CHAPTER FIVE: AESTHETICS OF DALITS

Before we attempt to map the various sites in which aesthetics of Dalit finds itself in play, it is important to bear in mind two things. Firstly, there is no such thing as the aesthetics of Dalit. The aesthetics of Dalit is the aesthetics of resistance to the caste Hindu social order by the formerly “untouchable” castes. The revolutionary concept of the Dalit is inhabited by a variety of castes, influenced by a variety of political philosophies, constrained by a variety of socio-economic conditions. The aesthetics of Dalit therefore is the varied yet often contradictory, but mostly symbiotic philosophies of life that Dalits participate in and accept today.

Secondly, and following from the first, an aesthetics of Dalit is not simply concerned with metaphysical questions of beauty, truth and judgment. It is not a theoretical conclusion derived from logical reflection. It is formed from self-identity and social action of Dalits today. It reflects paradoxical concerns, complex moralities, and contingent strategies. It is meaningless to find a homogenized aesthetic of Dalit. The revolutionary and epistemological potential of aesthetics of Dalit comes from the fact that it is possesses of such variation and dynamism and is constantly growing and changing and adapting. Like the term Dalit itself, the inclusionary nature of aesthetics of Dalit is its strongest point.

This chapter shall attempt at a brief programmatic discussion of socio-economic conditions of Dalits in India. It shall then analyse the cultural and religious hegemony of the caste Hindus and the impact that this had on self-respect and community identity. I shall then briefly elucidate the various philosophies of resistance that have informed and inspired Dalit identity and socio-political formation. Then I shall pause briefly on Arjun Dangle’s programme for aesthetics of Dalit in an attempt to illustrate one of the programmatic desires that the progressive Dalit movement imagines the direction of aesthetics of Dalit is in. then I will try to trace some of the diversions and confluences of various sites of differing aesthetics in Dalit life today.

A unique feature of the Indian caste is its composition on the basis of caste. A number of Indian and foreign sociologists have put forward theories on the class and caste system. While space
does not permit me to discuss all these theories even briefly, it will be appropriate to present the
views of Dr. B.R.Ambedkar. A dalit himself he led a fierce struggle for his caste-fellow rights.

According to the ancient *Dharmashastra* of the Hindus, there were only four *varnas* (classes). The Brahmans were priests; the Kshatriyas, warriors; the Vaishyas, traders and the Shudras, semi-skilled or unskilled labourers doing menial work. This hierarchy is primarily a class system. Dr. Ambedkar has traced the devolvement of the caste system in his work *castes in India-their mechanism, genesis and development* (1916), *Annihilation of caste* (1936) and *Who were the Shudras* (1948). In his opinion, the Hindu society in the early stages was divided on the basis of class, as had happened the world over.

Later according to Dr. Ambedkar, “each of these classes became an enclosed unit, accessible only by birth; in other word a caste. This development was unique in India. The first to enclose themselves were the priests or Brahmans; soon this exclusivity spread to the other classes too” (Ambedkar 48). Dr. Ambedkar describes the process as the infection of imitation. He rejects the commonly held view that god created castes, or that the caste system evolved as the result of a special evaluation of Indian society. His reinterpretation of religious mobility, and reshaping of the existing religions, reviving of the suppressed and forgotten ones, invention of new ones and even renouncing of all religions, either one of these singly or in combinations, was resorted to, as part and parcel of the overall process of their social emergence in human subjectivity.

Many researchers have been tempted to credit the origin of the caste system to the sage Manu because *Manusmriti*, a religious text attributed to the sage, justified the caste system. Commenting on this view, Dr. Ambedkar states “caste existed even before Manu who was merely an ardent supporter who canonized the institution, and not the originator, of the caste system” (Ambedkar 234).

Dr. Ambedkar realized that to understand the development of the caste system it is necessary to view it as a part of the condition prevailing at the time and not associate it with religion. He writes: “preaching did not make caste system nor will it unmake it.” While the four caste-Brahmins, Khatriyas, Vaishyas and shudras- came to be developed following particular
conditions, the caste system and later the class system were given to religious sanction in the
Hindu texts which were written by the Brahmins. The texts emphases that the class system was
god-made and not man made. The Hindu philosophy spread the theory that they themselves were
born from the mouth of Braham, the khatriyas from his chest, the vaishyas from his thighs and
the shudras from his feet. Hence Brahmins were put forth such in the Rig Veda, which was again
claimed to be god-made.

The kings or the Khatriyas implemented the social, political, economic and religious restrictions
laid down by the Brahmins in their religious texts. Thus, to follow the duties allotted to a
particular caste in the texts become not only a religious obligation but also obedience to a royal
order. On other words, religion and the state joined hands and bound the lowest class namely
shudras into mental, cultural, and social slavery and later into untouchablity.

