CHAPTER 6

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The mainstream writer’s thousands of books present the life and culture to which they familiar and belong. They have presented imagination, romances, mysticism, beauty of nature, philosophy and so on. So they have established criteria to evaluate their literature on the basis of pleasure and beauty. The mainstream literature is following Sanskrit and English aesthetics of beauty and pleasure. Therefore, upper caste writings present ‘Satyam (truth), Shivam (goodness) and Sundaram (beauty)’ (Trivedi. Literature. 6) and ‘Art for Art’s sake’ in their writings. Their writings move around art and beauty. Thus, mainstream writers evaluate literature on the basis of beauty and pleasure. Under the impression of these aesthetics, the upper caste writers have depicted reality which is dominated by imagination.

Dalit writers have presented faithfully Dalit life, Dalit milieu, and Dalit culture in their writings. Human being and humanity is the base of Dalit literature. The Dalit writings are dominated by realism. Society and surroundings come first then individual in Dalit writings. So, Dalit writers and critics have presented rational and sociological aesthetics for Dalit literature. It is because the foundation of Dalit literature is entirely different from the mainstream literature. Because of this reason the mainstream writers cannot judge genuinely the Dalit literature and Dalit aesthetics.
Dalit literature and aesthetics are unique. They have different taste than that of mainstream literature. So, aesthetics of mainstream literature cannot apply to the Dalit literature; just as Dalit aesthetics cannot apply to the mainstream literature. This is the chief reason that Sharankumar Limbale, Arjun Dangle, Omvedt Gail, Om Prakash Valmiki, Harish Mangalam, and other Dalit writers, critics and scholars have rejected the aesthetics of the mainstream literature. These Dalit literati elites have presented new rational and socio-cultural based aesthetics for Dalit literature. The Dalit writers and critics have depicted their rational facts to justify Dalit aesthetics. According to Sharankumar Limbale, the scholar Dalit writer and critic:

Equality, freedom, justice and love are the basic sentiments of people and society. They are many times more important than pleasure and beauty.

There has never been a revolution in the world for the sake of pleasure and beauty. Many governments have been overturned for equality, freedom and justice. This is history. . . The literature that promotes equality, freedom and justice is revolutionary, and emphasizes the centrality of the human being and society. (Towards 119)

Dalit writers and critics firmly and strongly deny Dalit literature to be evaluated by the aesthetics criteria of the mainstream literature. Sharankumar Limbale has rationally presented his viewpoint for denial of aesthetics of mainstream literature for evaluation of Dalit literature:
Dalit literature is a new literary stream of the post-independent period. Not only it is new, its form and purpose too are different from those of savarna Marathi literature. Therefore, it cannot be appraised using traditional aesthetics. (*Towards* 115)

Sharankumar Limbale has presented aesthetics of Dalit writings in his critical work *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies, and Considerations*. They are: Materialistic Aesthetics: ‘Dalit literature rejects spiritualism and abstraction, its aesthetics is materialist rather than spiritualist.’ (*Towards* 116) And Ambedkarite Thought: ‘Values of equality, freedom, justice and solidarity are inherent to this [Dalit] literature.’ (*Towards* 120)

It is absolutely right that Dalit literature has its own features which are quite different than that of the mainstream literature. Similarly, Dalit aesthetics also differs from the mainstream literature. Sharatchandra Muktibodh has presented the unique characteristics of Dalit literature and aesthetics in his essay *What is Dalit Literature?* He has carefully explained the distinctive elements of Dalit aesthetics and Dalit literature in it:

Dalit literature is the literature produced by the Dalit consciousness. Human freedom is the inspiration behind it. . . As Dalit sensibility seeks to bring about compatible changes in the social consciousness, it is rebellious as well as fundamentally optimistic and revolutionary.
The nature of Dalit consciousness is obviously not subjective. . . .the sufferings of the Dalits are common and are attributable to common reasons. Hence their content is essentially social.

. . . The Dalit sensibility show . . . an outstanding work of Dalit literature would be born only when Dalit life would present itself from the Dalit point of view. (Muktibodh 267)

Arjun Dangle, a well-known Marathi Dalit writer, has remarked about features of Dalit aesthetics in his *Poisoned Bread*, an edited work of Marathi Dalit literature. In it he has presented the elements of Dalit literature. The writer has presented his viewpoint regarding the writings of Dalit and non-Dalit writers. Further, he has tried to explain how Dalit literature and its aesthetics are different from the mainstream literature:

Dalit is not a caste but a realization . . . . It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary.

As a result of this realization, experiences are not simply stated but their meaning is also explained. . . .

The difference between the two kinds of writers (Dalit and non-Dalit writers) is not just because of their castes but also due to differing experiences and their ways of interpreting them. (Dangle 264-65)
The orthodox Hindus have looked upon Dalits with disgust and hatred. So they do not overcome of their superior complex being upper castes. As a result they cannot consider literature written by Dalits as worthy for reading. According to shallow-minded upper castes, Dalit literature does not fulfil the aesthetics criteria of mainstream literature. The basic difference one can notice in the literature of the non-Dalit writers and the Dalit writers is that the first presents the romantic view of the life and the later realistic view of the life. Arjun Dangle in his article Dalit Literature: Past, Present and Future, has noted that ‘this literature of the Dalits is intimately related to social reality and is not imaginary or entertainment-oriented.’ (Dangle 255) Similarly, in an interview Harish Mangalam, a Dalit writer and a critic remarks:

Non-Dalit writers describe the beloved’s cheeks by comparing them with roses and liken the beloved’s lips to rose petals. (Trivedi Tongues 161)

Further he said that unlike the non-Dalit writers’ imaginative concept of beauty, the Dalit writers present it with realistic approach:

The beloved’s cheeks were like hardened lumps of jaggery and her lips were like wrinkled black clay. (Trivedi Tongues 161-62)

The non-Dalit writers use imagination to present beauty of beloved. Unlike, the mainstream writers, the Dalit writers use reality to present beauty of beloved. Daya Pawar, a famous
Marathi Dalit writer has criticised the indifferent mentality of the non-Dalits. Remark of Pawar is quoted by Sharankumar Limbale in his critical work:

Our entire society is not on the same cultural level. Due to the mentality formed by different cultural categories, caste system and customs in society, social life and world-views were divided. Because of the pressure of false morality, even the process of tasting a literary creation did not remain uncontaminated. (Towards 100)

The indifferent attitudes of the upper caste writers are because of their superiority complex. They cannot bring themselves to the level of Dalit writers because to be inferior is alien to them. Further, to bring themselves to the low level is below their dignity. Hence, they observe and judge Dalit writings with a viewpoint of upper caste mentality. As a result, they cannot justify Dalit literature and Dalit aesthetics.

Since ancient time to the second half of the 20th century the history of mainstream Indian literature has not presented any thing serious about Dalits’ issues or Dalits’ world. Thus, the mainstream literature is the literature of non-Dalits. It presents everything about the non-Dalits; and from the viewpoint of the non-Dalits. A few glimpses are found superficially when the upper caste literary writers have presented Dalits in their literary works. In an interview, Bama, a well-known Dalit writer has said, ‘. . . other writers have always looked down upon us. They have written about us as good for nothing . . .’ (Sankaranarayanan, S. An
So the mainstream writers’ presentation of Dalits and their issues in their literary works are good for nothing:

Indian literary history and theory, as well as the teaching of the Indian literatures, are spectacularly silent about Dalit literature. Yet, Dalit cultural and critical productions make a significant critical intervention in the thinking and writing about Indian society, history, culture and literature. (Mukherjee A. Towards 1)

Arun Prabha Mukherjee, a critic and the translator of Om Prakash Valmiki’s Joothan: A Dalit’s Life also presented her view that how the presentation of Dalit characters are passive in the hands of upper caste writers and alive in the hands of the Dalit writers. She has criticised Dalit’s meek presentation by the non-Dalits in ‘A Note by the Translator’ in the autobiography Joothan:

My Hindi literature school textbook included a poem by Siaramsharan Gupt. This poem, entitled ‘Achut ki Aah’ (The Sigh of an Untouchable), narrated the sad story of an untouchable denied entry into a temple and how it broke his heart. Such portrayals of Dalits as mute and pathetic characters, unable to act or speak about their oppression, are characteristic of high caste Indian writers. . . Booker prize winner Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things or Rohinton Mistry’s A Fine Balance are also written in this
appropriative voice, a voice that contains, rather than expresses, Dalit experience. (ix)

