CHAPTER ONE: SITUATING DALIT EXPRESSION IN THE FIELD OF AESTHETICS

Aesthetics owes its name to Alexander Baumgarten who derived it from the Greek aisthanomai, which means perception by means of the senses (Budd “Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy”). Perception, however, is far from being a natural, fixed process. It is instilled with the culture, sensibilities and prejudices of the perceiver (Kivy 13). It is, this thesis argues, a product of social forces. According to Milind Malse, creativity, perception, criticism, aesthetics constitute the progression that results in the formation of judgment of one’s surroundings (Malse 12). This thesis shall show the manner in which each of these stages has been used in the creation of an aesthetic, that has kept Dalits subjugated for the last few millennia, and how, over the last century or so, Dalits have been rethinking their surroundings.

The most powerful weapon that exists is the imagination. In order to escape the oppressive cultural norms and flawed assumptions of the caste system, there is a need to liberate the imagination and articulate dreams for a life affirming future. “Reality” is the lens through which we see the world so that if we want to create a different world, there is a need to create new lenses. The foundation of Aesthetics of Dalit is reality. The materiality of Dalit thought works as an anti-thesis to the spirituality that gets fructified into the caste system.

This thesis is an attempt to conceptualize the aesthetics of the Dalits. Chapter One shall introduce the idea of the Dalit as a category. It shall trace the brief history of thinking about aesthetics in the Western and Indian traditions. The context and importance for seeking an aesthetics of Dalit shall be also be examined. Parallels and divergences shall be drawn with the Marxist, Feminist, and Black movements and their conceptualization of aesthetics. Finally, a brief outline of the nature and scope of aesthetics of Dalit shall be attempted.

Chapter two of this thesis shall examine the intellectual history of the aesthetic in the West and trace the trajectory of its development, from the study of perception to its articulation as a tool of hegemonizing cultural and political power. This chapter shall then study five major ideas, namely, judgment, reason, morality, the relation of self and society, and the role of experience in aesthetic theory. These five concepts shall form the basis of our conceptualization of aesthetics of Dalit.
Chapter three shall study the cultural and political history till Indian independence and trace those thinkers, namely, Jyotiba Phule, D.R. Ambedkar, M.K. Gandhi, and Periyar whose ideology has lead to the theorization of aesthetics of Dalit. It shall trace the political philosophy and emancipatory politics of these thinkers. It shall compare their similarities and trace differences. The chapter does not seek to create and maintain binaries in the thinking of these philosophers, but to trace the organicity of thought vis-à-vis the formulation of an aesthetics of Dalits.

Chapter four shall trace the sites of the aesthetics of Dalits. It shall attempt to create a framework of aesthetics of Dalit for establishing the domain of aesthetics of Dalit, tracing the existential epistemologies that create the moral inclusivity of the aesthetics of Dalits. It shall also examine the socio-politics of aesthetics of Dalit, and explore the ideas of aesthetics of Dalit as aesthetics of resistance and as an alternative aesthetics. Further, it shall focus on the unique nature of aesthetics of Dalit. The chapter shall also examine, in detail, the works of Dalit writers, poets and activists and their ontological attempts to create the Dalit self and its relation to the world.

Chapter five shall conclude the ideas set forth in the proceeding four chapters and attempt to trace the differing sites of aesthetics of Dalit. It shall examine the paradoxes and the social histories and various forms of Dalit expression. It shall trace the dialectical nature of the contradictory and confluencing expressions of aesthetics of Dalit. It shall also address other attempts at theorizing aesthetics of Dalit and try to add to them.

This thesis hopes to add to the existing but extremely limited literature on aesthetics of Dalit, by addressing the question using an inclusive methodology. Earlier attempts have stated programs for the aesthetics of Dalit to follow, but have to come to terms with the various and diverse forms of Dalit expression. Most have reduced their analysis into binaries which it is felt does not serve the purpose of an emancipatory epistemology. It is important to note that in classical Indian aesthetic articulation, the space of the Dalit has always been that of the outsider. As in social life, so too in aesthetics theory, classical Indian aesthetics has always posited the Dalit as that-without-aesthetics. The culture and lifeworlds of Dalits was not even considered as an adequate subject matter for aesthetic theoretical consideration. This thesis is one of the few works that address and articulate the need for the aesthetics of Dalits.
It is important here to distinguish the attempt of this thesis from the work of Sharankumar Limbale whose pioneering work on Dalit aesthetics has set the standard in the field. While for the most part there is agreement on the revolutionary nature of aesthetics of Dalits and the tracing of its roots from Buddha, to Phule and Ambedkar, this thesis differs from Limbale’s work as it looks at a much broader field of inspiration.

Who are the Dalits? What is Dalit writing? What aesthetic consideration should be taken into account in interpreting Dalit writing? Is it appropriate to apply to Dalit literature the criteria commonly used in assessing the work of non-Dalit writers generally and upper caste Hindu writers in particular? These are question raised by Sharankumar Limable in his book Dalit Sahityache Saundaryashastra. In the translator’s introduction of Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature, Alok Mukherjee mentions the problem with literary criticism in Indian “since most Dalit writing, and discussion of this writing, have been in the various regional languages of India. This is a major gap, given that much of the theorizing in India and abroad about Indian literature, culture and society, whether from Marxists, postcolonial or subaltern perspectives, has been in English. Only some of the theorists have drawn on materials from regional languages, and even they have taken virtually no note of interventions by Dalits” (Limbale 7).

“Dalit Sahityache Saundaryashastra is a response to this gap. Dalit writers have insisted that their writing has a particular purpose and audience, that these have an important bearing on their literary/aesthetic decisions, and that, therefore, their work should not be assessed by ‘universal’ criteria, which, in India, carry the markers of caste and class” (Limbale 8). On the contrary, this thesis’s contention is that, it is impossible to divorce the development of aesthetics of Dalits, from the enlightenment aesthetics of 18th century Europe and from more contemporary movements of Black and feminist aesthetics.

According to Limbale Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram (truth is god and god is beauty) –these are a fabrication used to divide and exploit ordinary people. In fact, the aesthetic concept of Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram is a selfish mechanism of mainstream. In Limbale's view, it is important to replace this traditional aesthetic conception with one that is material and social. Limable is making an attempt to create alternative aesthetic conception with his understanding of
Humanism. For him, “human beings are first and foremost human –this is satyam. The liberation of human beings is shivam. The humanity of human beings is sundaram. Therefore, it is essential to discuss equality, liberty, justice and fraternity in literary aesthetics” (Limbale 21).

Furthermore, Limbale advances the idea of Dalit literature which artistically portrays the sorrows, tribulations, slavery, degradation, ridicule, and poverty endured by Dalits. “Every human being must find liberty, honour, security, and freedom from intimidation by the powerful elements of society. These values are now being articulated in a particular kind of literature- its name being Dalit literature” (Limbale 30).

“Dalit literature is that literature, which is written by one who is Dalit by birth, which is filled with rebellion and rejection, and which gives expression to Dalit consciousness” (Limbale 105). The discussion of the aesthetics of Dalit literature received an impetus from Sharad Patil’s Abrahmani Sahityanche Saundaryashastrai. He advances the idea of Abrahmani (nonbrahmanical) aesthetics. His intervention proves that Dalit literature did not have its own aesthetics, it had to rely on Brahmanical aesthetics: “It must be considered why counter-revolutionary literature possesses the weapon of aesthetics, but revolutionary literature does not” (quoted in Limbale 113).

The aesthetic of Marathi literature has given primacy to the pleasure of the aesthetic. “The traditional theory of beauty seems abstruse and spiritualistic. According to this theory, the beauty of an artistic creation lies in its expression of world consciousness or other-worldliness. This traditional theory is universalistic and spiritualistic. The aesthetic, which proposes that the beauty of a work of art is its artistic rendering of reality, is materialistic. Dalit literature rejects spiritualism and abstraction; its aesthetics is materialist rather than spiritual” (Limbale 116).

Sharankumar Limbale advances the idea of Dalit aesthetic based on self-respect and search for freedom has an important aesthetic aspect of Dalit literature. “The sentiment of freedom is present in Dalit literature not only as its life essence, but also as beauty. The three values of life-equality, freedom, and solidarity-can be regarded as constituting the essence of beauty in Dalit literature. The aesthetics of Dalit literature rests on: first, the artist's social commitment; second, the life-affirming values present in the artistic creation; and third, the ability to raise the reader's
consciousness of fundamental values like equality, freedom, justice and fraternity” (Limbale 120).

Arjun Dangle traces the origin of Dalit literature in following words “Dalit literature is marked by revolt and negativism, since it is closely associated with the hope for freedom by a group of people who, as untouchables, are victim of social, economic and cultural inequality” (Limbale 13). The speaking subject of Dalit literature is the erstwhile untouchable other of upper caste Hindu society the occupant of the space outside the boundary of the village. The central concern of Dalit literature is how best of represent the ‘authentic experience’ of Dalit. (Limbale 10). Limbale characterizes Dalit literature as ‘purposive’ and describes its purpose variously as ‘revolutionary’, ‘transformational’ and ‘liberatory’.

