a slave hopelessly and the other is rebellions in nature. The grandson gives a clear diagnosis to his grandfather of what the dalits should do immediately:

When I said we should abandon the land-right, I didn't mean we should give it up literally. But we must stop begging under the pretext that we are getting our rightful share of corn. And instead of enslaving ourselves to life-long labour in exchange for that right, we must free ourselves from the land bondage and learnt to live independently, with a sense of pride .... We forget all the while that the crumbs they give us make us slaves. (Dangle 173)

Waman Kardark in his poem "Send My Boy to School" shows clearly how a mother is passionately looking for her son to be well-educated. She only utters :

We may be terribly poor  
Famine may knock at our door  
I'll see that he gets to school  
Send my boy to school, etc. (Dangle 11)

Dalit poetry gives the real agony of the Dalits as well as projects a forward looking attitude on the principle of equality and unity. The poem "Take a Hammer to change the World" by Anna Bhau Sathe shows an optimistic view:

Sitting on the chariot of unity  
Let us go forward  
To break the chains of class and caste,  
Hold to the name of Bhim! (Dangle 5)

Through literature, Dalit writers bring about, to quote Bama,

"A Chaos into the hierarchical relationships between the dominant and the dominated. It is singular in concept but plural in practice. (Shiva Prakash, H.S., 98)

Dalit writings produce a political reaction. The civilized notion of society is questioned in this type of literature. If we look at the history of the dominants, there is no place for the



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culture, art, language and literature of the Dalits. Janardan Waghmare in his critical essay entitled “Black literature and Dalit literature” argues:

White writers in America made an effort to portray Black life in their writings, but no such attempt has been made by high caste Hindu writers here, with a few exception. The untouchable has continued to remain neglected and ostracized in literature as in society. The untouchable is a ‘rejected’ man in Hindu society. This man has no place in Brahminical literature. (Dangle 317)

Therefore, every dominant concept of civilization has to be inverted. Bama argues :

This process of invention can be seen in the Tamil oral tradition-the folklore. There are traces of the agony and the ecstasy of the Dalits, the direct natural and emotional out bursts, the collective identity, the mockery and caricature of the immediate oppressors, the supernatural powers of oracle and the mythical heroism: these are the several elements for the construction of a conscious dalit literature. (Shiva Prakash, H.S., 97-98)

Dalits are removed from the social arena in such a way that the notion of nation for them becomes a big question. They can not escape from their mother land but ironically motherland becomes a curse to them. Benedict Anderson argues that nations are acts of imagination. It does not mean that there is not territory or people. What he is saying is that we can connect to people in other parts of the territory only in term of imaging them. (Nagar 78) But the Dalits could not imagine people around them as their own. Their land has become another country for themselves. In the story “The Refugee” by Avinash Dolas we have the same experience when the twenty-one years old boy “tried to come to grips with the turmoil in his mind and turned to look back just once. But the village was out of sight. The trees and the bushes had obliterated it. It was as if nothing had happned.” (Dangle 249). The boy has become a refugee in his own land. In the railway station he thinks himself to be a dog. This is the dalit reality expressed in this story. So, Ambedkar says, “Gandhiji, I have no homeland.” (Dangle 313)

L.S. Rokade in “To be or not to be Born” shows how an unborn child has revolted against his own motherland in which he will come very soon. He questions desperately:

“I spit on this great civilization  
Is this land yours, mother,  
Because you were born here ?  
Is it mine  
Because I was born to you?  
Must I call this great land mine love it.



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Sing its glory? (Roy, Amilav . et al. 64 Eds),

In the history of Marathi Dalit literature we have glimpse of various forms of protest against casteism. The Manusmriti was burnt as a symbol of Dalit protest against untouchability. This caste system and inequality is the first of the governing rules of Hindu religion. Bapu Patil, in the story “The poisoned Bread; is the representative of the upper class Hindu society. He tries to marginalize the Mahars and Mangs with the false notion of Hindu religion. He utters:

You should know that God intended to have a definite hierarchy when he created the Brahmin, the Maratha, the fisherman, the Weaver, the Mahar-Mang, the Dhor and the cobbler in that order (Dangle 169).

Only through protest Dalit writers try to break this boundary. This boundary has made the mother a where in the story “Mother” by Baburao Bagul. Her son only gets insult and punishment due to casteism. This boundary and its consequence find a better expression in the story:

She was trying desperately to escape from the bear-like hug of the overseer. But like a person stuck fast in a quagmire, she found release impossible ... (Dangle 218)

Dalit writers have presented a different mode of representation of the Dalit consciousness so as to form multiple forms of rebellion against inhumanity. The sensibility of the Dalit writers is that they write like a Dalit. We must reject all the dominant models to judge this kind of literature. Indeed our intention of reading such literature must be like the Dalits. In a nutshell, Dalit writings presents itself as a critique of non-humanity and tries to make the world on the vision of equality.

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