



## The Shattered Silence: The Dalit Voice in Contemporary Indian Poetry

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### Abstract:

The Indian literary canon maintained Brahminical aesthetic standards for hundreds of years through Rasa theory which established Rasa as the main framework for artistic expression through emotional cleansing and metaphysical advancement and pure artistic representation of reality. The traditional framework of poetry served as a pathway to express divine or sublime experiences while excluding the actual situations faced by disadvantaged people. The mid-20th century emergence of Dalit poetry which developed from the Dalit Panther movement has created fundamental changes in established cultural power structures. The article investigates how contemporary Indian poetry uses Dalit voices to present an aesthetic force that resists oppression which creates an anti-aesthetic design that opposes existing power structures. Dalit poets use their poetry to create an authentic connection with their audience through their choice of real street language that depicts suffering and common work life. The shift occurs through two processes which include thematic change and ontological transformation because people choose to adopt their original human nature after facing organized efforts to strip away their humanity. Through this study researchers explore how poets use dialects and street slang to create deliberate language breaks which serve as their main method to destroy high-literary language. The research demonstrates how artists intentionally choose to eliminate "spiritual" concepts and instead embrace the basic physical elements through "poetry of the stomach" which expresses both hunger and slum survival.

The article shows how contemporary Dalit poetry functions as an identity assertion venue through its analysis of essential figures Namdeo Dhasal, Arjun Dangle and B.M. Purushothama. The study shows that Dalit verse wants to destroy existing canon standards because it wants to create new artistic standards which demand social justice together with historical accuracy. This body of work represents a crucial movement toward an epistemological decolonization because it requires readers to face the uncomfortable realities which traditional aesthetic standards have tried to hide throughout history.

**Keywords:** Dalit Literature, Aesthetics of Resistance, Ambedkarite Ideology, Subaltern Studies, Caste Consciousness

### I. Introduction: From Silence to Subversion — The Genesis of Dalit Poetics

Your training data extends until the month of October in the year 2023. The word "Dalit" which comes from the Marathi word that means "broken" "ground down" or "crushed" has developed into a powerful political identity that people use to assert their power. Dalit poetry exists as a literary genre that serves as a complete literary expression from a group which society forbade from accessing basic educational rights and religious texts. The untouchable communities lost their ability to express themselves for thousands of years because the Brahminical social system deemed their presence unclean and their speech as disruptive which led to their voices being silenced. The development of modern Dalit poetry has created a fundamental alteration in Indian literature because it primarily demonstrates artists who reject the enjoyment-based artistic tradition. The aesthetic break from established norms challenges Savarna upper-caste artists who depend on their skills to create artwork that brings happiness to elite audiences [15]. The writer and theorist Baburao Bagul established the foundation of Dalit literature which he described as a form of protest literature that does not deliver entertainment [2]. The protest targets both the government and the core values of a society which constructed its sacred monuments and philosophical systems by exploiting outcaste people.

The contemporary Indian society has transformed this voice into a direct path which leads from its original location in socially secluded areas through their geographical limits to reach the main hubs of scholarly research. The poetry functions as a witness archive which records the complete system of untouchability through its documented proof of people experiencing systemic humiliation and physical abuse and total disappearance. The complete body of work requires analysis based on



more than a single perspective which shows victimhood. The current state of Dalit poetry combines two elements because it honors subaltern power while presenting "Pradnya" which means creative wisdom. The "shattered silence" produces sound which reveals a future that exists between democratic principles and equal rights because it builds on Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's constitutional radicalism [1]. Dalit poets establish their work as an Indian literary tradition which defines what people should consider the essential Indian experience through their focus on "broken" experiences [11].

## II. The Body as a Site of Resistance: Labor, Space, and the Flesh

The Indian canon shows its traditional Sanskritized aesthetic through its practice of regarding the human body as an object which exists temporarily until death because it serves as a permanent container for the soul. Dalit poets use their work to challenge the existing power structure which defines social status through religious belief. The Dalit poet uses his body as his main evidence to show how history and politics shape his existence. The body functions as a memory carrier which shows up through its physical markings that demonstrate the effects of caste discrimination [11].

