

**DALIT LITERATURE: A TOOL OF RESISTANCE**Sami- Ullah Bhat^{1*}, Dr. Tushar Nair²¹ (Research Scholar, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Career Point University Kota. Jammu and Kashmir. India.)¹ (Research Supervisor, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Career Point University Kota. Jammu and Kashmir. India.)

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Doi: <http://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2022.9303>**ABSTRACT**

In Indian society, the Dalits who are known earlier as untouchables or Shudras have been suffering in the name of Casteism. Even after more than 70 years of achieving Independence, the Dalits are bearing the brunt of torture and humiliation at the hand of upper caste people in many states in India. Dalits, being born in lower castes, are the worst target of embarrassment, dishonour, torture and discrimination. They have been inflicted violence physically or mentally in such a cruel manner that their whole identity is trampled underfoot. For centuries their life has been an epic of traumatic experiences. Their survival was possible at the behest of upper caste people who otherwise treated them like beasts. The wishes and dreams of the Dalits didn't matter as they had no right to dream for a world of joy and progress. With the passage of time, people in the Dalit community realised the traumatic situation and sufferings of their brethren and decided to give voice through literature to the worst kind of sufferings they had to undergo.

It is painfully surprising to think how Dalits were made to bear silently the humiliation and ill-treatment. If one comes across the excruciating accounts of pain and trauma poured down in Dalit literature, one can easily feel the immeasurable pain. Their afflictions are laid open barely before the readers just to make them feel how they will feel, in turn, if they happen to replace their position.

Keywords: *Untouchability, Centrality, Confrontation and Recognition.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Dalit writers have attempted to lift the veil that has concealed Dalit grief, exploitation, torture and upper-caste arrogance. Dalit writings have provided meaning to Dalit life, and these writings have become a means of resistance. Dalit writings have become a tool for attacking and exposing people who believe in Caste-based ideologies. These writings fight against the degradation and heinous misbehaviour perpetrated towards Dalits. "The Weevil", "Sujata", "The Sainly Man", "War", and "Twenty-five-Fours and Fifty" are among the stories covered in this paper that exemplify resistance. The injustice, mistreatment, and oppression that Dalits experience as a result of their vulnerability are frequently shown in Dalit stories with fury and resistance. In the story "The Weevil" (Limbale 1), the narrator, a Dalit, describes how his own instructor exploits him. When he was in college, the narrator had a penchant for composing stories. He writes and discusses his life tale of agony, poverty, and struggle with his teacher.

Prof. Khanolkar, in whom he had great faith, shared everything he wrote with him, and he continually encouraged the narrator to write about his own life saying:

No values the experience of us white-collared people any more. There was a time when people would jump on fiction. Now days they want reality. A lot of value is attached to Dalit memories. You don't need to be a writer to write Dalit literature.

Just write on your life experiences as they happened. People will enjoy it. If your book

becomes well-known you will with awards and fame, earn a lot of money. You have got the guts for it (3).

Prof. Khanolkar assists the narrator in publishing his two stories in the Sunday edition of *Dainik Kesari*, but then deceives the narrator by stealing one of his stories and having it published as a novel, saying that he wrote it himself. As soon as the narrator realises the truth, he becomes enraged and resists Prof. Khanolkar's misbehaviour. The narrator becomes uneasy and begins to wonder if he is telling the truth

"It wasn't a book; it was my life. It contained every single thing I had said. How had the jerk remembered everything? He might have a tape recorder. I'd made a blunder. I should have looked for a tape recorder before gazing at this modern, metropolitan man's wife" and children when I went to his house" (9).

The narrator violently enters Khanolkar's home. The narrator is speechless. He can't wait to spew the rage in his heart out. He tells his teacher "Prof Khanolkar you have written this novel on the basis of my story. I am the main character in it. All the sentences in it are those that came from my mouth" (10). The narrator's opposition is communicated in this way. The intensity of his confrontation can be gauged by his rage towards his teacher, whom he addresses by the name for the first time.

Another example of resistance is in the story "Sujata" (Limbale 62) where Dalits resist the act of municipality that was bent upon removing the hutments of Dalits. It is here that these Dalits raise voice against these atrocities, "We must resist this.



We must take out processions. We must fill the jails. But we must not leave this place. We have been living here for many years. We have rights over this land. It does not matter if we are killed we will fight" (65).