As it is known fact that Dr. Ambedkar struggled till his last breaths for the unity, equality, identity, fraternity, and liberty of all Indians including women and Dalits. To acquire the identity of Dalits, he had studied India’s past which was written in the sacred texts of the Hindus. Dr. Ambedkar through his critical assessment of Hindu religion, Hindu mythology, classical and sacred literary texts of Hindus, and Indian history brought great awareness among Dalits. As a result, Dalit literary writers have presented their own life, culture, existence and struggle which are not presented before world yet. By presenting firsthand experiences of being Dalit, the Dalit writers have jolted the non-Dalits on one hand and presented the world a new literature called ‘Dalit Literature’, on the other. In the introduction of Poisoned Bread, Arjun Dangle, the Marathi Dalit writer, editor, and activist states:

It is no coincident that the Dalit literary movement began in Maharashtra, the birthplace of Dr. Ambedkar’s movement. His revolutionary ideas stirred into action all the Dalits of Maharashtra and gave them a new self-respect. Dalit literature is noting but the literary expression of this awareness. (xi)

The Dalit writers gave vivid self-experienced expressions of sufferings, humiliation, pains, agonies, trauma, miseries, poverty, atrocities etc. into their own writings. At the same
time, by their literary creations they wish to bring the total change in society i.e., equality in social, political, and economic fields. Moreover, the Dalit writers ask and dream for the casteless egalitarian society in their writings. According to Arjun Dangle, Dalit literature is different than that of the non-Dalits’. He, in the introduction of Poisoned Bread writes:

Dalit literature is marked by revolt and negativism, since it is closely associated with the hopes for freedom of a group of people who, as untouchables, are victims of social, economic and cultural inequality. (xi)

The gulf between the Dalits and non-Dalits, since the ancient time, has been widened so long by the non-Dalits that it is almost impossible to present an authentic portrayal of the Dalit world by the mainstream writers. Here, the selected examples are considered which highlight how the Dalit aesthetics applied by Dalit writers.

Arjun Dangle’s poem Revolution presents the cruel attitudes of the orthodox Hindus towards the Dalits. The poem presents inner anguish of the poet. It also shows that how Dalits are pushed to periphery of social system. Thus, orthodox Hindus in general and Brahmins in particular have committed a hideous sin against humanity. The poem begins with the worst inhuman conditions of Dalits. As a matter of fact the worst than animal conditions of Dalits were imposed on them by the orthodox Hindus. The pathetic conditions of Dalits presented in the poem are a satire on orthodox Hindus in general and orthodox Brahmins in particular:
We used to be their friends

when, clay pots hung from our necks,

brooms tied to our rumps,

we made our rounds through the Upper Lane
calling “Ma-bap, Johar, Ma-bap” (1-5, Dangle 43)

In the poem, the poet has presented the sense of revolt towards the inhuman and irrational practices of the orthodox Hindus. The shallow-minded Hindus do not prefer the revolt of Dalits. Rather they try to prevent the revolt by every possible means. Thus, what the Dalit poet has felt and presented can never be felt nor be written by the non-Dalit writers:

“Shout victory to the Revolution”

“Shout victory”

“Burn, burn those who strike at tradition.” (18-20, Dangle. Revolution, 43-44)

The poem undoubtedly presents the burning volcano inside the Dalits’ psyche. Dalits are conscious enough of the meanness of the orthodox Hindus. Because of Dalits’ awareness, shallow-minded upper castes are afraid of their tortures and atrocities. They are afraid because time has come for them to pay back. At the same time, Dalits are ready for their victorious attempts to teach the non-Dalits the values of humanity.
The non-Dalit writers can present Dalits and Dalits’ world, but not as authentic as by the Dalit writers. As a result, Dalits are not satisfied with the literature of the mainstream writers. It is because the mainstream literature presents the picture of the non-Dalits’ world. In the mainstream literature, the real world of the Dalits with their centuries old pains, humiliations, agonies, traumas, miseries, atrocities, alienation, sufferings etc. have not ever been justified. What the best the mainstream authors can do is to feel pity and sympathy. Further, they can offer some minor changes within the existing unequal framework of Indian caste-system. So, Dalits want representation of the real world of theirs in the literature. And it is one of the desires which have given birth to the Dalit literature. In an interview Harish Mangalam, a Gujarati Dalit writer has aptly defined the taste of the Dalit writings:

The exploited and oppressed community is at the centre of all Dalit literature. . . . Dalit literature is expressive of the plight of the downtrodden. It is therefore natural that a writer from a Dalit background will recreate his experiences in his works. (Trivedi *Tongues* 160)

Dalit folks and life are not justified in mainstream literature. So Dalit writers have presented themselves, their culture, community and life the way they are. As a result a new kind of literature known as the “Dalit Literature” comes into existence. The aim of Dalit writers is to expose the Dalit world which is neglected in mainstream society:

The view of life conveyed in Dalit literature is different from the world of experience expressed hitherto. A new world, a new society and a new human
being have been revealed in literature, for the first time. The reality of Dalit literature is distinct, and so is the language of this reality. (Limbale *Towards*. 33)

Language is also distinctly used in the writings by the Dalit writers. The Dalit writers use regional vernaculars to present Dalit life and Dalit world. Over all, the purpose of the Dalit literature is to give voice to a culture that had been silenced for centuries.

The Dalit writers portray the real pictures of the milieu in which they live. Their own language, culture, and life are fully narrated authentically by the Dalit writers. The realistic depiction of the wrongs which are happening right before their eyes on them and on their community gives it a touch of realism. The soul of Dalit literature is ‘Dalit life’. This very concept is rightly observed by Ajit Thakor:

Dalit fiction differs from mainstream fiction from thematic point of view; Dalit fiction gives voice to untouchability, rebellion, anger and anguish which are characteristic of Dalit life. (Trivedi *Tongues* 182-83)

The above mentioned definitions and notions for the Dalit literature are seen in most of all Dalit literary creation. One of the examples of it is presented in the form of Hindi Dalit short story by Omprakash Valmiki, a scholar and versatile Hindi Dalit writer. A sense of struggle and never to bow down at the cost of dignity and self respect are clearly mentioned
in the short story *Amma* by Omprakash Valmiki. It is translated into English from Hindi by R. K. Shukla.

The short story *Amma* presents the protest of the Dalit woman Amma against the sexual advancement of the upper caste Vinod, a lover of Mrs. Chopra in whose house Amma used to do house hold work. Vinod’s relationship with Mrs. Chopra is illicit. One day Amma, just like routine, goes to Mrs. Chopra’s house for work. Vinod is sitting there in the bedroom and Mrs. Chopra is washing her hair in bathroom. At that time, Vinod tries to harass sexually Amma but she is strong enough to teach him a lesson of lifetime by beating him with broom. This shows that Dalit woman is not an object or toy for sexual exploitation of the non-Dalits. Besides, it also presents that if non-Dalits think of Dalit women as an instrument of sexual enjoyment, they must think twice; because the Dalit women know how to answer of such thinking and acts of the non-Dalits. It is presented thus in the story:

. . . . Vinod slipped his hand round her waist and pulled her to himself with a jerk. . . . She shouted: ‘What are you doing? . . . Let me go.’ And she tried to wrest herself free from his grip.

. . . . she jerked herself free. . . . She struck at his temple with full force. . . . Amma still kept on hitting him relentlessly. A stream of abuses burst forth from her mouth.

‘Stop it . . . what are you doing? . . . stop it . . . don’t hit him . . . ’ Mrs. Chopra tried to snatch the broom away from her hands. . . . she said: ‘Bhainji, tell this bastard that not every woman is a slut.’ (Valmiki *Amma* 167-68)
Misery of the working class Dalit woman is realistically depicted in the story. Her family’s poor condition is also realistically presented. The central character Amma, a Dalit woman has three children Shivcharan, Bisan and Kiran. Her experiences of life have made it clear that if the Dalits want to live a respectful life then they must have education. And only education can give them sound economic position. At the same time, it also gives strength to fight back against the atrocities and humiliations. She always advises all of them to have education so that they could live a better life and free themselves from the clutches of the poverty and misery. Says, Amma:

‘I have got tired of telling you. . . Get a bit of education so that you may be a peon in an office, if not a clerk. . . We’re up to the neck in debt. . . There is never a spell of peace anywhere, either inside the house or outside: the same miserable, harrowing routine everyday. That is how life goes–no one even lets you sit near him as if they will catch a contagious disease.’ (Valmiki Amma 169)

By presenting the realistic picture of the Dalit sensibility and their inhuman conditions which have been shaped for them since the ages by the non-Dalits, the Dalit literature wants to add a new vision to the world literature. In his article Gujarati Dalit Poetry Pathik Parmar has quoted the notion of Harish Mangalam. “The fragrance of humanity is the root of the Dalit literature. It is the story of ordinary human beings. There is the fresh air of natural world.” (Parmar P. 144-45)
Reality is always at the centre of narration of the Dalit writers. Thus, authentic scenario of Dalit life, community, and culture is found in Dalit writers’ works. The pain of being the Dalit is common to the Dalit literature. Poverty is a marked characteristic of the Dalit literature. In the poem *Cinema Poster* of Shibu C. M., a Malayalam Dalit poet this marked element of poverty and pain of the Dalits are aptly, realistically, and authentically presented. A touch of mild satire is adding the taste to the poem. The poem is translated into English form Malayalam by Dr. Manoj S.:

We just don’t care!

