

---

## Caste, Class, and Resistance in Contemporary Dalit Literature

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Pankaj, <sup>2</sup>Jayesh, <sup>3</sup>Dr. Anoop

<sup>1</sup>Ph.D in English

Mail id:- 10101994pk@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Ph.D. Scholar, Dept. of English, K. U.

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor

Dept. of English, CRSU, JIND

Haryana, India

---

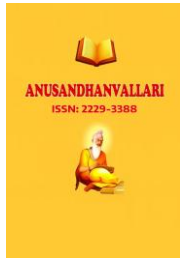
**Abstract:** Developed in modern India, the literature unfolding itself in the form of Dalit-world has proven one of the most productive spheres of social critiques since it challenges the systems of interconnected caste/class along with reflecting the means of struggle. According to lived practice, it is against the Brahminical literature tradition that is centered on self-representations founded on humiliation, the consumption of labor force and other forms of social dejection. Surpassing the echelons of representation, these writings serve as an instrument of political praxis whose end is an educational, agitational and mobilizing purpose as presumed by B. R. Ambedkar. The essay considers how Dalit writers, the variety of genre, many languages and geographical scattering, capture the castism Translation bibliothique uneasy bedfellows of caste and class. The interpretation of these interrelations between autobiographical testimony, oral registers, satire and documentation realism as counter-aesthetics of struggle comes about as the study follows the close reading of such works of Joothan by Omprakash Valmiki, Karukku by Bama, poetry by Namadeo Dhasal, Aaydan by Urmila Pawar, short fiction by Ajay Navaria and Ants Among Elephants by Sujatha Gidla. Such practices counteract normalizing trends of mainstream market and re-imagine the possibilities of solidarity and social transformation. The paper places the literary movement within bigger social-political discourses: of the Dalit Panthers of the 1970s, of the impact of economic liberalization, of urban migrations, and of the digital pamphlets and transnational Dalit movements. It postulates that despite the enhancement of mobility of classes in some corners, caste continues to set the stage in the receipt of resources opportunities and dignity. Dailt literature does not just reflect these continuities but also re-inscribes the worth of literature on the side of truth, immediacy, and political action of writing rather than elitist idea of literary finesse. Lastly, the current study establishes contemporary Dalit writing as tool and weapon in the annals of victimhood and equality rights journey. By examining the points where caste, class, and resistance met, it restates the abiding urgency of such a body of work in the imagination of an anti-caste, socially just future.

**Keywords:** urgency, critiques, bibliothique, contemporary

---

### Introduction

It is impossible to discuss the caste in India, other than questioning one of the most advanced, stability preserved and highly complex forms of societal ranking in human evolution. An engineered rule in the religious scriptures and enshrined as part of everyday undertakings, caste has been the lord of the secret to resources, career and even face. It can not be entertained as a mere dead remnant of the past, but as a dynamic element and an active element, that can shape the contours of the modern day Indian life. Caste is a distinct system of exploitation and marginalization compared to class- the economical ranking of the society. Caste in India is fundamental to the



conception of class, because it so often precedes the class. So dramatic an intercrossing is the most visible in the lives of Dalits, traditionally called untouchable, perennially being subordinate on a two-folded manner: one being through symbolic abasement and another through economic exploitation.

Dalit literature Modern Dalit literature originated in various Indian languages in the post-mid twentieth-century; it is both a document of a minority in India and a weapon of struggle. It interrogates policed speech of the mainstream canon by evading the rift between aesthetics and politics. Not only do such writings chronicle individual suffering, but they river encounters with work, shame, migration, and struggle and therefore literature is a kind of social criticism. Be they the revolutionary essay of Namdeo Dhasal or the autobiographical histories of Omprakash Valmiki, Bama, and Urmila Pawar, Dalit literature spells out what B. R. Ambedkar believed would be the paramount intention of the education and cultural production; to be disruptive of injustice and to organize towards equality.

Such urgency can be attributed to the fact that caste and class explorations in literature have a changed dimension in modern India both socially and economically. Economical liberalization of the 1990s, development of urban informal economies, and the digitalizations of the 21st century altered the material condition of life. However, as it is illustrated again and again in Dalit stories, economic mobility does not mean exchange to the social mobility. Discrimination may still be present in university, offices, in the media, and housing sectors albeit not as much in hospital form as it used to be. Hence, whereas a new open world is at hand, caste is an institutional barrier which prior determines access to the new opportunities.

