CHAPTER FOUR: MODERN EXPRESSIONS OF AESTHETICS OF DALITS

This chapter shall deals with the drawing out the socio-moral aesthetics of various writers, thinkers, and political activists, contrasting it against the theoretical foundations of pre-independence revolutionary Dalit thought. In the present context, the starting point for the aesthetics of Dalit is the discrimination that the dalits (or the untouchables or the outcastes) are subjected to, and their historical determination to free themselves from every form of suppression and subjection, which is reflected in post-independence dalit literature. It is these exploiting histories, and at the same time, libertarian potentials inherent in dalit existence and experience, which are the matter of concern for the emerging aesthetics of Dalit. Thus, aesthetics of Dalit is existential both in terms of context and content.

Dalit literature owes its origin to a revolutionary struggle for socio-economic change as well as to the ontological construction of dalit as an identity. This explains the various aspects of serious thought in dalit literature. This literature is closely associated with the hopes of a group of people, who as untouchables are victims of social, economic, and cultural equality, and it actively worked for the deconstruction of conservative and traditional identities linked with the dalits or depressed classes.

Dalit literature is characterized by a feeling of rebellion against the establishment; of negativism and scientific rationality. These expressions are based on concept of social justice and equal rights. Dalit literature must be assessed in the sociological framework of the struggle against untouchability and socio-economic inequality. Dr. Ambedkar liberated the dalits in India from mental slavery and abject wretchedness, giving them a renewed sense of new self-respect. His philosophy was employed as the psychological device for the dalits to relate themselves to a bright and golden past, and a superior culture to enable them to assert themselves as dignified moral agents; so that they could enter into a contract in public life with a rediscovered self and not as untouchables.
Dalit intellectuals and artists participated in the movement by composing songs and writing ballads, and through traditional folk art such as *tamasha* and *jalsa*. The literary expression of Ambedkar’s philosophy and movement during his lifetime was more or less of this kind. However, it did not last long, as it was topical in nature and had the bias of propaganda. Rejection of traditional religious culture, language, and other ethnic values and growing awareness of their backward condition is the common foundation of their writings. Religion and culture become the main elements in the making of dalit ideology or the underlying philosophy of anti-caste movement.

Dr. Ambedkar’s life and philosophy are a source of inspiration to all dalit writers. But there is one group of creative thinkers and writers who feel that Ambedkarism and Marxism support each other. In other words, they want to fight on both class and caste levels. Another group considers Ambedkarism as complete and therefore does not want any other ‘ism’ to be grafted on to it. A third stream of thought is of those who want to follow Buddhist literature rather than Dalit literature. This one was a weak stream of thought and did not develop systematically.

There are other streams, which, while acknowledging the crucial role of Ambedkar in theorizing the Dalit condition disagree with the manner in which Dalit struggle should take place. Still others reject the theological basis of personal revolution and proceed on the grounds of agnostic morality.

As a whole though, the Dalits rejected mainstream literary tradition and revolted so strongly that even thinkers and critics who were a product of their tradition were shocked. The leading writers such as: Annabhau Sathe, Daya Pawar, Waman Nimbakar, Tryambak Sapkal, Arjun Dangle, Namdeo Dhasal, J.V. Pawar, Pralahad Chendewankar and Raja Dhale reflect these trends in their thought and work. Dalit literature posed a critical challenge to the notion of religion, culture, and mainstream ideology in the caste-dominated elite by bringing up the voice of the marginalized people. The attempt of Dalit literature is its emphases on the construction of a new world order from bottom up.
In concluding the introduction of Dalit Sahita-ek Ahyave, Arjun Dangle noted that: "the first to set their feet on the land of Dalit experiences where the Dalits themselves. This literature of the Dalits is ultimately related to social reality and is neither imaginary nor entertainment oriented. The creation of Dalit literature is unavoidable and inevitable until the nature of this harsh social reality changes. I do not consider that all Dalit literature is great, nor do I insist that others should do so, but a major responsibility rests with Dalit writers" (Dangle 234).

From this conception one can frame a few fundamental ideas to work within the formation of the aesthetics of Dalit. The aesthetic of Dalit has avoided the pitfalls of aesthetics which proceeded from metaphysics and not from the materialistic perception of reality. If aesthetics of Dalit does not enter into this reality, it would also fall into the trap of busying oneself with the continuum between purity and pollution, the dichotomy or homogeneity of the soul and the body.

**Framework of the Aesthetics of Dalit**

**The domain of Aesthetics of Dalit**

Primarily my endeavor and engagement should consider the various dimensions of the public discourse on inequality in a caste-stratified system. Therefore while evolving a perspective for the aesthetics of Dalit, we need to engage and draw recourse in political philosophy, literature, economics and sociology. The social fact such as caste discrimination and denials of civil right are the logical outcome of the very caste edifice vis-à-vis caste hierarchies on which Indian society is constructed, which is strongly reflected in Dalit autobiographies, and serous critical writing. Caste system has been the single most important factor in India for the past three thousand years, which has created and sustained a graded inequality in all aspects of life. Everything in the Indian society is rooted in the caste system- social, economic, political, religious and cultural structure.

*Existential epistemologies of an Aesthetics of Dalit*
The aesthetic of Dalit is based on Dalits life experiences. That is why when the aestheticians refer to aesthetics of Dalit they are in fact making an affirmation about the need of an aesthetic expression which will address and help Dalits in search of their daily bread, to overcome their life situation of oppression, poverty, suffering, injustice, illiteracy, and denial of their human identity or dignity. This reality of Dalit life provides the reasons for the formation of aesthetics of Dalit. The hierarchy-structured society gives rise to a horizontal way of thinking, speaking, and living; and simultaneously the realm of beliefs and symbols, which legitimated and sustained the old order. The composition of Dalit aesthetics is needed to transform social realization in the right direction.

**Morality of an inclusive aesthetics**

The aesthetics of Dalit must essentially possess a philosophy of life. Its meaning is drawn from a society based on the principle of justice, equality, liberty, and fraternity (whether present or future). It forces one to engage in a constructive aesthetical debate in the light of one's experience and through critical self-reflection, and thereby develop an aesthetic from a uniquely Dalit perspective. The process of ideal conceptual Dalit collective universe reflects the overall transformation of society. Democratization of culture and society is not an automatic phenomenon but it is the product of specific and particular initiatives. The aesthetics of Dalit possesses intellectual imagination to construct a possible secular society.