We have been living-

Amidst pointed fingers all the while.

This is the only blame-

Because there are no windows

We use you as a cover. (8-13, M. Shibu 345)

The main agenda of the Dalit literature is to reveal that they are not the ugly creature as have been considered by the orthodox Hindus but the living human beings. At the same time, Dalit writers present that Dalits are not merely satisfied with economic and political equality given to them by the constitution as a reward of sufferings of ages but want religious, social, economic and creative equality. It suggests that human being and humanity are more important to the Dalit writings than anything else. The evaluation of the Dalit literature as
interpreted by the Marathi Dalit writer Baburao Bagul has been quoted by Pathik Parmar in the article Gujarati Dalit Poetry; the Marathi Dalit author has depicted:

Dalit literature is the enemy of untouchability and slavery. It has also the enmity against the discrimination and pains. . . That is the genuine Dalit literature, which establishes human being as god, more important than religion and region, strongly condemns caste-Varna, and liberates human being and honours him, dignifies him. (Parmar P. 162)

Non-Dalit writers have certainly presented Dalits but in a mild presentation i.e. sympathetic and piteous. Thus, their concentration is on the wretched inhuman conditions of the Dalits. They never presented Dalits with Ambedkarite ideology. In the hands of mainstream writers, Dalits are noting but tragic lots.

The centuries old pains, traumas, and sufferings, cannot be presented realistically by the non-Dalits in their literature because they are the viewers and doers and not the victims and sufferers. In the short story Kalu Bhangi, Krishan Chander, the mainstream writer has presented the central character in the form of Kalu Bhangi (Dalit). He always requests the author to write a story about him. ‘Chhote Saheb, I am Kalu Bhangi, your faithful servant, your old sweeper. Why can’t you write about me?’ (Chander Kalu 19) But the pity is that his life is quite simple and routine in such a manner that there is nothing interesting the writer finds to write about:
Kalu Bhangi, how can I make a story out of such shoddy stuff? No, I’m sorry, it’s beyond me. Go away. I beg of you with folded hands to get out of my sight. (31)

Thus, no doubt the non-Dalit writer Krishan Chander has written a short story on the life of Kalu Bhangi, the Dalit servant, but he cannot able to capture the essence of the emotional world of the Dalit Kalu.

Likewise in Telugu literature there are two eminent social works that present scenario of the Dalit world. They are Unnava Laxminarayana’s *Malapalli* and Ranga’s *Harijana*. The upper caste writers have depicted in their writings untouchability with the pain and sufferings of the Dalit milieu. They have also presented limited changes in the existed social caste-system. But they do not want to banish such a rigid and irrational caste-system as a whole. These very suggestions of the non-Dalit authors are good for nothing. Such suggested changes by the mainstream authors, according to A. Satyanarayana are not a truly realistic representation of the Dalits’ issues. In his research paper ‘*Dalit Protest Literature in Telugu: A Historical Perspective*’, A. Satyanarayana writes:

In a sense, it was not a truly realistic representation of the dalit question. Therefore, in the writings of the non-dalit scholars the problems of untouchability and caste discrimination were not reflected as serious and fundamental. They advocated minor reforms and adjustments, yet favoured
continuation of the existing unequal social hierarchy. For them the dalit masses became an object of pity and sympathy. (Satyanarayana 82)

Dalits are presented as tragic characters who suffer painfully by the mainstream writers. Similar depiction is found in the novel ‘Outcast’ by Romen Basu, a lesser known fiction writer who ‘set mainly in the Sixties and seventies during the United Front Government’ (Ali 175) His novel ‘Outcast’ ‘is about the evils of caste system not only Brahmins discriminating against the Sudras but the lower castes against one another.’ (Ali 175) Though Basu, in his novel, has presented the scenario of the Dalit community he cannot able to capture the real essence of the Dalit world. Basu, of course, has given a faithful picture of the non-Dalits’ inhuman attitudes towards the Dalits as he himself is belonging to the upper caste. But as far as Dalits are concern he cannot able to reach the bottom of Dalits’ trauma, sufferings and Dalit sensibility.

In the novel, there is a Dalit character Mahanta, a Chandal (one of the Dalit Caste) by caste has mistakenly climbs the temple steps which is forbidden for the Dalits. He is mercilessly beaten and is handed over to the police. But Bibhuti, the orthodox non-Dalit character wanted Mahanta to be beaten again in front of everyone by the police inspector. This very cruel approach is realistically depicted by the words of Bibhuti by the non-Dalit novelist; says, Bibhuti:

We want to see the law-enforcing authority punish the swine in our presence.

(Basu 2)
Ignominy of the Dalits by the non-Dalits is truly portrayed by the upper caste novelist. This distorted ancient behaviour of the orthodox upper caste towards the Dalits is represented through the character of Bibhuti in the following word spoken by him:

If God cared for you, how could you be born a Chandal, an untouchable who burns dead bodies, you son-of-a-bitch. (Basu 2)

To betray fellow Dalit is one of the drawbacks of Dalits. This fact of the Dalits is presented in the novel. By protest and struggle against the orthodox upper caste, the Dalit hero Sambal tries his best to establish the equal society. But his efforts are not realised because of his own Dalit brothers. They betray Sambal and join the non-Dalit zamindar (Landlord):

Sambal suffers because those who he was fighting for, betrayed him as they all in the end join hands with the Zemindars pushing him out. He is thus left where he started a Chandal. (Ali 180)

The novel presents gloom and desolation of the Dalit hero who wants to breathe the air of freedom and equality not only for himself but for his Dalit community.

The upper caste mainstream writers have done a job to highlight the issues and problems of the Dalits but could not arrive at the Dalit aesthetics. Writings of the Dalits life with their problems of untouchability and caste-base discrimination, in the hands of the upper
caste scholars are not reflected seriously and fundamentally. Besides, the non-Dalit writers can merely offer slight reforms and adjustments in general but in particular advocate the continuation of the existing irrational and unequal social system.

The job to give the heart felt pain words; the Dalit writers come forward and formed the new term for their writings: “Dalit Literature”. Raman Vaghela, a Dalit poet, in his poem *Harsh Destiny* gives the most authentic presentation of pain and humiliation:

> A life full of pains we live,

> They kick us putting aside shame,

> Our bleeding wounds they not see.

> Sprinkle salt of humiliation they,

> Saying it is sweeter than honey. (6-10, Vaghela 44)

Dalit writers mainly focus on the oppression, untouchability and the Dalit sensibility in their writings. Pathik Parmar in an article *Gujarati Dalit Poetry*, has depicted Maheshchandra Pandya’s poem ‘*Man Bites*’ which originally is written in Gujarati, titled ‘*Manasa Karade Chhe*’, reveals the pain of injustice that has been done to the Dalits since the ancient times. To present such inhuman attitudes of the orthodox Hindus, the poet has given reference of the ancient victims Ekalavya and Shambuka. The Dalit poet suggests his fellow beings to be aware of these biting kinds of the non-Dalits:
Beware, beware of the human race! Because

Man also bites

A man bites Ekalavya,

A man also bites Shambuka. (Pandya 154)

The ancient characters Ekalavya and Shambuka suffered though they had mastery in their field of archery and knowledge of Vedas respectively by the hands of the orthodox Hindus. The Dalit poet advices Dalits to be aware of such attitudes and practices of upper caste that can damage Dalits on name of religion and teacher’s fee; thus deprive Dalits of their best skills.

There is no exaggeration in saying that only who has suffered the pain can give the faithful presentation of that pain. How the human identity of Dalit is erased by the upper castes; and how they refuse to let retrieve the identity to the Dalits. Such is the pain felt by the Dalits which, authentically can never be expressed by the mainstream authors. This argument is aptly presented in the Dalit Bengali poet Anil Sarkar’s Poetry of the Outcast. It is translated from Bengali into English by Bikach Choudhuri. The Dalit poet writes:

Pangs of birth grill through my whole body

Mother I shiver in pain.

