

## **DALIT WRITINGS: RECONSTRUCTING MEMORY FROM THE MARGINS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Dalit writing, embraces the social & cultural functionality of the changing metaphors of 'Caste' in Contemporary India. Caste has continued to slip the collective nationalist(s) memory, where writing from the margins seems to convince the global consequences for all the marginalized groups, around the world, contesting and resisting the varied strategies of domination and discrimination, through the medium of writing across the various disciplines of social sciences. Dalit writing embraces the complexity of the sociology of cultures, even sub-cultural and regional variants dealing with the legacy of Pain and Humiliation, reconsidered for the readerly experiences. The paper strives to examine the role of the marginal writings, bonding the Dalit identity among the various writers across different Indian languages and regions. The paper also examines the foundational legacy of the humiliation, entrenched in the socio-cultural metaphors, icons of marginalization, and the symbols of Dalit subordination, since scores of centuries. It traces the development of the extraordinary repertoire of stereotypical Caste-idioms across various regional and linguistic Regions, Caste-symbols, and Casteist gestures of verbal and physical denigration of the Dalits over centuries. Dalit writing restructures the mainstream sociological and cultural aesthetics, exploring the constructedness of the negated 'self' of a lived social community. Dalit consciousness in the wake of Contemporary Indian reality, results out of the myriad challenges registered through the modules of the contestations, discourses through the writing by margins, such as translations, literary and cultural approaches, involving the various Indian languages, restoring the growth of the awakened Dalit consciousness in the post-globalized ambience. Dalit writing, embraces the social & cultural functionality of the element of the changing metaphors of 'Caste' in Contemporary India.

*Keywords: Collective Memory, Trauma, Resistance, Cultural Amnesia, Subalternity, Marginal discourses, Affirmative Action.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Dalit writing, embraces the social & cultural functionality of the changing metaphors of 'Caste' in Contemporary India. Caste has continued to slip the collective nationalist(s) memory, where writing from the margins seems to convince the global consequences for all the marginalized groups, around the world, contesting and resisting the varied strategies of domination and discrimination, through the medium of writing across the various disciplines of social sciences.

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Caste has continued to slip the collective memory where writing from the margins seems to revive the global consequence of all the marginalized groups, around the world, contesting and resisting the varied strategies of domination and discrimination, through the medium of writing(s) spread across the various disciplines of social sciences. Dalit writing embraces the complexity of the sociology of cultures, even sub-cultural and regional variants of the legacy of Pain and Humiliation, reconsidered for the readerly experiences. *Joothan: An*

*Untouchable's Life* (Omprakash Valmiki, Trans., Arun Prabha Mukherjee 2008) has been taken for the closer textual or the cultural reading of the trauma of Caste reflected on the marginalized groups inside a modernized ambience, relating the constructedness of the “Caste” for the modernized interrogation by the contemporary readers and researchers on Caste and Marginal Writing.

Caste unifies & accultures the invisible pattern offering differing social responses, castrating the very natural identity of the individual, dominated under the presumed religio-socio-cultural obligation, adhering to the norms of the Caste affiliation and its socio-cultural responsibility. Dalit Writings in the domain of literature, society and culture has appeared as the vibrant field of research for translation into English. Thus, Autobiographical writings, Ambedkarite Modules for Empowerment & Caste-based research with varied interrogatives on the Caste(s) hierarchies, have largely outlived the public scorn and contempt from the sole category of the exclusivist, ‘Caste framework’, for contesting through Marginal Writing, more particularly from the conveyed firsthand, and raw experience of the writers who were, themselves, subjected to humilatory and painful experiences.

Autobiographical narratives of the first-generation Dalit writers such as in; Hindi, Marathi, Kannada, & Tamil have offered narrative foci of the Dalit perspective which was/is during the independent India. Writing from the margins has also intensified the Dalitized literal bonding among the various writers, spread across various Indian languages and regions. Textual foremost instance is taken from the treatment of Caste and Denial by the famous Indian writer, Omprakash Valmiki, where the legacy of the humiliation among the Dalits in Indian society, entrenched in the socio-cultural metaphors, icons of marginalization, and symbols of Dalit subordination since scores of centuries bestow the diversity of the tradition and cultural lore of the Indian Society.