Theoretically, inequality is a phenomenon, which is structurally built into, for instance, livelihood, education, employment, security, etc. These trends and fingers of inequality have received significant attention in the mainstream body of polity and scholarly circles. The notion of social rationality seeks to relocate the process at the core of social relations at the two levels, one of epistemology and two of ethics. They recognize the basic similarity sameness, equal worth and uniform dignity of all human beings despite their external and hence superficial, and cultural-historical differences. From this new enlightenment flows a new social conduct, as an aspiration for the actualization of egalitarianism.

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Socio-politics of an aesthetics of Dalit

Dalit Consciousness is a fundamental component of the emerging theory of aesthetics of Dalit. Sharankumar Limbale in *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* writes: “By Dalit literature, I mean writing about Dalits by Dalit writers with a Dalit consciousness”. He goes on to define Dalit ‘consciousness’ as ‘the revolutionary mentality connected with struggle.’ Ambedkarite thought is the inspiration for this consciousness. Dalit consciousness makes slaves conscious of their slavery. Dalit consciousness is an important seed for Dalit literature; it is separate and distinct from the consciousness of other writers. Dalit literature is demarcated as unique because of this consciousness” (Limbale 12). Limbale is clear that Dalit consciousness is an indispensable attribute of the Dalit literary aesthetic. It is intimately tied to the emancipatory ideology of Dr.B.R. Ambedkar, and it is the yardstick by which the Dalitness of Dalit literature is measured.

All these constitutive elements and situate themselves within a framework of “Equality” as morality. The reason being equality is the regulative principle of justice. It is a principle of criticism under which every scheme of justice stands. “Equal justice” is the best approximation of the “human principle”. The rule of equality includes both concerns for process and also for equality, as a substantive goal and admiring Dalits will have to have the following in its framework an ideology of life and an aesthetic of resistance.

The aesthetic of Dalit must also help in stoking the consciences of the Dalits, to the fact that they are ramparts of a casteless community, based upon a divided established principle of equality. The aesthetics of Dalit has to raise their consciousness about the fact, that their assigned inferior status is neither of their creation nor a divinely created reality, but it is imposed upon them by a humanly created system. Therefore, a Dalit aesthetic has to prepare the Dalits to reject the old caste based religious order, which has perpetuated their condition, because this will pave the way for their aestheticism.

*Aesthetics of Dalit as Aesthetics of Resistance*
Such an aesthetic can be called an aesthetic of resistance, and it is emerging with a specific form of action and reflection. It exposes the conflictual fabric of caste-stratified Indian society. Aesthetic of resistance is not born in classrooms or in study materials of a particular discipline. On the contrary, it is born out the actual and concrete experience of communities that struggle to build a world, which is human, egalitarian, and inclusive. Their vision of building a better world where everyone can lead a life of dignity and equality is being realized in this context. Their resistance to the force that negates life becomes the focus of one's faith, articulation, and expression. The aesthetic of resistance is grounded, in a redemptive activity of the protested communities. It is embodied in particular philosophical and ideological moorings.

*Aesthetics of Dalit as negative aesthetics*

Dalit literature is marked by a wholesale rejection of the tradition, the aesthetic, the language, and the concern of a mainstream literature that even at its best, is carried within the signs of the caste-based social and cultural order. Instead Dalit literature has established its own tradition with anti-caste or untouchable thinkers such as: Buddha, Phule, and Ambedkar as its signposts. The central concern of Dalit is how best to represent the authentic experience of Dalits. It is the experience of this unique Dalitness that Dalit literature has been challenged to represent authentically. The experience that Dalit literature represents is neither always pleasant nor constituted in terms of relation with the upper castes only. Dalit literature is unflinching in portraying the seamier side of Dalit life.

Dalit literature seeks to free human beings from exploitation. This is understood in Raoshaeb Kasbe's *Ambedkar ani Marx*, and Sharad Patil's *Abramhaniya sahityache saundaryashashtra*, it is the actualization of selfhood. They are indicating a new elaboration of interiority in an individual transforming him or her into a person capable of and also obsessively in need of discovering meaning and meaningful totality in reality.
Everything in the Indian society is rooted in the caste system - social, economic, political, religious and cultural structure. The composition of aesthetics of Dalit is needed to transform social realization in the right direction. Its meaning is drawn from a society based on the principles of justice, equality, liberty, and fraternity (whether present or future). It forces one to engage in a constructive aesthetical debate in the light of one's experience and through critical self-reflection, and thereby develop an aesthetic from a uniquely Dalit perspective.

From this new enlightenment flows a new social conduct, as aspiration for an actualization of egalitarianism. Dalit consciousness is an important seed for Dalit literature; it is separate and distinct from the consciousness of other writers. The aesthetic of Dalit must also help in stoking the consciences of the Dalits to the fact that, they are ramparts of a casteless community, based upon a divided established principle of equality. Therefore, aesthetics of Dalit has to prepare the Dalits to reject the old caste based religious order, which has perpetuated their condition, because this will pave the way for their aestheticism.

Such aesthetics can be called aesthetics of resistance, and it is born out the actual and concrete experience of communities, that struggle to build a world, which is human, egalitarian and inclusive. Their vision of building a better world where everyone can lead a life of dignity and equality is being realized in this context. Their resistance to the force that negates life becomes the focus of one's faith, articulation and expression. The aesthetic of resistance is grounded in a redemptive activity of the protested communities. It is embodied in particular philosophical and ideological moorings.

The central concern of Dalit is how best to represent the authentic experience of Dalits. The experience that Dalit literature represents is not always pleasant nor is it constituted in terms of relation with the upper caste only. It is at times brutal and self-referential. This enables it to articulate experience that which may be difficult or even impossible to articulate in a relational manner.
Dalit Literature as an aesthetic category

Some of leading writers known as Dalit writers, such as: Annabhau Sathe, Shankrao Khart, Baburao Bagul, Daya Pawar, and P.I. Sonkamble among others, try to point out in their novels the division in society. They are dominated by the short stories culture of the fifties. Dalit writers seem to have accepted the artificial stories form, merely for its effectiveness. The attempt of Dalit literature is to point out the core issues of its ideology.