Ever since my birth.
Yet you repeatedly make me feel

I am a price,

Happiness will be mine someday, (1-6, Sarkar 88)

Since ancient to present time Dalits have victimised and robbed off the status of being human. So, the miseries, pains, sufferings, and wounds of the Dalits are centuries-old. Thus, the ages old personal experiences of the Dalits can only be justified truthfully by the Dalit writers. This perspective is aptly observed by Namdeo Dhasal in his collection of poem ‘Golpitha’, which is appropriately worded in Dalit Literature and Dalit Poetry: A Brief Survey. ‘Dalit literature is flowing into the 21st Century mixed with blood, sweat and anger, flowering into greatest poetry that this country is producing now.’ (Paul 63)

The history of pain and suffering is noted authentically in the writings of the Dalit authors. The lyric Let Us Say Now is written by Balachandran Inchakkad, the Dalit Malayalam poet. The poem also presents the broken silence of the Dalits for better, just, and equal ways of living. It is translated in English by S. Sreenivasan:

But from the black people’s woeful songs

Form the throbbing of the earth they have laboured on.

Let us prepare for the birth of the golden
The pain, suffering and misery of Dalits are common in the Dalit literature. Inchakkad has also presented them in the poem. Writes, the poet:

Common ponds and wells, they say, have been polluted
Like evil portents, the shadows have fallen on the Brahmin’s body (19-22, Inchakkad 335)

Besides the sorrow, pain, suffering and misery, the poet has also stated that now Dalits are aware of their dignity. And they do not live anymore like filthy beasts:

No one need waltz here boasting of caste purity.

The bygone filthy days will not be reborn. (35-37, Inchakkad 335)

The Dalit poet has presented sufferings of the Dalits and cruelties committed by the non-Dalits on one hand and on the other, the revolt of the Dalits not to tolerate insult and atrocities. It is an Ambedkarite ideology. The sufferings of the Dalits are ancient-old. The
Dalits are forced to accept the most inhuman, irrational, and the ugliest ways to live their lives. Since ancient-old times the Dalits had meekly and silently suffered out of their inhuman conditions. But this suffering of the past is not allowed by the present Dalits and they are conscious enough of their dignity and rights given to them by the constitution of India. And likewise they are ready to fight with all strength against any kind of humiliations and atrocities.

Although the Dalit writers Valmiki and others were existed during the ancient time, the Dalit literature has made its unavoidable, strong, and powerful appearance in the second half of the twentieth century. “Dalit literature”, as described in *Distinctive Voices of Distress* by D. Padmarani “was not so blatant till 1967, the impetus of it got from Karl Marx, the revolutionary trends from Black literature and the ideas of prominent people like Dr. Ambedkar.” (80)

Dalit literature is in nascent stage in comparison to the mainstream literature. But it represents ancient-old trauma, centuries-old exploitation, ages-old pain, and saga of sufferings of the Dalits. Besides, Dalit literature presents the unexplored world of the Dalits community with their ground realities. Thus, authentic presentation of Dalit culture and Dalit life are exhibited before world which had never been presented.

Historical fact is that the Dalits worked as manual scavengers, cleaning latrines and sewers by hand and clearing away dead animals. So Dalits were commonly banned and isolated from participation in non-Dalit social life. Dalits were forbidden to worship in
temples or draw water from the same wells as non-Dalits. Further, they were forced to live as segregated neighbourhoods outside the village:

The Untouchables have the culture of the Hindu community. They live on the outskirts of a village and not in the midst of it. They are attached to the village but are not a part of the village. An Untouchable must not own and cultivate land and lead an independent life. An Untouchable should not take to such services as would give him an authority and power over caste Hindus.

(Mandal 7)

The Dalits were worse than the worst sufferers throughout past centuries by the non-Dalits. The orthodox Hindus, even, did not want to give the Dalits the status of human. But Dalits are proud of being Dalit. Gujarati Dalit poet Shamat Parmar in his poem *Self-Pride*, presents that why he is proud being a Dalit. He has exposed the upper castes in the poem:

If God...

Has made me a Brahmin

(according to the Varnashrama)

I would have deceived the people

By my appearance and

False chanting of shlokas,
The poet is thankful to God that He has given birth as a Dalit. He has justified his birth as Dalit in the poem. He would have committed sins and crimes if he would have taken birth in different upper castes. But the poet is saved as he is given birth as a Dalit:

Thank... God...

That He made me a Shudra

And liberated me from all these sins.

This why I am proud of myself.... (30-33, Parmar S. 74)

The orthodox Hindu forced Dalit to live in wretched, inhuman, unhygienic, and filthy conditions. When Dalits try to claim life with dignity and equality, they are denied by all possible means. This very attitude of the upper castes, in his book Beyond Hindutva is aptly exposed by S. L. Verma:

On the basis of law of karma, the varna system was translated into a caste hierarchy wherein the majority of the lower strata were subjected to inequality, exploitation and oppression. The metaphysics of Hindu religion became the citadel of caste system which made millions of the lower caste virtual serfs, slaves and sub-humans. (41)
The inhuman practices of the orthodox Hindus since past centuries have been exposed by the Dalit writers in their literary works. The centuries-old dehumanized conditions of the Dalits are given voice by the Dalit and non-Dalit writers and at the same time they tried their best to give Dalit identity in literature. But the Dalit writings by the mainstream writers before 1975 were dominated by the ideology of Gandhi which shows sympathy and pity towards the Dalits. The social reformation of the upper castes has a little modification in existing irrational, unjust, and unequal social caste system. They did not want to forbid such an inhuman social system of caste. They are willing to present the world of the Dalits with pity and sympathy.

*In to the Sun* (1933), a social novel by Frieda H. Das is a fiction of ‘fight against all forms of social injustice towards widows, untouchables or the poor.’(Mehta 116) In this fiction nothing but the Gandhian influence is expressed by the novelist. On one hand novelist has successfully presented Gandhian ideology but got utter failure in the presentation of the Dalits’ world and Dalit sensibility.

The leading character of the novel Rama Devi, a widow, is a Brahmin who under the influence of the spirit of nationalism, becomes the worker of Congress and works as a social activist. She goes to the village Chowdwar where the untouchables live. The novelist has given the exaggerated picture of the non-Dalit’s adaptation of an illegal child of an untouchable widow Moti; who died after given the birth to the child, into the family of Rama Devi. This view is rightly criticised by P. P. Mehta:
Some of the incidents have been exaggerated. For example . . . , there is a touch of exaggeration in the description of the poor conditions of the untouchable village. The last incident of substituting the living untouchable child for the dead Brahmin child is unrealistic. (Mehta 117)

However, a graphical picture of the Indian social milieu of the Dalits is faithfully captured by the author. The novelist ‘has very graphically described the dirty and hopeless condition of the untouchables, with their ignorance, with their superstitions, diseases and uncleanliness.’ (117)

In this way, the literature related to the world of the Dalits is presented only with a sympathetic view and not in a realistic manner. So the literature before 1975 presents a sympathetic touch to the Dalits’ life under the influence of Gandhian ideology. In a genuine sense, this kind of works and their authors are utter failure in the presentation of the exact reality of the Dalits’ world. So the mainstream upper caste writers do not considered as the faithful writers of the Dalits’ world. Pathik Parmar in Gujarati Dalit Poetry, depicts the criticism of Mohan Parmar. In following words these types of writers are criticised in his article: Gujarati Dalit Literature of the 20th Century, by Mohan Parmar:

The literature produced before 1975 based on the Dalits’ life that was created under the influence of Gandhian thoughts. In the code of conduct of Gandhiji, Untouchability and its removal was one issue. The novelists who raised the
issue in their works, it was the part of social evils. These all the writers were not dedicated authors in genuine sense . . . (141)

Thus, it is very true that though the non-Dalit writers have contributed to the Dalit literature, they could never do the justice to the ages-old traumas, pains exploitations, atrocities, sufferings, and alienation of the Dalits.

Krishan Chander, the upper caste writer in the short story *Aunt Isari and Her Debt* has presented the realistic presentation of the orthodox attitude of aunt Isari, the non-Dalit character. The writer could present the realistic irrational behaviour of the orthodox upper caste because he himself belongs to the upper caste. When a non-Dalit aunt Isari mistakenly touches and kisses the Dalit girl Savitri, the daughter of Dalit maid-servant. And for the sake of her purification she takes bath from the sacred water of river Ganga:

Aunt Isari hugged the girl end [and] kissed her on both her cheeks. . .

Aunt Kartaro, . . . said . . . She’s Savitri, the maid-servant’s daughter.”

“Hai, I’m ruined!” Aunt Isari looked agitated. “This girl has polluted me. I shall have to take a Ganga bath. I even kissed her.” Her breath came sharp and short. (Chander *Aunt* 60)

The writer has presented the pain of the Dalit girl Savitri by showing her only shading tears. The author could not give authentic presentation as he has no words to reveal the pain felt by the Dalit Savitri. The writer writes, ‘Puzzled, she looked at Savitri, who on being thus
reporved, had started crying.’ (60) Thus, the non-Dalit authors could not appropriately present the pain, exploitation, trauma and sufferings of the Dalits.