"The living conditions of these untouchables were shameful. They had no land to till nor could
they follow any profession. They did menial work ordered by the higher caste, come rain or
shine. Treated like animal, they lived apart from the village and had to accept leftovers from the
higher caste people, in return for their endless toil. Their physical contact was said to 'pollute'
the upper caste—even their shadow was said to have the same effect. Hindu religious texts forbade
them to wear good clothes or ornaments or even footwear, and prescribed harsh and humiliating
punishment for violating these orders. Even for a basic necessity like water they were haplessly
dependent on the higher caste good will" (Ambedkar 315).

The most perverted practice of untouchabilty was that which once compelled the untouchables to
tie an earthen pot around their necks so that their spit should not fall to the earth and pollute it.
Another was the compulsion the tie a broom behind them so that their footprints would be erased
before others set eyes on them. The caste system in India was based on exploitation. An
exploiting system always adheres to the philosophy or system, which is most favourable to it,
while other system are either destroyed or corrupted. Social inequality and untouchable were
convenient, indeed necessary for the earlier rulers and were hence retained. Religious sanction
was perpetuated and the cultural development and philosophy that supported the exploitation
were encouraged to flourish. All revolt against untouchability or social inequality failed. These
social groups are always passive consumers of the religion handed out to them, that religion had a different psychological meaning for the individual and sociological import for the composition of this social group.

Thus the Dalits lived a life full of poverty, starvation, ignorance, insults, and injustice, atrocities-practices totally against humanity. The only thing available to them in plenty was their wretchedness and this was so mingled within every drop of their blood that they forget their own existence and could hardly dream of freedom or independence. This condition prevailed till the British came to India.

The arrival of the British and their establishment as regulars in India severely jolted the social system in India. The British brought with them new knowledge, technology and production process which in turned led to industrialization. Most importantly, a new legal system replaced the old dominated by religious restriction. With the introduction of English and its spread, a new class of literates began to grow.

Human relation began to be examined in the light of ethical values and by the touchstone of scientific query. The work of social reconstruction gained momentum. A generation of social reformers came into began during the early days of the British rule. However, their reforms were restricted to evils such as child marriage and superstition, that too among the higher class of society, which is the upper caste/class. While the restrictive scope of their reforms was excusable in the early days of social awaking and social reconstruction, it cannot be denied that these reforms were intimidated by religion-based values and by those who jealously guided these values. In this context it is important to see the development of thought that worked on the enlightenment values that inspired the early Hindu reformers and the foundational theorists of the Dalit movement.

Development and critique of enlightenment values

Before we go further, it is important to summarize the development and critique of enlightenment values as was attempted in Chapter two. This section shall attempt to focus on the
major pillars of theoretical support that Dalit aesthetics draws upon in attempting to contest dominant ideas of self, society, experience and morality.

Crawford had used Kant’s claim that ‘the beautiful symbolizes the morally good to complete the deduction by arguing that the judgment of taste’s demand for agreement could be grounded in a legitimate demands for “sensitivity to that which symbolizes the basis of morality.”(Paul 15) The core of Kant’s theory is an epistemological interpretation of the claims made by judgments of taste and a psychological explanation of the response, such as our feelings of pleasure in the beautiful and the sublime, that are expressed by such judgment. ‘By a “judgment of taste”, Kant means the proposition or the assertion of the proposition that a particular objects is, for example, beautiful” (Eagleton 105), the aesthetic signifies what Max Horkheimer has called a kind of ‘internalized repression,’ inserting social power more deeply into the very bodies of those it subjugates, and so operating as a supremely effective mode of political hegemony.

Isobel Armstrong writes, in his The Radical Aesthetic: “the aesthetic is Emancipatory because access to the change of categories is possible in many ways and questions are raised about our culture and its production. That is, men and women need to be able to create and tolerate paradox in order to create change” (Armstrong 67). Change is both essential and impossible. It is the potential and frustration of Dalit aesthetics that makes it possibly the most powerful and challenging site of expression and ideology today. It is these paradoxical attempts that draw Dalit aesthetic ideology to the values of Kantian universalism and push them towards a rejection and violence against the theoretical and social orders of caste-Hindu culture.

In recognizing the cultural and social dimension of Hume’s philosophy, some have concluded that Hume aestheticizes values in a largely subjective way. However, although Hume develops an aesthetic of human nature, he does not aestheticize human nature. It is important, therefore, as mentioned above in the subsection on the subjective and the universal, that any attempt to work with Dalit aesthetics must remain critical and reflective of the possibility that the very tools that are used to emancipate insidiously perpetuate the very structures of oppression.
Any linkage of aesthetic and political ideologies must appear scandalous or merely bemusing. Aesthetic ideology by representing the contingent aphoristic relation, which holds between the spheres of language and the real, naturalizes or phenomenalizes the former and thus is in danger of converting the accidents of meaning to organic natural process in the characteristic of ideological thought.