While this thesis agrees by and large with Limbale’s views on materiality and the importance of freedom and equality in aesthetics, it also differs significantly from Limbale. As can be seen above, Limbale focus is on a positive aesthetics. Precise making an argument for positive aesthetics, this thesis, however, holds that an important trend in aesthetics of Dalits is that of alternative aesthetics, as shall be seen in Chapter Four. Also, unlike Limbale’s attempt this thesis tries to contextualize aesthetics of Dalits within the lager framework of emancipatry aesthetic discourses, as shall be seen in Chapter two.

Last but not least, Limbale’s attempt is grounded in the works of Marathi Dalit literature, however, as shall be seen in chapter four, its is impossible to create a Dalit aesthetics of uniquely of literature. Given the interconnectedness of Dalit life worlds, any attempt at mapping Dalit aesthetics has to take into account, Dalit lives, political expression, public performance, religious ideology, and social aspirations.

**Historical context of the idea of the Dalit**

According to D.D. Kosambi, Romila Thapar, and many other historians and social scientists, the so-called untouchable Dalits (Avarnas) of today, were one time tribals who have been domesticated by the immigrant people (Savarnas) (Chakravarti 34). Taking into account the historical roots and common cultural patronage, we treat the culture of so-called Avarnas (Lower
castes) the tribals as that of Dalit (Matriarchal / Lunar) Culture, and that of the Savarnas (Higher castes) as Non-Dalit (Patriarchal/Solar) Culture.

Etymologically, Dalit means that which is made Dal. According to the Sankrit-English dictionary of Monier Williams, dal means: multi-sected, broken into pieces, fractured, violated, destroyed, subdued, and pulverized (Zelliot 56). The word ‘Dalits’ has come to mean a people subdued, exploited, kept disunited, and powerless. They are the Shudras and among them the Adi-shudras. They are the Dravidas and specifically the Adi-Dravidas. They are called by different names by the dominant such as: ‘Avarnas’, Out Castes, ‘Panchamas’, ‘Dark-skinned Dasyus’, ‘Rakshasa’, ‘Nishidas’, and ‘Mlechas’. In the strict sense of state recognition, Dalits today mean the Scheduled Castes (the ex-untouchables) of our country (Pallath, “The Cultural Aspects of People Oriented Social Action”).

When two cultures of opposing value systems co-exist, the technologically dominant one subsumes the other. The history of the whole world is a history of conflict between invading cultures and the original cultures. The technique used almost universally by the dominant cultures to marginalize the original inhabitance is to label them disparagingly as: “Cultureless”, “untouched”, “rough” etc. But in reality it is observed that, the marginalized are the most cultured people in terms of their humane value system and behavior patterns (“Cultureless”, and “cultured”, is yet another contradiction created by the dominant culture. For an anthropologist, “to be human is to have a culture”) (Pallath, “The Cultural Aspects of People Oriented Social Action”).

In the Indian context, the simple cultures are the Dalits (ex-untouchables), who are known, as the marginalized people, and therefore, marginalized (Dalit) cultures. Dalit as a word was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of ‘depressed classes”; a term the British used for those who are now called the Scheduled Castes. “In 1970s the Dalit Panthers revived the term and expanded its reference to include: scheduled tribes, poor peasants, women, and all those being exploited politically, economically, and in the name of religion” (Joshi 23). So Dalit is not a caste but it is a social category.
It is a symbol of change and revolution. The primary motive of Dalit literature is the liberation of Dalits. The Dalit struggle against casteist tradition has a long history. For example, in Kannada, it goes back to the first Vachana poet of the 11th century, Chennaiyah, the cobbler. The 12th century Dalit saint Kalavve challenged the upper castes in the following words: “Those who eat goats, fowl and tiny fish: Such, they call caste people. Those who eat the Sacred Cow That showers frothing milk for Shiva: Such, they call out-castes” (Mani 29).

In modern times, because of the legacy of Mahatma Phule and Bhimrao Ambedkar, Dalit literature got impetus in Maharashtra. But before the name came into being in the 1960s, such people as: Baburao Bagul, Bandhu Madhav, Shankaraao Kharat, and Annabhau Sathe were already creating Dalit literature. In its formal form, it sprouted out of a progressive movement called Little Magazine, which was a kind of rebellious manifestation of the educated youth of those days against the establishment. These Dalit youths found inspiration in the movement of blacks in the distant land of North America; their black literature and Black Panthers became the role models of sorts for them. This protest gained its first expression in the form of a new literature called Dalit literature.

Poems, short stories, novels, and autobiographies written by Dalit writers provided useful insights on the question of Dalit identity. Now the subaltern communities found a new name by coming together with the perspective ‘Dalit is dignified’; thereby rejecting the sub-human status imposed on them by the Hindu social order.

In this context it can be said that, Dalit literature questioned the mainstream literary theories and main stream ideologies, and explored the neglected aspects of life. Dalit literature is experience-based. This ‘anubhava’ (experience) takes precedence over ‘anumanq’ (speculation) (Mishra, Critical study of Dalit Literature in India”).

Thus for Dalit writers, history is not illusionary or unreal as Varna metaphysical theory may make one to believe. That is why authenticity and liveliness have become hallmarks of the Dalit
literature. These writers make use of the language of the out-castes and the under-privileged in the Indian society. Shame, anger, sorrow, and indomitable hope and the stuff of Dalit literature. Because of the anger against the age-old oppression, the expressions of the Dalit writers have become sharp.

In their search for alternatives, Dalit writers have rediscovered the low caste saint poets of the Bhakti movement. Even they found relevance in Buddhism. Referring to folk lore, they make an assertion that Dalits were members of an ancient primitive society and were uprooted by the alien Brahminical civilization.

New trends in Dalit Expression

Over the last two decades, there has been a markedly increased production of Dalit literary, cultural, social and political expressions. This has simultaneously led to increased availability of such literature, and absorbing of these various modes of expression by Dalit society, and a critical feedback from society to the artists, writers, poets, activists and politicians. It is important to note here that, the term Dalit is not an already given construct; it is a discourse in the making. Each novel, poem, and political speech simultaneously articulates the particular concerns of the writer, poet, or politician and also creates the shared social space of what it means to be a Dalit. It must be understood that, given the vast differences of language, region, sub-castes, and class, the idea of the Dalit is organized on the shared experience of exclusion and suffering, and on the principles of egalitarian change. All expression therefore is simultaneously expressing the voice of the Dalit, and while doing so is also creating this the process of Dalit voice. The aesthetics of Dalit therefore, needs to situate itself within this dynamism. Creation of it is able to articulate its experience, recognize its moral position, and express its future.

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 the same social phenomenons which are 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/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 use 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 hint 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 a kind 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.

However the rational hence, 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, which 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 sacred symbol system with which meaningful ideological linkage could be 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. 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.

Understanding diversity in Dalit expression

What will such aesthetics consist of? At a political juncture where the idea of the Dalit is gaining increased national prominence, diverse and often contradictory forms of expression are either fused together, with little attention to their difference, or set against each other without understanding the similarities.

It is imperative that the aesthetics of Dalit addresses deeply, the existing divisions within Dalit society, while at the same time strives to formulate the shared experiences and future of Dalit society as a whole. An aesthetics that does not include the multiple forms, conditions, and aspirations of dalits today, will not be adequate in understanding dalit cultural and political production.

As we shall see in the later part of this chapter, while some of the major social movements especially the Communist movement, the feminist movement, and the Black movement, have a lot to offer as theoretical guidelines for the formulating of aesthetics of Dalit, none of them are able to explain or articulate the particular production of Dalit literary, social, and political expression. Classical aesthetics leaves us further alienated, both in terms of its methods and in terms of its subject matter. It is crucial therefore, to consider emancipatory strands in existing attempts at understanding aesthetics, while at the same time fusing these strands with the existential experience of Dalit life-worlds and desires, to create an aesthetics that both explains and guides.

Before articulating the specificity of aesthetics of Dalit, it is useful to dwell briefly on the methodology and subject matter of classical aesthetics, both in the Indian and Western contexts.
Similarly, it is important to recognize the theoretical and experiential resonances that any aesthetics of Dalit will possess with the Marxist, Feminist, and Black movements.

Classical views of the subject matter of aesthetic.

Aesthetics is that branch of philosophy concerned with the essence and perception of beauty and ugliness. Aesthetics also deals which is the question of whether such qualities are objectively present in the things they appear to qualify, or whether they exist only in the mind of the individual; hence, whether objects are perceived by a particular mode, the aesthetic mode, or whether instead the objects have, in themselves, special qualities—aesthetic qualities. Philosophy also asks if there is a difference between the beautiful and the sublime (Kivy 78).

Western philosophical tradition of aesthetics

The term aesthetics was introduced in 1753, by the German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, but the study of the nature of beauty however, had been pursued for centuries. In the past it was chiefly a subject for philosophers. Since the 19th century, artists also have contributed their views (Kivy 13).