U. R. Anantha Murthy’s novel *Samskara* presents an orthodox non-Dalits’ society in Karnataka of south India. The fiction faithfully presents the extreme orthodoxy of the shallow-minded Brahmins. The novel presents the true picture of socio-religious structure of south India:

This novel is about a village Durvasapura in Karnataka where the brahmin community with its age-old beliefs and traditions exist as a closed society. . . There is a blind adherence to the age-old beliefs and custom in Durvasapura. . . The novel also provides a glimpse of the complex Indian socio-religious system. (Sharma I. 133)

In the novel, there are two non-Dalit protagonists namely Naranappa and Praneshacharya. Both are Madhva Brahmin by caste. Both the characters are living with two different ideologies which clash with each other. Praneshacharya stands for a rigid and orthodox socio-religious system and values. On the other hand, Naranappa is violating the orthodox and rigid traditions. Chandri is a Dalit but very crucial character in the novel. Both the protagonists have been put under the process of change by this Dalit female character. She is by social status and profession a prostitute who is called by non-Dalit men and women as “Mari”, the dark goddess of death, plague etc.
Though Dalit Chandri provides a vital cause to change the existed age-old codes and conducts of the socio-religious structure, her character is superficially presented by the novelist. Thus, the non-Dalit writer has not given exposure to the world of the Dalit Chandri. It is clear that the task of presenting the Dalit life as it is lived by the Dalits is not possible for the mainstream upper caste writers. The novelist centres round the socio-religious structure south India. He cannot justify the inner sentiments of the Dalit world.

Like other mainstream writers, Anantha Murthy has also presented the Gandhian ideology i.e. to reform the society by a few modifications, as far as Dalits are concern; and continue in irrational and inhuman caste system. On the whole, he has criticized the existed socio-religious atmosphere and how it has made the good social and religious way of life into a distorted one. ‘The novel Samskara also shows the futility of the centuries old caste-system in India. The caste-system has eaten into the vitals of Indian society and it has weakened it to the core.’ (137)

The character of Naranappa, a symbol of the changing times, is in favour of new emerging ideas to abolish many social evils: untouchability, rigid casted barriers, spread education. He believes in a materialistic pleasure. Till his death he has not only openly flouted, mocked at and questioned the prescribed ideology and code of conduct for his caste but also exposed the hypocritical and sinful living of the narrow-minded, selfish, greedy, jealous fellow Brahmins:
He lived with a shudra woman Chandri for ten years. He also ate flesh and consumed liquor with his Muslim friends. . . Throughout his life, Naranappa had been a potent threat to the brahmanism of Durvasapura. (131-32)

But, even Naranappa is not doing anything worthwhile in the novel to advocate the issues of the Dalits and nor does he fight for them. Thus, in the hands of the upper caste writers the presentation of the Dalit scenario is nothing but a superficial touch.

Arundhati Roy an upper caste writer won Booker prize for *The God of Small Things* in 1997. The novel presents intense pain and suffering of the Dalits who have been victimised since the ancient time by the orthodox Hindus on one hand and on the other pathetic condition of women in India. Though prohibited in the constitution, untouchability, even at the end of the 20th century it is practiced in India which is brought before the world by the novelist. The hypocrisy of shallow-minded upper castes and Syrian Christina are exposed in the novel. According to Dr. M. B. Gaijan:

Christianity is world wide known for universal “brotherhood and humanism” but here, in this novel Arundhati has described intense cross caste conflict, . . . its between Syrian Christian and Untouchable. It shows that untouchables are not only suffering and torturing from Hindus but also other religious communities in this democratic India. Thus untouchables are sandwiched between the Hindu majority and other religious minority. (*Dalits in 227*)
The novel represents the hypocrisy of equality through character of Velutha, a sensitive, intelligent, and talented craftsman is a Paravan one of the Dalit castes. His skills and intelligence are not appreciated just because he is a Dalit. He falls in love with a non-Dalit divorcee Ammu, a mother of twins –Estha and Rahel. Velutha and Ammu are annoyed and become victim of evil caste-system. Thus, the relationship of the Dalit with the non-Dalit becomes the sole cause in the novel for the tragedy of the central characters. Velutha pays a great price for falling in love with non-Dalit divorcee. He has been beaten wildly and very brutally by the police that stands for law and order in society. But in the case of Dalit Velutha the same protector of law and order in society plays a role of murderer and kills the Dalit. Roy has depicted faithfully the atrocity because she is belonging to the upper caste. She is one of the upper castes who are either doer or viewer of the atrocities on Dalits:

They realized that man was beaten, was Velutha. They heard the thud on wood on flesh. Boot on bone. On teeth the muffled grunt when a stomach is kicked in. The muted crunch of skull on cement. The gurgle of blood on a man’s breath when his lung is turn the jagged end of a broken rib. (Roy 308)

The brutality and atrocity as well as the sham orthodoxy have been presented in the novel. The intelligent and skilled craftsman, simple and lovable human is brutally beaten and killed merely for loving an upper caste woman.

Even the upper caste novelist could not faithfully present the Dalit world. Same sympathy and pity of Gandhian era are seen in the portrayal of Dalit Velutha. His character
in the novel represents Gandhian ideology of pity and sympathy. Thus, in the hands of mainstream writer the Dalit characters are nothing but tragic masses that have no identity. In his critical work, Sharad Rajimwale has noted Nila Shah’s criticism on the sympathetic mentality of the upper caste writer:

“Velutha is a skilled paravan embodies the state of untouchable in free India. His plight is not much different from that of Anand’s Bhaka. In spite of his inborn noble qualities and physique he is not empowered to strike back. . . Velutha, a God of Small Things ‘left no foot prints in sand, no ripples in water’”. (Rajimwale 60)

Thus, the mainstream upper caste writers failed in faithful presentation of the Dalit world and Dalit sensibility.

On the whole, the upper caste mainstream writers have presented the Dalit life and world with a limitation. The non-Dalit writers have presented Dalits as the meek sufferers, having no voice of their own. The limitation of the upper caste writers resulted in presentation of the Dalits as merely the tragic masses. That is not the fact based or true presentation of the Dalits and Dalit sensibility.

Thus, the task of true and authentic presentation of the Dalits must be justified by the Dalit writers. In comparison with the mainstream upper caste writings, Dalit writings are
authentic in its presentation of Dalit life and Dalit sensibility. As Dalit literature is different from the mainstream literature; so is the Dalit aesthetics. The differences are discussed in detail by Sharankumar Limbale in his critical work *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations*.

In aesthetics Dalit literature is different from the existed mainstream literature of the non-Dalits. Dalit writers wanted sociological perspective for the Dalit aesthetics whereas the mainstream literature presents pleasure or beauty as its aesthetics. So, Dalit writers are rejecting the aesthetics of mainstream literature on the sociological ground:

Dalit writers believe that their literature should be analyzed from a sociological perspective focused on social values than on beauty. . . Rejecting traditional aesthetics, they insist on the need for a new and distinct aesthetic for their literature—an aesthetic that is life-affirming and realistic. In other words, Dalit writers have demanded different yardsticks for the literary appraisal of their works. It is the firm conviction of the Dalit writers and critics that if yardsticks change, the concept of aesthetics will change too. (Limbale *Towards* 19)

According to Darshana Trivedi in *Literature of their Own: Dalit Literary Theory in Indian Context*, about the Dalit aesthetics the Dalit authors and critics have ‘rejected all role models, traditional literature, Eastern and Western critical theories and decided to create a literature
of their own, an identity of their own.’ (2) The Dalits reject the traditional literature and appreciated the Dalit literature as it gives prime importance to the Dalit affairs and issues.

Dalit literature possesses essence of realistic aesthetics. ‘The universe of Dalit characters and Dalit life created by the Dalit writers makes Dalit literature a literature of commitment.’ (Trivedi Tongues 3) As it is earlier discussed, considering that criteria of the Dalit aesthetics, Dalit writers remain faithful to their writings. Dalits and their sufferings are the sole importance for the Dalit literature that is completely out of narration in the non-Dalit writings. Community comes first for Dalit writers than the individual, because it is about Dalit community from whom everything has been robbed, even human identity too. Sharankumar Limbare has explained this viewpoint systematically:

For thousands of years, Dalits have been kept deprived of power, property, and position. It was propounded that ‘god created this hierarchy’ . . . Thousands of generations of Dalits have continued to endure this injustice.

Dalit society . . . . It is not the pain of any one person, nor it is of just one day—it is the anguish of many thousands of people, experienced over thousands of years. Therefore, it is expressed collectively. The anguish of Dalit literature is not that of an individual but of the entire outcast society. . .

