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Reclaiming Aesthetics: Voice, History and Resistance in Dalit Literature of Post-Colonial India

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the reclamation of aesthetics in Dalit literature within post-colonial India by analyzing the role of voice, history, and resistance in key autobiographical and theoretical texts. Grounded in the works of Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* and Bama's *Karukku*, the research highlights how Dalit literature challenges traditional Brahminical aesthetics and asserts a counter-narrative rooted in lived experience, protest, and Ambedkarite ethics. Drawing on Sharankumar Limbale's theory of Dalit aesthetics and Ambedkar's political philosophy, the study examines how literature becomes a site of identity assertion and socio-political resistance. It also investigates the ways in which Dalit authors redefine the value of literary expression – shifting focus from artistic pleasure to ethical urgency and transformative potential. Through its focus on autobiographical voice, counter-history, and linguistic subversion, the research contributes to subaltern and postcolonial studies by positioning Dalit literature as both a cultural intervention and an emancipatory movement. Ultimately, the study affirms the literary and political significance of Dalit narratives in reshaping Indian literature and confronting entrenched caste hierarchies.

Keywords: Dalit literature, aesthetics, resistance, Ambedkarite thought, autobiography, post-colonial India.

Introduction

Dalit literature in post-colonial India stands as a powerful testimony to the silenced voices and erased histories of oppressed castes, reclaiming space through narratives of resistance, self-respect, and identity. Emerging prominently after the 1960s with the rise of the Dalit Panthers movement in Maharashtra, Dalit literature marks a radical departure from the mainstream literary canon, which often marginalized or romanticized the experiences of Dalits (Limbale, 2004). Rooted in lived realities and collective memory, this body of literature offers a counter-narrative to dominant caste

historiography, foregrounding the everyday humiliations, systemic injustices, and resilient struggles of Dalit communities.

The assertion of voice in Dalit literature is an act of defiance. Historically excluded from education and authorship, Dalits found in literature a means of asserting subjectivity and reclaiming agency. Autobiographies such as Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (2003) and Bama's *Karukku* (2000) exemplify this phenomenon, where personal narrative becomes political resistance. These texts challenge the upper-caste gaze by centering on caste-based exclusion in schools, temples, and social life. Writing in raw, unembellished prose, Dalit authors reject the Sanskritized and decorative styles favored by upper-caste writers. Instead, their aesthetic is one of urgency, pain, and ethical clarity, where literature serves as a vehicle for justice rather than abstract beauty (Limbale, 2004).

Resistance in Dalit literature is deeply entwined with history – both remembered and reclaimed. Dalit writers expose how historical records have invisibilized the oppression of marginalized communities and glorified upper-caste dominance. Their narratives reconstruct alternative histories, offering accounts of community resilience, cultural practices, and anti-caste struggles that have been systematically suppressed. This historical reclamation often draws on the legacy of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, whose writings and activism provide a theoretical foundation for Dalit literature. Ambedkar's critique of Hindu social order and his call for annihilation of caste inspire Dalit writers to imagine liberation through knowledge, dignity, and collective action (Ambedkar, 2014).

Thematically, Dalit literature is not limited to documenting suffering. It speaks of solidarity, transformation, and dreams of an egalitarian society. Poets like Namdeo Dhasal, fiction writers such as Baburao Bagul, and essayists like Arjun Dangle utilize literature as a form of protest that disrupts the moral and cultural fabric of caste hegemony. The act of writing becomes a form of resistance – a refusal to remain silent in the face of structural oppression. In this way, Dalit literature functions both as a cultural intervention and a socio-political movement, challenging readers to rethink notions of nationhood, democracy, and humanity.

Ultimately, Dalit literature in post-colonial India is not only a reclaiming of the pen but also of voice, history, and agency. It carves out a space where the marginalized are not objects of sympathy but subjects of power and resistance, transforming literature into an emancipatory act.