The first aesthetic theory of any scope is that of Plato, who believed that reality consists of archetypes, or forms, beyond human sensation, which are the models for all things that exist in human experience. The objects of such experience are examples, or imitations, of those forms. The philosopher tries to reason from the object experienced to the reality it imitates; the artist copies the experienced object, or uses it as a model for the work. Thus, the artist's work is an imitation of an imitation.

Plato's thinking had a marked ascetic strain. In his Republic, Plato went so far as to banish some types of artists from his ideal society, because he thought their work encouraged immorality or portrayed base characters, and that certain musical compositions caused laziness or incited people to immoderate actions (Peyton 32).
Aristotle also spoke of art as imitation, but not in the Platonic sense. One could imitate "things as they ought to be," he wrote, and "art partly completes what nature cannot bring to a finish." (Peyton 57). The artist separates the form from the matter of some objects of experience, such as the human body or a tree, and imposes that form on another matter, such as canvas or marble. Thus, imitation is not just copying an original model, nor is it devising a symbol for the original; rather, it is a particular representation of an aspect of things, and each work is an imitation of the Universal whole.

"Aesthetics was inseparable from morality and politics for both Aristotle and Plato. The former wrote about music in his Politics, maintaining that art affects human character, and hence the social order. Because Aristotle held that happiness is the aim of life, he believed that the major function of art is to provide human satisfaction. In the Poetics, his great work on the principles of drama, Aristotle argued that tragedy so stimulates the emotions of pity and fear, which he considered morbid and unhealthy, that by the end of the play the spectator is purged of them. This catharsis makes the audience psychologically healthier and thus more capable of happiness. Neoclassical drama since the 17th century has been greatly influenced by Aristotle's Poetics" (Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Aesthetics).

The 3rd-century philosopher Plotinus, born in Egypt and trained in philosophy at Alexandria, although a Neo-platonist, gave far more importance to art than did Plato. In Plotinus's view, "art reveals the form of an object more clearly than ordinary experience does, and it raises the soul to contemplation of the universal" (Lloyd 84). According to Plotinus: "the highest moments of life are mystical, which is to say that the soul is united, in the world of forms, with the divine, which Plotinus spoke of as "the One"(Lloyd 93). Aesthetic experience comes closest to mystical experience, for one loses oneself while contemplating the aesthetic object.

The idea of the mystical loses some hold over aesthetic theory by the 18th-century. German philosopher Immanuel Kant was concerned with the judgments of taste. Objects are judged beautiful, he proposed, when they satisfy a disinterested desire: one that does not involve
personal interests or needs. It follows from this that, beautiful objects have no specific purpose and that judgments of beauty are not expressions of mere personal preference, but are universal. Although one cannot be certain that others will be satisfied by objects he or she judges to be beautiful, one can at least say that others ought to be satisfied. The basis for one's response to beauty exists in the structure of one's mind.

Art should give the same disinterested satisfaction as natural beauty. Paradoxically, art can accomplish one thing nature cannot. It can offer ugliness and beauty in one object. A fine painting of an ugly face is still beautiful. According to the 19th-century German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: "...art, religion, and philosophy are the bases of the highest spiritual development. Beauty in nature is everything that the human spirit finds pleasing and congenial to the exercise of spiritual and intellectual freedom. Certain things in nature can be made more congenial and pleasing, and it is these natural objects that are reorganized by art to satisfy aesthetic demands" (Beiser 348).

The German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer believed that the forms of the universe, like the eternal Platonic forms, exist beyond the worlds of experience, and that aesthetic satisfaction is achieved by contemplating them for their own sakes, as a means of escaping the painful world of daily experience.

Unlike, Hans-Georg Gadamer's aesthetic theory was embedded in phenomenology, marking a difference between the classical enlightenment philosophers and those from the modernist tradition. "Hans-Georg Gadamer's aesthetic does not provide an account of the aesthetic in any customary sense. His approach to art runs, in many ways, against conventional philosophical expectations. Aesthetic qualities are not debated in the manner of the analytic tradition of modern philosophy, nor does he concern himself overtly with the problems of aesthetic pleasure. Gadamer's approach to aesthetic experience stands squarely in the phenomenological tradition. He is primarily concerned with the place of art in our experience of the world. Furthermore, his approach to aesthetic theory is one of those rare intellectual achievements which are simultaneously deconstructive and constructive" (Standard Encyclopedia of Philosophy).
Gadamer's aesthetics is consequently anti-representationalist. Gadamer's determination to reveal the cognitive content of aesthetic experience requires him to expose the ontological grounding of subjectivity. To approach art works solely on the basis of subjective responses to them or, to read them only in terms of an artist's intentionality, is, for Gadamer, always to miss the point. Hermeneutically speaking, the philosophical focus should be on what shapes subjectivity and guides its expectations. This initiates a speculative re-figuring of aesthetic subjectivity. In *Truth and Method* he writes: "All self-knowledge arises from what is historically pre-given, what with Hegel we call "substance," because it underlies all subjective intentions and actions, and hence both prescribes and limits every possibility for understanding any tradition whatsoever in its historical alterity. This almost defines the aim of philosophical hermeneutics: its task is to retrace the path of Hegel's phenomenology of mind until we discover in all that is subjective the substantiality that determines it (Gadamer 302).

Experience is not wordless to begin with, subsequently becoming an object of reflection by being named, by being subsumed under the universality of the word. Rather experience itself seeks and finds words that express it. We seek the right word—i.e., the word that really belongs to the thing (or experience) so that in it the thing comes into language (Gadamer 17). This suggests that Gadamer is not applying a hermeneutic method to aesthetic experience but seeking to expose the hermeneutical movement from part to whole within aesthetic experience. In other words, the claim that aesthetics should be taken up within hermeneutics is not an attempt to reduce aesthetics to another idiom.

*Classical aesthetic tradition in India*

Aesthetics is the branch of comparative philosophy which seeks to illuminate and refine understanding of the aesthetic dimension of life by comparative investigation of the aesthetic concepts and practices of all the world's cultures. The dominant tone of the European tradition, I would argue, rests on assumptions first made explicit by Aristotle. "Notable among these is the assertion of ontological pluralism, that is, the assertion that individuals are real and ontologically ultimate. Separateness is real and not an illusion: what there is consists of individuals of various
kinds, from sub-atomic particles to galaxies, standing in various types of relations, spatial, temporal, and causal and so forth. This belief in the reality of individuals sits very coherently with other beliefs which, if not logically entailed by it, are at the very least compatible with it” (Wilkinson, “New Essays in Comparative Aesthetics”).

This is a view that has been held by many of schools of thought that have studies aesthetics in India. For the purpose of our discussion here we will deal with two: The “nirvanic” school and the “rasa” school. These are more methods of thought than dogmas but we shall study them as coherent entities. Unlike the nirvanic school, for the rasa school “… beauty, Saundarya, could only be considered as part of a larger world-view, not as an end itself” (Paranjape 308).

Nirvana Tradition

There are elements in the western philosophical tradition which are not Aristotelian, to some degree, much as there are significant non-European ones which are not nirvanic in the sense to be set out below. Nirvana (nibbana in Pali) or extinction, and in Taoism it is attaining the condition of sagehood, becoming a sheng. What is common to all these conditions is that what we ordinarily call the self, the ego we live with everyday and whose desires we try to satisfy, is held to be an obstacle to salvation, and has to be overcome and in effect dissipated by means of various disciplines.

In these philosophies, many aspects of life can be made to contribute to the achievement of this goal, the aesthetic aspect included. The metaphysics, on which the doctrine of the desirability of self- dissolution as a goal is grounded, is different in each of the three cases, and it is necessary to say a little about these metaphysics, since key terms or ideas from them are used in my context.

To quote S. Radhakrishnan,

“The Upanisadic philosophy rests on a few key assertions: (a) that the samsara, the everyday world of individuals, including what we call our self (the jiva), is ultimately illusory (maya). To believe that the samsara is real is to be in a state of spiritual blindness or avidya; (b) the ultimately real is not the samsara but an undivided or perfectly unified reality, Brahman. Properly speaking, Brahman is beyond
description, but to hint in some way at its nature the writers of the Upanisads characterize it as having the attributes of being, consciousness and bliss (sat, chit, ananda); (c) not being an individual, Brahman cannot properly be said to act. Brahman has no motives and no components, and there is nothing other than it on which it could act. To account for its manifestation of itself as the world, the only available explanation is via the analogy of play (lila), that is, pure spontaneity; (d) it is false to suppose that human nature is exhausted by the jiva: we have another component, our true or original self, which is immortal: it was never born and will never die. This component is called atman, and is our true and original self. The atman has no form, and whatever is without form is without limit; whatever is without limit is omnipresent, and in other words god. This argument is the ground for the most celebrated and at the same time the most astonishing of the Upanisadic doctrines, the assertion of the identity of atman and Brahman: ‘Containing all works, containing all desires, encompassing this whole world, without speech, without concern, this is the self [atman] of mine within the heart; this is Brahman. Into him I shall enter, on departing hence” (Radhakrishnan 72).