What finally secures social being order is that realm of customary practice and instinctual piety, more supple and resilient than abstract right where the living energies and affections of subjects are invested. At the very root of social relations lies the aesthetic, source of all human bonding. The aesthetic is, in this sense, the relay or transmission mechanism by which theory is converted to practice, the detour taken by ethical ideology through the feelings and senses as to reappear as spontaneous social practice. "The individual is the social being. The expression of his life ...is therefore an expression and assertion of social life" (Engle 306). The relationship between individual and the social whole can be given an ontological formulation. Human individuality is but a concretion (particularization) of a totality (universality).

Aesthetic consciousness for Marx is a specific form of man's general consciousness. It is a theoretical reflection of the living form of man's real social existence in its perfected state. Aesthetic awareness quite naturally entails sensuous perfection. Beauty can only be presented to man via his senses. Thus the idea of beauty entails a specific structuring of human sensibility. Unlike Black aesthetics and Feminist aesthetics, Dalit aesthetics has used the idea of beauty in a completely revolutionary manner. The allegory and symbolism used in Dalit aesthetic transforms beauty into a lens that focuses on all that the oppressive caste structure creates and conveniently forgets.

Thus, the category 'aesthetic' is more responsive to and better able than the categories of social scientific thought to represent the heterogeneous ways in which caste weaves itself into dense fabric of Indian society. The aesthetic can help take us beyond the rational, disembodied, public self of modernity - which is the self that dictates social scientific discourse in India- into the phenomenology of its everyday life replete with contradictions and myriad possibilities of living.
Jurgen Habermas, in his works *The Legitimating Crisis* and *Theory of Communication Action* gave the term a new fillip in the context of social theory, by seeing it as the domain of pre-reflective communication or linguistic practice that serves as a counterpoint to rational or scientific cognition and instrumentalist reason as embodied in modern economics and administrative states. On the philosophical register, as we shall see later, it is Heidegger’s Dasein or his anti-subjectivist notion of ontic belonging, with its focus on the subjects’ enmeshedness in things in the first instance that lends the category life world, a particular density and radicalism not available to it in social theory. In its most general sense the term can be used to connote the phenomenology of everyday life.

It is this association of pleasure, experience and agency that underscores a large section of Dalit aesthetics. While there is a simultaneous celebration of the resilient “character” that hardship and oppression create, there is also a revolt against the involuntary nature of conditions of life. This is also the site of much of the contradiction within Dalit aesthetics. It is the location of the faultline between the middle class Dalit aesthetic and the radical Dalit aesthetic. It is this association that fictionalizes autobiographies, politicizes poetry, and forms the theoretical basis of most of Dalit aesthetics.

**Politics of resistance**

As has been mentioned in chapter three the major proponents of the politics of resistance focused largely on the inbuilt hierarchy of the caste, the paradoxes of polytheism, the hegemonic control of the priestly castes, the development of self respect either through new religion or atheism and political organization. With this specific socio-historical context in which the dalit made their bid to emerge as a subject in the religion-cultural sphere. The universe of belief-symbol, predominantly viewed as productive and expressive of cohesion, continuity, stability, and solidarity, becomes in the modern time.

Early history of the politics of resistance can be traced to Buddhism and the revolt against Brahmanism. This in a way set the flavor for the cultural revolutions and religious focus of the Dalit movement in the times to come. The major challenges that were thrown up were a critique
of Brahmin morality, a questioning of the nature of the divine, and a rejection of polytheism, a focus on individual morality and the foundation of social good as the legitimizing force for morality. This is reflected in the bhakti cult of medieval India and strains of this thought can be found in Phule and in Ambedkar.

However, it is important to recognise that unlike Phule, Ambedkar's advocacy was not of religion as the end product of rational enlightenment and equality. Religion was a tool, which was essential to attain such rational enlightenment. Religion for Ambedkar was also a political strategy that was essential in the context of the cultural hegemony of the Vedic ideology. M. K. Gandhi's philosophy was widely regarded as the best example of reformist Hindu ideology. Like Ambedkar, he saw religion as a public morality lawgiver and as the basis of social organisation. However, unlike Ambedkar, religion was in no way to be contingent. Like Phule and Ambedkar, he was not a secularist, believing that rational analysis would lead everyone to recognise the Varna system as the perfect moral organisation of society.