Significance and Contribution of the Current Study in Dalit Literary Discourse

The present study holds critical significance in advancing the discourse on Dalit literature by focusing on its aesthetic, historical, and political dimensions in post-colonial India. While mainstream Indian literary criticism has historically privileged canonical works by upper-caste writers, often marginalizing the voices from oppressed communities, this study reorients the literary lens toward narratives rooted in lived Dalit experience. By analyzing key themes such as voice, resistance, and counter-history, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how Dalit literature functions not just as art, but as a powerful instrument of social transformation and epistemic resistance (Limbale, 2004).

One of the study's central contributions lies in its engagement with Sharankumar Limbale's theory of Dalit aesthetics, which departs from conventional notions of literary beauty and instead centers on *anubhava* (experience), *sangharsh* (struggle), and Ambedkarite ideology as the core constituents of Dalit literary value. This theoretical framework allows for a redefinition of literary merit based on ethical urgency and socio-political relevance rather than stylistic elegance or universalism often shaped by Brahmanical norms (Limbale, 2004). By adopting this aesthetic paradigm, the study validates a tradition that has long been dismissed as "non-literary" and brings visibility to its intellectual and creative contributions.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of Dalit autobiographies such as Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (2003) and Bama's *Karukku* (2000), not merely as personal testimonies but as collective political texts. These works disrupt hegemonic narratives and introduce a counter-narrative rooted in caste consciousness, memory, and resistance. The study thus illuminates how these narratives act as tools for reclaiming history and asserting subjectivity, offering a unique contribution to subaltern studies, postcolonial criticism, and intersectional feminist theory (Bama, 2000; Valmiki, 2003).

Another significant contribution of the study is its exploration of how Dalit literature reclaims language as a means of cultural assertion. It interrogates how Dalit writers consciously reject Sanskritized or "refined" forms in favor of regional dialects, colloquialism, and oral storytelling traditions that resonate with their communities. This linguistic shift challenges the homogenization of Indian literary expression and affirms the pluralism of Indian vernacular voices (Dangle, 1992). As such, the study contributes to broader debates around linguistic politics, cultural nationalism, and identity.

The current study also opens up interdisciplinary avenues by linking literature with political philosophy, sociology, and cultural studies. Drawing on Ambedkarite thought, it situates Dalit writing within a broader struggle for dignity, social justice, and the annihilation of caste (Ambedkar, 2014). In doing so, it enriches academic conversations not only in literary criticism but also in human rights and social justice education.

Dalit Identity and Resistance in Indian English Literature

Dalit identity and resistance have emerged as significant themes in Indian English literature, challenging the dominant upper-caste narratives and reasserting the socio-political realities of marginalized communities. The articulation of Dalit subjectivity through Indian English literature has created a dynamic space where historical oppression, social stigmatization, and cultural exclusion are exposed and contested. This literary domain reclaims voice and agency for Dalits, often silenced in mainstream discourse, and foregrounds the intersection of caste, power, and resistance. As Gopal Guru (2001) argues, the emergence of Dalit discourse signifies a rupture in the hegemonic Brahmanical framework, placing emphasis on experience as epistemologically valid and politically necessary.

Indian English writers have increasingly addressed the structural violence embedded in caste hierarchies, and many have centered their narratives around Dalit protagonists and communities. While vernacular Dalit literature has long been a site of assertive resistance, Indian English writing has helped globalize these concerns. Works such as Meena Kandasamy's *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014) and *When I Hit You* (2017) weave caste, gender, and class into narratives that challenge systemic violence and patriarchal structures. Kandasamy's sharp use of language, irony, and fragmentation destabilizes traditional narrative forms, asserting a radical Dalit feminist voice that confronts both casteist and patriarchal oppression (Kandasamy, 2017).

Moreover, Dalit identity in Indian English literature is often constructed through narratives of trauma, social exclusion, and the quest for dignity. These texts underscore how caste operates as an embodied and inscribed form of violence that influences one's access to education, mobility, and self-expression. Arundhati Roy, although not a Dalit writer herself, in her novel *The God of Small Things* (1997), presents the tragic fate of Velutha, an 'untouchable' character whose love for an upper-caste woman results in violent social retribution. While Roy's work has drawn both acclaim and criticism for her portrayal of caste, it foregrounds the historical erasure and silencing of Dalit lives within dominant literary traditions (Roy, 1997).