In this context, it can be said that Dalit literature questioned the mainstream literary theories and upper caste ideologies, and explored the neglected aspects of life. Dalit literature is based on real experience. This experience takes precedence over speculation. Thus to Dalit writers, history is not illusionary or unreal as Hindu traditional metaphysical theory may make one to believe. That is why authenticity and liveliness have become the hallmarks of Dalit Literature and that is the aesthetic of Dalit literature. These writers make use of the language of the outcastes and under-privileged in the Indian society. Shame, anger, sorrow and indomitable hope are constitutes the stuff that Dalit literature is made of. The anger against the age-old Oppression, has found its expression of Dalit writers who have been writing about a socio-cultural alternative.

Although society is stratified, In Hindu society it has been made the basis of caste. The Marxist approach analyses the reality from the class perspective. It ignores the caste-reality of India and bases its argument from an economic perspective. This dichotomization, however, does not serve the purpose in a multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic context of India. To state that those in the periphery of the society, here Dalits in our context, can be analyzed only within the framework of the caste system and economy, has nothing to do with them, will be a gross mistake. In fact, some of the recent literature in the recent times has been able to analyze the caste-class dialectics in interrogating the margins.
Unique characteristics of Dalit literature

Let us use this above framework to briefly contextualize Dalit literature from this perspective. Given our stated understanding of aesthetics of Dalit, the first and essential foremost characteristic feature of the Dalit literature is that it is not originally and essentially a literary exercise. The practice of writing does not aim at achieving an aesthetic performance in literature as an art. It serves the purposes of social intervention and accordingly carries strong militant connotations. The ‘expressivity’, articulation is assertion. They have used this method of registering one’s presence, inviting interrogation, or demanding assent from the ‘others’. It seems they have used the verbalisation as a way of clarifying to oneself one’s own instinctively but incoherently felt mental-moral framework or horizon.

The emergence of a distinct Dalit poetry, literary participation and the creation of “text of resistance” and “protest literature” not only reflected the changing consciousness but also symbolized the intensification of the Dalit quest for dignity and social justice. Essentially for a right understanding of the Dalit writing we should to bear in mind the general historical setting of their social surroundings. Dalit autobiographies and poetry are literary forms of social protest practices. The critique is even used to evaluate Dalit literature in general, as being one dimensional, namely negatively focusing on revolt only.

These “written life narratives used to be described or defined as autobiographical testimonies. This label appropriately points to their social internationality and functionality. It also designates some of their characteristic structural features, regarding semantics, stylistics and rhetoric” (Satyanarayana 42). Moreover, in this regard, these personal and direct testimonies surely provide relevant documents of social history, though they may not belong to that genre or discipline. Still they are somehow in affinity with the concept of social history as understood by those historians of the school of Subaltern Studies.
Dalit literature is a social discourse. This term points to the historical, social, and cultural processes that these texts initiate, first as actual cognitive performances, and, simultaneously, as social agency within the liberation movement of the Dalits in general.

They are a social phenomenon more than a literary event, a socio-cultural action in the form of a literary performance. I shall therefore, be concerned with their intentionality, context, social dynamics, and communicative interaction. Dalit literature in general and autobiography in particular, insists at length upon the condition and mechanism of oppression of the individuals and their communities, and upon the access to school and education as the essential way towards employment and social mobility in a modern urbanized setting, that is, allowing for an escape from the grip of traditional repressive systems. This does not touch upon the question of the will to autonomy of the Subject as distinct from his social personage and appearance as an individual among others. In reference to the will to achieve liberation that motivates the Dalit autobiography, the critical question that our analysis points to, is about the individual not only as one from within his community, but as himself /herself wishes to stand in front of his/her community and society.

Dalit writers do not use literature only as a positive force (creating the emancipatory discourse around the Dalit or the Working Class). But also uses it as a negative force, portraying the social realities, both of the oppressive systems of power and of the working classes miserable conditions in a manner that decimates any hints of romance or possibility surrounding the survival of that order.

They represent the Dalit’s hope for egalitarian idealism. They unleashed the power of the Dalit’s utopia because they were moving towards a utopia themselves. They continue to represent a forceful moral critique of a caste-ordered hierarchy and its excess and to subvert unjustified inequality by launching alternative symbolization as a cultural construct. Their writing is the symbolization not only of ideological contrast or to control difference but also a move in creating new cultural capital for voiceless people and sharing asceticism through their literary activism. As idealists, their concerns were to formulate distinct cultural propositions for the Dalits. In this manner Dalit writers
provided their audience and readers the tools of cultural inspiration and social transformation.

Dalit writers’ surrounding is the barter system (Hindu reality), which was sometimes replaced by supreme human and cosmic virtue and harmony. They write very seriously about devising or even legitimizing coercive sites of caste relationship, particularly the concrete reality of disadvantages, as experienced by those of low and unclean objective, or caste.

Dalit short stories give the taste of modern experience of Untouchability. The deployment of caste into the otherwise “whole” and “stable” category of class, has met with much resistance from the literary and political world for a variety of reasons. Dalit writing gave new levels of self-pride, militancy, and analytical clarity to the movement. In this way, they wrote about the caste system or Varna system to be cultural as well as economic domination also.

Dalit writing is based on their own personal experience or stories told to them. Their work is therefore, in a sense, an associational autobiography. Viewing them together not only tells us about the narrative rationale behind their writing, but also leaves us with a fantastic picture of the scope, depth, texture and complexity of the author’s life.

If someone was to do an overview of the history of Dalit writing it shows us how to discern the development of the writer’s distinct morality. It is a morality of existence, not one of testament. It is a dynamic morality. To read their sense of morality into one story is to miss its various dimensions. Each work of Dalit writing contains many locations from which a writer explores and puts forth this tenuous but distinct morality.