This is the view summed up in the much quoted Sanskrit phrase tat tvam asi, “That art thou”, where the “that” refers to Brahman. The goal of life in this philosophy is to experience directly the unity of atman and Brahman, and to do this the jiva must be dissipated. The means to this end are typically the various yogas, from work to meditation, about which so much has been written in the west, though not usually in the context of attaining the annihilation of the self, for it has to be stressed that the goal which is sought by means of these yogas is not a state of an individual as we ordinarily understand it at all. The yogi is not seeking a state of individual bliss, but a state of bliss not predicable of an individual (Wilkinson “New Essays in Comparative Aesthetics”).

In the case of Buddhism, once again the underlying metaphysic departs radically from western individualism: indeed it departs as radically as it is possible to depart. So far, no other philosophy in the world has explored the idea of impermanence (aniccata in Pali) as extensively as Buddhism. The Buddhist universe is one in which the conception of enduring individuals of any kind is regarded as totally false. They are an appearance only, the first step on the path to salvation is to grasp deeply the transience of all conditioned phenomena, i.e., all phenomena which are formed or arise from other phenomena, whose origination is (in Buddhist language) dependent.
Only nirvana, which is not a formation from anything else and so is not dependent or conditioned, is permanent (nirca). What we ordinarily misconceive as individuals are in fact moment-states of what are termed the five aggregates (khandhas in Pali; skandhas in Sanskrit): physical form; feelings; perceptions; volitions and consciousness. This impermanence is as true of our own selves as of any other type of apparent individual in the cosmos, and this is the meaning of the central Buddhist doctrine of no-self (anata or anatman) (Hussain 23).

The paradoxes to which this assertion gives rise were recognized from the first, notably that it is difficult to state (in our ordinary language) what it is, in the absence of individuals that can be said to enter nirvana. (Hussain 25). “Mere suffering exists, no sufferer is found; the deeds are, but no doer of the deeds is there; Nirvana is, but not the man that enters it; the path is, but no traveler on it is seen” (Magga 16).

The goal of Buddhism is the release of all sentient beings from suffering. In the case of human beings, it is held that the source of suffering is desire: to be free from suffering we must free ourselves from desire, and a realization of the unreality of our own self is one of the major steps on the path to such release, the attainment of which is nirvana. Since the individual self is unreal, there is no special reason to be attached to it, and its dissipation is not quite the bizarre sacrifice it might at first seem. Hence, in Buddhism all elements of the human condition are valued according as they help or hinder release from the self and its suffering, and the aesthetic is no exception. The ways in which the aesthetic aspect of life can help are varied, and this matter will be discussed further below.

There has been a persistent debate in the western philosophical tradition about the relation of the aesthetic and moral/religious domains of life, in particular about whether art (and more generally the aesthetic) is or should be made subordinate to certain moral and/or religious goals, and also whether the moral content of a work of art (if it has one) does or should affect its aesthetic value. A wide range of positions have been taken on both issues. It has been held that art should be made to contribute to moral well-being by having certain kinds of subject-matter.
The aesthetic is conceived in terms of the conceptual framework of the dominant system; but more importantly, in western terms, since these systems are primarily religious and moral systems, the aesthetic is firmly embedded in such a context. One of the most important areas of aesthetics in which this embeddedness manifests itself is, in the conception of aesthetic experience. In us the occurrence of rasas, universalized emotions not predicable of the jiva, emotions are to be savored in the context of aesthetic experience. In the most perfect cases, the aesthetic experience terminates in the rare condition of santarasa (santac meaning serenity), a state of absolute calm, close to a religious epiphany, though generally less permanent in its effects. In order to bring about the occurrence of such states, the poet must make use of all the properties of language. The most important property of language, from this point of view, is its power to suggest meanings that are not explicitly stated.

In the Indian aesthetic tradition, the concept of ananda was to have a long and important history in Indian aesthetics. It has been noted that in nirvanic philosophies, aesthetic and religious experience tend to be assimilated or identified, and the Indian tradition furnishes a prime example of this tendency, with the term ananda being used to characterize aesthetic experience. The Indian tradition cannot meaningfully be accused of any cultural partiality, since it aims at a non-differentiated state of aesthetic consciousness, santarasa, in which all cultural distinctions, including all manifestations of speciesism or cultural preference are in abeyance. If such an approach can be accused of any sort of centrisms it is cosmo-centrism, as holistic an approach to experience as the human race has yet devised, a holism which manifests itself (for example) in the many microcosm/macrocosm analogies present in the classic Indian texts.

One of the most important of the later Indian examples is to be found, in the thought of the great Kashmiri aesthetician of the eleventh century, Abhinavagupta. Abhinava asserts that once human consciousness is free from taint (i.e. from an individual point of view and conceptual thought), cosmic energy and consciousness become one, as do true existence and beauty.

Suwanna Satha-Anand takes as her subject one of the most neglected areas of aesthetics, ugliness and the disgust it inspires, and shows how this disgust has been utilized by the Buddhist thinkers.
to further one of the most important of all the goals of Buddhist practice, the liberation of human beings from desires or cravings. There are few more powerful cravings than that for union with another person who has a beautiful body, and the Buddhist parables Satha-Anand discusses attempt to dissipate it by harnessing the power of aesthetic disgust.

Once again, the aesthetic domain of life is fully and frankly made subservient to an overriding religious/moral imperative. Bhamaha was a master of logic in early as 800 A.D. Particularly the Buddhist logic as set out by Dinnaga. “Bhamaha’s Mahakavys is considered as one of the great epics. Its characters are lofty and its style is beautiful. It includes all meters relating to the story or chronicle of the hero, like precepts on statecrafts, war-like expeditions, and conquests. Its style is none too obscure and it will have a happy ending. Though it has something to say on all the four-fold values of human being (purusharthas) its emphasis is on material gain (artha). It refers to the truth of human nature and has scope for each of the several rasas or the recognized aesthetic emotions in poetry” (Chaitanya 12).

Rajashekharas Kavyamimamasa is written on the model of the Arthasastra of Kautilya and the Kamasutra of Vatsyayana. Here and there, Rajasekharas quotes the views of different writers and then states his own under the name of Yayavara. In some places, he has cited the views of his learned wife, Avantisundari. This work was probably intended to serve as a handbook of information to aspiring poets. The author firsts gives mythological information about divine and semi divine authors of the 18 sections of the Kavya-vidya. Rajashekharas has a high regard for the science of aesthetics. He calls it the seventh “anga” (help book) of the Vedas, as without its help the full meaning of the vedic texts cannot be grasped. He considers sahitya-vidhya to be the vidhya (Chaitanya 36).

Abhinavgupta was an encyclopedic thinker of Kashmir. He wrote more than 50 works. His literary activity admits of division into three periods: Tantrika, Alamkarika, and philosophical. His contribution to aesthetics is primarily based on the available works of the second period, the Dhvanyaloka Lonchana and the Abhinava Bharti references to the authorities on various subjects
such as: dance, music, meter, acting, etc. and quotations from them, found in his works, give a clear idea of the vast intellectual background of his aesthetic thought (Chaitanya 42).

*Abhinavgupta* was a true aesthetician. He approaches the problems of aesthetics from the historical, analytical, psychological, logical, and philosophical points of view, and discusses the ends of art and the theory of meaning. His treatment of aesthetical problems is confined to those which arise in the context of drama and poetry (Chaitanya 43).

Approaching the problem of aesthetics from a historical standpoint in the context of *Rasa* as presented in and experienced from a dramatic presentation, Abhinavgupta refers to the well-known views on *Rasa*, presented by his predecessors, *Bhatta Lollata* (830 A.D.), *Srisankuka* (850 A.D.), and *Bhatta Nayaka* (883 A.D.) (Chaitanya 49).

From *Abhinavgupta's* presentation we get the idea that *Bhatta Lollata's* point of view was essentially practical and he did not attempt to explain how aesthetic experience arises in the spectator. But later writers have attributed the theory of illusion to him which, with its criticism may be put as follows: "Just as at the time of illusionary knowledge of silver at the sight of brilliance of a mother of pearl, there is the same experience for a moment as at the sights of the real silver so on the objective perception of the stage-representation of the historic, there is for a moment an emotive state in the focus of the situation, the hero, though it is really not there. The criticism of this theory is that if art creates illusion it would arouse ordinary attitudes and responses. And such an admission would mean condemnation of all tragic presentations" (Chaitanya 60).

*Abhinavgupta* approaches the problem of aesthetics from a scientific point of view and analyses the object of aesthetics experience from a dramatic presentation into its constituents. He has shown as to how the aesthetic objects are related to another, and distinguishes the personality of the aesthetics from ordinary to which the empirical knowledge is due, as also the aesthetic objects from the empirical. He rejects the view of *Bhatta Nayaka*, that the universalization of the subjective and objective aspects of aesthetic experience is brought about by the two powers of
poetic language, assumed by him and shows how by the technique of presentation of Sanskrit drama, the constituents of the personality of the aesthetic and his psycho-physical condition bring about it (Chaitanya 67).

Abhinavagupta analyses aesthetics experience into different levels of sense, imagination, emotion, catharsis, and transcendence—each of which leads to what follows and allocates each of the various conceptions of aesthetics experience at a separate level. His analysis begins at the sense-level. He admits that aesthetics experience begins with direct perception of objects of sight and hearing, which pleases. Rasa has been deeply linked to brahmaswad (the experience of sweetness in all things, including pain, heat etc) which was linked to spirituality (Malse 4).