Crucially, Indian English Dalit literature also reflects the influence of B. R. Ambedkar's philosophy. Writers often invoke Ambedkarite ideals of social justice, rationality, and constitutional democracy as frameworks of resistance. This ideological foundation not only critiques caste hegemony

but also envisions an egalitarian future. According to Limbale (2004), Dalit literature must serve a purpose – social transformation through literary expression. In Indian English writing, this is visible in the themes of political activism, community solidarity, and educational empowerment.

In conclusion, Indian English literature has become a vital platform for the articulation of Dalit identity and resistance. It challenges the aesthetics of dominance, reclaims narrative agency, and introduces caste as a critical category of analysis in postcolonial literature. Through a combination of experiential testimony and radical critique, Dalit writers in English contribute to a growing body of literature that demands recognition, justice, and transformation.

Reclaiming Aesthetics in Dalit Literature in Post-Colonial India

In post-colonial India, Dalit literature has emerged as a revolutionary form of artistic and political expression that reclaims aesthetics from the hegemonic structures of caste and cultural elitism. Traditionally, Indian literary aesthetics – rooted in Brahminical norms – valorized spiritualism, myth, and ornamental language, often excluding the lived experiences of the oppressed. Dalit literature rejects this exclusionary paradigm by redefining aesthetics through the lens of caste, struggle, resistance, and moral urgency. Rather than pursuing beauty for its own sake, Dalit writers emphasize *anubhava* (lived experience), *sangharsh* (struggle), and social justice as central components of literary value (Limbale, 2004).

This reclamation is both ideological and formal. Writers like Omprakash Valmiki in *Joothan* (2003) and Bama in *Karukku* (2000) foreground personal experiences of systemic discrimination, thus transforming autobiography into a political tool. These works depart from traditional aesthetics by employing simple, direct prose that mirrors the rawness of Dalit realities. The very act of narrating pain and humiliation becomes an assertion of agency. Dalit literature does not seek approval from dominant literary circles but challenges their foundations, refusing to conform to the norms of “purity” or “beauty” as defined by the upper castes. It calls for an aesthetic that is grounded in realism, resistance, and transformation.

Sharankumar Limbale’s theory of Dalit aesthetics asserts that literature should arise from and speak to the socio-political realities of Dalits. According to him, “Dalit literature is not a literature of vengeance but of struggle, awareness, and a demand for rights” (Limbale, 2004, p. 31). His framework moves beyond literary technique and centers the ethical dimension of literature. It insists that art must serve the oppressed, question social hierarchies, and provoke change. This is in direct contrast to traditional Indian aesthetics like *rasa*, which prioritize emotional pleasure and transcendental harmony – values that often sanitize or ignore the violence of caste.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s vision adds another dimension to this reclamation. His writings, particularly *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), conceptualize caste not only as a social evil but also as a moral and aesthetic crisis. Ambedkar argued that true art must reject the mythological and hierarchical traditions of Brahminism and instead reflect material truth and strive toward social equality (Ambedkar, 1936/2014). Ambedkarite aesthetics therefore champion clarity, reason, and ethical purpose over mysticism and ornamental excess. The emphasis is on dismantling caste through literature that speaks truth to power and inspires collective upliftment.

In reclaiming aesthetics, Dalit literature asserts that beauty lies not in conformity or escapism but in truth, courage, and resistance. It subverts dominant literary traditions and insists that the voices of the marginalized are not only valid but central to the cultural and moral conscience of the nation. This reframing of aesthetics as a political and ethical act marks a defining feature of post-colonial Dalit literature in India.

Voice and Counter-Narrative in Dalit Autobiography: A Study of *Joothan* and *Karukku*

Dalit autobiographies such as *Joothan* by Omprakash Valmiki (1997) and *Karukku* by Bama (1992) mark a pivotal shift in Indian literature, where the personal becomes a powerful political statement. These texts not only offer individual testimonies of caste-based discrimination but also function as counter-narratives that dismantle dominant upper-caste histories and literary traditions. Through voice, form, and language, both authors redefine the autobiographical genre, anchoring it in the lived realities of the oppressed. Their narratives reject ornamental language and aesthetic distance, opting instead for raw, unfiltered truth as a mode of resistance and reclamation.