Generally Dalit short stories deal with particular human circumstances. And that too are about their modes of survival. The stories cover a wide range of characters, social conditions and eras from Urban to rural, and pre-independence and post-independence. workers, the poor, Dalits, and women make up the central characters. The tensions that
wrought survival are strung tight though their stories. The alienation of the characters and the conditions of this alienation are dealt with in depth, and with care.

This move is in a sense enabled by the fact that most of Dalit writers’ writing never refers to a sublime inner self, a domain that has been denied to Dalits through History. Their spirituality is based, in that sense, on the struggle for material existence. This move away from the ideal, pure, holy self, to a self that is defined by production and the struggles of survival, allows the Dalit writer to bring agency back to a people denied this domain. The heroes of Dalit writers are fighting for their own dignity, but they are still making history, both for the present and for the future. The creation of a spiritual domain, which can be seen as sovereign, as separate from the spiritual domains of Brahmanism, allows for a location from which the Dalits and others who are written off from history can agitate.

Analyzing sites of an Aesthetics of Dalit

Given this basic framework of aesthetics of Dalit, it is now possible to analyze the works of the Dalit writers, poets and activists that follow in a way that makes it meaningful. We can then ask questions of form, content and social relevance, and the framework provides a basic structure from which we can analyze these works. It becomes possible to see how each of these works are similar, how they differ and most importantly how they work together to create the onology of the Dalit self and its emancipation.

A particular touching story *Ani Buddha Marun Padla* by Arjune Dangle, shows the relation between Buddhism and aesthetic aspiration. The story is about a young Buddhist student’s attempt to get the Buddhist in his village to let the untouchable *Mang* (traditional enemies of the untouchable Mahar -- the caste which became Buddhist) use their well. He refuses to give money to help build a Buddhist temple. But then his father dies and since he must help with the funeral he agrees to contribute. Then as he looks down at his dead father’s face he sees the Buddha has died (Zelliot 259).

There is focus on the Dalit life of the lowly in Dalit literature. The style and content vary, however from the suffering tinged with hope of the village untouchables on Dalit writer’s
Brutality of life in the villages and slums is described by various Dalit writers particularly: Shankar Kharat, Daya Pawar, Annabhau Sathe, Baburao Bagul, Namdev Dhasal in their prose and poetry. Baburao Bagul’s Bara Balutadar took all twelve-village servants as subjects for stories. He has continued to deal with characters from many different communities, generally these lower orders in a dozen volumes.

Three stories translated by Promod Kale in Robert Miller ‘Robert Miller and Promod Kale’, ‘The burden on the head is always there’ represent the writer’s treatment of the untouchable. In “The Burden” (Miller 317) a Mahar kotwal refuses to help an educated mahar who has returned to village saying “you felt my pain and that’s why you held the umbrella over my head now. But what about tomorrow? Rain is there. Heat is there. The burden of the head is always there.

In “The Town Crier’s call” (Miller 142) the Mahar village servant has to go out to drum and announce the need for all villagers to come to be inoculated by the visiting doctor, even though he himself is so sick he falls, vomits and dies as he attempt to shout and drum. In “Inside the Village Womb” (Miller 317-59) an educated Mahar, returning to his village remembers himself as school boy following his father on his humiliating round of duty and runs from the now tumbled down houses, that empty Chavdi, that collapsed shop with the perspiration.

“Song” (Dangle 7) by Bhimsen Dethe, is the perfect reflection of the alienation of the Dalit from his productive work. Like Town Crier’s call, it speaks of the brutal dislocation of the services that the Dalit provides, and the abject humiliation and desperation of his life.

As father carried stones upon his head,
The headman, twirling his moustaches, used to say, ‘Hey Kisnya’
Let’s have a first – rate Lavni!
And my father would sing with his tattooed throat;
In his song
There was the moon, and the sun,
And flowers blossoming, sea-waves,
An impassioned girl drunk with love...
Sweat-stained hands clapped;
There was applause all round.
My father was touched, was filled with gratitude.
Walking home he groped towards the song of bread
That he never could sing.

The poem is interesting in that, it reflects the forced passivity of a community that is constantly reminded of the distance between the products of their labour and their current existence. However, it is the superficiality of the aesthetics of the oppressing culture that becomes immaterial on the edge of survival that is the most powerful message of the poem.

*Annabhau Sathe*

It is this upsetting of the aesthetic and its classical concerns that is one major thread of Dalit culture reflected by Daya Pawar, Namdeo Dhasal and Annabhau Sathe among others. Annabhau’s work almost always reflected this contrast. An overview of his work is required to understand the frame in which Annabhau negotiates with the aesthetic. Reading a single story would leave the reader with a sense of an aesthetic based in urban squalor, reading two would leave the reader with the feeling that Annabhau has rejected the aesthetic. As this chapter will show this is far from the case. An understanding of Annabhau’s politics also benefits from an overview of his work. Annabhau’s work is an education of sorts in political theory.

Moving spatially from the global to the national to the regional to the village and temporally from the feudal through the colonial and into the industrial political economy his short stories deal with particular human circumstances. These too are about modes of survival. The stories cover a wide range of characters, social conditions and eras. Urban and rural, pre-independence and post independence. Workers, the poor, Dalits and women make up for the central characters. The tensions that wrought survival are strung tight though his stories. The alienation of the characters and the conditions of this alienation are dealt with in depth but with careful brevity.
The stories require the reader to enter the paradigm of the poor. The conditions and relations that Annabhau describes could well be out of fantasy but they are not. The stories are not so much about plots as about Annabhau using the situations to project and make available for solidarity and understanding the mind and life space that the characters occupy. The sense of the situation that the reader is left with is a bodily experience far more powerful and lasting, than the characters or their particular lives.

If the reader is unable to occupy this space, he is left with empty words. Most of Annabhau’s readers, however, were only a generation away from that space. A major theme in Annabhau’s works, especially in his short stories, is the problematizing of the stereotypes related to Dalits. Till then the Dalit has been usually portrayed as a gangster, a cheat, a thief or an amoral sexual predator. Annabhau’s short stories try to remove the moral baggage that these categories carry, and investigate and expose, the manner in which Dalits are written into the public imagination.