Periyar, on the other hand, took the logic of rationalism to its obvious end marking a divergence from the focus on religion that we have seen in the thought of Phule, Gandhi and Ambedkar. He started the rational movement against brahminical chauvinism. This movement not only raised its voice against Hindu religion, which advocates the caste system but also against the theory of God and religious ideology in general. His theoretical position is much more complex, personally he did not believe in God, soul, or religion and that he was a confirmed agnostic or even an atheist. On other hand, he elaborated his own version of philosophical atheism, for the benefits of those of his followers who were intellectually and communistically inclined.

It is important to clarify here two other points that have bearing to this discourse on religion. That of rationalism and secularism and their bearing on morality. The word rationalism has been used in more than one sense. For example, it has been used in philosophy to describe the epistemological position of the seventeenth century French philosopher Rene Descartes (Gallie 303-321) as well as to characterize the ethical position of the eighteenth century German philosopher Immanuel Kant (Gallie 303-321). Besides, we have the popular sense in which the word has been mainly used in twentieth century. If we look into details, these three meanings are
different from one another, but still there is a common thread among them. There is no doubt about the fact that rationalism is linked to “reason”. Rationalists emphasize reason in one way or another, either in the sphere of knowledge or in the sphere of ethics.

Defining rationalism, Bertrand Russell says: “The question of how to define Rationalism is not altogether an easy one. The question is how to arrive at your opinions and not what your opinions are. The thing in which we believe is the supremacy of reason. If reason should lead you to orthodox conclusions, well and good; you are still a Rationalist. To my mind the essential thing is that one should base one’s arguments upon the kind of grounds that are accepted in science, and one should not regard anything that one accepts as quite certain, but only as probable in a greater or a less degree. Not to be absolutely certain is, I think, one of the essential things in rational in this way, I will be using the word "humanism" without prefix in this sense only”(Russell: “Am I An Atheist Or An Agnostic? A Plea for Tolerance In The Face Of New Dogmas”). Humanism in this sense accepts or is closely related to rationalism. In fact, at times, "humanism" and "rationalism" are used almost as synonyms. According to Finngeir Hiorth, "nowadays the word "rationalist" is often used more or less synonymously with "freethinker", "secularist" or "secular humanist" (Hiorth, 23).

However, we also need to ask what is secularism? It is doctrine of basing morality solely on consideration of well being of mankind in the present life, to the exclusion of all consideration of well being of mankind in the present life, to the exclusion of all consideration drawn from belief in god or in matters of life after death. Moral values are placed from foundation when they are reflected back to the innate rationality of the man. They need no other sanction than the good of humanity.

In other words of Dr. Ambedkar “Morality does not require the sanction of god. It is his own good that man has to love man. It is nothing but another name of brotherhood of men” (Ambedkar 322). Like all other thinkers, Ambedkar believed in the necessity of morality for just relation in the society. Rather, his contribution is distinctive and conscious in this context. Ambedkar says: “Society cannot maintain right relations between man and man or even endure without same standards of sociality. Another name for this standard is morality. And morality
further synonyms with Buddhist dhamma, believes Ambedkar. As he wrote ‘dhamma is righteousness, which mean right relation between man and man all spheres of life” (Ambedkar 323).

This right relation must be established on the basis of social principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. These three principles according to him must serve as basis of any morality. What is valuable and everlasting in Ambedkar’s conception of society and morality is his rejection of any divine sanction behind moral imperatives. “Morality arises from the direct necessity for man to love man. It does not require the sanction of god. It is not to please god that man loves man. It does not to please god that man has to be moral. It is for his own good that man has to love man” (Ambedkar 323-25), argues Ambedkar. Society must abide by it for the social good. Because in the absence of any sacred moral code, the best among the citizens cannot be protected; society can’t become a harmonious whole and the full growth of the individual cannot be facilitated.

Ambedkar as a true democratic humanist and also like Russell, M. N. Roy, Sellers - was an ardent believer in atheistic morality, otherwise known as secular morality or rational humane relations in society in the following words; “Ambedkar’s chief concern in life was to meet the challenge of a wrongly idealized social relation which threatened the whole of human existence and shook the foundation of a moral and just social order. The aim of his mission was to arouse in men and women the passion for right relations” (Kuber 297). One thing, which is purely humanistic and unique in Ambedkar’s conception of morality, is that the purpose of following morality is not the attainment of salvation or moksha (liberation from bondage of karma). It is rather to create social harmony.