In *Joothan*, Omprakash Valmiki chronicles his journey from a childhood of poverty and humiliation to becoming a writer and activist. The title itself – *joothan*, meaning leftover food touched by others – becomes a metaphor for the systemic degradation faced by Dalits in Indian society. Valmiki's voice is marked by clarity, anger, and a deep sense of injustice. His use of unembellished prose emphasizes the everyday cruelty of untouchability, school discrimination, and economic exclusion. What makes *Joothan* revolutionary is its refusal to seek validation from the mainstream literary canon. Valmiki does not conform to traditional narrative aesthetics; instead, he insists on a Dalit subjectivity that confronts rather than accommodates casteist norms (Valmiki, 2003).

Similarly, Bama's *Karukku* breaks new ground as one of the first Dalit autobiographies by a woman, combining caste and gender critique in a highly innovative narrative style. Written in a mix of Tamil and English, *Karukku* disrupts linguistic hierarchies and centers the vernacular as a site of resistance. Bama recounts her experiences of being a Dalit Christian woman in Tamil Nadu, particularly the contradictions within religious institutions that preach equality yet perpetuate caste-based discrimination. Her narrative voice is intimate and introspective, yet charged with political insight. The nonlinear structure of *Karukku* reflects a fragmented identity trying to piece together dignity and meaning in a hostile world. Through this, Bama asserts that Dalit women's voices have long been doubly silenced – first by caste, then by patriarchy – and that literature becomes a space to reclaim both (Bama, 2000).

Both *Joothan* and *Karukku* challenge the elitist conventions of autobiography, which often privilege introspection detached from social critique. These texts replace self-indulgence with self-inquiry rooted in collective struggle. In doing so, they expose the mechanisms of caste oppression and provide an alternative historiography from the margins. Their counter-narratives do not merely seek empathy; they demand recognition, justice, and structural change. The use of voice in these works is not just a literary device but a political act – one that asserts Dalit identity as central to the narrative of modern India.

Sharankumar Limbale's Theory of Dalit Aesthetics: A Paradigm of Resistance and Experience

Sharankumar Limbale's *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* (2004) presents a foundational framework for understanding Dalit literature not through the lens of traditional Sanskrit poetics but through the lived experience of the oppressed. His theory challenges the canonical literary standards that prioritize beauty, harmony, and spiritual elevation, arguing instead for an aesthetic grounded in reality, struggle, resistance, and pain. According to Limbale, Dalit literature cannot be judged by the same standards used for mainstream literature because it emerges from a fundamentally different sociopolitical and cultural experience – one rooted in historical marginalization and systemic injustice (Limbale, 2004).

Central to Limbale's framework is the concept of *Anubhava* – meaning lived experience. For Dalit literature, authenticity arises from the direct, personal experience of caste-based oppression. It is not imagination, ornamentation, or myth that gives Dalit writing its power, but the raw truth of existence under social stigma and economic exploitation. Limbale asserts that Dalit literature must be

evaluated based on its emotional honesty and ethical commitment to depicting reality as it is experienced by the oppressed, not by abstract notions of artistic pleasure (Limbale, 2004).

Another key pillar of his aesthetic theory is Sangharsh, or struggle. Limbale emphasizes that Dalit literature is inherently a literature of protest. It is not passive or reflective in the conventional sense, but active and interventionist. Through narrative, poetry, and autobiography, Dalit writers fight to reclaim dignity, history, and agency for their communities. Literature becomes a weapon of resistance—expressing anger, anguish, and resilience in the face of dehumanization. As Limbale states, “Dalit literature is not a literature of artistic pleasure. It is a literature of pain, sorrow, struggle, and revolt” (Limbale, 2004, p. 30). The aesthetic is thus inseparable from political consciousness.

Equally important in Limbale’s theory is the integration of Ambedkarite thought. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s emphasis on rationality, equality, and the annihilation of caste forms the ideological backbone of Dalit aesthetics. Ambedkar’s critique of Hindu orthodoxy, his advocacy for education, and his embrace of Buddhism as a path to liberation deeply influence the philosophical outlook of Dalit writers. Limbale adopts Ambedkar’s ethical vision to argue that the function of literature must be transformative, not contemplative. In this sense, Dalit literature becomes a vehicle for moral reawakening and social revolution—its aesthetic value lying in its power to awaken collective consciousness (Limbale, 2004).