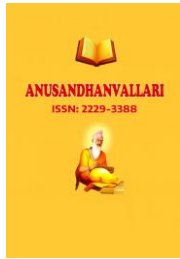
Dalit literature does not refer to this fact through abstract theorization but through experience. Its writers employ a wide variety of forms, some of which are, among others, autobiography, poetry, short fiction, drama and oral narrative that undermine purity of high literary language and favor the colloquial and fragmented forms and para-testimonial. In this way, they free the literary space and introduce the legitimacy of the subaltern voices. Those stylistic choices are not stylistic per se, they are cultural resistance against Brahminical rule in the meter of the language of culture and beauty.

In contemporary Dalit literature the Indian social criticism is continued and allows both category of cast and of classes to fall under the same analytical secular. It presents the areas of interactions of the two systems in the domain of work, education, gender, faith and politics. Still more to the point, it turns literature into the realm of political praxis, and the latter does not only signify oppression but thinks also through liberation. Reading the collection of this work therefore today is not a mere literary exercise but a significant portion of the effort to understand the capabilities and limitations of social justice in modern India.

### **Historical Coordinates: From Panthers to Platformed Voices**

It is characteristic of the 1970s with the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra whose manifesto redefined literature as an agitation and memory as a political strategy. The Panther cultural praxis took place alongside the anti-caste movement, working-class politics and the student movements and formed a counter-public space in which poetry readings, little magazines and street plays helped weaken the hegemony of Brahminism. Some related processes were occurring at the regional level: Tamil Dalit writing was connected to autobiographical testimony; Hindi Dalit literature was extended into experimental fiction; Telugu and Malayalam writers used reportage and oral histories and Punjabi and Kannada writers re-contextualised Dalit experience in terms of agricultural and industrial transformation.

When the process of economic liberalization occurred (1990s onward), geographies of the regions and different employment changed, rural impoverishment led to increased migration; serfdom in the city thrived in the form of informalization, and in the form of the NGO-media complex, the NGOs and media resurrected geographies of



development. Such shifts are chronicled in the modern Dalit literature: various work locations, various humiliations and various solidarities. The increased availability and visibility of online publication and archives (online magazines, social media platforms, translation collectives) in the 2010s and 2020s opened up the testimonies to reach beyond regional borders, and a transnational solidarity could be built around an Ambedkarite concept.

### **Theoretical Frameworks: Reading Caste with Class**

**Ambedkarite Political Thought:** The ethics of the Dalit literature lies with the criticism of graded inequality put forward by Dr B. R. Ambedkar. By making a distinction between caste and straightforward economic stratification, between the closeness of respects to that in ritual authority and the institution of endogamy and social closure, Ambedkar does find it. This criticism has been generalised to general humiliations and systematic violence in the modern literature.

**The Marxian and Neo-Marxian approaches:** In contrast, classical Marxism has focused attention on relations of production whereas, in Dalit discourses, class is said to be cast in India but only under the condition of the re-theorization of class incorporating a discourse of not only class in the context of ritual status and social reproduction. Labor treatment, differences in salaries and occupation stigmatization present a segregation tinted society in terms of social layers.

**Bourdieu and Capital of Signs:** Brahminical canon is crony capital of gusto and price. Dalit writing challenges such hierarchy by redesigning the very definition of literacy by elevating colloquial language, diction of speech, and interrogative prosody in text.

**Intersectionality And Dalit Feminisms:** This argument against the separation of gender and caste had its reflection in the memoirs and fictions of Dalit women who insisted on showing that the body is an intersection of patriarchy and caste authority. These texts complicate masculinist explanations of Dalit resistance and cast a spotlight on care, the work of reproduction and sexual attacks.

**Postcolonial, Subaltern Turns.** The Dalit literature displaces the loci of subaltern studies-its axis mundi by returning to the caste as constitutive axes of modernity of state nation that simultaneously interrogates the limits of elite intercession and upsurge of voice.

### **Testimony, Lyric, Fragment, and File: Genres of Resistance**

There is thematic and formal resistance in Dalit literature.

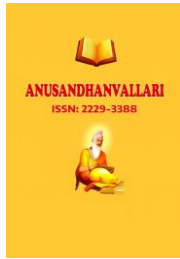
**1.Political Theory as Autobiography/Memoir:** Representing life-writing challenges this invisibilization of Dalit experience. The binding together of family, village, and movement history presented as the narrative I is collective.

**2.Poetry and Street, Shock:** Collage, profanity and urban slang violate decorum to shock a complacent population back into the right to be angry.

**3.Short Story as Laboratory:** The short form shrinks caste micro-aggression down to stinging vignettes, decimating liberal hypocrisies in colleges, workplaces, and suburbs of middle-class life.

**4.Documentary Realism, and the File:** Bureaucracy and slow violence of the state are criticized through repurposed lists, petitions, complaints, and officialese as the literary devices.

