

**POST GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMME (CBCS)**

**M.A. in ENGLISH**

**SEMESTER - III**

**DSE - 304**

**DALIT STUDIES**

**Self-Learning Material**



**DIRECTORATE OF OPEN & DISTANCE LEARNING**

**UNIVERSITY OF KALYANI**

**KALYANI-741235, WEST BENGAL**

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Directorate of Open and Distance Learning, University of Kalyani

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## **Director's Message**

Satisfying the varied needs of distance learners, overcoming the obstacle of distance and reaching the unreached students are the threefold functions catered by Open and Distance Learning (ODL) systems. The onus lies on writers, editors, production professionals and other personnel involved in the process to overcome the challenges inherent to curriculum design and production of relevant Self Learning Materials (SLMs). At the University of Kalyani, a dedicated team under the able guidance of the Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor has invested its best efforts, professionally and in keeping with the demands of Post Graduate CBCS Programmes in Distance Mode to devise a self-sufficient curriculum for each course offered by the Directorate of Open and Distance Learning (DODL), University of Kalyani. Development of printed SLMs for students admitted to the DODL within a limited time to cater to the academic requirements of the Course as per standards set by the Distance Education Bureau of the University Grants Commission, New Delhi, India under Open and Distance Mode UGC Regulations, 2021 had been our endeavour. We are happy to have achieved our goal. Utmost care and precision have been ensured in the development of the SLMs, making them useful to the learners, besides avoiding errors as far as practicable. Further suggestions from the stakeholders in this would be welcome. During the production process of the SLMs, the team continuously received positive stimulations and feedback from Professor (Dr.) Amalendu Bhuniya, Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, University of Kalyani, who kindly accorded directions, encouragements and suggestions, offered constructive criticism to develop it within proper requirements. We, gracefully, acknowledge his inspiration and guidance. Sincere gratitude is due to the respective chairpersons as well as each and every member of PG-BOS (DODL), University of Kalyani. Heartfelt gratitude is also due to the faculty members of the DODL, subject-experts serving at the University Post Graduate departments and also to the authors and academicians whose academic contributions have enriched the SLMs. We humbly acknowledge their valuable academic contributions. I would especially like to convey gratitude to all other University dignitaries and personnel involved either at the conceptual or operational level at the DODL, University of Kalyani. Their persistent and coordinated efforts have resulted in the compilation of comprehensive, learner-friendly, flexible texts that meet the curriculum requirements of the Post Graduate Programme through the Distance Mode.

**Director**

Directorate of Open and Distance Learning  
University of Kalyani

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**Total Credit: 4**

**Study Hours: 16**



**BLOCK – I**

**UNITS: 1 – 4**

***ANNIHILATION OF CASTE***

**BY**

**DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR**

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**CONTENT STRUCTURE:**

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Unit 1: The Life and Works of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar (1891 – 1956): An Introduction

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**UNIT 1: THE LIFE AND WORKS OF DR. BHIMRAO AMBEDKAR (1891 – 1956):**

**AN INTRODUCTION**

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Born in a family of “Untouchables”, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar’s life is full of struggles. He is respectfully and popularly known as Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. His achievements are completely earned by himself, his willpower, his talent, and obviously his hard work. He is the architect of the Constitution of India. His contribution to the making of the nation, and for the upliftment of the oppressed has been phenomenal. He has robustly fought for the deprived classes. He was born on April 14, 1891, to a Mahar family originally belonging to Maharashtra. His mother’s name was Bhimabai and his father was Ramji Maloji Sakpal, an army officer in the British Indian army with his military cantonment located at that time at Mhow, Madhya Pradesh. Though the surname of his father is Sakpal, Bhimrao was admitted to school with the

surname “Ambadawekar” which denotes their native village Ambadawe. Bhimrao Ambedkar was the last of the 14 children of his parents but they did understand the value of education. One of his Brahmin teachers in high school changed his surname from “Ambadawekar” to Ambedkar. After his retirement, Ramji found it difficult to run the family only on his pension so he took a job and moved to Satara but unfortunately, shortly after shifting Bhim’s mother Bhimabai passed away. Ramji was a devout man and also believed in strict discipline. He recited excerpts from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* to young Bhim.