In another story "The Saintly Man" (Limbale 115) the narrator's father is detained for breaking down a tree from the village moneylender's pasture. The narrator though a small boy withstands saying "I wanted to throttle the police, but I was too young to do anything" (115). In the same way his mother also opposes by saying, "You will grow up one day. You will be big. You will take vengeance for your father" (115). The narrator was very annoyed with the moneylender the ethos of confrontation is very transparent when he says I would sometimes think I should grow up quickly, creep into the mansion and regicide the moneylender. A teacher used to go to the moneylender's mansion to give school lessons. I used to think, I must become a teacher. I used to go to school daily. I never missed a day. Letters would come from jail from my father. In them he wrote that I should not miss my school. Perhaps his father knows well that education is the best tool to resist any type of prejudice and maltreatment.

"War" (Limbale 121) is the narrative of Bhagwan, a Dalit who quits his army duty after being injured in the India-Pakistan war. He arrives in the village, where his father performs Mahar work for the Deshmukh of the village. Deshmukh offends Bhagwan and reminds him that he is a Mahar and must remember this. The cleaning at the Deshmukh's house is also done by Bhagwan's sister. When Bhagwan learns that his sister is pregnant by

Deshmukh's son, he becomes enraged and storms into Deshmukh's residence, shouting "Hey, Deshmukh, come out!" The mansion echoes with Bhagwan's voice. When Deshmukh walks out the door, his wife is right behind him. Deshmukh my sister is pregnant from your son, says Bhagwan, who emerges like a blazing fire. The thuds of Bhagwan's voice sound like the cannonballs exploding in a warehouse. Deshmukh and his wife stood there as though they were detainees. Bhagwan goes on to say, "You will accept my sister as your daughter in-law, Go Bhagi go into your house. Deshmukh if anything happens to my sister, I shall set the mansion on Fire" (130). Bhagwan is bereft of all possessions. His hut has been completely consumed by fire. His father and wife have likewise been reduced to ashes. He sighs in excruciating agony. All of this is ineffective in bringing Bhagwan to his knees. He hears the voices of his village youngsters. He forgets about his discomfort and rises to his feet. In the military style, Bhagwan begins to give the children drill commands as he has given in free time to impart military training to the children. His voice penetrates the skies, and the children stand facing the village, in an attitude of war. This attitude of war is a symbol of resistance and protest.

In "Twenty five-Fours are Hundred and Fifty" (Valmika 125), the author mocks people who exploit the destitute and deprived. The impoverished are first granted loans, and subsequently they are overcharged. This story contains a strong element of dishonesty and fraud. Sudeep belongs to the Dalit community. His father is the one who sends him to school. He argued twenty-five fours are hundred and fifty because the landlord imposes one-fifty for a



hundred while memorising multiplication tables. Sudeep is able to persuade his father that twenty-five fours are hundred, not one hundred and fifty, after receiving an education. It is only through education that father is made to realise that the Chaudhary has been cheating him. In his heart, a tremendous ache arises, and he feels compelled to say: "May Chaudhary's life be cut short! There would be none to give him water" (35).

The father intends to resist only after his kid has convinced him of the Chaudhary's duplicity. Sudeep's father isn't the only one who is forced to suffer through betrayal. Thousands of Dalits had previously been subjected to such a deception at the hands of those who lent money to the underprivileged. Dalits have such a poor status that they are afraid to speak out against the upper castes. They have no other means of expressing their sentiments but through words. Women of the higher caste are treated similarly to Dalits in our society, where women don't have the same status as males and are subjected to the most heinous forms of pain and humiliation. Her value is determined by her ability to be a mother; otherwise she is considered unimportant. As a result, these stories challenge the traditional literary theories and upper caste ideologies that support Dalit subjugation, while also exploring a hitherto overlooked element of life (Mishra). They are well aware of their social rank and understand that they must endure humiliation in all aspects of life. The severity of their humiliation helps them realise the power of words. To communicate their grief and miseries, they utilised words as weapons. The goal of Dalit literature is to "liberate the Dalits" (Mishra). Dalit is not a class, but a

awareness, and it is linked to the experiences, joys and sufferings of individuals in the lowest social strata. This text must be viewed through the lens of a literary outlook. The importance of this literary chain of events will not be realised unless it is viewed from a sociological perspective against the backdrop of societal changes (14).