Abhinavagupta has drawn a distinction between Rasa, as experienced at the cathartic level (bad rasa as synonymous with Paramananda), and as experienced at the transcendental level, and has declared that only those can have aesthetic experience of the latter type, who are capable of rising above even the residual traces of objectivity (Chaitanya 89).

Thus it is clear that aesthetic experience, at its highest level, the transitional level, is not an emotive experience. There is no tinge of emotion in any form in it. “Aesthetic experience is not static. It is dynamic. It is the experience of itself by the self in its absolute universality. It is the experience of the self (Svatmaparamarsa). Such an experience cannot be explained in the light of the monistic Vedanta. For, it holds the ultimate, the atman, the Brahman to be self-luminous (svaprakasa) but not self-conscious (Svatmaparanar-sin)” (Chaitanya 63).

Approaching the personality of the aesthetic from a psychological point of view, Abhinavagupta shows that taste (rasakvta), aesthetic susceptibility (sahridayatva), power of visualization (pratibha), intellectual background that is due to the study of different branches of learning and close observation of facts of nature (yuputra), contemplative habit (bhavna or charvana), capacity to identify (tanmayibhavana-yogita), freedom from purpose attitude (kinchginme bhavishyatityem-bhutanusandhiskarabhava), and from influence of personal joys and
sorrows or pleasure and pains (ni\(\text{j}\)a sukhaduhkhadivivastibhavabhava), are its essential constitutes. It is, therefore, different from the empirical” (Chaitanya 63).

**Rasa theory**

“Beauty or sanudarya is not a cardinal principle or aesthetic cardinal in classical Indian traditions. Instead, aesthetic delight or rasa and ananda or the bliss of both artistic and spiritual relish are, of course, more important. Beauty, moreover is neither inherent in the work of art nor is it goal of either the artist or the critic. As an aesthetic experience, beauty may also be found in that which is not beautiful in a conventional sense. In any case, the object whether beautiful or otherwise, is a means, not the end, of either the creative, or a critical process. Either the object is “dissolved” in the cauldron of consciousness and transcended as in extreme version of Vedanta or Buddhism, or the object is transformed and sanctified as in Tantra and Bhakti. In either case, the aesthetic experience, is of a non-contingent, ahistorical and non-spatial kind: it is outside the bound of normal space time or process” (Paranjape 310-11).

Rasa literally means taste or savor, and, is used to denote the essence of poetry; it signifies the peculiar experience that poetry affords us. The Rasa School stresses this experiential or subjective side of poetic meaning (Chaudhury). This seems rather pointless, for ultimately everything is an experience, such as a color, taste, or emotion, and can be known as it is in itself, only through direct acquaintance. Yet we have classes of similar experiences, each class being represented by a general idea of it (and by a word), and we have a descriptive knowledge of it in terms of phenomena which are found to be its natural correlates or determinants.

The most outstanding contribution of Bharata, who, is traditionally regarded as the father of Indian dramaturgy. In Sanskrit its connotation has a wide spectrum including ‘taste’, ‘delight’, and ‘sap’. Rasa is said to be the quintessence and life breath of every element in a play-weather representation, plot, style, costume, music or dance. But the concept of rasa is so inextricably bound up with that of bhava or emotion, that one cannot be understood without the other. In usage rasa-bhava is almost an interchangeable single concept (Chaitanya 52).
The Rasa School holds the essence of poetry to be a quality distinct from its determinants which are more commonly known characters, such as: natural situations, human actions, and emotions. (Rasa itself is not an emotion, as we shall see presently). Thus poetry is not essentially an imitation of nature (which includes life and emotions) though nature is depicted in it (Chaudhury). To check the naturalistic fallacy in poetics, the Rasa School emphasized the experiential aspect of poetic value, the qualitatively new product that must be directly experienced in order not to confuse it with an aggregate of its natural constituents. The secret of this extraordinary mode of experiencing emotion lies in the dissolution of the practical and egoistic side of our self, in the poetic attitude, and the consequent appearance of the universal contemplative self. Emotions are latent in the self, in their generalized form as dispositions connected with their general, not particular, associations.

So, when generalized objects and situations are presented in poetry, they awaken the generalized emotions which are felt in an impersonal and contemplative manner. They do not relate specifically to any individual person or any object. However, all this depends upon the dissolution of the practical self, and this in its turn depends upon many factors; some relating to the poetry which is to be appreciated, and others to the nature of the appreciators’ mind.

Thus if there is too much of naturalism (i.e., topicality or verisimilitude) and too little of impersonality, the autobiographical elements, including the author's own dispositions and opinions, being manifest, there will be naturalistic responses, Again if the reader is too much of a matter-of-fact person seeking information (‘news’), instruction, or sensation from poetry, his practical realistic attitude cannot wholly be suspended even by good poetry full of idealization. To counteract and cure the naturalistic attitude in the reader, poetry employs, besides idealization, such devices as: line and stanza structure, rhythm, and rhyme, while drama utilizes music, stage decorations, and other effects (Chaudhury, “The Theory of Rasa”).

Rasa is realized when, because of the factors related above, the self loses its egoistic, pragmatic aspect, and assumes an impersonal contemplative attitude, which is said to be one of its higher modes of being. Thus, Rasa is a realization of the impersonal contemplative aspect of the self.
which is usually veiled in life by the appetitive part of it. As the contemplative self is free from all craving, striving, and external necessity, it is blissful. This bliss is of a different quality from the pleasure we derive in life from satisfaction, of some need or passion. Now it may be noted that Rasa as realization of one's contemplative and blissful self is essentially one. But this realization is associated in poetry with an experience by this self, of some emotion in its generalized form. This self is, therefore, self-aware and self-enjoying, through the awareness and enjoyment of an emotion which colors it (Chaudhury, "The Theory of Rasa").

In short, Rasa can be understood in the light of our generally held ideas about poetry. That poetry is an expression of emotions, and that emotions are objectified and disinterestedly contemplated is widely believed. The Scholastics attribute poetic delight to the perception of some intelligible (non-conceptual) form in the emotions, which is in harmony with the intelligent principle in the mind. However, it appears that the Scholastic theory stresses the form of the emotion presented in poetry, its order, proportion, and harmony, which makes it intelligible (other-wise it is a confused agitation); while the Rasa theory points to the peculiar, self-contained nature of the emotion as divested of its connotative tendencies and felt for its own sake. In both theories, the mind in poetic appreciation is regarded as revealing its quiet contemplative character, which is essentially joyful. Hence, the extraordinary kind of joy experienced in poetry. The insulation of emotions as enjoyed in poetry from their ordinary practical manifestations and enjoyment of them in a disinterested manner made possible by many factors inside and outside the poem (as described before) is another notion in Rasa theory which is more or less recognized in the theory of "psychical distance" (Chaudhury "The Theory of Rasa").

Historical denial of access to subject matter

"Caste is an institutionalized hegemonic system in which a minority is enabled through the Brahminical socio-religious structure, which is, to use Gramsci's expression, 'a permanently organized force'. Caste ideology has been made 'an interiorized force' or an 'external law taken into psyche' so that 'culture becomes nature and individual learns to affirm and to reproduce the reality principle from within himself through his instinct'. Each person is born into a caste and is
there by either superior or inferior to someone else” (Mani 52). In this sense caste order was
given religious and spiritual sanctity; mere mortals could not challenge it.

“The Shudra was given name the name Padaja- ‘born from the feet’ implying thereby that god
created the Shudras to be the eternal slave.” (Mani 53) Caste ideology was founded on the twin
religious doctrines of karma and dharma. The doctrine of karma expounded that one’s present
caste status was the consequence of deeds done in previous existence; thus birth in a high caste
was a reward, while birth in a low caste punishment. This implied that a person born in a high
caste was intrinsically superior in intellect, ability, and morality to a low caste person. The karma
theory reconciled the lowly person to his degraded condition. The related concept of dharma was
to reinforce one’s caste duty. It is to be noted that dharma is now generally used to embody the
religion of the highest moral order. “All facts and fiction, legends and myths, fables and
fantasies, stories and superstitions, were rendered in such a way as to preserve and strengthen the
caste- bound social arrangements and institutions” (Sharma 83).

The Dalit cultural identities and practices have come under increasing attack in the past few
decades. Their cultural space is increasingly squeezed out. The inherent civilizing mission and
utter disregard for Dalit world views have pushed Dalits into a state of cultural marginalization
and identity crises. This is at a time, when they are subject to renewed assaults by forces of
economic globalism, destroying their life styles and cultural specificities, under the banners of
assimilation and mainstreaming. Cultural annihilation of a people is the first step towards their
annihilation as a distinct people.

Thus the question of cultural production is a part and parcel of general life activities, designed to
hold existence together, and impart meaning to it. Cultural representation, social space, and re-
figuring social identities spanning through Marathi Dalit literature, and in the specific context of
post-70s Dalit literary articulation of Dalit writers.