### The Aesthetics of Labor and Pain

Dalit poetry rejects the "sanitized" body. The poem shows a body that exists through its physical conditions because it includes the scavenger's sweat the tannery's stench and the landless laborer's weariness [9]. Poets like Namdeo Dhasal, a founding figure of the Dalit Panthers, revolutionized Marathi literature by bringing the raw, unrefined language of the Mumbai underworld into the sacred space of the poem.

In Dhasal's major works, bodily existence exists beyond romanticized depiction as actual bodily experience. He uses "rotting intestines" and "blood-soaked rags" as visual elements to disturb reader's mindless appreciation of art. Dhasal and his contemporaries construct their argument through "unclean" physical reality because they believe Dalit work stands as civilization's basic component, yet civilization attempts to erase their existence from view [6].

### The Reclamation of Forbidden Space

The Dalit body was historically seen as forbidden in particular public and sacred spaces. The spaces of the village well and temple and school

were designated as areas which Dalits should not enter because their presence would cause pollution. Contemporary Dalit poetry uses these geographies of exclusion to create defiantly resistant themes [15].

The poet uses public drinking water and temple entry to demonstrate social behavior which functions as revolutionary space reclamation. The poem becomes a medium through which the poet "steps into" the light of the public sphere. The reclamation process includes "negative nostalgia" which brings back memories of past humiliations at sites like the Chavdar Tale and Kalaram Temple to show readers that traditional village "peace" existed because of violent outcaste segregation.

### The Material over the Metaphysical

The body and physical environment create a base for radical materialism. Dalit poets demonstrate that truth exists in "the grit of the earth" because they reject Brahminical spirituality's "ether" concept. They use leather and dirt and manual toil, which people used to create social boundaries against them, to create new ways of identifying themselves. The Dalit "broken" body becomes a resilience monument which demonstrates that the body can express its existence after enemies have tried to eliminate its identity. The body transforms from a sign of "untouchability" into an assertion of existence through this perspective. The Dalit voice asserts that before one can talk of God or the soul, one must first address the "scream of the stomach" and the dignity of the physical form [9].

## III. Linguistic Radicalism: Subverting the Master's Tongue

The most important impact of Dalit poetry comes from its power to disrupt established linguistic systems. The Indian social system has used language as a tool to maintain caste-based purity throughout its history. Sanskrit served as the sacred tongue of the gods which only the twice-born people could use while the educated upper-caste elite controlled access to standard regional dialects. Dalit poets decolonize knowledge systems through their linguistic creation because they understand that oppressors use their native language to create barriers against Dalit experiences [11].

### The Weaponization of the Vernacular

Dalit poets frequently reject the "polished," "standard," or "Sanskritized" versions of languages like Marathi, Tamil, Kannada, or even English. They



use the authentic street and slum and rural vernacular because it functions as their most powerful creative tool. The poets NamdeoDhasal and L.S. Rokade created new linguistic elements through their use of slang and profanity and "unrefined" dialects. The poet uses this linguistic choice as a weapon against traditional pronunciation and Western body language [5]. The upper-caste reader must enter "untouchable" speech patterns through this approach which removes their safe access to standard polite expressions. A Dalit poet uses "vulgarity" as an artistic tool to show how the caste system functions in its most base form. The statement asserts that "pure" languages fail to express "polluted" human experiences.

#### **Inversion and Revision of Symbols**

The dictional choice aside, there is a complete inversion of cultural symbols that Dalit poetry engages in. It takes the iconography of their oppression and puts them back into new configurations in which the symbol becomes symbolic of dignity, history, and labor.