Dalit marginalization remains more or less, camouflaged in the Upper-Caste psyche, as reflected through the Valmiki’s treatment of the Dalit identity, with the embedded role of Caste-prejudice, in the already constructed Dalit identity. Development of the extraordinary repertoire of stereotypical Caste-idioms spread across various regions, Caste-symbols, and Casteist gestures of verbal and physical denigration of the Dalits over centuries. Caste is embedded in the literary and artistic imagination and sensibility of the Upper Caste. Dalit writers realize that the mainstream literature of the conventional style of the Sanskrit and

many other Indian languages, structures the in-built paradigm of Dalit marginalization or the inferiority that needs to be challenged and dissented, with the forceful and theorized positions to be critiqued, subverted, and deconstructed.

Regional autobiographical works, in a similar context, by Dalit writers, like the exploration of the “trauma of Caste”—Bama’s *Karukku* (2000) in Tamil and in Hindi *Tiraskrit* (vol. 1, 2002) of Suraj Paul Chauhan and the much elegant *Meri Safar aur Meri Manzi* (2000) of B. R. Javav critiques the mainstream dominant literary perspectives conveying the immoral and the unethically distorted legacy of the oppressor’s logic for victimization of the weak and the vulnerable in the name of the ‘Caste’ operating as the authenticated version of Indian society and culture. Overruling the claims for a homogenous structure of the Indian society, gathered through the reflex of the poststructuralists, Dalits in India remain severed of their normalized social networking and cultural freedom, tracing the legacy of the proverbial invisibility of the Dalitized subjective traditions from the dominant reflex of the Indian culture. Crude and violent was the isolation and separation of the Dalits in the form of Caste-discrimination, as these writers relate—living on the fringe of the socio-cultural margins, as muted subalterns of their location & period. It was the vertical mobility that devoured the legitimated voice of the dominant sections and even absolving the very essence of the Dalitized identity in Indian society and culture. Valmiki’s chronicling of the “Casteism” from his childhood-to-the-present indicates that he grew up in a village near Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh, born in an Untouchable Caste called as, *Chuhra* (meaning the Caste affiliation of the sweepers and cleaners), much before the self-assertive term “Dalit” was coined and more presently is even misappropriated by the Media and the Literary circles.

Unconventional writing style, unlike the Dalit autobiographies, allude to the stringency of the Casteist phenomena, that Valmiki recalls as: “Untouchability was so rampant that while it was considered quite all right to touch dogs and cats, or cows and buffaloes if one [a higher-caste person] happened to touch a Chuhra, one got contaminated or polluted. The Chuhras were not seen as human” (p. 2). Forced to be on the tenement clusters of the periphery of the village, under the dominant control of the Upper-Castes, like Tyagis confused and internalizing the absolute power of negation created by the stereotyping of the Shudras as the those always the least in the socio-cultural order. Valmiki reminds of the hegemony of power and control over the labor and the ordeal of punishment for the Dalits in case of refusal to work and retribution reaffirming the casting away of the dalitized identity in

conflict all the legitimated structures of the society and culture, reimposed through the functionality and adherence to the laws of Caste. Democratic ironies of the ordeal of the Womenfolk and the weeping children, crying loudly for the policemen's brisking of the innocent victims demanding their natural wages, which Valmiki remarks: "The women and children of the basti were standing in the lane and crying loudly.... They could not think of what else they could do but cry" (p. 45). The author shares his ordeal, besides other dalitized identities, made forcibly dragged into work by Fauza Singh Tyagi in the field, while he was preparing to appear in the Mathematics exam the following day, reminding of the bondedness or that uniqueness, which Dalitized identities seem to carry the traces of the bonded laborhood.