Select sites of Aesthetic intervention

Given these basic streams of thought we have seen in the fourth chapter that Dalit aesthetics has dealt with a wide variety of issues and concerns and expressed them in a multitude of forms. Dalit aesthetic 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. A Dalit aesthetic 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 aesthetic 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 human-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 aesthetics of Dalit is how best to represent the authentic experience of Dalits. Dalit expression is not ahistorcial. 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/her community but also as himself wishes to stand in front of his/her 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 dynamism to Dalit literature. Dalit short stories give the taste of modern experience of Untouchability. Not simply 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.
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. Seeing 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. Arjun Dangle suggests that Dalit aesthetics must be self critical of the following ideas (Dangle 256).

a) Very aggressive and crude language is used in the mane of dalit literature to write short stories on social injustice or atrocities. This is more so in the case of poetry.
b) Dalit literature is not restricted only to Buddhists (i.e. the Mahars of yesterday).
c) One should not try to fit a short or a poem forcibly into the framework of an ‘ism’.
d) The portrayal of emotion in reaction to dalit life should be done on various levels.
e) It is necessary to relate the revolutionary aspect of dalit literature with that of world literature.
f) Dalit writers should avoid striking the pose that a writer is different from others in society.

Dalit aesthetics however, does not follow a fixed pattern. Its expression in various spaces of Dalit life has shown itself to be revolutionary and emancipatory while not following a particular program.

Paradoxes, contradictions and emancipatory potential of aesthetics of Dalit

As has been mentioned in the earlier chapters, aesthetics of Dalit cannot be streamlined into a single trajectory or pattern. Sixty years following independences, various streams of Dalit action, expression and belief have contested and confluence with each other to create the field of aesthetics of Dalit. For the purposes of clarity let us consider some of these streams of belief and behavior.

Neo-Buddhism
One of the defining moments of aesthetics of Dalit has been the conversion of Ambedkar to Buddhism and the subsequent mass conversions that marked modern India. The rise of the neo-
Buddhists (as newly converted Dalit Buddhists have come to be known) has been accompanied by one of the most distinct aesthetic ideologies that the Dalit movement has witnessed. As has been mentioned in chapter three, one of the major reasons for Ambedkar’s conversion to Buddhism was its foundation of rationalism, its stress on justice and its appeal as an indigenous alternative to the existing caste Hindu order.

This intellectual and moral base of neo-Buddhism has resulted in a distinct aesthetic that covers the entire gamut of Dalit life. As shall be seen in the discussion below, social rituals, community identity, art, literature, child-rearing, politics and religion have all been deeply influenced by this aesthetics. Claiming to represent the will and wisdom of Ambedkar, this stream of Dalit thought has held an important space in defining what the Dalit aesthetic is today.

Dalit Panther Movement

Although many of the activists and those inspired by the Dalit Panther movement were themselves neo-Buddhists, there is a sharp contrast in the manner in which they perceived the world, and the actions and beliefs that informed their expression: artistic, social and political. Many of them were influenced by Marxist ideas of social organization and revolution. Much of Ambedkar’s writings have also been influenced by Marxist thought. However, Ambedkar, upon considering the Indian context feels the need to move beyond Marx. Those active in and inspired by the Panther movement revisit Marx, and the confluence of Ambedkar and Marx, results in a cultural revolution that transforms the basis of social interaction, personal aesthetic and political expression.

As Ram Puniyani explains: “Dalit panthers came up as the most promising organization for Dalit rights and their path was that of alliance with the other oppressed sections of society. They broadened the definition of Dalits to include workers, minorities, adivasis and women. This indicated the line of alliance to be followed. This last concerted effort fell to pieces with different leaders of dalit movement getting co-opted by one or the other political power or personality” (Puniyani, “Shiv Sena Dangles Carrot For Dalits”).
Dialectical Progress of aesthetics of Dalit

One can see the various sites of differing of aesthetics of Dalit and their socio-historical development in following contradiction, this contradiction is dialectical progress of aesthetics of Dalit. Neo Buddhism, dalit panthers, political expression-violent vs. satyagraha, cultural expression – reaction vs. creation, social formation – caste vs. imagined community, literary expression- morality vs. realism, personal philosophy-self vs. community, Personal aesthetic – simplicity vs. globalization, political rationality, power vs. self dignity

Political protest: Violence vs. Satyagraha

A major theme in Dalit life today, in fact one of the few spaces where the identity of the Dalit clearly formalizes itself across sub-caste lines is in its manner of political expression. One of the crucial events in united political expression is the spontaneous reactions to desecration of statues of personalities of Dalit political and cultural importance. This event is usually accompanied by massive mobilization and large scale anger against the state; the burning of buses, the destruction of police stations, and so on. This mobilization cuts across class and sub-caste lines and is a phenomenon seen across India.