- **The Broom and the Basket:** Once seen as a badge of servitude, they are restructured as a part of deep social service that the "pure" themselves are too weak to embark upon.
- **Leather and Hide:** Which is regarded as a formerly undesirable, artificial, and time-consuming social stigma, tanning has become the celebration of the transformation of nature by human skill.
- **The Sun:** The traditional Vedic imagery connects the sun with the high-caste Surya. Dalit poetry uses the sun as a "militant fire" and "witness to the dark" to represent the arrival of a new time that brings equal rights to all people [6].

#### **The Confrontational Direct Address**

Modern Dalit poetry distinguishes itself through its complete rejection of traditional lyrics which require artists to create through indirect or hidden forms of expression. The poet chooses to use direct speech which creates a confrontational "I-Thou" relationship that allows him to address both his oppressor and the citizen who remains indifferent. The "anti-lyricism" of the work establishes immediate contact between the reader and the experience of suffering. The poem shifts from its status as an artistic work of beauty which

people can view through admiration to become a call which demands our response.

Dalit poets demonstrate through their use of "Master's Tongue" that literacy extends beyond reading and writing proficiency in the dominant dialect because it enables people to express their own understanding of existence. They demonstrate that the true "purity" of a language exists beyond its grammatical correctness and traditional usage because it enables speakers to express authentic experiences of "broken" existence [9].

The next critical section studies how Dalit women experience oppression from three sources which include their social class and their caste and their gender-based discrimination.

#### **IV. The Intersection of Caste and Gender: Dalit Women's Voices**

The Dalit voice exists as a unified sound because its different elements create a complex musical pattern that shows how men and women live through different life experiences. Dalit feminist poetry has emerged as an essential aspect of the movement because it demonstrates how multiple forms of discrimination impact women who face both Brahminical society and their own community's patriarchal systems [13]. The male Dalit voice expresses its main concern through public battles against both state power and landlord authority, while Dalit women's poetry uses domestic spaces like kitchens and personal body areas to show their fight for justice.

#### **The Critique of "Mainstream" Feminism**

Dalit women poets Bama and P. Sivakami and Hira Bansode contend that mainstream Indian feminism operates as a "Savarna" (upper-caste) movement which fails to recognize the unique aspects of caste discrimination. The Dalit woman experiences "patriarchy" through all her social environment which considers her body to be "doubly pollutable" and "doubly exploitable."

Hira Bansode uses her emotional poem *Bosom Friend* to show how an upper-caste woman and the poet share only artificial "equality" between themselves [4]. The first line of this poem reveals how people who claim to support equality actually participate in exclusionary practices. The upper-caste woman shows acceptance of the Dalit woman as a professional peer but she keeps her caste-based barriers intact when she returns home.



### The Body as a Site of Double Trauma

Dalit feminist poetry shows the body as a location where people experience both their work obligations and their reproductive responsibilities while it serves as a target for "caste-sexual" attacks. The "upper-caste" male demonstrates his authority by committing sexual violence against Dalit women which creates an enduring trauma that traditional artistic methods have fully suppressed. The poets Sukirtharani and Challapalli Swaroopa Rani write about their experiences of violation to transform the societal stigma attached to victimhood into a powerful movement for reclaiming their right to control their bodies [14].

### The Aesthetic of the "Everyday"

Dalit women express their poetry through ordinary life events which they need to survive. They write about the "soot-covered pots," the "broken bangles," and the "aching back" of the field worker. The political nature of this investigation into daily existence demonstrates that Dalit women perform the essential work which maintains both their households and their country [13].

The present-day poetry which presents the viewpoint of Dalit women enables a complete social revolution which goes beyond changing who holds power because it removes the entire "Manuvadi" patriarchal system from society. Their voices serve as a reminder that the Dalit movement is only truly radical when it is also feminist.

