Chapter 5

Conclusion

It seems universal that every creature which cannot contain itself or draw itself together in its own fullness, draws itself together with its own fullness, draws itself together outside itself, whence, for example, the elevated miracle of formation of the word in the mouth belongs, which is a true creation of the full inside when it can no longer remain in itself.

F. W. J. Schelling

For a dalit deprived of linguistic expression—the written word—what is problematic is the question of the writing self. That is to say, how does a dalit represent the interchange of expansion and contraction, externalization and internalization of dalit experience? How precisely does the written word discharge the tensions of the subject? Schelling’s hypothesis might help us to understand this problematic. The self remains muted till it finds the required strategy—writing—to be able to express. Deprived of the written word, it waits for its formation; once it is formed, it expresses through the dialectical process that consciousness executes on itself. That is, in his/her search for an alternative identity, the dalit writer makes effective use of what Foucault calls history of counter-memories, as a necessary opposition to traditional history. In his *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, Michel Foucault claims that:
The traditional devices for constructing a comprehensive view of history and for retracing the past as a patient and continuous development must be systematically dismantled ... Effective history deprives the self of the reassuring stability of life and nature ... [and instead] deals with events in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations. An event, consequently, is ... the reversal of a relationship forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked ‘other’.²

The developmental phase of dalit literature conveys immediate sorrow, shock and anger through autobiographical narratives written mostly from the victim’s perspective. The next phase of dalit literature achieves a different perspective relying on multilayered narrative and a multi plot structure in order to create a response not of the visceral engagement encouraged by the earlier works, but of interrogation, treating the readers not as passive or empathetic consumers but as active, questioning participants making them regard the dalit writings with critical eyes. Readers of these narratives are made to realize that history is a collection of subjective experiences that can be rewritten and reinterpreted from a distant spatio-temporal dimensions; from the contexts of other kinds of narrative, such as folkloric archetypes; or from many different subjective sites. Through this sequence of changing perspectives, several kinds of thematic continuity are evident. Apart from the obvious theme of caste discrimination and exploitation (commenting on death, destruction, terror, loss, etc.), in particular, dalit literature manifests a skepticism and distrust of authority. Collective memory of a torturous past is narrated through retrospectively in linear, direct and limited ways. Most
of the dalit writers did not resort to special literary devices to convey the
tensity of the suffering or the grotesque condition of dalits and their
ruined selves. Instead the direct portrayal of the dalit subject in the
narratives may result in emotionally shaking the reader.

The colonial educational policies and literacy programmes
undertaken by reformist movement of India complemented by Gandhian
system of vernacular education made it possible for dalit literary
articulation in more codified form. Education is regarded as symbolic
power as it was the school teachers and immigrant educated liberal youth
of cities who nurtured and encouraged the dalit communities to voice their
protest and fight for equality. To reproduce in challenging discourse the
fetishizing of the dominant language which actually takes place in society,
the dalit writer, in the initial stages, should borrow the writing instruments
from the already established discourse. The acquired language is thus
constituted as the absolute norm of all linguistic practices, which then can
only be conceived in terms of the logic of deprivation. Conversely,
ignorance of what popular and educated usage owe to their objective
relations and to the structure of the relation of domination between castes,
which they reproduce in their own logic, leads to the canonization as such
of the language used. In this sense, like the sociology of culture, the
sociology of language is logically inseparable from sociology of education.
As linguistic products are strictly subject to the verdicts of the guardians of
legitimate culture, the educational market is strictly dominated by the
linguistic products of the dominant castes and tends to sanction the pre-existing differences in capital. The combined effect of low cultural capital and the associated low propensity to increase it through educational investment condemns the least favoured castes like the dalits to the negative sanctions of the scholastic market. That is, the dalits are subjected to exclusion or early self-exclusion induced by lack of success and competence in the educational market. The initial disparities therefore tend to be reproduced since the length of inculcation tends to vary with its efficiency: those least inclined and least able to accept and adopt the language of the school are also those exposed for the shortest time to this language and to educational monitoring, correction and sanction. This process of education continues right from school to the university level and the dalit product of this educational system makes use of the training to extend the fight for equality to the scholastic planes. The process of dalit education in the pre-Independent India was almost negligible or very rare. But the constitutional reforms of the Independent India made it possible for dalits to participate in education, not without resistance from the upper castes in the initial stages. The short stories sketch the path of educational curves and graphs in a very clear way – the pre-Gandhian period forcing the dalit to abandon the idea of primary schooling is replaced by the access to education with some difficulty in the Gandhian era. Dalits found more opportunities to educate themselves in the Ambedkarite period but few could afford it due to the practice of merit-based-system of academic institutions. This phase was replaced by the
modern system of reservation policies, which made it possible for dalits to enter colleges and universities. However, non-availability of scholarships and social rejection by the upper caste students, made it difficult for a dalit to educate himself/herself. Throughout these different phases of educational process, the dalits were constantly burdened by economic deprivation and their positioning in the lower stratum of the market-economy.