In summary, Limbale’s theory offers a radical redefinition of literary aesthetics. It prioritizes experience (*anubhava*) over imagination, struggle (*sangharsh*) over escapism, and Ambedkarite ethics over detached formalism. Dalit literature, under this framework, is evaluated not by its conformity to elite standards, but by its capacity to voice the silenced, document the real, and fight for justice.

Ambedkarite Aesthetics: Literature as a Tool for Social Justice and Liberation

Ambedkarite aesthetics emerges not from a conventional literary tradition but from a profound ethical and political vision—one that views *caste as both a moral and aesthetic crisis*. At its core, Ambedkarite aesthetics insists that literature must do more than entertain or elevate taste; it must interrogate injustice, dismantle caste hierarchies, and illuminate the path toward human dignity and equality. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s philosophical writings, especially *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) and *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (1957), provide the moral architecture upon which this aesthetic framework stands. In them, Ambedkar outlines not just a political roadmap for emancipation but an ethical framework that reimagines the purpose of culture, art, and literature as active forces in the struggle for justice (Ambedkar, 1936/2014; Ambedkar, 1957/2011).

In *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar (1936/2014) does not mince words. He critiques Hindu society for building its foundations on graded inequality, perpetuated and sanctified by religious texts and customs. This critique extends directly into the realm of aesthetics, as he sees Brahminical spiritualism, myths, and ornate ritualistic traditions as tools that reinforce caste hegemony. These aesthetic modes, saturated with symbolism and mysticism, function not as innocent cultural expressions but as mechanisms of exclusion and moral evasion. From Ambedkar’s perspective, such traditions are ethically hollow because they serve to obscure material realities and perpetuate hierarchical norms under the guise of divine order or cosmic balance. Thus, any literature or art that reproduces these myths without question becomes complicit in the oppression of Dalits and other marginalized communities.

In contrast, Ambedkarite aesthetics champions a literature that embraces material truth over metaphysical fantasy, clarity over ambiguity, and ethical urgency over ornamental beauty. Literature, according to this view, should be rooted in social reality—particularly the lived experiences of the oppressed—and should serve as a mirror to society’s failings. It should provoke moral reflection and inspire political action. Art that does not challenge injustice or remains indifferent to suffering is

considered not merely apolitical, but morally bankrupt. Therefore, the role of the writer is not that of a detached observer but of an engaged intellectual, a moral witness, and, ultimately, a participant in the collective struggle for liberation (Kumar, 2016).

This vision is further deepened in *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Ambedkar's (1957/2011) final work and his reinterpretation of Buddhist philosophy. Here, he positions compassion, rationality, and ethical action as the cornerstones of a just society. These values translate directly into his vision of aesthetics. The Buddha, unlike Hindu deities who operate within mythic cosmologies, becomes for Ambedkar a human figure of reason and ethical leadership. In this light, the aesthetic ideal becomes one of simplicity, truth-telling, and clarity. Ambedkar's preference for Buddhism over Hinduism is, in part, an aesthetic choice – an embrace of a tradition that centers ethical clarity and human dignity rather than ritual and symbolic spectacle.

Ambedkarite aesthetics also strongly rejects the notion of "art for art's sake." Such a position, common in elite literary circles, is seen as a form of escapism – an aesthetic aloofness that denies the brutal reality of caste discrimination. In the Ambedkarite framework, art has a responsibility: to speak truth to power, to give voice to the silenced, and to contribute to social change. Literature that is indifferent to injustice, or worse, beautifies oppression, is not only irrelevant but dangerous. By centering the experiences of Dalits and other marginalized communities, Ambedkarite aesthetics insists that true beauty lies not in the polished language of the elite but in the courage to name suffering and demand change (Satyanarayana & Tharu, 2013).