We must examine the Dalit's socio-economic situation because only then we will be able to understand the true significance and ramifications of literature produced from their outlook. The Dalit population cannot be overlooked, as they now make up a sizable portion of the population. They have been at the bottom of India's pyramid for generations, denied even the most fundamental human rights such as access to drinking water from public wells, freedom to travel on public highways, and the opportunity to choose a vocation rather than having one given to them by birth. The transition of these once-Untouchable people's stigmatised recognition is a story of centuries of collaborative struggle. Dalit life is excruciatingly painful, and these personal occurrences are reflected in writings written by Dalit authors. For a long time, they've wanted to put the story of their suffering into literature. Dalits fight physical brutality, mass killings and rapes, and injustice using political and cultural means. Dalit literature serves as a weapon against the injustices that have been penetrated against them. It's more of a tool for resistance and creativity. Untouchables confront their suffering as a result of exploitation and express their feelings. Following India's partition, the Constitution of India establishes a "Democratic Republic" in which the backward classes. Particularly the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are



granted two essential rights: “the right to equal treatment” and “right to equal rights”. Manusmriti is seen to be proof of Brahmanical discrimination. Dr. Ambedkar and his associates burned a copy of Manusmriti on December 25, 1927, in protest of what it teaches about Shudras. For the Scheduled Castes and Tribes, the Indian constitution has created a new exemption in the form of “reservation” or “reverse prejudice”. As a freeing principle, it is necessary. The literature of the Dalits is part of a larger movement. It is literature that promotes transformation. Their rage is portrayed in Daya Pawar’s poem “you wrote from Los Angeles”:

In the stories here, in hotels about the streets
Indians and curs are measured with the same
yard stick.

“Niggers!” Blacks! This is the abuse the flying on
me. Reading all this, I felt so dam! Now you’ve
had a taste of what we’ve suffered. In this
country from generation to generation (Abedi,
Web).

In this poem can be heard the resonances of a
rebellion soul:

I ‘am the sea; I soar, I surge.

I move out to build your Tomb.

The winds, storms, sky, Earth

Now all are mine.

In every inch of the rising (Abedi, web).

The literature of Dalits has yet to be recognised as
mainstream. It’s still trying to figure out who it is. The
sounds that reverberate within it continue to go
unheard and unnoticed around the world. However,

this literature has recently gained recognition, as
Dalit literature is now prescribed in many university
syllabuses and has earned a position in post-modern
literature. Aside from that, Dalit literature has been
translated into English, which has broadened its
appeal. Education is an important tool for improving
the identity and self-esteem of those who are socially
disadvantaged. Educated people, regardless of caste
or creed, are capable of contributing to national
development in a variety of ways. They are able to do
so because of their knowledge and intellectual
resources. According to De (2002), it is third-world
education that demands extra care and attention.
Swami Vivekananda arrived at the root of the
country’s current degeneration after travelling
throughout the country as a “Paribrajka” and
witnessing the masses abysmal poverty. The only
thing that can be done for our underprivileged
classes is to provide them with knowledge so that
they can reclaim their lost identity. Though large
claims of their elevation in society are made in Dalit
literature, life has remained the same for them for
generations. That’s why they are enraged at their
dictators. Daya Pawar’s poetry reflects such rage.

Elements of resistance and struggle are
clearly noticeable in the Branded (Laxman Gaikwad).
The novel lays before us the desire to remove
poverty from Uchalya community as it makes Laxman
Gaikwad restless. It is absolute poverty that has
impelled the downtrodden like the author to raise his
voice against discrimination and trouble. He wrote a
letter to Indira-Gandhi the then Prime Minister,
“Mahatma Gandhi did not wear clothes so that the
poor would be benefitted, they would get clothes
when Gandhi ji’s dream going to be fulfilled? Please



take steps to see that the poor get one square meal a day at least" (79). Gaikwad's (Dalit) struggle to poverty is symbolised by the occurrence of drafting a letter to the Prime Minister. Nothing however, came of it.