**5.Translation into Politics:** Translating not only linguistically transports something but is a political action that broadens the Dalit archive and makes across-regional solidarities and comparative critique possible.



---

## Close Readings

### Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (Hindi)

In his memoir, Valmiki sets the issue of caste as a pedagogy of humiliation: the child disciplines his/her own body in the eyes of the upper-caste neighbours, peers, and employers in school and at work. Food Joothan the remains disposed of on the untouchable the leftovers can be considered a master trope of social abjection and aspiration. Class becomes the wage relation which cannot wash away stigma: even with the rise of the family income to a more respectable level, access to dignity is denied by ritual pollution. The bleak forthrightness of the prose is something of a formal ethics of its own--in refusing metaphor when it is a book of account in which facts cut deeper.

**Resistance:** It happens that education has the face of a two-edged sword; a ladder to heaven, a place of exclusion. The literary-political awareness that culminates the memoir traces Ambedkarite self-fashioning: reading has become the counter-ritual by which taint is cancelled.

### Bama's *Karukku* (Tamil)

Bama provides a specially Dalit Christian feminist outlook in her autobiography. Bulwarks of caste hierarchy, the convent and church are anything but refuge. The title itself, which means karukku (serrated leaves/palm fronds) gives an image of a cutting breath-like book-. jagged, rhythmical, oral. The story juxtaposes vignettes, proverbs and songs of Tamil Dalit life-worlds in an innovative prose language unwilling to accept the prestige of standard Tamil.

**Caste Articulation:** Agricultural day-labor and domestic servitude are caste; wage work does not provide any dignity as the bosses control body contact, speech, and physical proximity.

**Resistance:** This leaving the convent is not just a personal liberation but an indictment of the collusion of the institution, pre figuring the Dalit feminist groups to demand spiritual and material justice.

### Poems (Marathi) Namdeo Dhasal

In early production Dhasal blows up the lyric: brothel streets, butchers, and city wastes turn into topography of poems. He writes the excremental underside of the city, against sanitized nationalism, upon which the middle-class lives in comfort, through Dalit labour.

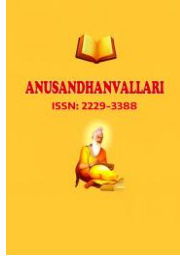
**Form and Politics:** The grotesque, the obscene, the surreal are turned into counter-aesthetics. The poems on Dhasal would not allow any lifting up of suffering into metaphysics; they want the body as battlefield, banner.

**Caste-Class:** The urban proletariat of the poem is caste-marked: sanitation workers, butchers, porters-to see that the stratification in the city classes goes according to ratification.

### Urmila Pawar's *Aaydan* (*The Weave of My Life*, Marathi)

Pawar also combines the craft of storytelling and the craft of domesticity (basket weaving) and the labor of women is a metaphor and a technique. In the memoir, education, self-help groups and women organizations facilitate mobility although patriarchal rules of caste are still followed in marriage markets and politics in the community.

The text exemplifies the weaving as feminist epistemology- the knowledge created in kitchens, meetings and factories. This negates histories of the movement of the androcentric and presents an alternative account of Ambedkarite politics as care and as coalition.



---

### Short Fiction (Hindi) Ajay Navaria

The stories of Navaria dissect contemporary institutions, universities, publishing houses, corporate offices, where caste evolves into encoded prohibitions: surnames, addresses, networks and merit. Merit appears as a ritualized purity that sieves jobs, conferences and prizes.

Form: Irony and twist finishing showing liberal self-image. The “modernized” city turns into a caste laboratory where anonymity does offer liberty but, in a new twist, leaves people with new surveillance.

### Ants Among Elephants (English) by Sujatha Gidla

The family history put together by Gidla sews together missionary schooling, communist printing, and castebigotry in Andhra-Telangana. This is revealed in the story where left movements tended to under-theorize caste and Dalit Christians experience multiple exclusions.

CasteRevolutionary networks can provide a source of solidarity, but revolutionary leadership may be caste privileged. The book ambivalences class-reductionist modes of explanation, and insists on the need to develop an Ambedkarite analytics of the left.

### Labor, Body, and Space: Materiality of Untouchability

#### Dalit text indexes the material structures of caste:

**Employment:** As in leather tanning, sanitation, agricultural bondage, construction and domestic service continue to recur in working-class lives, fresh lines are added to the picture (call centers, delivery platforms, higher education). The stigma of an occupation is applied to bodies not activities; any mobility does not erase the pollution.

**Body:** Eating, menstruation, childbirth, sexuality and touch are policed. The body itself is the burden to bear shame, the literature transforms this body into the witness and the arm.