Bhomkiya (Dangle 242) is the story of a man who Annabhau met in prison. Bhomkiya was a misfit. He was huge. He was ugly. His clothes did not fit him. He did not fit his bed. He was the butt of everyone’s jokes and ridicule in prison. Annabhau’s curiosity in him led him to ask about his name, as Annabhau could not place the roots of such a name. Never had he heard it before and neither had anyone he knew heard such a name. It prompted Annabhau to ask Bhomkiya his story and this is how it went...

Bhomkiya’s story was a simple one. He was a beggar, eking out a living on the streets of Amravathi with his wife and children. However his appearance proved a handicap. One day, he received a large amount of alms from a house. The next day he returned and was rewarded similarly. On the fourth day, when he went to seek alms, he found the house had been robbed. The Seth of the house sees Bhomkiya and immediately accuses him of having robbed the house on the basis of the fact that he was here seeking alms four days in a row. Bhomkiya is thrown into prison where Annabhau meets him.
Annabhau ends his narration with a tirade against the capitalist system and the manner in which the justice process works to serve the rich. He ends very powerfully by saying that the only meaning he found for the name Bhomkiya was this. It is the name of the stone hurled onto the consciousness of cultured India by the truth of Indian slavery.

Annabhau stories do not only deal with the external constraints on the Dalits life. Time and again, both in his plays and his short stories he brings up the issue of superstition, again not ridiculing, but dealing with it in his own language, making his point only by contrasting it with other ways of seeing. Even this move can be seen as his attempt to delimit the constraints under which the Dalit must labour; be they social, psychological or physical.

In stories like *Barbadhya Kanjari* (Sathe), we get a sketch of the life of a character from a nomadic, uneducated, poverty-stricken community namely the *Kanjari*, a community that lives in hutments in slum areas in Bombay. Annabhau shows how modernity and the speed with which it engulfs and traverses the world can skip a slum less than half a mile away as though a blockade ostracized it from the world.

The story is of Barbadhya Kanjari. The slum was filled with people who eke out living seeking alms as they were denied the opportunity to produce. Desolateness, poverty, lack of spirit and hunger mark the slum. It brings with it the worst conditions and inhuman practices that prevail in the community from which Barbadhya hails. Barbadhya, as per the prevalent practice in his community, sells his beautiful daughter, Nilli for 200 Rupees to one Dallaram to whose son, namely Saidya, Nilli will be married.

By tradition, Nilli is bound to stay with her husbands’ home till her death even if her husband dies. However when Saidya dies, Nilli runs away, with one Haidarya, a youth who lived in a hut right in front of hers. When Dallaram comes to know about this development, he holds Nilli’s father responsible for her running away and asks him to returns the money. But Barbadhya refuses to agree to this demand. Consequently, a fight ensues. The court of the caste is summoned which declares Barbadhya guilty and asks
him to pay back the 200 Rupees to Dalla. And when he refuses to pay they ostracize him from the community and cut off his ear. None less the fighter that Barbadhya does not bother about the troubles that lie like storms in wait for him owing to his ostracization.

Annabhaus however, is not a romantic. Neither is he trying to enthuse his readers with a spirit that is based on propaganda. Time and again his stories have no heroes. Only pain, Only the loss that accompanies the lives of most of the marginalized.

_Samashantil Sona_ (Dangle 210) (Gold in the Graveyard) is one such story. This story revels the pitiful plight of millions of the poor, the uneducated and unemployed people of our country. It further shows that poverty and unemployment can force a man to live even by digging out buried corpses, by shifting though the ashes and braking the mortal remains of the cremated/buried bodies in an attempt to find trinkets of gold that are brunt with dead bodies mainly that of the Hindus. By selling out. These trinkets found on the dead bodies, the central character of the story, namely Bhima, earns his and his familys livelihood, since the quarry in which he was employed was suddenly closed down. Although his wife is uncomfortable with his new profession, Bhima sees that he is able to make more in a few hours now than he could ever hope for toiling all day in the mine. There can be no morality for the hungry.

The work begins to take a toll on his mind. Sifting through the ashes the line between the living and the dead begin to get blurred. He begins to see the rich by the gold in their ashes and the poor by the poverty of their ashes. He begins to resent those who die without leaving something behind and comes to think as the rich as being the only ones with the right to die and the poor as not even deserving death as their dying serves no purpose.

One night, while trying to approach a buried corpse, he is attacked by a dozen wolves. A fight ensues between him and the wolves for the possession of the buried body. The wolves tear out lumps of his flesh. Bhima fights with the wolves. Shooing them away, he approaches the corpse. In doing so his hand gets caught in the tightly locked jaw of the
corpse. The wolves attack again. With one hand incapacitated he fights the wolves but they tear his flesh from his body in the total dark of the night. The scene is likely to shake the readers to their roots and send shivers down their spine. Bhima's misery does not stop here. In a bid to free the fingers that were caught in the corpse's mouth, he looses his fingers which incapacities him for any effective manual work. Ironically, he learns that the closed down quarry is reopening the next day. Annabhau seems to be asking if any fiction can be stranger than this reality.

The story brings to light the various facets of Annabhau's morality, most clearly its materialist base. However he does not surrender his morality to the dictates of material reality. If in Babariya Kanjari, Annabhau celebrates the individual's battle against the confines of a restrictive community, many other stories are about the community itself galvanizing itself to battle the confines of a restrictive society. He is constantly suggesting other modes of being, different kind of politics and morality, as his seen in his espousal of alternative community living in Samashantil Sona.

It is worth our while to spend some time on the problematic questions thrown up by attempts to represent this experience. It is an experience that has been denied access to any form of legitimacy. Literary or otherwise. It has been represented as a stagnant experience; seeing no motion, no change across centuries. It is a subsidiary experience. It is not an experience that has witnessed renaissance. It is not an experience that has codified its aesthetic, it's meaning of beauty, whether or not beauty is understood in the same manner. It is such an experience that forms the underlying theme of Annabhau Sathe's work. And it is no mean task to represent such an experience.