To contextualize the thematic concerns by locating Marathi Dalit literature in the larger domain
of creative knowledge and juxtaposing normative theory, one needs to raise very pertinent
questions on Dalit Literature. The systematic enquiry of Dalit literature may raise questions like: Is Dalit literature able to reflect Dalit experience? Does Dalit literature get public appreciation? If yes, what are its bases? Is it accepted as a part of general literature or is it identified as 'Dalit literature'? Is this appreciation received from Dalits alone or non-Dalits too? Whether the non-Dalit’s appreciation is genuine, patronizing, or ghettoizing?

Furthermore, the extension of this argument can raise more serious issues like, whether literature can substitute normative theory? Theory has its own intellectual strength to argue and theorize the lived experience or existing social realities. The construction of Dalit metaphor in Dalit literature actually creates gap between itself and the symbol. That is reality and the image. It is imperative to engage with the existing reality for constructing a theory. Hence, Dalit literary movement is understood as counter cultural movement.

Caste was India’s essence. It originated in a transcendental realm of religious ideas and was subsumed under the materiality of economic and political power. Louis Dumont, a prominent sociologist, posited the binary purity/impurity as the core principle of caste hierarchy. From within this binary evolved the notion of ‘status’: ‘superiority and superior purity are identical: it is in this sense that, ideologically, distinction of purity is the foundation of status’ (Dumont 3).

"Louis Dumont’s was the first attempt to construct an Indian ethno-sociology in post-war western anthropological discourse. The belief that only Indian conceptual apparatuses could help one account for Indian social practices has had many adherents since. Inherent in such culturology of the enlightenment reinforced political historical power play in the era of high colonialism" (Ganguly 51).

Besides the binary of purity and pollution, one of the major differences between a proposed Dalit aesthetics and classical vedic aesthetics is that, while classical aesthetics is contemplative, a Dalit aesthetics must essentially be productive. Similarly the subject matters of classical aesthetics are, given the experiential conditions of Dalits, either redundant or inaccessible. For instance, concepts such as: taste (rasakvtva), aesthetic susceptibility (sahridayatva), power of visualization
(praśibha), and intellectual background that is due to the study of different branches of learning, form the basis of the classical aestheteician’s methodology.

If these bases are seeing from the point of view of someone attempting to understand Dalit aesthetics, it becomes clear that given its elite nature, classical aesthetic methodology is not a suitable tool for analyzing the Dalit condition. In fact, as shall be seen in chapter four, much of Dalit literature and cultural production is a response to the elites, and therefore exclusionary nature of classical aesthetics. Similarly, the subject matter of classical aesthetics, i.e., close observation of facts of nature (yuputra), contemplative habit (bhavna or charvana), capacity to identify (tanmayibhavana-yogita), freedom from purpose attitude (kinchginme bhavishyatityem-bhutanusandhisamkarabhava), and from influence of personal joys and sorrows or pleasure and pains (nija sukhaduhkhadivastibhavabhava) are conditions that are not suited for practicing Dalit aestheticians (Chitanya 32). Dalit aestheticians need to be engrossed in the worldly material existence of themselves and their community. No understanding of Dalit expression is possible though a methodology of renunciation.

**Modern desire to use aesthetics to explain Dalit life-worlds**

“In aesthetic cognation, reflection is linked with a deep realization of the inner, law governed unity of methodological and world view of problems of any philosophical and not only philosophical discipline. This assumes an interdisciplinary synthesis of the sociological and epistemological, axiological and phenomenological approaches to the study of aesthetic problems” (Gherman 36).

Historically, Dalit expressions of resistance to the dominant caste-based world view have been many. Simmering tension between the liberal-humanist Shramanic School and the conservative-exclusivist vedic tradition, has been the defining feature of India’s social history. A series of medieval socio-religious movements, broadly, though not quite appropriately termed the Bhakti movement, which peaked in the 16th and 17th centuries in India with the emergence of subaltern saint poets. They represent the cultural revolt in and scintillating examples of toiling caste creativity.
Maharashtra was another region where Bhakti Movement (popularly known as the *Varkari* tradition), made its powerful presence felt. Saints like Gyaneshwar, Eknath, Namdev, Chokha, and Tukaram had made tremendous contribution to Marathi language and literature. These proponents of the Bhakti tradition provoked popular and radical revaluations of prevalent values. The ferment thus generated, especially among the downtrodden communities, threw up many cultural heroes popularly recognized as saint poets who came up with their unique ideology which involved belief in one god, a passionate advocacy of social justice, and a reposing faith in people as means and measure of all things, material as well as religious.

Of late, the Dalit-subaltern radicals and those engaged in the ongoing work of recovery of the Indian past are increasingly stressing a close relationship between Buddhism and various streams of Bhakti movement. They categorized Bhakti movement as a movement of protest against vedic cultural hegemony. This tradition insisted that true religion is important to both individual and society, as it does not merely concern an individualistic search for moral edification or spiritual progress but also determines the relations between people. It is important that, in their use of religious idioms they shape the terms of the debate in a secular context.

In this sense, their movement, contrary to the traditional trajectories of dominant historiography, represented a sort of resurrection of the earlier *shramic* heterodoxies. In this context, it is significant to underline that their god was not the transcendental Brahminic god; their god had an existence within their own being in the form of individual and social conscience. As such, the *Bhakti* (devotion) movement should be appropriately renamed *Mukti* (Liberation) movement.

Antonio Gramsci argued that hegemony exists in multiple levels of a society of which cultural hegemony stands significant (Gramsci 72). The negative connotation of hegemony emerges from the established state power and authority whereas cultural hegemony or counter hegemony is located in civil society. The cultural hegemony is to be understood as values, ideas, notions, culture, and also power. Therefore, in the Indian context, Dalit society can also attain this
cultural hegemony by attaining certain values, ideas and notions through the cultural artifact. Dalit literatures has started attaining the counter hegemony.

This counter hegemony of Dalits cannot stabilize and reproduce a new set of values, ideas and notions. This new set of ideas challenges the existing one and the same could provide alternative culture. "Power" operates not only in the formal structures of the state but operates in the social-cultural and economic sphere as well. The contemporary Dalit culture and politics is significant and it has to be understood in that context. Locating contemporary identity politics of Dalits and Feminists is important. However, how far this identity politics caters to the larger project of establishing counter hegemony is the crucial question.

Dalit literature needs to be understood as a counter hegemonic force. It has impacted the potential movements that have a capacity to transcend existing power relations. Dalit writings are the parallel history which contextualized Dalit life experience in the context of globalization, political marginalization, and subjugation. It haunts the community from generation to generation which is the core of all these Dalit narrations. The existing cultural studies mainly focused on aesthetic dimension of life rather than the diversity of culture. The aesthetic of the society is deeply rooted in dominant notions. The richness of the written Dalit literature made it uneasy to understand a different notion of culture.

The dominant aesthetics exist in the everyday forms of culture. Dalit writings are critically engaging with the everyday form of culture. It is very imperative to understand, as to what kinds of Dalit experiences are transformed as a resource, to interact with the dominant notion of culture. The word Dalit gives a meaning to culture and politics provides the answer that if one uses the word Dalit, it has to be understood in its implied meaning – i.e. the culture of resistance. Before the emergence of Dalit category, a number of categories were used to understand the Dalit life. Dalit is a major resistance category of hegemonic culture. The Dalit cultural movements are formulating new subjectivities. The central point is to understand, how one creates or locates new aesthetic modes in Dalit culture, as well as, how Dalit tries to intervene and create the larger creative domain.

29
Similarities with black and feminist and Marxist aesthetics

There have been many social movements especially in the last hundred years or so, that have come up in relation to the white male capitalist dominated western political and aesthetic hegemony. Each of these has a lot to offer aesthetics of Dalit, in terms of experiential similarities and theoretical tools. We shall consider three such movements in some detail, namely: the feminist, the Marxist, and the Black movements.

Feminist Aesthetics

Feminist aesthetics is a field of study that has developed primarily over the last thirty years, as the influences of the feminist movement and its academic corollary of feminist theory have entered into and influenced our major academic disciplines. Contrary to the appearance of the name, and possibly confusing to many as a result, the field of feminist aesthetics is not directly connected with advancing feminism in the political sphere. Nor, strictly speaking, does feminist aesthetics deal with the notion of a specifically female approach to aesthetics or aesthetic appreciation, the so-called "feminine aesthetic."

"Inquiries into gender identity and its associations in aesthetic concepts and judgments have been largely ignored within the traditional discipline of aesthetics, which itself only goes back to the eighteenth century (though ancient writings of Plato and others on beauty have often been enlisted in aesthetic debates). Given its development as a sub-discipline of philosophy during the Enlightenment, traditional aesthetics reflects that era’s emphasis on clarity of categories and definitions, as well as philosophy’s emphasis on logical argument" (Detels, “Wither Feminist Aesthetics”).