What also distinguishes Ambedkarite aesthetics is its deep distrust of transcendentalism and mystification. Traditional Indian aesthetics often celebrates the sublime, the eternal, and the spiritual – but Ambedkar calls for an aesthetic that remains grounded in the here and now. For Ambedkar, spiritualism without social conscience is a distraction. He seeks not transcendence but transformation. He envisions a literature that opens the reader's eyes to the structural violence of caste and urges them toward moral accountability. This grounded, materialist orientation leads to a redefinition of what is considered aesthetically valuable. A poem about hunger, a story of humiliation, or an autobiography of resistance becomes more artistically and ethically significant than verses about divine love or metaphysical harmony.

In sum, Ambedkarite aesthetics is an ethical-political project disguised as literary theory. It is not concerned with form over substance, but with substance that transforms form. It reclaims the aesthetic from the hands of those who have long used it to maintain caste order and instead places it in service of human liberation. Ambedkar's vision calls upon writers and readers alike to engage literature not as an escape from reality but as a confrontation with it. Through moral clarity, political insight, and social responsibility, literature – under the Ambedkarite aesthetic – becomes a revolutionary act.

A Critical Analysis: Ambedkarite Aesthetics vs. Sharankumar Limbale's Theory of Dalit Aesthetics

Ambedkarite aesthetics and Sharankumar Limbale's theory of Dalit aesthetics form two foundational frameworks that shape the discourse on Dalit literature in postcolonial India. While both share a common ideological commitment to social justice, their critical focus diverges in scope, application, and aesthetic orientation. Ambedkarite aesthetics originates in the writings and political philosophy of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, emphasizing literature as a moral and political instrument in the fight against caste oppression. Limbale, drawing from Ambedkar's legacy, formulates a more explicit literary aesthetic rooted in the everyday experience of Dalit life, structured around principles of truth, struggle, and lived pain.

Ambedkarite aesthetics is deeply grounded in a rationalist, humanist tradition. It critiques Hindu religious orthodoxy and Brahminical culture, arguing that traditional literary and artistic forms have historically excluded and dehumanized Dalits (Ambedkar, 1936/2014). In *Annihilation of Caste*,

Ambedkar positions caste not just as a social ill but as a moral crisis that distorts all aspects of Indian life, including cultural production. His emphasis lies on material truth, ethical clarity, and the role of literature in reshaping public consciousness toward justice and equality. Ambedkar's reinterpretation of Buddhist philosophy in *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (1957/2011) further enhances this aesthetic by advocating simplicity, reason, and compassion as the basis of cultural and literary values.

Sharankumar Limbale's theory, as articulated in *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* (2004), builds directly upon Ambedkarite ideology but localizes it within the specific realm of literary criticism. Limbale rejects classical Sanskrit aesthetic ideals like *rasa* and *sahridaya*, arguing they are inadequate to capture the pain and resistance inherent in Dalit literature. Instead, he proposes a tripartite framework consisting of *anubhava* (experience), *satya* (truth), and *sangharsh* (struggle). For Limbale, the aesthetic value of a Dalit text lies in its capacity to reflect the unfiltered experiences of Dalit life – marked by humiliation, poverty, and systemic violence – and to use that reality as a source of literary strength (Limbale, 2004). He asserts that Dalit literature is not created for pleasure but for awareness and social transformation.

While Ambedkarite aesthetics takes a broader philosophical approach, integrating ethics, religion, and politics, Limbale's framework functions within the contours of literary theory. Ambedkar did not propose a literary aesthetic in the conventional sense, but his ideas have inspired writers and critics to reshape aesthetics as a moral and political tool. In contrast, Limbale speaks as a literary practitioner and theorist, focusing on language, form, and narrative structure as arenas of resistance. Both perspectives converge in their emphasis on social change, but they differ in emphasis: Ambedkar critiques the cultural roots of caste ideology, while Limbale provides tools to critique and construct literary texts from a Dalit standpoint.

In conclusion, both frameworks are interdependent yet distinct. Ambedkarite aesthetics provides the ethical and ideological foundation, while Limbale's theory translates these values into specific literary criteria. Together, they offer a comprehensive lens to understand Dalit literature – not merely as art born from suffering but as a purposeful act of cultural reclamation.