From the perspective of today the descriptions and characters that fill Annabhau's writing may seem commonplace. However when he was writing, he was dealing with a people who had till date received only pity or contempt. Never individuality, forget heroism, assuming they ever made it to the peripheries of art and that is the literary aesthetics of his writing.
Annabhou manages this attempt at representation without trivializing or undermining his subject. What he is primarily affecting is dialectic between literature and the imperatives of nascent Dalit activism. He allows concessions to literature; he uses romanticism, accepted aesthetics (scenic beauty, feminine grace etc), celebrated traits of heroism and such like. However he also bends literature to suit its new functionality as a tool of Dalit experience-representation. He uses characters in forms uncommon to traditional narrative discourse, his heroes are villains his villains, victims. His plots are non-plots and most importantly he takes literature out of a passive creator of identity and ideas and pumps it full of political vigour and social critique.

He is also constantly performing a self-reflexive role for literature. He uses concepts like beauty and discards them as meaningless in the squalor of reality. Concepts like morality are used to show the poverty of such a concept in the face of hunger. While he is using literature to change the understanding of the Dalit self, he is also irreversibly changing the way literature (and the performing arts) understand their component assumptions.

*Daya Pawar*


*Baluta* is autobiography of Daya Pawar written in 1978. Its narrative of the atrocities suffered by Dalits shook the Marathi society. In it, he raised the issue of Untouchability, specifically regarding the construction of Dalit subjectivity and the flow of narrative events. Dalit autobiographies are conceptualized within certain larger socio-historical processes; including as well the influence of the Dalit autobiographer’s own status. This will aid in understanding why autobiography has arisen as such an important genre of Dalit assertion, and why Dalit writers through these autobiographical narratives articulate this specific narrative agenda. Coming back to Dalit autobiography as a means of assertion, my focus will be on the idea as to how autobiographical narratives have been
used by Dalit writers as a form of political assertion by providing entrance into the public sphere and a reassertion of control over the construction of Dalit selfhood.

*Baluta* is an autobiography of Daya Pawar. *Baluta* draws upon the quintessential symbol of the Dalit’s humiliation, having to beg for leftover food as *Baluta*, or his traditional village share as renumeration for performing stigmatized labour. Understood more broadly as the Dalit’s share or lot in life, *Baluta* historicizes the figure of the stigmatized Dalit by locating him within an economy of suffering. The narrator of *Baluta* undercuts the presumed veracity, the reality effect of the autobiographical from the start, characterizing his story as a secret that must not be revealed, perhaps because of the shame as well as the pain that attaches to confronting the (collective) self of which he writes.

Daya Pawar is himself the son of a village mahar, who did the work dedicately, described in British records as that of the ‘inferior village servant’ cutting wood, carrying messages, bringing fuel to the burning ground, working on others lands, dragging out dead cattle etc. Pawar managed an education, however, and had a degree. His childhood experience and the life he saw in the Mumbai slums are the subject of his fictional writing.

Daya Pawar plays on the relationship between secret and revelation instead of celebrating the autobiographical as an authentic act of self-representation. Indeed, Dagdu Maruti Pawar is both a character as well as a concept; he is the secret sharer of Indian society, whose shameful experiences cannot be related without disavowing the pact of caste Hindu secrecy. The problem of Dalit selfhood also requires a transformation in ideas of autobiographical interiority. Thus the discussion of themes and expression in Dalit literature, which follows, is a very personal one.

Recent critical theory on women’s and blacks autobiography serves as an interesting lens through which to analyze Dalit autobiographical work, since, unlike the autobiographies of famous individuals, autobiographies of marginalized groups differ in that, they are usually written by anonymous individuals who emphasize on the ordinariness of their life.
rather than on their uniqueness, in order to establish themselves as representatives of their community. For Dalit autobiography, as for autobiographies of other marginalized groups, the entire life-narrative is based on the idea of the communal identity. As Stephen Butterfield writes of African American autobiographies, “the self belongs to the people, and the people find a voice in the self” (Pawar 5). Subjectivity in these autobiographies is thus complicated by the deep connection between the individual, self and the communal self.

It is clear then that Dalit autobiographies, like the autobiographies of other socially marginalized groups, serve a very different purpose than those of famous celebrities or historical personalities. Their agenda is not localized in individualism but links the individual to his entire caste community as a way of gaining power and support in a group struggle against similarly experienced oppression. Consequently, there has been much debate over who is the subject of Dalit autobiography.

It seems that, if it is an autobiography, then it is not of an individual but of a community. Putting community in place of the individual the past and present of the community itself becomes the plot of the story. An unstable attention to the individual is certainly a common characteristic of Dalit autobiographies, even despite the dictates of the autobiographical form.

Such form is not simply restricted to series of short stories or complete autobiographical novels. Much of Dalit Poetry is infused with this form, fusing social critique, and political positions with personal experience. Buddha is a classical example of this. Daya Pawar rejects the classical images of the Buddha for one walking through the Bombay slums; in his poem “Buddha” (Pawar 22).

I never saw you
In jetawana’s Garden
Sitting with closed eyes
In meditation, in the lotus position;
Or
In the caves of Ajanta and Elura

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With stony lips sewn shut
Taking the last sleep of your life.
I see you
Walking, talking,
Breathing softly, healingly,
On the sorrow of the poor, the weak;
Going from hut to hut
In the life-destroying darkness
Torch in hand,
Giving the sorrow
That drains the blood
Like a contagious disease
A new meaning.

The present poem reflects the new past, and the new future. In Buddha, Daya Pawar is neither too proud of Buddhist past of India, reinterpreting it for today’s needs, or blind to the conflict between the past tradition and the contemporary situation. With the example of this poem we can analyze how Dalit poets made an effort to use images as well as words, which come from their own experience. The problem of Dalit self-hood was staged as a problem of literary self-representation, one that overturned traditional ideas about literary form and content. Dalit sahitya, the literature that emerged from this transformative period in Maharashtra’s politics in the 1970s, was deeply identified with the neighborhoods and the working class ethos of Bombay. Dalit literature came to be defined by the often-sexualized language of the Bombay slums, and by the disfigurement of literary Marathi.