"Yet this clarity is resisted by the stunning breadth of the subject matter of aesthetics: namely, the study of sensual perceptions and judgments of taste in the whole wide world of all human sensual experience, including experiences of the arts and of nature. Because of the enormous breadth and subjectivity of the Aesthetic realm, philosophers in the field have generally been at
great pains to hold its subject-matter still enough for logical reasoning, particularly the rigorous "analytic" variety of reasoning that has dominated Anglo-American philosophy over the last half century. Typically, they have focused on the fine arts (witness "philosophy of art" as a frequent title for courses and texts in aesthetics), and have worked to fix and debate definitions for terms such as "taste," "beauty," "sublimity," "aesthetic judgment," "aesthetic experience," "expression," "artist," "greatness," "genius," and "artwork." Thus, with some exceptions, philosophical aesthetics has been a discipline much removed from the "messier" sensual activities of everyday life experiences, like sex, eating, cooking, gardening, dancing, wherein it is difficult to fix on a single artist and artwork. Largely ignoring practical arts and crafts and everyday experience, the field of philosophical aesthetics has often smacked of elitism and idealism, and its debates have repeatedly dealt with a canon of great artworks by the feminist aesthetician" (Detels, "Wither Feminist Aesthetics").

Feminist art historians have commented on the gendering of the "art vs. craft" binary since the 1970s, noting that "craft" is polluted by both its female associations and its utilitarian dimensions. But Korsmeyer goes further to suggest that the very notions of the aesthetic and of taste developed in contradistinction to (typically) female practice, and that the institutions in which women have so long sought equity were founded specifically to cultivate these elite pleasures. Thus, "structural sexism" in the arts reaches all the way back to fine art's original premises (Keathley 3).

Furthermore, it is important to note that the term feminism does not pertain to women as the objects of love or hatred or even of social injustice, but fixes upon the perspective that women bring to experience as subjects, a perspective which hitherto has been ignored. Feminist theory derives its vitality from feminist practice and its credibility is tested in women's experience. Feminism is linked to the aesthetic because of its inherent pluralism and its inseparability from experience. It cannot have the axiomatic purity that much of classical thinking aspires to. Necessarily encountered in context, feminism as doctrine is often challenged as anti-theoretical and as polemical -- but this begs the very issue that feminists mean to hold up to question -- the presumption that theory must be singular, totalizing and comprehensive.
One of the most important issues ignored under traditional aesthetics has been gender: the way a person's gender identity may affect perceptions and judgments of aesthetic value. Under traditional aesthetics, gender is not a category of concern. Rather, it is assumed that key aesthetic concepts such as: "taste," "beauty," "sublimity," "aesthetic judgment," "expression," "artist," "greatness," "genius" and "artwork" are all gender-neutral. In fact, the assumption of gender neutrality is characteristic of philosophy in general (Detels, "Wither Feminist Aesthetics").

According to Carolyn Korsmeyer, in her introduction to *Aesthetics in Feminist Perspective*, philosophy "traditionally is typified by the aspiration to universality, that is, to the formulation of theories that pertain to all situations, all human beings, at all times.

Dalit aesthetics draws deeply from these concerns of feminist aesthetics. It is grounded in the everyday nature of Dalit experience and contests the universalization of experience that classical aesthetics forces on the Dalit gaze.

*Marxist Aesthetics*

Marxist aesthetics provide a dynamic account of perception. "Dynamic" is just a more everyday word for "dialectic." Part of a Marxist aesthetic would be simply critical, e.g., describing the many mechanisms by which our perception, intuition and cognition of objects is constrained by material conditions, social class, ideology, etc. As for art, the Marxist's job is to differentiate art from commodities (Moloyneux, "Is There Marxists Aesthetics?").

"Marx adopted a historical materialist view of social reality. Historical materialism is historical in the sense that, all ideas are embedded in their social contexts, and it is materialist in the sense that such ideas are the result of the organization of the material relations of society. Thus different modes of economic ownership produce different kind of social relations and different sets of ideas. Whereas Nietzsche traced morals, cultural norms, and common sense beliefs back to the hidden source of power animating them, Marx traced cultural manifestations back to their economic determinants. And unlike Freud, who saw consciousness as determined by
unconscious, libidinal forces, Marx saw personal consciousness as a reflex of the individual’s particular location within the relations of production” (Kellner, “Liberal Humanism and the European Critical Tradition”).

History for Marx is a dynamic process besides because of the continual conflict that emerges between forms of ownership and the mode of production. For instance, in capitalism, there is a central contradiction between the individual ownership of the means of production by the capitalist class and the communal mode of production in the factories. Here, the unknowable thing-in-itself, which Kant’s idealism could not adequately approach, is transformed by Marx’s materialism into class struggle as the objective motto of history.

As long as we live within a capitalist society, the class that controls the economic base also controls the production of ideas. Ideology articulates the ideas of the ruling class (individualism, profit, market logic, and the entrepreneurial spirit), transforming class specific interests into common, social interests. (As long as we live within a capitalist society, the class that controls the economic base also controls the production of ideas. Ideology articulates the ideas of the ruling class (individualism, profit, market logic, and the entrepreneurial spirit), transforming class specific interests into common, social interests. Thus ideology acts to universalize and naturalize bourgeois ideas, and in the process conceals the fundamental and inescapable reality of class conflict (Kellner, “Liberal Humanism and the European Critical Tradition”).

“Thus ideology acts to universalize and naturalize bourgeois ideas, and in the process conceals the fundamental and inescapable reality of class conflict. Because of its mystifying nature, ideology is conceived of as producing a false consciousness or a set of false ideas that merely act to reinforce the ruling classes dominance, and ensure their position of power and prestige in the society. Therefore ideology for Marx is almost always associated with negative or pejorative connotations” (Kellner, “Liberal Humanism and the European Critical Tradition”). Ideology is imposed upon the subjugated working class as a form of domination, preventing the working class from consciously recognizing that their objective interests stand opposed to those of the
bourgeoisie. While the basic premises of historical materialism remain largely unchallenged within Marxist debates, the function of ideology is hotly contested.

For the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci: “military/economic domination by a single class is not enough to maintain its position of power within a society; instead the ruling class must legitimize this rule. In order to lead the people, the dominant class cannot simply impose upon them a set of distorting and oppressive, ideologically infused ideas” (Gramsci 265). The answer for Gramsci is that ideology must become common sense and is constructed in a struggle over hegemony and control between social groups. Hegemony is thus a contested terrain, a negotiated space, and a relationship of social power over subordinate groups. As opposed to Marx’s concept of ideology, hegemony is not simply a false consciousness imposed upon the masses by the ruling class, obliterating working class values. In order to gain the consent of the subordinate class, hegemony attempts to take into account the needs, fears, and hopes of the populace. Put another way, hegemony must contain rhetorical constructs that attempt to persuade and convince.

As such, hegemony is never absolute domination of one class position over another. In summary, opposing class interests need to be addressed and rearticulated by a hegemonic political process. Hegemony thus incorporates subordinate groups into its coalition. The subordinate groups accept their inferior position without contestation, consenting to the domination of the ruling class. Put another way, they consent to be led by the ruling class. The important point here is that hegemonic power is not guaranteed simply by class position but must be won. Struggles for hegemony take place in the realms of media, culture, and civil society. As Gramsci states: “the press is most important weapon in constructing an ‘ideological front’. Also, civil societies, i.e. churches, schools, clubs, and so on, are all sites of hegemonic struggle. In order to understand how a hegemonic coalition is being formed” (Gramsci 245). Gramsci argued that media culture and civic institutions are politically charged fields of contestation. As such, Gramsci moved Marxian analysis beyond its focus on economic relations of production and into the sphere of media culture.
As we can see, Gramsci’s view of hegemony is more dynamic than Marx’s formulation of ideology in three very distinct ways. Firstly, the hegemonic social position is never absolute but must be continually constructed, maintained, and defended. Domination over ideas is never guaranteed by one’s position in a system of economic production. Secondly, it is not purely false consciousness, but is a negotiation between a variety of voices that are stitched together into a dominant ideology that supports the ruling class agenda, and that will take different forms in different historical contexts and eras. And finally, the struggle over culture and politics takes precedence in Gramsci’s theory as a necessary evil.

“Marxists-Leninist aesthetics itself, and the theory of aesthetic education, must embark on a profound re-appraisal of the world view, socio-practical and moral ethical significance of man’s aesthetic relations to the world, of their revolutionary influence on socio-economic development and perfecting of socialism constructed in this society, in its movement towards communism. In this situation, aesthetics must study the most effective ways of lending the individual from aesthetic assimilation to aesthetic creation, must seek the most effective ways of leading the individual from artistic creation, and the formation in the individual of the necessary socio-psychological qualities” (Gramsci 228).

While the similarities with feminist aesthetics is evident, it is important to note that Marxist aesthetics, while delineating a space for the proletariat against the capitalist classes, universalizes the proletariat, leaving no space for the articulation of difference. However, the influence of Gramsci on Dalit aesthetics is considerable. The constant tension between the hegemonic “untouchable” location and the liberating Dalit location is one of the main sites of dynamism in Dalit aesthetics. Similarly, even when attempting to understand social and cultural relations within sub-castes among Dalits themselves, Dalit aesthetics constantly battles embedded hegemonic practices that Dalits have internalized, and which require careful and sensitive critical deconstruction.