*Joothan* by Valmiki ignites the fire of deeper scars inside the writer's soul, unwilling to forget the deeper scars of time and rage for being born as a marginalized & Dalitized in terms of Caste-based hierarchy. Angish of the Caste as Valmiki indicates, seldom 'heal', as they form both the psychological and physical negatives enforced upon in the name of Caste to be shared forever. Caste and regular discriminations faced by the Dalits continue to distort the realistic impression of the feature of Caste in contemporary times. Out of greater despair and emotive realistic experience, Valmiki indicates, "The scars that I have received in the name of caste--even eons won't suffice to heal them" (p. 61).

Casteist reformulation grows inside the victim, slowly engulfing the heat of the time and space, smoldering the fire deep inside the character's mind emitting the red-hotter pangs of Caste discrimination, repulsive for the margin involved in the immediate crisis (p. 66). Blot of the academia of learning by the Casteist-tainted teachers added more painful aspect of the humiliation, aggravating the Caste hierarchy, by offering a legitimated space to the nature of discrimination in the name of Caste to the margin. Segregation and seperation for the learning Valmiki, reconfigures the space of culture ridden with Caste differences, often making the case of Valmiki worse, as he is made to sit and accommodate beyond the Upper-Caste, Tyagi schoolboys.

Life for Valmiki at school was never a joyous experience of learning unlike the Upper-Caste shcoolboys; he could not drink water from the glass during the exam when he felt thirsty, but punished for performing better with the low marks in the examination. Cultural trauma of Caste hurled deep-inside the soul of the promising schoolboy takes it toll

when he could never dare to overcome his Casteist environs that Valmiki reveals: “Such were the model teachers I had to deal with. Moving from childhood to adolescence when my personality was being shaped, I had to live in this terror-filled environment... At times I feel like I grew up in a cruel and barbaric civilization” (p. 57). Caste went everywhere, was like the invincible power inside-out in terms which Foucault understands of the Power, “Caste” followed Valmiki, like an albatross hung around his neck. Caste reverted everything that was decent, educated, and respectable individual, unless the Caste of Valmiki was mentioned.

In matters of love too, like Savita breaking-away after realizing the Caste of Valmiki whom she loved. Personalized relationship between sexes as Valmiki indicates suffered in the words according to Valmiki as: “Suddenly, the distance between us has increased. The hatred of thousands of years had entered our hearts. What a lie culture and civilization are” (p. 113). Affirmative Action dialectics of Dr. Ambedkar indicates to the failure of the reasonableness of the social condition to realize the negative ideology of the Caste, appropriated as the authentic framework of Indian tradition and culture. Writing from the margins indicate, as the case of Valmiki, the unquenched thirst for struggle that almost never fades, a sense of bitterness that comes along the victim facing the exploitative oppression of the Caste in Society and Culture.

Dr. Ambedkar’s Affirmative Action dialectics acted as an epicentre for the growth and development of Dalit aesthetics. Sub-cultures of the Dalit aesthetical writings did influence and propelled Valmiki to underscore the writings of the margins, by the efforts and pioneering venture of Dalit writings of the first-generation Dalit writers whose lives held similar trajectories of denial and humiliation, which Valmiki recalls: “During that period I was introduced to Marathi Dalit literature. The words of Daya Pawar, Namdev Dhasal, Raja Dhale, Gangadhar Pantavane, Baburao Bagul, Keshav Meshram, Narayan Surve, Vaman Nimbalkar, and Yashwant Manohar were igniting sparks in my veins. Their voices exhilarated me, filled me with new energy. My reading of Dalit literature was beginning to change my notions about what is literature” (p. 105).

Dalit as margin decentres the valiant struggles, deeply entrenched with/into Caste prejudices and Oppressive Humiliation by creating awareness through Literature and Art, invoking a new archeology of literary and critical reading of the Dalitized marginal writings. Valmiki’s *Joothan* shows that the: “Dalit life is excruciatingly painful, charred by

experiences. Experiences that did not manage to find room in literary creations. We have grown up in a social order that is extremely cruel and inhuman. And compassionless towards Dalits” (p. xiii). Valmiki’s socio-cultural narrative or the textual strategy remains more graphically symptomatic of the elasticity of socio-cultural challenges involved in the process of reclaiming primary individual identity and a sense of shared society and culture.