The 1930’s phase in dalit literature saw the effective use of militant violence to counter upper caste exploitation. Communist revolutionary ideological influences like, “Comrades you are the people. A patriot does not fear the people. Mao Dze Dong, the friend of the people, has said: ‘The people is an ocean in which the patriots are the fishes. A fish cannot survive a day without water.’ Today, hungry and thirsty, we fight for the people”, drawn from Mao is interpreted on caste basis. The general assumption was that upper castes needed dalits for their survival while the dalit is denied of his immediate survival by these upper castes. The same sentiment is echoed on the religious domain too – “What do you want to obtain from a God and a religion which steal the fruit of your work in order to fill someone else’s belly?” This bred parallel contempt towards Hinduism, the main proponent of caste system. The act of religion as an institution became the act of communication, but of a particular kind. It signifies to someone what his/her identity is, but in a way that both expresses it to the subject and imposes it on the subject by expressing it in
front of every one and thus informing the subject in an authoritative manner of what the subject is and what the subject must be. It is through the effect of statutory assignation that the ritual of religion as an institution produces its most real effects – the person instituted feels obliged to comply with his/her definition, with the status of his/her function. The designated subject is recognized and treated as such by the whole group, beginning with his family, and this different and distinctive treatment can only encourage the subject to fulfill the configured role in the community.

All the subjected groups entrust the body, treated like a kind of memory, with their most precious possessions, and the use made of the suffering inflicted on the body by the rites of institutionalization is understandable if one realizes, as numerous psychological experiments have shown, that people’s adherence to an institution is directly proportional to the severity and painfulness of the rites of institutionalization. The work of inculcation through which the lasting imposition of the arbitrary limit is achieved can seek to neutralize the decisive breaks that constitute an arbitrary cultural limit. From analytical history, it is a verifiable fact that Brahminic discursive development was inextricably woven into the complex process of differentiation, stratification and power relations. The Vedic discourse of caste might have played the crucial role, probably as the coercive instrument in transforming and organizing people for various labour processes in ancient India. But this led to the formation of social organizations deriving from the ethical didactics of the dominant discourse stemming from the discursive elements of Vedic, Puranic and Sastric texts.
It was an extremely intense process of reification that filled the discursive domain, offering prescriptions, explanations, meaning and legitimacy to the variety of rights, ranks, positions, privileges, entitlements and obligations binding the hierarchical social relationships. The most potent discursive element that stabilized the relations of production was caste, accommodating in its fold a variety of economically stratified functionaries of hereditary trades/professions. The role of caste in the integration of the agrarian society whose mechanisms of appropriation were based on extra-economic coercion, was extremely crucial. The realm of ideology, on the whole, became enormously complicated through reification and discourse production catered to the changing functional requirements of the expanding dominant society. The resultant social structure was a hierarchy with upper caste landlords at the apex and in the center of the discursive formation and the primary producers who are lower caste dalits at the bottom and in the margins of the formation. Separating these two are the large number of upper caste poor whose function was to exploit the dialectics of slavery for their own betterment. The conditions of subjection together with the objective reality of the producers being stripped off their produce constituted the major contradiction in the system. Perpetuating relations of domination through the reproduction of contradictory dynamics, the discursive regime became distinct by the emergence of alternative discourses like Buddhist, Jainist, Veerashaivite, Bhakti, etc., influencing dalits from time to time. The Bhakti movement of the 6th–7th century south India can be seen as a
precursor to the present day Dalit movement. As a new religious sensibility, it gradually appeared in the invocatory stanzas of the heroic anthologies before being institutionalized through hymns. The Bhakti movement mirrored the way the subject and the exploited lived, the relation between themselves and objective conditions of their experience, which is also one of the major themes of Dalit literature. It glossed over the material reality of the conditions of domination by inventing other-worldly explanations for the social contradictions. This discourse provided psychological basis for social acceptance of the explanation of the plight of the oppressed in the ancient society. The psychological basis took the form of a cult of complete surrender at the feet of God as the final refuge, acting as an illusory solace to the miserable. Within the mystifying discourse of Bhakti, voices of dissent against the hegemonic were not precluded. Since it was a social formation of contradictory relations involving the tensions of subjection and exploitation, voices of protest were inevitable. The hegemonic discourse was so imposing that the elements of protest and dissent could be articulated only through its discursive practices that neutralized them through the strategy of containment. A defiant attitude to the religion will absolve the subject of any pre-configured status and hence the need for an alternative religious identity is felt strongly. Ambedkar who openly denounced the Hindu religion by burning a copy of Manusmriti and embracing Buddhism vehemently propagated this idea. The newly found religious identity
helped the dalits to break away from the dominant religion but paved the way for new frames of confrontation triggered on religious grounds.