(Towards 30-31)

Dalit’s experiences and feelings are one of the subjects for the mainstream literature which is the only subject of the Dalit literature. In short, the world of the Dalits which is not
authentically touched by the mainstream writings is touched faithfully by the Dalit writers. In this regard the words of a well known Dalit short story writer Baburao Bagul are quoted in her *Literature of their Own: Dalit Literary Theory in Indian Context* by Dr. Darshana Trivedi:

> Dalit Literature is not a Literature of Vengeance. Dalit Sahitya is not a literature which spreads hatred. Dalit Sahitya-first promotes man’s greatness and man’s freedom and for that reason it is an historic necessity. (3)

The Dalit Literature is, in the words of Harish Mangalam:

> Any work of literature which seeks to express in words, the pulses of those sections of humanity which are oppressed hand which are engaged in struggles for their existence deserves to be called, in the broadest sense, Dalit literature. (Trivedi *Tongues* 2)

According to Arjun Dangle, the Dalit literature is having its own peculiar identity as it is revealing something new to the world literature. He states in his article *Dalit Literature: Past, Present and Future* that the Dalit literature is a depiction of the Dalit world which is forcefully made lost in the dark by the non-Dalits:
Dalit Literature is not simply literature. It is associated with a movement to bring about change. It represents the hopes and ambitions of a new society and new people. (Dangle 266)

These different definitions justly state that Dalit Literature has a separate identity from the mainstream Literature.

The themes one finds in the writings of the Dalit writers are: Ambedkarite ideology, the ancient-old pain, sufferings and anger, the problem of the untouchability, issues of the exploitation of the Dalits, the exploitation of the Dalit women by the non-Dalit men, the better life of equality in all areas like politics, economics, social, and the like. But above all rests the Dalit life and its culture. ‘Protest against injustice, exploitation of Dalits by savarnas, untouchability, social discrimination, the struggle to make two ends meet are all inevitable of Dalit literature.’ (Parmar M. 182) But even in the 21st century the concept of the equality is nothing but a Utopia for the Dalits.

The basic difference one cannot notice in the literature of the non-Dalit writers and the Dalit writers is that the first presents the romantic view of the life and the later realistic view of the life. In an interview Harish Mangalam remarks:

Non-Dalit writers describe the beloved’s cheeks by comparing them with roses and liken the beloved’s lips to rose petals. Readers have had enough of
such monotony in literature. The question that arises is that is it ever possible that every beloved’s cheeks like roses and lips like rose petals? Isn’t it a fact that we complain of a decline in the reading activity? How would a reader’s interest be sustained if he were able to guess half-way . . . (Trivedi Tongues 161)

Further he said that unlike the non-Dalit writers’ imaginative concept of beauty, the Dalit writers reveal it with realistic approach:

The Dalit writer depicts the bare reality stripped of all its deceits: he doesn’t believe in building castles in the air, his feet are firmly planted on the ground and rooted in actuality. . .“The beloved’s cheeks were like hardened lumps of jiggery and her lips were like wrinkled black clay.” The creativity of the writer is certainly at work and cannot be under-rated for all its concreteness. (Trivedi Tongues 161-62)

The beauty for the Dalits’ is struggle in poverty, hunger and harshness of life. The Telugu Dalit poet Bandi Styanarayana has presented why the beauty of Dalits are different than that of the non-Dalits in his poem A Tender Leaf (Chiguraku). Besides, the poet has presented poverty and wretched condition of the Dalits. It is translated in English by T. Bharathi:

Born in the poverty of darkness
So you never had sufficient food

Only in dreams you had good sleep–

Then how will you have

Smooth cheeks and long black hair? (Styanarayana B. 178)

Anger is the protest against existing evil practices against Dalits by the orthodox upper castes. In the Dalit poetry the poets do not adore the beauty but anger. The poetry of Daya Pawar is translated by Vidya Dixit, Karve and Eleanor Zelliot. Daya Pawar’s poem *Siddhartha Nagar* reveals the inhumanity and coldness of the non-Dalits. The poet also depicts the anger towards the hypocritical nature of the non-Dalits:

O Siddhartha, did you know

a project is going on to Change the hearts

of the bandits in Chambal valley;

and here in the cultured world

white collar inhumanity has reached a peak. (24-28, Pawar 137)

Daya Pawar’s poem *You Wrote from Los Angeles* exposes the sense of awareness of the injustices of the non-Dalits’ caste system on one hand and the burning desire of anger of the Dalits is aptly presented on the other:
Indians and curs are measured with the same yard-stick;

‘Niggers,’ ‘Blacks!’ --this the abuse they fling me,

and deep in my heart a thousand scorpions sting me.”

Reading all this, I felt so damn good!

Now you’ve had a taste of what we’ve suffered

In this country from generation to generation. (2-7, Pawar 133)

Mina Gajbhiye’s poem is translated in English by Jayant Karve and Eleanor Zelliot under the title *The Weeping Wound of Centuries*. The poem states rebellious nature of the poet who does not want to live like Dalits of the past centuries but instead of that the poet prefers to die. The poet does not want to suffer meekly rather desires to rebel against existing unequal society:

From now I’ll live to die

Let the village become a burning ground

along with me

I will not live like a dog, nowhere. (6-9, Gajbhiye 77)

Similar touch of anger, a sense of wrong done to the Dalits, and fire of revolt are found in K.G. Satyamurthy’s poem *Nadustunna Charitra* which is quoted in D. Padmarani’s
Distinctive Voices of Distress. In this poem the poet wants to deconstruct the myth of Eklavya, Shambuka, and Bali. The poet writes:

With smile on his face,

Shambhooka is killing Rama.

Bali is trampling Vamana

With his small feet to hell.

Manu is piercing his eyes with needles,

Cut his tongue,

Pouring leads in his ears

Is tossing and turning in the cemeteries. (3-10, Satyamurthy 82)

Next characteristic of Dalit aesthetics is that it is free from western theories of literature. “T. S. Eliot’s theory of objective,” Darshana Trivedi remarks, “correlative or experimental use of the myth and allusions is not found in the Dalit Poetry.” (Literature 5) The Dalit writers are using the same local language as used by them in their day to day life. This view point is nicely stated by the Dalit writer Narendra Jadhav in his Outcaste: A Memoir through the central character Damu. This protagonist does not prefer polite language instead chooses to use his local native tongue; as he utters:
Arre, call a spade a spade . . . language when spoken should come alive with meaning. It should have flavour . . . your polite, bland language is as insipid as boiled potatoes. (Jadav 216)

In this way, the central character does not prefer to use ornamental language nor does he wish that his children should use such ornamental language which does not give the real test of tongue of native. The Dalit writers are using the language of the Dalit communities with a view to relive the reality of the Dalit lives. ‘The Dalits from different states speak different languages.’ (Sivaprakasam 80)

Hindu religion, religious scriptures, and Hindu gods and goddesses are also criticised by Dalit writers because they present inequality among the people. Anger of Dalit authors burst on Hindu religion, Hindu gods, and religious scripture. Bitter tongue is used to satirise and criticise them:

Dalit writers have reacted bitterly to Hindu religious literature. . . . Shudras were prohibited from learning Sanskrit, since it was regarded as the language of gods. (Because of this reason, Babasaheb was not able to study Sanskrit; instead, he had to study Farsi.) ‘Rama, the killer of Shambuka, cannot be our ideal. Gita and Mahabharata, which support the caste system, cannot be honoured by us’: this is the perspective of Dalit writers. (Towards 34)
Use of local dialect is visible in the first collection of Marathi poems of Namdeo Dhasal, a poet and a writer under title *Golpitha* (1972). Namdeo has written prose and poems in which he has presented authentic portrait of Dalit world, Dalit life and Dalit sensibility. The Dalit author has become spokesmen of the Indian oppressed masses in his literary writings: *Moorkh Mhataryane, Itihasatil Apaphavya, Khel, Priya Darshin, Ambedkari Chalawal, Tuhi Iyatta Kanchi, Negative Space* and *Hadki Hadawala*. These literary creations of Dhasal represent anger as well as voice of protest against caste-based discrimination of Dalits.