On the other hand there is a distinct Gandhian-influenced mode of political protest inhabited mostly by the urban Dalit middle and upper-middle classes. While some of these actions are a part of long-term political strategies, mostly, they are spontaneous reactions to atrocities and injustices faced by the Dalits across the country. They however, follow a very different trajectory from the one described above. They usually involve fact-finding teams, reports, lobbying with the government, legal aid, and intervention in the mass media. These attempts also find large scale support across the country.

It is important to note that the constitutionalism that the Dalit movement inherited from Dr Ambedkar remains intact. In both cases, the target of Dalit ire is the state, on the one hand it shows its disappointment with state for failing in its duty to protect the sanctity of its cultural
heroes, and on the other hand it forces the state to assume responsibility for stemming caste-based violence and injustice in the country.

It is important to note here that while there are numerous occasions of political expression where Dalit violence is not directed against the state, these do not find sanction under a larger umbrella of Dalit consciousness. On the whole, despite the brutalities and injustice of their life-worlds of the aesthetic of Dalit political expression is largely constitutional reflecting a deep-seated commitment to institutionalized change and libertarian possibilities.

*Cultural expression: Reaction vs. Creation/Alternative*

Dalit cultural expression represents the Dalits’ 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 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.

*Social formation – Caste vs. Imagined Community*

Unlike in political and cultural expression the idea of the Dalit is least tenable in social formation. Sub-caste divisions are still strong and social interaction, professional cooperation,
marriage and even to some extent inter-dining are still divided on sub-caste lines. One of the major political demands of the Dalit movement has been the division of reservation to enable not so well-to-do sub-castes to gain access to government jobs and education. This is a reflection of extent to which caste-Hindu hegemony has percolated down to the Dalit society. However, there is a constant dialectic between the identity of the sub-caste (which represents an acceptance of caste-Hindu hegemony and the low status it confers) and that of the imagined community of the Dalit (which represents a pan-Indian consciousness that transcends caste-lines and articulates a revolutionary spirit born of suffering). This dialectic is at the heart of aesthetics of Dalit. It poses the problem of abandoning existing social structures of kinship marriage and interaction and adopting a new and tentative identity which is philosophically strong but which has not been socially articulated fully. It is an identity that leaves the Dalit at loggerheads with the rest of Hindu society, constantly aware of his social realities and constantly contesting them. This is not an easy space to occupy, for it is not simply by adopting the name Dalit that one frees oneself of structural violence and insult. In fact, it is the Dalit that claims his freedom and his dignity that is most marginalized and ostracized from caste-Hindu society in the myriad insidious forms that caste discrimination has mutated into since legal sanctions on it have been imposed.

While in certain spaces, the social composition of Dalits has been sufficient to support such identification, in others, such as neo-Buddhism, an alternative social structure has been put in place to fortify the dignity and self-respect of Dalits. In other places, sub-caste identities have been strengthened to the effect of serving as a tool of emancipation in themselves. However, the constant dialectic between these varied positions is what informs to large extent the paradoxes that populate Dalit life and social expression today.

Literary expression- Morality vs. Materialism

Aesthetics of Dalit literature, by emphasizing only the subalternist, excluded non-material culture (values, consciousness, and identity) has failed to consider aspects of the material culture such as clothes, food, furniture, living and working conditions, housing, technology, the financial system, political institutions, trade, and the impact of the features on Dalits lives. Dalit writing is a means of assertion; Dalit writers have used these narratives as a form of political assertion by
providing entrance the public sphere and a reassertion of control over the construction of dalit selfhood.

Dalit literature examines how the human agency produces the material culture (physical objects) while people interact socially with other people and with specific conditions. These processes are important for the existence of any society and for the production of the material culture, in which people's bodies are located (including the brain, which processes human emotions). These material conditions affect people's psychology (the non-material culture) as strongly as psychological conditions influence their material choices. In short, Dalit literature and its aesthetics are focusing on the discussion of material culture and conditions of dalits, which produces agency for the emancipatory politics as it is closely linked with their material condition.

Dalit writing are not only restricted to the lives of Dalit writers. It is delineation of the social system, communalism, injustice, exploitation, and of people who had been subjected to these evils. Dalit philosophy or school of thought shapes the consciousness and attitudes of the artist, and the creation, which has a personality of its own. The core of Dalit writing is the rebellious reaction against exploitation and the call to free man. As Ambedkar found “...without equality, liberty, would produce the supremacy of the few over many. Equality without liberty would kill individual initiative. Without fraternity, liberty and equality could not become a natural course of things” (Bugenia 89).

Theory has its own intellectual strength to argue and theorize the lived experience or existing social realities. The metaphor in Dalit autobiography and poetry actually creates a gap between it self and the symbol. That is reality and the image. It is imperative to engage with the existing reality for constructing a theory. There is need to understand Dalit literature as a locus of counter hegemonic space and Dalit literary movements are understood as counter cultural movements.