This search for alternative religion and religious identification of the dalits can be traced through another interesting aspect of dalit literature – naming convention or character names. We find that the pre-Gandhian phase has names, which are more ethnic in nature like Polainah, Paidahah, Ankadu, etc. for men and Neeli, Maachi, Sarasa, etc. for women. These names are not usually used by Hindu upper castes. The list of Hindu gods and goddesses, with reference to several Puranic, Vedic and epic texts forms the Hindu names database. The dalit names of the pre-Gandhian period are outside this database with a rare exception here or there. The Gandhian concept of Harijan and minimal entry into the temple, resulted in right wing nationalist activities and several dalits used the Hindu database of names for their purposes. Names like Ramulu, Gopadu, Venkatappa, Subbulu, Lachimi, etc. are colloquial forms of the Hindu Gods like Ram, Krishna/Gopal, Balaji/Venkateswara, Subha. Lakshmi, etc. The causitic remarks of Ambedkar on Hindu religion and burning of ‘Manusmriti’ quickly relocated the dalit religion into non-Hindu fields. According to him, the dalits may choose any religion but Hinduism, as caste system is integral to Hinduism and it is difficult to fight against it from within it. This gave three choices to a Dalit – Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. While few Marathas could adopt Buddhism, which in Modern Hinduism is disputedly regarded as its variant, most of the Indian dalits embraced
Christianity, which quickly proclaimed that it is the religion of equality as there was no draconic caste system at its backdrop. The stories of post-Ambedkarite phase sketch names like Mattiah (Mathews), Yakub, Pal (Paul), Mari (Mary), etc. There are few stories which also expressed the practice of caste in born again Christianity in the meeting places of converted upper castes and converted dalits. What next? But, this was not as brutal as the traditional Hindu practice. Therefore, Christianity remained the alternative religion and gave a new religious identity to the dalit. The Indian constitution has a clause which treats Christian converted scheduled caste and scheduled tribes as Backward castes thus enabling a movement upward in the caste hierarchy. But the political formation of such a concept is very complex as it invites discussion of reservation policies of Indian Government and dominant political parties along with attitudinal factors of dalits and upper castes, which has the scope for further research.

The concept of freedom and facility of constitutional security made it possible for dalits to actively participate in political democratic processes. Ideologies owe their structures and most specific functions to the social conditions of their production and circulation. We must remember that ideologies are always doubly determined, that they owe their most specific characteristics not only to the interests of the castes, but also to the specific interests of those who produce them and to the specific logic of field of production. A properly ideological function of the field of
ideological production is performed almost automatically on the basis of the structural homology between the field of ideological production and the field of caste struggle. This discourse is a structured and established order which is evident from the available socio-political history. The unequal distribution of the instruments of production of an explicitly formulated representation of the social world means that political life can be described in terms of the logic of supply and demand. That is to say, the political field is the site in which, through the competition between the agents involved in it, political products, issues, programmes, analyses, commentaries, concepts and events are created. The boundary between what is politically sayable or unsayable, thinkable or unthinkable, for a social group is determined by the relation between the expressive interests of that group (caste) and the capacity to express these interests, a capacity which is secured by its position in the field of cultural and political production. The political awareness and the opportunity for political participation made it possible for the Dalits to reorient their militancy programme to a better synthetic democratic agenda interrogating the basic lapses in the constitutional implementation. Dalit literature describes the political formation of dalit subject in a very comprehensive way. It portrays the unassuming dalit subject to be appropriated by the political will of the dominant castes during the early years of independent India. Recognition of political exploitation of the Dalits made it possible for them to learn the intricacies of growing democratic political process. This results in the fight for fundamental rights of the Dalits on the political
front. Lack of congenial atmosphere to put up these fights from the existing political formations, the Dalit groups formed their own political parties or joined the political parties that are organized exclusively for dalit purposes.

In the formation, reformation and deformation of Dalit identity as an articulated position in Dalit writing, one notices that in spite of the historical disruptions, some stability has been accomplished. The 'mute' Dalit has finally been 'voiced'. This voice is no more mimetic, it is self-reflexive that actualizes the selfhood at various levels of socio-political matrix. The Dalit writing of today asserts a position in which the Dalit is no more an object – (s)he is a fully developed subject. The subject continues to confront but the voice will never die. This voice will continue to reinforce the process of reading, writing and rewriting.
Endnotes

1 Quoted in “Selfhood as such is spirit: F. W. J. Schelling on the origins of evil” by Slavoj Žižek in *Radical Evil*, edited by Joan Copjec; London: Vesko; 1996, p. 3.