**Space:** Also as series when hamlets are segregated, when wells are separate, when there are kitchen thresholds, office seating plans, hostel allocations, algorithmic delivery zones, etc., they are already serialized when they are cartographies of exclusion.

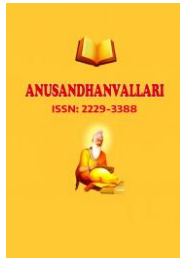
**Violence:** the daily humiliations (slurs, segregation) result in spectacular violence- honor killings, atrocities, evictions. Banal and brutality are archived in texts, which insist that the small is structural.

#### Dalit Feminist Interventions: Voice, Weakness and Power

The reconstitution of resistance through reproduction labor, kinship, and sexual violence takes place in contemporary Dalit woman writing (Bama, Pawar, Baby Kamble, P. Sivakami, Meena Kandasamy, and others). Dalit public spheres are criticized in these works regarding patriarchal bias and criticize caste-blindness in savarna feminism. The memoir and the lyric are places where one tells the abortion stigma, harassment at the workplace and in universities, and the politics of desire. More importantly, they conceptualize care-feeding, cleaning, healing- as not essentialized and normalised female work, but instead as political work that needs redistribution and recognition.

#### Aesthetics against the Canon: Toward a Dalit Poetics

**Language:** Colloquial idiom, dialect and street registers all oppose the Sanskritized prestige. Rejection of the polite language is unforgetting ethics.



---

**Form:** Non-linearity, montage and fragmentation resemble lives disturbed by caste violence and bureaucratic delays. Lists, FIRs, petitions and affidavits go literary.

**Genre:** The testimonial neutralizes the line of demarcation between the literature, sociology and law. Pamphlet and manifesto have been raided by poetry; reportage and oral history by fiction.

**Affect:** Anger, disgust, and satire, are not excess, but forged affects that wrest control of the moral discourse off of Brahminical ideas of propriety and sparse restraint.

**Audience: Address:** Playing back and forth between intra-communal solidarity and inter-caste indictment, the address throws readers into the space of complicity, and cannot be consumed as aesthetic capital.

### **University, Media, Market: New Sites of Contestation**

Whereas the village and the agricultural work place has traditionally been the major places of cast oppression, the modern times has changed much of such struggles to the metropolis and the institutions. Colleges, the media and the literary marketplace have taken the form of important venues in which caste discrimination is being recycled as well as reinforced.

#### **Universities**

Enrolment in higher education institutions especially after the introduction of reservation policies has been gaining steady proportion in the Dalit population. Yet, Dalit writings and testimonies show that these spaces can recreate caste hierarchies in subtle ways, with biased viva voices, excessive drop-out rates, denial of informal networks between faculty and students as well as harassment in the name of academic assessment. Dalit activists, intellectuals, writers, raise their voice to identify how the university turns into a caste coded space in which merit is weaponized against affirmative action and the caste prejudice is repackaged as an expression of the concern with standards.

#### **Media**

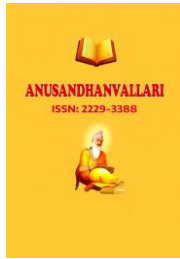
There is a dual role of the media, i.e., the traditional and the digital one. On the one hand, Dalit voices have never had such opportunities to engage in self-publishing and distributing their work through blogs, YouTube channels, podcasts and other commons news portals. Conversely, mainstream media continues to homogenize the voices of the Dalits by giving little to no place in general news coverage and representing atrocities of caste as regional disputes or outright denying that the victim was Dalit at all. There is unfair representation still in editorial teams i.e., the news agendas, covering the culture, and even literary reviews are still biased toward the upper caste viewpoints.

#### **Market**

The literary marketplace in terms of festivals, anthologies, publishing houses and prizes, has started to promote Dalit writing, with more representativeness. But, political contents may be thinned down by market logics with preference to the works which are acceptable to liberal Indian upper-caste audiences. As a result, Dalit-publishing houses, translation collectives and online magazines have sprung up or taken their own stands: building their own canons and establishing their editorial independence. These technologies are not subject to commodification as they focus on political integrity, regional variety and language authenticity.

Along with the market and media, universities themselves have been something of a boundary and a battle field on which modern Dalit writing has both struggled against established caste-class power and tests against alternative forms of cultural production and consumption.