**Personal philosophy- Self vs. Community**

Another one of the basic paradoxes that informs the aesthetics of Dalit is the contradiction between self and community. In some ways, this is mirrored in the aesthetics of social expression
mentioned above but it is dialectic not between the idea and implications of the identity of Dalit or a particular sub-caste, but it is dialectic internal to the idea of the Dalit. This is a dialectic that runs through various sections of Dalit society and best reflects the moral imperatives of the idea of the Dalit. The basic contradiction that this dialectic addresses is the fact that in the development of Dalits personal life there is the constant tension between self and community. Given that Dalits inhabit a social and cultural history of pain, suffering, trauma and constant erosion of dignity, it is only natural that those able to better their condition seek the simple pleasures of life and desire to free themselves in every small way that they can, to forget temporarily the pain they have suffered, to move on, to ignore the constant assault of persistent modes of caste discrimination. However, this is rarely possible with the morality that infuses the idea of the Dalit. The idea of the Dalit is built on suffering and an understanding that temporary release from such suffering (as is possible when one is subsumed under caste-Hindu hegemony) is illusionary. Added to this is the constant awareness of the continued oppression of Dalits in everyday life. The aesthetics of personal philosophies of Dalits, especially the more well-to-do Dalits is marked by the constant tension between wanting and desiring to leave the Dalit identity behind and the moral and emotional compulsions of continuing to be aware of and fighting against caste discrimination.

Aesthetic of the Self: – Simplicity vs. Globalization

Related to the aesthetics of personal philosophy is the aesthetics of the self. There is a constant contradiction between the desire to live life to the fullest, to experience and participate in the spectacle of the global experience but at the same time, the deep awareness of the continued structural inequalities and violence that inform Dalit life in India, mar the experiences of pleasure. There is a constant conflict between the desire to forget temporarily the structural conditions that surround oneself and to experience the pleasure that the Dalit has been denied over the centuries, and by the constant return of the awareness before during and after the experience of such pleasure, changing the nature and the aesthetic appeal of the experience.

Political Rationality: Power vs. Dignity
Another site of contradiction in the formation of the aesthetics of the Dalit is the field of political rationality. Deeply influenced by ideas of liberty and equality, two contesting views hold sway. The first is the position that political power is the source of all change and an understanding of caste as an instrument of political subjugation. The second is the position that believes that political power, economic standing or professional excellence are undermined by the forms of caste discrimination that constantly erode Dalit dignity. Political power cannot supplant the grassroots cultural revolution that is the foundation of radicalizing Indian society and reasserting Dalit dignity. These two positions are not always contradictory but reflect a deeper moral debate that exists in Dalit society. Is the expression of sub-caste political articulation a desired means to the end of social freedom? This in turn reflects back to the contradiction in Dalit social expression which is divided between the strengthening of the idea of the Dalit and the political and cultural benefits of maintaining ones sub-caste identity.

Tentative formulation of Aesthetics of Dalit

The bases of paradoxical salvation, liberation comes from the point of view of the oppressed and present literature, as an analytic vision for an alternative paradigm of aesthetics in public life in India. Here aesthetics of Dalit asserts that culture, social interaction, societal realities etc., matter when we look at aesthetics of Dalit literature as a new project. The aesthetics of Dalit has been an intellectual tradition based on anger and rejection of traditional social location. The bases of aesthetics of Dalit and its tradition, has been largely influenced by the non-Brahmanical theory or progressive literature. The aesthetics of Dalit is open to insights that critically engage with oppressive ideologies irrespective of caste system.

Furthermore, by conceptualizing aesthetics of Dalit, the project focuses on the basic realities of Dalit life that is, an account of how the social order and social institutions articulate in forming the individual subject. How is the link between social and psychological reality to be spelled out? How should it be theorized? Given these various contradictions and consideration of the political philosophers and literary figures in the previous chapters, let us summarize the idea of the aesthetics of Dalit.
Primarily our 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 aesthetics of Dalit, we need to engage and draw recourse in political philosophy, literature, economy and sociology. The social fact likes 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 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 Aesthetics of Dalit

The aesthetic of Dalit is based on Dalits’ life experiences. That is why when the aestheticians refer to aesthetic 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 forms the reasons for the formation of aesthetic 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 aesthetics of Dalit is needed to transform social realization in the correct 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 phenomena but it is the product of specific and particular initiatives. The aesthetics of Dalit posses intellectual imagination to construct 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 sameness, equal worth and uniform dignity of all human beings despite their external and hence superficial, cultural-historical differences. From this new enlightenment flows a new social conduct, as aspiration for an actualization of egalitarianism.