A Comparative Analysis of Dalit Literature in Post-Colonial India

Dalit literature in post-colonial India presents a powerful counter-narrative to dominant caste and class ideologies, offering a compelling critique of systemic oppression while reclaiming silenced histories. Emerging primarily in regional languages and gradually extending into Indian English, Dalit literature reflects the lived experiences of the oppressed castes and serves as a medium of social protest and self-assertion. This body of work, shaped by the sociopolitical framework of Ambedkarite thought, challenges hegemonic Brahmanical aesthetics and demands a redefinition of literary value and purpose (Limbale, 2004).

Comparatively, Dalit literature in different linguistic regions – Marathi, Tamil, Hindi, and English – reveals both shared thematic concerns and distinct cultural articulations. For instance, Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (1997), written in Hindi, portrays the humiliations faced by Dalits through autobiographical testimony. The narrative emphasizes systemic exclusion and social stigma, echoing a broader pattern of caste-based discrimination experienced across India. On the other hand, Bama's *Karukku* (1992), a Tamil Dalit Christian woman's narrative, foregrounds the intersectionality of caste, gender, and religion. Bama articulates resistance not only to caste but also to patriarchal and ecclesiastical structures, offering a unique perspective shaped by her dual marginalization (Bama, 2000).

While *Joothan* emphasizes the collective struggle and social awakening inspired by Ambedkarite ideology, *Karukku* is deeply personal, spiritual, and rooted in everyday resistance. Despite their different tones and settings, both texts highlight the inescapable reality of caste and its psychological,

social, and physical ramifications. Moreover, both employ an experiential mode of narration that prioritizes authenticity and emotional resonance over literary ornamentation, aligning with Sharankumar Limbale's (2004) assertion that Dalit literature must arise from lived suffering and aim for social transformation.

Indian English Dalit literature, such as Meena Kandasamy's *Touch* (2006) and *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014), continues this legacy while broadening the audience. Kandasamy's poetry and prose are marked by sharp political critique, feminist resistance, and stylistic experimentation. Her work transcends regional confines and dialogues with global anti-oppression discourses, showing how Dalit identity intersects with other systems of power such as patriarchy and capitalism (Kandasamy, 2014). Compared to regional autobiographical texts, English Dalit writing often adopts hybrid forms – combining poetry, fiction, and memoir – thus reaching international platforms while still rooted in the Ambedkarite vision.

Furthermore, a comparative reading reveals how Dalit literature has evolved from personal narratives of humiliation to more radical calls for justice and transformation. It has expanded to include women's voices, queer identities, and labor struggles, reflecting the diversity within the Dalit community itself. The multiplicity of experiences, languages, and literary forms underscores the richness and complexity of Dalit literature in post-colonial India.

In essence, Dalit literature across languages and regions forms a powerful literary and political archive that resists erasure and asserts dignity. Through comparative analysis, one appreciates both the common struggles that unite Dalit writers and the unique contexts that shape their narratives.

Conclusion

Dalit literature in post-colonial India represents a radical reimagining of literary discourse by centering the voices, experiences, and struggles of historically oppressed communities. Through autobiographical narratives, theoretical interventions, and aesthetic subversion, Dalit writers have reclaimed literature as a space of resistance, dignity, and transformation. Works like Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* and Bama's *Karukku* challenge dominant narratives that have long marginalized Dalit identity and offer counter-histories rooted in pain, protest, and resilience. Drawing from Ambedkarite thought and Sharankumar Limbale's framework of Dalit aesthetics, this literature foregrounds *anubhava* (experience), *sangharsh* (struggle), and moral clarity over conventional notions of beauty and form. Rather than conforming to the ideals set by the upper-caste literary tradition, Dalit literature redefines aesthetics in terms of social justice and collective empowerment. This study affirms the value of Dalit literature not only as a cultural and intellectual movement but as a crucial force in shaping democratic and inclusive literary spaces. It underscores the transformative power of storytelling when grounded in truth, lived experience, and ethical resistance, marking Dalit literature as essential to the understanding of contemporary Indian society and its ongoing battle against caste-based injustice.

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