*Black Aesthetics*
Black aesthetics as a programmatic quest began in the United States of America in the last half of the 1960s and lasted until the mid-1970s, while Afrocentrism, its more expansive incarnation, erupted into public and scholarly consciousness in the 1980s and has firmly remained there. Black aesthetics was a product of the twilight of the vulgar institutionalized racism known as "Jim Crow" and of the civil rights struggles, peaceful and violent, mounted against it. Afrocentrism, on the other hand, emerged in the context of post-civil rights persistence of discrimination and racism of the subtle and therefore the most insidious kind. Black aesthetics was the more militant, its “military wing” the Black Power movement, while Afrocentrism has proven to be infinitely more tenacious. Part of its tenacity is derived from the incredible range of field it has declared its legitimate focus, from curricula matters at all levels of the educational system and in all disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, to sartorial standards to tour cruise packages; Afrocentrism thus authorized wider cross-class and cross-professional participation. Black aesthetics, on the contrary, was the exclusive project and burden solely of the artists—as the group of cultural workers that uniquely give affective form and measure to a community's ideals of beauty, ethics and politics. It aimed mostly for product—the "black" poem or play or criticism—while Afrocentrism aims mostly for method: the Afrocentric approach to wedding or reading history (Tejumola, "From Black Aesthetics to Afrocentrism").

The distinctive tone of black aesthetics was querulous; Afrocentrism took it up but significantly lowered the decibel, diverting its energies instead to building institutions where it could be autonomous, or nudging dominant institutions for more elbow room. While black aesthetics argued in the name of blackness, which often intimidated and therefore short-circuited sympathies from a white public as yet not too willing to share their racial privileges, or from blacks who would rather protest in a less confrontational manner, Afrocentrism argues strategically in the name of multiculturalism, a quietly “high moral ground” agenda it shares with other American ethnicities as well as radical and activist groups able to influence public opinion.

The iconoclastic artistic experimentation that surfaced with movement for black aesthetics in the 1960s U.S.A., formally known as the Black Arts Movement, could in a certain sense be regarded as a revolution. In the area of theatre and theatre criticism, where black aesthetics and with some
of its fullest articulations, it effected a decisive break from previous practice, a shift, as one critic calls it, from the canon of “the theatre of Negro participation” and “the criticism of Negro sensibility,” a blend of “Western bourgeois esthetic criteria and a sentimental racial awareness,” to “black theatre” and “the Black Esthetic Criticism,” a self-assured advocacy of black “consciousness” undergirded by a determined synthesis of dramaturgical and ideological presuppositions (Jeyifous 34-35). For instance, the previous era was occupied largely with a “rectification” of the “negative images of the race” produced and circulated by the dominant discourse, while remaining essentially grounded within the same aesthetic structure and vision that produces the lamented images in the first place. Rarely was that ground questioned. This received structure, on the other hand, was in the era of black aesthetics the constant target of interrogation, a structure to move away from if there was to be any possibility of constructing a truly liberating black subjectivity.

Never in the black artistic traditions was there such an eruption whose iconoclasm was so simultaneously inward (an uncompromising critique of black culture itself) and outward (a re-­visioning of the relationship with the larger social structure, in both national and international dimensions). The period was momentous enough: the festering stalemate of Civil Rights struggles both in its achievements and tragedies, such as the 1954 Supreme Court desegregation ruling and the later assassination of many of its members and leaders; the American misadventure in Vietnam; the formation of a socialist state in Cuba, so tantalizingly a mere stone throw away; and the massive wave of political decolonization on the African continent and elsewhere. It was a period of productive flux that appropriately left nothing as sacrosanct from critical inspection. For once, “Power” became prefixed with “Black,” both as describing the seized moment and as a galvanizing aspiration. The Black Arts Movement was the cultural arm of the nationalist, political Black Power crusade (Tejumola “From Black Aesthetics to Afrocentrism”).

You have all heard of the African Personality; of African democracy, of the African way to socialism, of negritude, and so on. They are all props we have fashioned at different times to help us get on our feet again. Once we are up we shan't need any of them any more. But for the
moment it is in the nature of things that we may need to counter racism with what Jean-Paul Sartre has called an anti-racist racism, to announce not just that we are as good as the next man but that we are much better (Achebe 44).

Chinua Achebe, the distinguished novelist, published the famous article, “The Novelist as Teacher,” from which the above quotation is culled, in 1965. He offers in it what still remains a discerning entry into an inquiry on the nature and functions of such social phenomena as Black Aesthetics and Afrocentrism, which he could very well have added to his list of “props” were it not for the circumstances of history which placed the latter two at a later moment. Even so, Achebe included “negritude,” a significant lodestar in the genealogy of both black aesthetics and Afrocentrism.

Two principal features of black aesthetics and Afrocentrism—features indispensable for the full grasp of both their form and substance—emerge from Achebe’s condensed historicization. First, they are “props . . . fashioned . . . to help us get on our feet again,” meaning that they are neither essential nor permanent but consciously fashioned contingent strategies of resistance. They are discourses, discursive means designed to achieve particular ends. To speak of discourse is, to speak against the realm of the given and the inevitable and to emphasize instead, the enormous transformational work in the construction of social phenomena, their over-determined and contingent existence. And since no discourse is monologic, but most often multiple, dispersed, and contradictory, the realm of the social is replete with agonies, scars, and offensive and defensive masks—epic battles for the framing and definition of reality (Wall 75).

Second, as contingent strategies of resistance, black aesthetics and Afrocentrism are “re-active” discourses, counter-discourses against the dominant or hegemonic discourses that subordinate them. Specifically, they are racialist or race-based discourses designed to counter the pervasive Euro-American racism against the peoples and cultures of African descent.

The continental African discourse of “black aesthetics” was no less uneven, though accented differently. It achieved its most activist exploration in South Africa, where the practice of
apartheid, or racial segregation, by the minority white population that controlled the government, produced a similar explosive racial animosity as in the United States of America. Perhaps because of the overwhelming frizzing sanctions against the black majority on which the apartheid system rests, the late 1960s South African Black Consciousness Movement, could not produce or elaborate any large body of aesthetic/cultural theory.

The Black Consciousness Movement, on the belief that the way to liberation from white minority rule lay in a change of consciousness of blacks—a change from their inferiority complex and overly Eurocentric ways and ideas forced on them by various apparatuses of the apartheid regime—embarked on a program of ideological recuperation and re-indoctrination. The goal was “black consciousness,” an outlook meant to instill pride and dignity in black self and heritage and catalyze a steadfast resistance to the institutionalized racism of apartheid. Black consciousness is the self-conscious invention and promotion of black culture and art that would aid the “conscientization” and therefore liberation of black people. Steve Biko, the articulate and martyred leader of the movement wrote:

“Black culture above all implies freedom on our part to innovate without recourse to white values. This innovation is part of the natural development of any culture. A culture is essentially the society’s composite answer to the varied problems of life. We are experiencing new problems every day and whatever we do adds to the richness of our cultural heritage as long as it has man as its centre” (Biko 96).

Dalit aesthetic draws on both the Black Arts movement and Afro-centrisim. While it is involved in the production of cultural commodities such as novels and paintings, it is also simultaneously involved in social method, such as forms of religious practices, modes of political protest and so on. It also recognizes in the Dalit aesthetics the nature of the contingent. It is subversive, but not nihilistic. While artists like Namdev Dhassal shatter pre-set ideas of beauty, love, sensibility, simultaneous and contrary strands seek unifying principles, egalitarian ideologies, and shared futures.
The uniqueness of Dalit aesthetic

Saratchandra Muktibodh addresses this issue in his article “What is Dalit literature”? He explains: “A Dalit is bound to have a Dalit point of view, but it is not enough for a literary artist. It is essential for him to experience a Dalit insight on his own, through it. This is true of any point of view, a Marxist view, for instance, would not necessarily produce a Marxist work of art. That cannot come in to being unless the view is transformed in to artists’ vision” (Nanda 67).

As Baburao Bagul said, Dalit literature is about oppressed human beings, about their pain, about their quest for their identity. Anyone who fought for his identity and his/her rights can identify him/her with Dalit literature. More and more Dalit writers nowadays addressing their writings towards wider audience, for some writers, like Raosaheb Kasbe, this brings a dilemma to their commitment: he says: “I am not opposed to cultural assimilation, but I also feel the necessity for cultural conflict up to a certain extent. Assimilation is a kind of compromise. It is expected that this compromise will not necessitate compromise with values. From the literary point of view, we have before us the history of total defeat and the tendency towards self-annihilation” (Kasbe 296).

It is not only self-awareness it is inherited fear about their future of the struggle. There was no history for them before, no tradition, no mythology, no Dalit panther movement. Now they have Dalit history written in subaltern studies collected as books, they have fifty years of Dalit literary tradition, they have Dr. Ambedkar as their mythological hero, they have Dalit literary movement all over India. Still they have to travel, for them it is an existential question to retain the gains they achieved in these fifty years.

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 of 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. The chapters which follow shall attempt to historicize, contextualize, and develop further a dynamic theory of Aesthetics of Dalit.