Univocal textual practice of offering the account of the perplexing Caste prejudices and debased harbouring of the element of Caste negation by the dominant discourses, in a clear way declares the internal divisions inside the marginalized caste category, acting as a visible/invisible socio-cultural faultline for negation and dissent against the much anticipated question of Caste. Dalit Movement and the Dalit Writing through the apex of the margins, translates the raw and the crude, often the vulgar internalized as the inner-feelings/experiences undergoing the textual liberatory advancement, against the conservative Caste-based rhetoric of all sorts and forms of argumentative or the theorized positions. Critique of the margin theorized position as Universalist, counter-reading lacks the credentials of objectivity, ignoring the seriousness of the Caste margin in crisis.

Dismissing it as sensationalism of the gross objectivity does not help in redefining the cultural trauma of the Dalitized subjectivities in crisis. Dalit writings trace a specific historical and social reality, offering the rhetoric of the Protest and Dissent with candid testimonies of Humiliation and gross denial to be deconstructed with the cultural aesthetics of literature, sociology and applicability to humanity that itself grapples with the vital questions of living through the nonfictional and critical writings. Translating the margin from the Dalit perspectives offers various challenges, mainly because of the linguistic nuances and regional variations with respect to definite literary and expressive medium narrating the best of challenges, making it more untranslatable. Dialects and the idiolect categories spoken and used by the Dalit writers for specific Caste-groups, remain conventionally standardized in Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Kannada or Telugu.

Translative normalization and the process of making the textual practice available and accessible to mainstream readers, retains the difficulty of the Translation of the so-called minor pedagogy of the Dalit writings. As Ranajit Guha argued in his programmatic essay on Indian historiography, and as the early work of the Subaltern Studies Collective, showed the mainstream historiography which tended to represent the process of decolonization as an

elite(ist) achievement. In response to this, the project of the Subaltern Studies group was to recuperate the history of subaltern struggles against Colonial and Class exploitation. Homi Bhabha adds in, *The Location of Culture*, I want to take my stand on the shifting margins of cultural displacement that confounds any profound or authentic sense of a national culture or organic intellectual (21). Postcolonial Dalit is also subjected to the shifting margins of displacement that Babha seems to adhere. Priviledging of the diasporic or the First World Critic makes the case of marginalization and oppression unique over the subaltern approach with Class and gendered approach with its subject position. Likewise, the displacements caused by the splitting of the centre, is again remnicent of the Dalitized writing, from the margin, returning back the partial-gaze of the ‘Caste’, towards the mainstream dominant discourses. Dalit literature delivers the slippage between the literary/discursive (magic realisms challenge to the canonical conventions) where the real world remains clearly problematic.

Global Dalits have reponded to the alienation, inequality and disenfranchisement related to class, gender, sexuality and ethnicity, that inevitably produced alienated and the marginalized individuals. Resistance by the margins becomes adopted as a metaphoric trope, by the Dalit writers—focused on the dynamics of internal displacements, dislocations of Class, Gender, Caste, and Locality with differing perspectives on the Dalit suffering brutality and atrocities in the postmodern times. Marginality and Resistance, through the modes of the Dalit writings have evolved the sphere of the Dalit culture, addressing the perils of conflict in the contemporary times. Writing the margin, from the Dalitized perspectives, has represented the act of resistances, through the marginalized and the multiplied-cultural determiner reclaiming the process of new identity in a globalized context.

Writings from the margins have subverted and undermined the notion of identity-as-resistance, and refigured identity as being shaped and reshaped by the specific Social and historical-cultural forces. Subaltern agency emerges out of the actually existing conditions on the ground, as it were, rather than from ones identity-as-performance. Furthermore, the liberation rhetoric or the emancipatory module from the Dalitized human agency seems to revisit often-and-often, declaring of the consequences of the contingencies of Caste struggles, offering a critique of the repressed and subsumed national culture, involved with the question of “Caste” with an added global metaphor of change and response to the negativity associated with the Caste all over.