Namdeo Dhasal, like other Dalit writers, has inspired and frequently stated Dr. Ambedkar, who is recognised as the father of Dalit literature. *Poverty as my own Independent Piece of Land* is one of the poems from the collection *Golpitha*. It is translated by Dilip Chitre. In this poem the red light area of Mumbai city is portrayed by the poet with the vernacular used by the men and women of the red light area. The miserable conditions of Dalits are presented in the poem:

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I am squeezed: in my yearning

Feminine beauty flowers

The Mona Lisa painted by Leonardo da Vinci

In the service of A-B

Rain driving down in sheets, a dying cigarette,

A dehydrated dancing girl,

Contrasting colour harmony
```
I too have poverty as my own independent piece of
land... (20-28, Dhasal 73-74)

The use of local dialect with the first hand experiences of being Dalit is presented effectively in the Gujarati poem *Jivli*. It is written by Dr. Maheshchandra Pandya, a Gujarati Dalit poet. It is translated in English by Rupalee Burke and Darshna Trivedi:

The five husbands of Draupadi

Who witnessed quietly while

The Kauravas robbed her honour

I want to shoot them repeatedly. (14-17, Pandya 63)

In the poem, Hindu gods and great Hindu knights were criticised for their heinous actions. The poet wants to even murder them for their actions. Dalit writers are even not ready to give up any one or any god who had/have robbed them of their dignity and identity. The use of local vernacular enriches the Dalit writings.

Similarly use of bitter tongue is observed in Om Prakash Valmiki’s short story *Amma*. Valmiki is well-known for his use of language. His use of simple and direct dialect contributes to the authenticity of the writing. The story presents a strong Dalit woman who struggles to overcome the odds of life. Though she is poor, she lives with pride and dignity.
She is strong enough to teach lesson to the adulterous non-Dalit men like Vinod. The sexual advancement of the upper caste Vinod is rewarded with the beating at the hands of Dalit Amma. Further she tells the incident to other upper caste woman Hardei. She gets angry and says to Amma:

> After that you should’ve beaten the dog with the broom and taken him to street. That would’ve completed the disgrace of the mother-fucker–seeing him run with his ganpati swinging about. (Valmiki *Amma* 168)

Poetry of Siddhalingaiah, a Dalit Kannada poet, presents a realistic tongue. One of his poems *My People* presents the use of direct and simple language. The use of simple language is used to present entire Dalit community’s experiences–sufferings, agonies, traumas and pains. This kind of heart felt pain could never be presented by the upper caste mainstream writers. The poem is translated into English by K. Narasimha Murthy:

> And get crushed for their pains under the debris
> Who, fallen by the wayside, voiceless, weep
> within themselves
> These, these are my people. (16-19, Siddhalingaiah 249)

It is deeply rooted in the psyche of the Dalits that religion is used to deprive Dalits of all equality: economic, social, political, and religious. Jotirao Phule, the pioneer of Dalit uplift movement wrote radical literature that exposed the Hindu gods and Hindu religious texts. He satirised very harshly Brahmins and their nonsense teaching of religious literature.
In his play *Slavery* (*Gulamgiri*), he used very bitter tongue to criticise the orthodox Hindus and their gods. His use of such bitter language is seen in the dialogue between Jotirao and Dhondiba. In this work, Phule exposed the original creation of the Brahmin, Shudra and others in Hindu social system. He wanted to enlighten the downtrodden masses. So his writings are full of sharp, harsh and bitter-tongue.

To deprive and to push to the level of sub-human conditions, the orthodox Hindus had used religion, gods and goddesses as their means. This mean scheme of the shallow-) anything good for Dalits. If He had done anything then Dalits too have the dignified life of human being.

In *The Outcaste: Akkarmashi*, the autobiography of Sharankumar Limbale, anger of Parshya, one of the writer’s childhood friends furiously fell on Hindu God’s idol. Autobiography writer has depicted the incident of his childhood realistically. Unlike the author, his Dalit friend Parshya was having angry personality. His bitterness against the orthodox Hindus was burst on the idol of the upper caste Hindus’ God. He pissed on the icon of the Bhutalsidh temple:

Parshya was a very bitter boy. . . . That rascal had recklessly pissed on God.

(Limbale *The Outcaste* 4)

Even at the tender age, the anger is fused in the Dalits which sometimes come out in such reaction. Ignominy and indifferent dealings towards the Dalits are the major factors that Dalits are ruthlessly satirise Hindu religion and Hindu gods.
Caste is one of the barriers for Dalits to progress. The social system like religion, religious literature, and Hindu gods is used to deprive Dalits of their dignity and identity being human. So, hatred for caste system is commonly presented in the literary creations of the Dalit writers. It is because of the caste system the Dalits are sufferings. They are humiliated everywhere they go also because of caste-based discrimination. As a result a phobia has dominated the minds of the Dalits called ‘non-Dalit phobia’. In the short poem *Caste* of Bharti, a Punjabi Dalit poet this ‘non-Dalit phobia’ is presented. It is translated into English form Punjabi by Narinder Bhangu:

If you could do,
know my wretched position,
wash the stain of my low caste,
tagged with my name
life long. (12-16, Bharti 155)

The Dalit father is depressingly remarked to his son that in this world of the non-Dalits do not ask him to raise him (son) to make him (son) a big man or legend. Because if he tries to do it than his caste will become a hurdle. On the contrary, he suggests his son to write down notes of the wretched conditions of him because of the caste-system of the non-Dalits.

Another poem *Caste Meaning* by Bharti shows the cruelty of non-Dalits’ caste-system. The lyric is translated from Punjabi into English by Narinder Bhangu:
It is tragic
to be of low caste

...........
its meaning is
of course, very complex
sharper than a sword
killer than a bullet
where in its eyes
rusty layers of hatred are seen
over the centuries; (1-2, 9-15, Bharti 155)

How caste system has restored all the benefits to the non-Dalits and no profit on the part of the Dalits is presented in the poem. The reason according to the poet is the social system which has been established by the non-Dalits.

The ‘non-Dalit phobia’ is profoundly rooted in Dalit psyche because of centuries’ caste-based discrimination. The ‘non-Dalit phobia’ is well exposed in the short poem *Caste*. It is written by Omprakash Valmiki. It is translated into English by Naresh Jain:

I refuse
to enter
your swarga [heaven]
after death.

There too

you will know me

only by my caste. (Valmiki 175)

Effect of ‘the non-Dalit phobia’ has so strong hold on Dalits that the Dalit poet even afraid of the heaven because he feels that even in heaven inequality of caste would be prevailed. Life on earth is quite miserable and the worst to live on for the Dalits so would be in heaven. As a result, the Dalit poet is firmly rejecting the heaven to enter after death.

Dalit culture is a rich in its language, especially vernacular, in its customs, in its folk traditions etc. In Dalit literary works the richness of Dalit culture is presented. In Joseph Mackwan’s novel *The Stepchild: Angaliyat*, the Dalit novelist has presented rich culture of Dalits. In the caste-system of the Hindus, Dalits are the on the bottom still Dalits are far more advance in their customs. They accept changes easily. Mackwan has depicted it realistically. The customs of Dalits are advanced regarding remarriage and widow marriage:

Like Valji, Bijal was also quite popular. And after all nothing new to this caste which accepted remarriages–marriages between brothers and sisters-in-law took place and widow remarriages also. (Macwan 68)
Methi married to Chunthia. They have son Gokal by name. Chunthia is a drunkard. So, Methi declares that she will live for Teeha. Further, she will spend her life in taking care of Teeha whom she loves and respects. Without any oppose, the Dalit community has accepted the declaration of Methi:

‘I have followed this one (Teeha) openly, putting aside my marital status. . .now I must be in his service for the rest of my life. Since I came here leaving behind a living husband, I cannot be considered a widow. But as long as my previous husband is alive, I cannot start a family with him. . .’. (83)

Similarly, Bama, an eminent Dalit writer, in her novel *Sangati: Events* has presented modernity of Dalit culture. Customs of Dalits are different than that of the upper castes Hindus. Further, in terms of customs, Dalits are much advance than the upper castes. The Dalits have advance tradition regarding marriage. For marriage, the non-Dalit bride has to give dowry whereas the Dalit groom has to give cash gifts to the bride in order to marry:

We give girls what we can afford . . . . The groom’s family will see to all the wedding expenses. We don’t have to give any money. It’s the groom who gives a cash gift and takes away and marries her. (Bama 112)
‘Widow Remarriage’ is common in the Dalit communities. ‘That's the custom in our community.’ (Bama 113) The important facts regarding Dalits’ world are narrated by using reality. Thus, realism is one of the bases on which foundation of Dalit literature laid.

Vemula Yellaiah, a well-known Telugu Dalit writer has presented authentic picture of Madiga, one of the Dalit caste people of South India in his novel Kakka. Novelist has depicted the rich culture of Dalits. Modern thinking of the Dalits is represented by the character of Kakka. His mother was humiliated by his own community and they were excommunicated from the village. His mother was widow. Kakka wanted her mother to be happy. So he decided to get her remarry. When his Kalemma came to know this notion of Kakka, she was worried about the society:

‘What’s this, Kakka? Whoever might have told you this? Does the society spare us if one’s son gets one’s own mother married off? Arey, do you advise me to get married again?’ (Ellaiah 298)