On the way to the Dargah (Dhasal 55) is one such example. The upsetting of the assumptions that the title brings is a common feature of Dalit writings. The process of taking hold of an established aesthetic, situating it in the bleakness of Dalit life, and then simply re-iterating the aesthetic again completely subverts its meaning. The poem is also a reworking of established mores of religious morality that fails to deal with the Dalit experience, relegating it to the row of beggars outside a temple or mosque.

On the Way to the Dargah
A leaking sun
Went burning out
Into the night’s embrace
When I was born

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On a pavement
   In crumbled rages-
   And become orphaned-
   The one who gave birth to me
   Went to our father in heaven
She was tired of the harassing ghosts in the sari
   And I grew up
Like a man with his fuse blown up
   On the shit in the street
Saying 'give five paisa
   Take five curses'
   On the way to the dargah

Namdeo Dhasal

Namdeo Dhasal’s famous collection of poetry, Golpitha, (1972) that focused on the red-light neighborhood in which he grew up comes to mind. The progressive Brahmin playwright, Vijay Tendulkar, noted that Golpitha was an object lesson in the desperate materialistic circumstances, and the easy exchange of violence and intimacy that saturates Dalit life: “This is the world... of the jobless, of beggars, of pickpockets... Dhasal’s Golpitha where leprous women are paid the price and fucked on the road, where children cry nearby, where prostitutes waiting for business sing full throated love songs” (Shah 228).

Anti-traditionalism might as well be started from the most condemnatory of the poems; as for Namdev Dhasal, even the best of orthodoxy was unacceptable to him. His poems are the most innovative, prolific and difficult of all the Dalit poets. Images torn from all aspects of Bombay life around him, trouble through his work, from the grossest sexual images of the prostitute’s area near his childhood home to the fringes of the world. He is a man who believed in the creative powers of his own untouchable people.

“To turn briefly to classical aesthetic, and especially to Sanskrit poetics, in Namdeo’s multilayered image of the real world, the underlying layer is the world of the untouchable and its nauseating details of degraded humanity. This is the primary layer that foregrounds the rest and it is used for exposing the various overlays of the touchable, leasing, beautiful, refined, world that cannot obliterate its width and depth. The bibhasta
rasa is the dominant feeling and resonance (actually a dissonance) that Namdev juxtapose with shringara, adbhuta, roudra, karuna, hasya and shanta” (Dhasal 15).

Namdeo Dhasal’s personal experience of stigmatization reaches deep into his childhood in his native village and keeps accumulating through his years of growing up in Mumbai, dividing the world into ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’—a world broken apart in an absolute sense. His poetry divides its audience into “us” and “you” at times; however, more often than not risen above the rift and views human life with dispassionate compassion, almost forgiving life with its flaws and faults.

The world of Namdev Dhasal’s poetry is the world known as ‘Golpitha’ in the city where Mumbai’s white-collar worlds end and a no-man’s land opens up. This is a world where the night is reversed into the play, where stomachs are empty or half empty, of desperation against death, of the next day’s anxieties, of bodies left over after being consumed by shame and sensibility, of insufferably flowing sewages, of diseased young bodies lying by the gutters braving the cold by folding up their knees to their bellies, of the jobless, of beggars, of pickpockets, of holy mendicants of neighborhood through guys and pimps.

The poetry of Dhasal is reflective of the strength within the despondence that pervades Dalit life. It is a strong reassertion of subaltern culture that belies the rational existence of hope. It is in the familiarization of the pathetic and the desperate that serves as the touch stone of reality. There are strands of Dalit thought and aesthetic that seeks to disassociate themselves from the existence of that formed them. Much of this aesthetic comes from an interpretation of Ambedkar’s life as a testament. However, there has been a distinct rejection of such a path to liberation by many of what are called the madhouse poets, most importantly Dhasal, as is best in Poverty as my own independent piece of land (Dhasal 18).

Destiny willing, the form may change or may not. 
Even then poverty itself is my own independent piece of land
And as I cultivate it my days rise
And my days fall...

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Earlier men I could have been wretched slaves...
I refused to make compromise with the later feudal lords
My limbs of a forest were fostered by geometric contagion
Drenched me in gentle innocence
I am the headless body of a rat with a pyramid rising above me
Meat and fish
Rice and eggs
Bootleg liquor and the flowers of white champak
Kisses, embrace, coital postures, jewels,
And beds and a house with a leaking roof,
And the rhythm of flowers
The Mona Lisa painted by Leonardo de Vinci
In the service of A-B
Rain driving down in sheets, a dying cigarette,
A dehydrated dancing girl,
Contrasting color harmony
I too have poverty as my own independent piece of land...

The critique of the existing caste structure is not limited to socio-economic implications. Much of Dalits creative expression is focused on the destabilization of familiar concepts and values. Ambedkar and Phule sought to upset these locations in a largely binary formulation of the demonization of all behavior stemming from the caste Hindu culture of polytheism and unproductivity. There focus was largely on the brutality of treatment of Dalits, the exploitation of labour, and the denial of social dignity.

Later Dalit poets and writers, use this form repeatedly. However, there is a further nuancing of the critique to incorporate commonsensical ideas and values that to further magnify the disjuncture in caste Hindu existence to the effect of upsetting the very nomenclature of culture and morality that it posits. This is best seen in Dhasal’s “Their Orthodox Pity” (Dhasal 44).

Their orthodox pity is no taller than a Falkland Road pimp
It’s true; they haven’t raised any ceremonial tent for us in the sky
After all, they are the feudal lords; they have locked all light in their vault
In this lowered life imposed on us, not even a pavement belongs to us
They have made us so helpless; being human’s become nauseating to us
We cant find even dust to fill up our scorched bowels
The rising day of justice, like a bribed person, favors only them
While we are being slaughtered, not even a sigh for us escapes their generous hands.
The use of brutal portrayal is not simply to demonize but to force a rethink of the cultural morality of the time which is one of the formative bases of aesthetics of Dalit making its creative expression not simply these texts of resistance, but more vehicles of philosophical renaissance. This problematization of enlightenment values is also reflected in the creative work of Dalits in the period surrounding and following national independence. The idea of self-determination is in many ways central to the revolutionary Dalit political and social morality. However, the critique of the idea of what the nature of the imagined national community was lead many writers, poets and play writers to contest the absolute value of the dominant social morality of self-determination as reflected in nationalism.