Dalit consciousness offering the Subalternized resistences in the globalized times, have been split and marginal narratives attempting to decentre the hegemony of the past with balanced view of culture and society for the margins. Representation of a fragmented, multiply-determined subject of Caste all round the academic discourses offers a standpoint of discourses where the narratives of the margins as per the Dalit linguistic module, parallels the narrative intensity with the truthful use of irony and acts of symbolic resistences confirming with the growing ideas of awareness and gravity taken as axiomatic by the mainstream dominant discourses. Dalit identity is a resultant consequence of the resistance that reproduces and reformulates itself in the context of the collective struggles. Forgetting the legacy of the Humiliated becomes almost ruled out as it forms the basic foundational aspect of the Dalit consciousness immersed in the flow of Oppressive traditions and categories of painful histories. Interesting are the discourses of the sloganizing & the grandeur of the statements that conceal the responsibility for the uncured Casteist legacy for the dominant in the Society and Culture. Dalit marginal narratives invoke the irony and reflexivity of the central narrative, thus, achieving a sort of Brechtian alienation-effect, forcing the reader to reflect on the ideological implications of the narration. Demystifying the heroic adds a fresh vigour to the aesthetics of the Dalits, where the narrative of the 'truth' constantly, critiques the unjust and humiliatory frameworks in the Indian society and culture. Ironic confirmation of the inevitability of Dalit struggle, serves to revitalize political commitment to a vision of a liberated future, and insists on the continuing relevance of the struggle for self-determination and Dalit solidarity.

Act of narration is itself seen by some postcolonialists, as a politically subversive act, it might also be read as and indeed, as a marker of privilege. Sometimes, the mere enunciation of cultural difference and thus, identity appears as a political act of crowning importance, when it usually means the disappearance of politics, as such. Politics of identity based on the enunciation of the cultural differences is not the same as political identity, whose formation depends less on difference than on some recognition of equivalences (140). Contemporary society and culture [globalization] had addedly displac[ed] the subjectivities of postcolonialism and its twin, postmodernism (32). In terms of political and ideological effects, theories of globalization displayed continuity, rather than a break, with postmodernism.

Globalization emerged from the introspection in the social sciences that in various ways confirmed-via-political economy, the speculations of the consequences of postmodernism. According to the postmodern vision, nation-states and nationalisms, even Classes and their antagonism were a thing of the past. For the new globalists, the nation-state have ceased to have any meaningful political, economic or cultural significance, as the political theorists like Susan Strange and Vincent Cable have already argued. Erosion of the nation-state and the consequent homogenization of national cultures, in the neo-liberal rhetoric of globalization, is extremely essential for the realization of the Dalitized anguish and their cultural trauma. Nation-state is losing its relevance due to the literary absurdity of the separateness that breaks down the eventual meaningless difference of the Dalitized subjectivities in the neo-liberal framework.

Dalit texts critique the sweeping generalizations of the mainstream nationalist discourses, which have strived and maintained for a homogenous nationalist entity without considering the rifts and the imbalance of the oppositions involved in the creation of the Dalit identity. Its representation of the notion of resistance, while avoiding the pitfalls of nationalist essentialism and authenticity, represents the shifting margins of cultural displacement, not as an enabling condition of resistance, but as a profoundly alienating and debilitating experience. It also becomes a condition imposed on the colonized by the contingencies of their struggle.

In this arena the national becomes a name not for an ethnic chauvinism, but for its opposite: i.e. for solidarity with others involved in the same struggle. Dalit invisibility in the mainstream discourses of the contemporary times becomes an internal feature, symptomatic of a willful forgetting, on the part of postcolonial scholars, of the continuing relevance of Caste hegemony forming a category of the analysis of national liberation but relevant as a zone of commitment. Dalit writing from the margins indicate the subject matter of the liberation struggle that is carefully kept hidden from the eyes and ears of that audience. Ambivalent position of the Dalit subjective agency of the postcolonial condition becomes neither able to consolidate the institutional location, neither fully metropolitan nor postcolonial but always the diluted Dalitized subjective agency. Politics of resistance has continued for the Dalitized subjectivities in the Contemporary times, often grounded on the basic concerns of 'Caste', moving towards the global plane of resistances along with the minority cultures.

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