---

### Translation Politics: Risk, Reward and Circulation

Translation has given Dalit voice but certain questions arise; Who is the translator and to whom? Does translation soothe the bumps of speech and straining to adapt to metropolitan taste? Good translators (e.g., Lakshmi Holmström, for Karukku; Jerry Pinto, for Baluta) demonstrate that a sensitive use of paratexts can maintain context and rhythm: strong introductions, glossaries and notes. Nevertheless, the politics of translation- profits, fees, not to mention festivals- determines which books move at the risk of commodifying a Dalit canon that overshadows more radical or area-specific texts. Such domestication is becoming guarded against by Dalit critics and translators.

### Law, Policy, and the Limits of Recognition

Atrocity prevention acts, reservation policies and the manual scavenging prohibition have also been significant in terms of legal frameworks. Despite this, contemporary literature tends to dramatise that distance between law-on-paper and lives-on-ground: thinned-out cases, uncooperative plaintiffs, bureaucratic indifference, and social dangers of making complaints. Texts frequently dramatize the petition and FIR as episodes of narration that discloses the rituals of the state: queues with no end, inaccessible files, demands of evidence of suffering. Through literature, a mirror court of record is therefore created.

### Towards Comparative Horizons Dalit, Black, Indigenous, Global South

Recent criticism and writing situates Dalit experience in conversation with literatures by Black and Indigenous people and other marginalized groups. Compared with themes (segregated neighbourhoods, police violence, stigmatized labor, and cultural appropriation), comparative thinking can occur and avoid a collapse of historical specificities. This form of cross-movement reading produces novel critical vocabularies: the ethics of abolitionism re-conceptualise caste apartheid; decolonial thinking questions Sanskritic and colonial archives in juxtaposition; solidarity poems, essays and translations, crucial in the weaving of transnational paths of opposition.

### Pedagogies of Freedom: Reading as Organizing

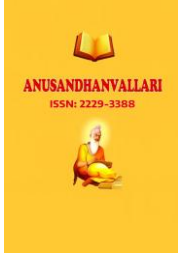
According to Ambedkar, in Ambedkarite idiom education is agitation. Modern Dalit literature serves as movement pedagogy: novels and memoirs can be read in study circles; poems are recited at the rallies; short stories can be used to inoculate classroom debate. These syllabi focusing on Dalit texts instead of tokenizing them also provide a model of a pedagogy of unlearning: challenging Savarna comfort, historicizing the nation-state and elevating Dalit women as leaders. More importantly, pedagogy also implies infrastructures, such as libraries in bastis, open-access archives, translations into school-level readers, so that literature is circulated where it is most needed.

### Conclusion

Contemporary Dalit writing is not a subcategory of the dominant sub-genre-identity writing but a significant movement that can redefine the boundaries of what literature could do-record, indict and imagine. Dalit writers increase the scope of Indian and world literature by making caste-class articulation perceptible on the body, in the workplace, and the street; by creating forms that would deny respectability; and by demanding feminist, Ambedkarite, and transnational solidarities. On their pages, resistance does not mean a reaction to atrocity outside the domain of the everyday, but rather it is the everyday practice of living in another way: of reading as a writing against, of speaking as a practice of solidarity, of remembering as a politics of method, and of forms as forms of action. An anti-caste future does not just happen in narration, but rather is rehearsed itself in the very stitching of these writings.

### Works Cited :

- [1] Ambedkar, B. R. *Annihilation of Caste*. 1936.



- 
- [2] Bama. *Karukku*. 1992; trans. Lakshmi Holmström (revised ed.).
- [3] Dhasal, Namdeo. *Golpitha* and selected poems.
- [4] Gidla, Sujatha. *Ants Among Elephants: An Untouchable Family and the Making of Modern India*. 2017.
- [5] Guru, Gopal & Sundar Sarukkai. *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory*. 2012.
- [6] Ilaiah Shepherd, Kancha. *Why I Am Not a Hindu*. 1996.
- [7] Jaffrelot, Christophe. *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India*. 2003.
- [8] Kamble, Baby. *The Prisons We Broke*. (Marathi original; English trans.).
- [9] Kandasamy, Meena. *The Gypsy Goddess; Ms Militancy*; essays and poems.
- [10] Limbale, Sharan Kumar. *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies, and Considerations*. 2004 (English trans.).
- [11] Navaria, Ajay. *Unclaimed Territory* (short stories; trans.).
- [12] Pawar, Urmila. *Aaydan (The Weave of My Life)*. (Marathi; English trans.).
- [13] Phule, Jotirao. *Gulamgiri (Slavery)*. 1873.
- [14] Rao, Anupama. *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India*. 2009.
- [15] Teltumbde, Anand. *Republic of Caste*. 2018.
- [16] Valmiki, Omprakash. *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*. 1997 (Hindi; English trans.).
- [17] Yashica Dutt. *Coming Out as Dalit*. 2019.