But Kakka was firm to do so. He searches proper person for his mother and finds Bolguri Kondaiah from native village with the help of Potter-Magngaiah, who suggested the name of Bolguri Kondaiah. Thus, Kakka finds husband for her mother’s remarriage:
Kakka said, ‘Amma, I’ve gone to the village where you would live after your remarriage. The man, Bolguri Kondaiah seemed a good man – the man who would be my father. . . I’m fixing your re-marriage . . .

While sending off his mother with father . . . Kakka asked his mother to take care of herself, and his mother in turn asked to the son to take care of himself. ‘Amma, let me take leave of you,’ as the son said, ‘Let me take leave of you, my son,’ the mother said. They consoled each other. (298-99)

This incident became talk of the village but no body opposed the action of Kakka. The son did not go with his mother at his step-father’s house to live, rather he decided to live alone it his village. It shows that Dalit community is ready to accept new changes which let understand the world that the Dalits are advance in their thinking and practical approaches:

‘This fellow is so great! Being a son, he got his mother marred off,’ the village folk felt it an unusual event. . . (299)

Thus, Dalit writers have spread unheard and unseen rich aroma of Dalit life, community and culture over the world by presenting them faithfully and genuinely in their writings.

Dalit writers also reject the established standards of evaluating literature. They want new standards for Dalit writings by which Dalit literature must be evaluated. It shows a marked changed into literary aesthetics i.e., form a sophisticated perspective to a realistic aesthetics sense. In D. Padmarani’s *Distinctive Voices of Distress*, she interprets the words of
Sharankumar Limbale about the Dalit literature. In its form, purpose and function Sharankumar Limbale describes the Dalit literature in his *Dalit Literature and Aesthetics*:

Dalit literature is written with the purpose of conveying the anguish and suffering of the Dalits and demands an antidote for it. Its aim is not to teach or preach. It derives its strength through the depiction of hard reality. So the basis for aesthetics of Dalit literature is pain, agony and torture. (84)

The soul of the Dalit Literature is the human being and humanity. Thus, Man is even more important than to God for the Dalit writers. Likewise, humanity is more important for Dalit writers than spirituality. Similarly, love for human is more important for the Dalit writers than religion. Thus, ‘Dalit Literature considers man as its centre and depicts trauma, pain, exploitation and suppression of the community in a very creative and lucid expressive ways.’ (Sharma P. 7)

The chief difference between the two is that the Dalit literature is connected with the naked reality of the life whereas the mainstream literature is based on their romanticism and idealism. The Dalit literature presents— the writings of the Dalits which is closely interwoven with Dalit life stories. Thus, the reality is the base of the Dalit literature. The untold and unheard pains of the Dalits are very aptly presented in Manish Parmar’s poem *Our Heritage*. The poem reveals the century old pains of Dalits:

An old water-pot, rags, torn mattress,
A broken cot is our heritage.

Try if you can mend it with a needle,

A broken life-wish is our heritage. (Parmar M. 75)

The non-Dalits social and religious attitudes are very irrational and are based on inequality. These social and religious attitudes of the non-Dalits are rightly observed by Dr. Ambedkar:

Hinduism is a denial of equality both social as well as religious, and it is also a degradation of human personality. . . Hinduism denies freedom of a vocation. . . It denies the common man the right to knowledge. Hinduism, far from encouraging spread of knowledge, is a gospel of darkness. There is also absence of fraternity. A spirit of hatred and contempt has actually pervaded the Hindu society. The class war is a permanent phenomenon which is silently but surely working its way. (Mandal 32)

This notion of inequality, realistic appearance of life, pain and trauma of the Dalits is aptly presented in the poetry of the Dalit versifier Arvind Vegada. In his poem Hadaselo, quoted by Pathik Parmar in his article Gujarati Dalit Poetry, the injustice felt by him cannot best being presented by the non-Dalit writers:

He is a man,

We are not human beings

Because we have lifted up the dead bodies
of our shadows on the shoulders and we

have not learnt to push the air aside. (Vegada 158)

The same opinion is shared by Sharankumar Limbale, the writer of Akkarmashi. In it he has revealed the ugly and selfish lot of non-Dalits who like to drink liquor at the hands of the Dalits but could not drink water given by them:

Mahalasha Kotwal, Chandu Pujari, Basu Ajjya, Bhallu, Sharanu the tobacco dealer, Hatale Malesha, were some others who drank regularly. Thus the streets of the Maharwada were always sprinkled with intoxication. These boozers had no qualms about downing our liquor, but they would not touch water offered by a Mahar. They could have a Mahar woman, but not food prepared by her. (Bastard 120)

Besides, in the Dalit Literature there is a rejection of the Western and Indian theories. “Dalit literature rejects” According to Darshana Trivedi “Western theories like Freud’s Psychoanalysis, Barthe’s structuralism or Derrida’s deconstruction theory, it also rejects Indian theories of rasa and Dhawni.” (Literature 6) In her Literature of their Own: Dalit Literary Theory in Indian Context by Darshana Trivedi, she has translated C. B. Bharti’s Hindi article, The Aesthetics of Dalit Literature in which he has stated about the Dalit Literature:
The aim of Dalit Literature is to protest against the established system which is based on injustice and to expose to evil and hypocrisy of the higher castes. There is an urgent need to create a separate aesthetics for Dalit literature, an aesthetics based on the real experiences of life. (6)

The statement is quite right related to the Dalit literature, one cannot, for example, find the beauty of the Dalit women in the physical beauty but is found on the face while she works in the field.

Dalit literature in English and of regional languages of the present time has broken the past boundaries made for Dalits by the non-Dalits. Dalit writers are carrying forward the struggle of Mahatma Phule and Dr. Ambedkar through their literary creations. Dalit writers present Dalit culture, Dalit milieu, Dalit life, Dalit sensibility and Dalit language as it is; which are quite different than that of the non-Dalits’. So, Dalit literature is also different from the mainstream literature. As a result, the aesthetics of Dalit literature is different than that of the non-Dalits’ literature.

Therefore, until the rise of Dalit literature, the non-Dalit writers and critics have evaluated literature from aesthetics of the mainstream literature. Emergence of Dalit literature is out of cry for freedom, equality, justice and love. So it is different from the mainstream literature. In Dalit literature imagination is replaced by reality, pleasure by pain and suffering, beauty by struggle for identity and dignity, and love by quest for equality. Aim of Dalit literature is quite different from the non-Dalits’ literature. Likewise, aesthetics of
Dalit literature are different and unique from mainstream’s literature. Thus, the upper castes’ writers and critics cannot evaluate Dalit literature or Dalit aesthetics.

Thus, Dalit literature is emerged out of inequality, anger, pain, sufferings, and revolt against Dalits’ social, political and economic discrimination. Therefore, unlike mainstream writings, Dalit literature is based on realism. In an interview with Rupalee Burke and Darshana Trivedi, Dr. Mohan Parmar, a Gujarati Dalit writer has defined characteristics of Dalit literature:

Dalit literature portrays dreadful circumstances which engulf Dalits, with a view to awakening social awareness. . . Thus, social commitment is at the root of Dalit literature. Such characteristics make themselves felt when a definition is attempted. One may consider these characteristics to be a wholly different kind of content . . . *(The Silver 83)*

In the same interview Mohan Parmar has presented the characteristics of Dalit literature. They are:

1. Dalit existence or way of life.
2. The portrayal of Dalit problems in the work of literature.
3. Speech and behaviour patterns and customs of Dalit characters.
(4) Dalit sensibility and the context of the work.

(5) Internal and external emotions arising from actions.

(6) Implications of realistic Dalit problems.

(7) The surfacing of Dalit consciousness in an unfamiliar reality. (The Silver 83)

In a conversation with Alok Mukherjee, Sharankumar Limbale has presented rational and logical argument to present Dalit aesthetics. He said:

Ambedkarite thought is the aesthetics of Dalit literature. . . I have written that this literature cannot be evaluated on the basis of either Sanskrit aesthetics or western aesthetics. The aesthetics of this literature can only be based on the thinking of Ambedkar and Phule. (Towards 147-48)

The Dalit aesthetics are: 1) Materialistic Aesthetics: ‘Dalit literature rejects spiritualism and abstraction, its aesthetics is materialist rather than spiritualist.’ (Towards 116)

Sharankumar Limbale has explained the Materialistic Aesthetics:

- Human beings are first and foremost human – this is satyam.
- The liberation of human beings is shivam.
- The humanity of human being is sundaram. (Towards 22)
2) Ambedkarite Thought: ‘Values of equality, freedom, justice and solidarity are inherent to this [Dalit] literature.’ (Towards 120)

Likewise, to evaluate Dalit literature, Limbale has presented following standards:

- Artists must be motivated by their experience.
- Artists must socialize their experiences.
- Artists’ experiences must have the strength to cross provincial boundaries.
- Artists’ experiences must seem relevant to all time. (Towards 120)

Thus, Dalit writers have used effectively and passionately these features of Dalit literature and aesthetics in their literary writings. Dalit literature began with the regional languages effectively in the post-independent era in twentieth century. By the twenty first century Dalit literature has emerged as a new identity of Indians; the Dalit identity.

Works Cited