_Socio-politics of aesthetics of Dalit_

Dalit Consciousness is a fundamental component of an 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” (Limbale 28). 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 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.
Aesthetics 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, 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.

Organicity of aesthetics of Dalit

Such an aesthetic can be called an aesthetic of resistance. An aesthetic of resistance 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, ideological moorings.

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, 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 like Buddha, Phule, 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 caste 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*, 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.

**Reflective role of Dalit Literature in Indian society**

provided the brutal nature of the life-worlds of Dalits, all literature, aesthetics and expressions, directly or indirectly seek to address and possibly resolve the injustice that Dalits experience in their everyday lives. Caste has hitherto been a silent burden that Dalits suffered to maintain the fabric of Indian life. Today, the expression of Dalits narrating their experiences, painting pictures of the world as they see it, creating philosophies for new worlds, all serve as a mirror for the rest of Indian society.

However, it is not only for society at large that the aesthetics of Dalits plays a reflective role. As can be seen in the words of Baburao Bagul:

“A human being is not inherently Dalit, neglected or untouchable. It is the system that degrades him in this fashion. When the system is changed, the human being regains his human essence. Therefore literature that portrays the human being is, in fact, not Dalit literature at all. Even after realizing this, a major literary stream calls itself, in all seriousness, Dalit literature. The caste ridden society and its literature have viewed the Dalit as someone who is mean, despicable, contemptible and sinful due to his deeds in his past life; he is seen as sorrowful in this life, poor, humiliated and without history, one whose ancestors could never hope to acquire respectability in either temples or scriptures. This, in fact, is the suffering, misery, servitude, humiliation, neglect and contempt of the Indian society as a whole, and dalit literature carries the burden upon its head. Dalit literature has accepted ‘Dalit-hood’ ” (Bagul 289).

Similar to the role feminist aesthetics plays with regards to feminist practice and theory, Dalit aesthetics derives its vitality from Dalit practice and its credibility is tested in Dalits’ experience. Dalit theory is linked to the aesthetic because of its inherent pluralism and its inseparability from experience.

**Evolution of the Idea of the Dalit**

As has been said in the beginning of this chapter, there is no such thing as the aesthetic of Dalits. This is a reflection in part of the path that the idea of the Dalit has come to traverse over the last
sixty years. The social realities of Dalits have changed dramatically for some in the years since independence. For others, almost trapped in time, violence, blatant untouchability, and poverty still mark their lives. Still others, though in positions of power and eminent, still find that ideas of touchability and untouchability permeate the highest institutions of government and society.

As has been mentioned earlier, the idea of the Dalit has drawn deeply from Feminist and Marxist. Similarly, it has grown to include the deprived of many classes, castes and tribes. Much of the work done by feminists show similarities between the treatment of women and Dalits in India. Marxist historians have pointed out that the working classes in India more often than not consist of the lower castes. Similarly, on a wider plane, Dalits have begun to recognize resonances in struggles in other countries where the vulnerable are feeling the impact of globalization just as in India.

It is important to note however, that despite shared experiences and understanding of injustice, it is the nature of othering by untouchability, at birth, during education, while looking for a job, at marriage, in temples even in death, that push Dalit intellectuals, writers, artists and activists to search for specific forms of caste discrimination in more generalized economic, gendered or linguistic injustice. Therefore, while at various planes the idea of the Dalit has moved from the specific location defined by Ambedkar to the more universalist proposals of M.C. Raja and Periyar, the fulcrum of untouchability still distinctly marks theory, experience and practice.

Conclusion

This thesis has attempted to bring together the historical contexts, inspirations, social conditions and political desires that comprise aesthetics of Dalit in literary domain today. It is fragmentary, paradoxical, and incomplete. It cannot but be such. It is a reflection of Dalit life worlds and the contradictions inherent in them. The attempt has been to resist the harmonizing influence of classical aesthetics that has created the conditions of Dalit life while simultaneously bothering Dalits into a world that it describes as ugly, immoral and brutal. The attempt has been to trace synergies with movements of self respect and revolution across the world and to learn from them. The attempt has been to recognize the political and philosophical influences that inform aesthetics of Dalit and to bring attention to the similarities and differences between them. The
attempt has been to acknowledge the works of pioneers of aesthetics of Dalit and the crucial role that they have had in creating an understanding of difference, resistance and emancipation. The attempt has been to situate the contradictions and synthesis of Dalit life and to respect them for the struggles they embody. The attempt has been to express aesthetics of Dalit that is proud and confused, reactionary and revolutionary, positive and destructive. I hope this attempt has been, at least in part, successful.