Repeatedly, the metaphor of balancing evils, of reinterpreting the costs of colonization, of contesting the idea of the other or the foreigner appears in Dalit works. This is in many ways foundational to the creation of the revolutionary Dalit self image that is able to recognize multiple levels of exploitation and forge fraternities across traditional faultiness. Again, it is illustrative to turn to Dhasal’s *Song of the Dog and the Republic* (Dhasal 53) to get a feel of this consciousness.

The chained dog, being a dog, whines and sometime barks
This being his constitutional right: he lives often;
He’s used to injustice; his mind is desensitized;
He’d be shot dead of he took a chance to rebel and break free of his chain.
Every street resounds with the drums of ‘total liberation’.
Friends, I ask an uncircumcised child what democracy means,
What you eat with it.

The Panther manifesto

The active creation of the moral social and political aesthetic of the post-independence Dalits’ revolutionary present and imagined future is best stated in the Dalit Panther’s manifesto, that was written a year into its activities, to clarify and give concrete direction to the political and cultural movement that was sweeping Maharashtra at the time.

“It has therefore become necessarily clearly to forward our position.
Because panthers no longer represent an emotional outburst of the Dalits.
For the emancipation of the Dalits needs a complete revolution. Partial
change is impossible. We do not want of either. We want a complete and total revolutionary change. Even if we want to move out of the present state of social degradation alone, we will have to exercise our power in economic, political, cultural field as well. We will not be satisfied easily now. We do not want a little place in the Brahmn Alley. We want the rule of the whole lane. We are not looking at a person but at a system. Change of heart, liberal education etc. will not end our state of exploitation. When we gather a revolutionary mass, rouse the people, out of the struggle of this gain. Mass will become tidal wave of revolution. Legalistic appeal, requests, demands for concessions, election, satyagraha- our social revolution and rebellion will not be borne by such paper-made vehicles. They will sprout in the soil, flower in the mind and then will come into full beings with help of a steel strong vehicle.

Panthers will paralyze and attack untouchabily, casteism and economic exploitation. This social system and state have taken many a cruel path to covert us into slaves. Turned, as long into ‘shudras’ in the present modern forms of slavery there are mental chains of slavishness. We will try to break them. In our struggle we will become free” (Joshi 141).

This revolutionary statement forms one of the formative bases of post-independence Dalit political and social morality of action. As shall be seen in the concluding Chapter, this trend is in conflict with the aesthetics of existence that were inspired by Gandhi and even some sections inspired by a different reading of Ambedkar. Before I attempt to map these various trends of expression and morality in Dalit life today, let us briefly sum up the sites that I have explored in this chapter.

Conclusion

Thus, aesthetics of Dalit has avoided the pitfalls of aesthetics which proceeded from metaphysics and not from the materialistic perception of reality. It considers the various
dimensions of the public discourse on inequality in a caste-stratified system. Dalits aesthetic is based on their life experience. Aesthetics of Dalit must essentially possess a philosophy of life. Its meaning is drawn from a society based on the principle of justice, equality, liberty, and fraternity (whether present or future). The aesthetics of Dalit tries to raise Dalit consciousness about the fact that their assigned inferior status is neither of their creation nor a divinely created reality, but it is imposed upon them by a humanly created system. Therefore, aesthetics of Dalit has to prepare the Dalits to reject the old caste based religious order, which has perpetuated their condition, because this will pave a way towards their aestheticism. Such an aesthetic can be called an aesthetic of resistance.

The central concern of the aesthetics of Dalit is how best to represent the authentic experience of Dalits. Dalit expression is not ahistorical. In fact, some of the recent literature in the recent times has been able to analyze the caste-class dialectics by interrogating the margins. Another essential characteristic of the Dalit literature is that it is not originally and essentially a literary exercise. They are a social phenomenon more than a literary event, a socio-cultural action in the form of a literary performance. Following from this Dalit literature portrays the individual not only as one from within his community, but also as himself/herself wishes to stand in front of his community and society. Subjectivity in these autobiographies is thus complicated by the deep connection between the individual self and the communal self.

Dalit writers do not use literature only as a positive force (creating the emancipatory discourse around the Dalit or the Working Class). But also uses it as a negative force, portraying the social realities, both of the oppressive systems of power and of the working classes miserable conditions in a manner that decimates any hints of romance or possibility surrounding the survival of that order.

There is a great sense of attached dynamism to Dalit literature. Dalit short stories give the taste of modern experience of untouchability. Not merely referring to the gross brutalities of the past but also to the insidious violence of the present. They expose the moral
baggage that the categories of beauty, honesty, truth and justice carry and investigate, and expose the manner in which Dalits are written into the public imagination.

However, the rational and, the liberative potential of the Dalit literature and its mission and its message shows the capability of clarifying and even solving several historical obscurities and ambiguities and also serving the greater purpose of expressing the modern form of egalitarian fraternity, solidarity, and identity of the larger and inclusive society, has been the discovery of the Dalit writer in the course of their critical self-emergence. The Dalit writer, critic, ideologue in the course of their self-recovery, also discovered a unified and genuinely traditional stream of thought, code of ethics and ritualised symbol system with which meaningful ideological linkage could forged, without distorting their historical truth. This brings to the fore the epistemological and ethical superiority of their collective effort.

The aesthetics of Dalit is born of an experience that has been denied access to any form of legitimacy. Literary or otherwise. It has been represented as a stagnant experience that saw no motion, no change across centuries. It is a subsidiary experience. It is not an experience that has experienced renaissance. It is not an experience that has codified its aesthetic, it’s meaning of beauty, whether or not beauty is understood in the same manner.

Given this brief manifesto of the various ideas and attitudes that aesthetics of Dalit concerns itself with, let us now attempt to map the various ways in which aesthetics of Dalit manifests itself in Dalit life. We shall attempt to see the contradictions and symbiosis of the ways in which various Dalit groups and political formations; individuals and sub-castes draw on and transform aesthetics of Dalit.