We must not overlook Ambedkar's role in this regard, as he continued to fight for Dalit rights till his death. His contribution, which he made with his great pen, cannot be overlooked. He employed a variety of strategies to achieve this goal. In the religious realm, he initially urged Dalit brothers and sisters to participate in religious festivals, visit temples, and marry according to Vedic traditions. Following the Mahad Conference in 1927 in Mahad, Bombay, the Mahad Municipal Council designated the Mahad tank a natural rain water, initially exclusive to Dalits but now open to all communities. It was a significant accomplishment that could only be attributed to the ability to resist. In order to show their religious equality with the Caste Hindus, the Untouchables of Maharashtra attempted three "temple entries". In 1927, the temple entrance scheme in Amravati was a failure. The Untouchables attempted to ascend the Parvati Hill in Pune, which was deemed sacred, again in 1929-30, with the help of new reforms. Several volunteers were taken to the hospital after being attacked by caste-Hindus. The Satyagraha at Kala Ram temple in Nasik, however, was the most crucial of these initiatives, since it served as a platform for uniting and mobilising the Untouchables. The satyagraha lasted five years and concluded in 1935. Even now, lower caste individuals are denied admission to several temples, which is a major source of concern. In the following lines by Kisan Fagu Bansode, such opposition is expressed.

Why do you endure curses?

Chokha went into the temple resolutely.

Why do you ashamed, stay far off?

You are the descendants of Chokha.

Why do you fear to enter the temple?

Brace yourself like a wrestler, come,

Together let us conquer pollution (Eleanor 11).

Such an attempt of resistance is made in the Branded. The author says that a lake was constructed in Banjipalli, by Nizan government where Uchalya community was recruited as bonded labourers and was forced to work under the strict watch of police. The author's grandparents resisted against the orders and refrained from working there and settled at somewhere else (5).

Not only person of high status like Ambedkar but also others of low stature wrote about the sufferings and resistance. Dawa Pawar equally shows light to others in his poetry. In "Sanskriti" culture. He wrote:

In hut offer hut, total darkness.

Then the siren went off.

From the fourteen story Damodar

Comes... What's this.... A gleam of light.

What do you say?

They've got a permit for light. (Eleanor 282).

Resistance against Untouchability is necessary for both Dalits and non-Dalits to progress in a country like India, where Untouchability still exists and generates a schism between different communities



based on castes. In his book *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*, Luis Fisher correctly states Untouchability is a form of segregation gone insane. Although it is theoretically an anti-contamination device, it actually contaminates the country that allows it (Kishore 118).

Resisting and struggling against the man-made odds against Dalits is a necessity of the hour. Once Dalits learn to resist, their situation will begin to improve. Furthermore, no rule will be able to change the thinking of caste-ridden Indians until the high caste people demonstrate the willpower to do so. On the 4th of October 2001, a report on Untouchability was published in Amar Ujala (Himachal Pradesh), in which the Governor remarked, "The problem of untouchability cannot be remedied with the help of law alone, as Gandhi ji said, heart reform is also important" (120). We may transform our hearts by treating them with a good attitude rather than a negative one. It will take time for the deep-seated resentment of Dalits among the upper castes to dissipate. However, in order to achieve the desired social position, one must first fight back against the abuse they are given. The writers from the Dalit community do an excellent job in this area of struggle. Many people are serving their communities in this way, and Omprakash Valmika's autobiography *Joothan* is not the only place where he has instilled the spirit of resistance. In his recent literary work, *Amma* and other stories, he makes one such attempt, in which not only male Dalit characters, but also female Dalit characters dare to speak up against indignity and misdemeanours. Upper-caste people's mistreatment and step motherly behaviour are what drives low-caste people to demand justice. It not only

intensifies their suffering and trauma, but it also makes them stand and resist. As the following lyrics from Pralhad Chandwankar's "Empty Advice" show, there comes a point in their lives when humiliation and agony become intolerable, and the resistance packed with better feelings takes the form of a volcanic outburst.

This Country which demands

A pot of blood

For a swallow of water

How can I call it mine

Though it gives the world

The (empty) advice of peace.

And in another poem, "I have become the tide", another rebellious soul sighs:

As the sand soaks up the water at the shore,

So my great sorrow.

How long will it be liked the sand?

How long will it cry out because of its obstinate wish to exit (Pawar 306).

As a result, the major goal of Dalit literature is to liberate Dalits. According to Dr. Nimbale, "I'm progressively becoming to despise dead creatures. Even the flesh of deceased animals disgusts me. This hatred spreads like an epidemic among the youth in my neighbourhood. We pee on the flesh of a dead animal that has no hide. Throw manure or mud" (Kishore 39).

As a result, Dalit literature speaks out against a culture that abuses people inhumanely simply because they are born into a lower caste. This



literature has demonstrated for the Dalit brothers and sisters who can stand tall and speak out about their sufferings. As a result, Dalit literature becomes a voice for the land's suffering people, without whom the country's cohesive fabric is incomplete and will remain so for a long time.

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