### Beyond Pain: The Assertion of Pride and Identity

The early Dalit literature used "aesthetic of pain" as its fundamental element. Contemporary poetry has developed into a forceful expression of pride through its identification with Dalit heritage. The "New Dalit" identity has emerged through this transformation which establishes a new poetic identity that exists beyond its historical traumatic experiences. The organization aims to develop future pathways which will honor cultural heritage and maintain intellectual independence. The organization does not reject historical events but it chooses to stop using them as a continuous source of suffering [10].

### The Iconography of Ambedkar as a Living Force

The statement depends on Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's symbolic existence as its primary element. Ambedkar functions as a mythic transformative figure in contemporary Dalit poetry who existed as a historical lawmaker. The life and teachings of Waman Dada Kardak and Arjun Dangle

have been used by poets as a secular form of religious practice which they use to educate the public [1].

The iconography functions as an essential psychological mechanism which presents an alternative story that opposes the Brahminical tradition's "avatars." The poet uses Ambedkar as a method to demonstrate his connection to intellectual and legal and equitable traditions. The verse transforms into a "hymn of the constitutional revolution" which changes the "broken" man into a "citizen" who possesses both inherent rights and a divine-like destiny that he creates for himself.

### Mythological Revisionism and the "Counter-Epic"

One of the most subversive strategies in contemporary Dalit poetry is **mythological revisionism**. Dalit poets engage in a radical "re-reading" of the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Manusmriti*, stripping the "divine" justification from narratives of exclusion.

- **The Figure of Eklavya:** Rather than a tragic disciple who gave his thumb as *gurudakshina*, the modern Dalit poet reimagines Eklavya as a victim of a prehistoric intellectual apartheid, using his silence as a gathering storm of resistance.
- **The Shambuka Narrative:** The slaying of Shambuka for his asceticism is framed as the first recorded instance of state-sponsored caste violence.

By reclaiming these figures, Dalit poets are essentially creating a **counter-epic**. They demonstrate that the "heroes" of the mainstream canon were often the oppressors of the subaltern, thereby dismantling the moral authority of traditional texts [11].

### The Global Subaltern: Caste as a Human Rights Paradigm

Dalit poets from modern times began to view the world outside India because their fight for civil rights united them with the global "Brotherhood of the Broken." The activists established caste as an international human rights issue through their comparison of Dalit-Bahujan activism to Black Lives Matter and the Palestinian quest for home rights [10].

The Dalit voice exists within a universal movement for justice because the international perspective creates pride among Dalit people. The New Dalit style of poetry shows its authorship



through a subaltern identity which connects to local village life but uses international revolutionary language.

#### V. Conclusion: The Future of the Dalit Voice

The Dalit voice of modern Indian poetry will develop from its current state, which expresses local grievances, into a global movement that supports international solidarity and digital resistance. The movement has entered its second century, which enables it to develop from its former "provincial" identity into a worldwide connection with subaltern movements, which includes Black Lives Matter and Indigenous rights movements. The "Global Dalit" movement establishes an online space that empowers Dalits to communicate their "shattered silence" through social media platforms which operate outside Brahminical control. The voice of this movement will develop through its upcoming implementation of complete intersectional analysis.

The growing visibility of Dalit queer and trans poets, together with the ongoing advancement of Dalit feminism, allows the movement to maintain its self-reflective nature while building an inclusive environment, which works to destroy all forms of patriarchy that exist within and outside the community. Dalit poets will use English in their poetry as a "weapon of the weak," which will enable them to present their cause to an international audience, while they develop new militant language forms that will enhance their regional dialects. The Dalit voice has developed from its original expression through eyewitness poetry which described past suffering to its current form which uses poetic vision to create egalitarian utopias. The project has progressed beyond its initial goal of recording slum darkness to its present objective of obtaining scientific and judicial and digital archival knowledge. The Dalit voice serves as the moral center of Indian literature because caste discrimination continues to exist which creates an ongoing battle against systemic injustice that this "literature of the sun" will fight until its last remnants are destroyed. The voice has moved beyond the need for table space and now works to transform all aspects of space design.

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