After entering high school Bhim experienced some untoward incidents that happened to him as he belonged to the backward caste that was engraved in his sensitive young mind. Anyhow, Ambedkar attended school but found some discrimination on the basis of caste as he and some other “untouchables” experienced a “no peon, no water” situation. It is like when these students were thirsty, they had to depend on the peon who would take and pour water for them. They were not allowed to even touch the vessel otherwise the vessel may get impure. Sometimes they were segregated and had to sit outside the classroom. Bhim and his elder brother Anand once travelled far to meet their father and after descending from the train they took a bullock cart. The bullock cart driver belonged to the higher caste but once he knew that these boys were “untouchables” he stopped the cart and refused to carry them anymore. It is only when they promised to pay double the fare, he again agreed but with a condition. Anand had to drive the cart and the cartman followed them by foot. They even couldn’t have a sip of water on their entire journey as people refused to give them water once their caste was revealed. But Bhim had been fortunate to see some kindness in the upper caste community people as the father of one of his friends saw him going to school in heavy downpours and he gave Ambedkar some dry clothes and good food. There was another Brahmin teacher who shared his lunch with Bhim and loved him and inspired him.

Bhim’s father married again when he was ten years old and soon moved to Bombay. There they lived in a *chawl* which is a single-room tenement and gradually Bhim became determined to be diligent in his studies. Bhim was admitted to Elphinstone High School, one of the most renowned at that time and he pursued his studies with perseverance and resolution. His father even borrowed money from his married daughters for his son’s education. Although there were lots of adversities, Bhim passed his secondary exam with excellence in the year 1907. Bhim was brilliant in his early career as it was really an outstanding milestone for someone belonging to the lower and suppressed class. Bhim was compelled to marry only at the age of 16 but this could not impede his quest for knowledge. He was nonpareil in his pursuit.

Bhim passed his intermediate exam from Elphinston College, Bombay but after that, the family did not have sufficient financial ability to continue his study. At this time one of the distinguished personalities K.A. Keluskar, Bhim's well-wisher approached the Maharaja of Baroda who was a kind and noble ruler. He was so broad-minded and generous that he extended his hand of help to any needy but worthy untouchable in his or her endeavour of higher studies and thus Bhim acquired a handsome amount of scholarship to continue his dream. He obtained Rs 25 every month to support his education without any hindrance. He passed his graduation from Bombay University with subjects like political studies and economics.

After graduation, Bhim got a job as a Lieutenant in the Baroda State Army but fate has written his story otherwise as he had to leave the job due to his father's sudden demise. The Royal Highness, Maharaja of Baroda, decided to send some deserving extraordinary scholars to study at Columbia University, USA at the state's expense. Bhim was quite curious and with his power of education, he enabled himself as one of the chosen few. In 1913, he went to study at the prestigious Columbia University. America is a country that has fought against slavery and any kind of segregation, and discrimination and established an environment of equality and freedom that had a huge impact on Babasaheb's mind and thought, and the stigmas of untouchability were almost washed away. He could act freely, independently, refreshingly but he devoted himself to studies. He used to visit many libraries and bookshops and took Economics and Sociology as his main subjects. Here his insight and intellect got the proper environment to grow and flourish and at this time he had written a letter to one of the friends of his father and expressed the value of women's education for the overall development of any nation. In 1915, Bhimrao received the M.A. degree and wrote a thesis entitled, "Ancient Indian Commerce". Though studying in a foreign country, he wanted to know and understand his country in a better way. In 1916 he presented a paper in a seminar entitled, "Castes in India, their Mechanism, Genesis and Development". He was thoughtful about the root causes of castes and wanted to show the world the wrong consequences that the caste system can create. For his Ph.D. degree, he researched on a very pertinent social issue, and titled his thesis, "The National Dividend of India, a Historic and Analytical Study". It was later published as a book considered to be censorious of the British bureaucracy and its imperial regime. After that, Ambedkar left New York and moved to London and enrolled himself in the London School of Economics. But, unfortunately, due to the discontinuation of the scholarship he had to come back to India at a time when India was in turmoil. It was the year 1917 when World War I was still raging.

In India, at first, he joined a good job through Baroda Civil Service. Though he was performing well as he was well educated and well deserved, he got mistreatment again due to his caste. Files were thrown at his desk disrespectfully. He searched for accommodation but no hotel agreed to give him a room because of his caste. He managed to get a Parsi guest house but he had to hide his caste for it. But yet it ended in a miserable situation as one day suddenly a group of people came and blamed him for polluting the hotel. The incident was so humiliating and inhuman. So, his identity as usual was revolving not on his brilliance or competence but only on his caste.

Being dejected and broken in such a way he left Baroda and returned to Bombay. He started a business of counselling for investments but it dwindled once people came to know about his caste. By 1918 he got some recognition for his education and skill and was appointed as a lecturer at Sydenham College, Bombay. Here he started to publish “Mook Nayak” (Leader of the Dumb) about the plights of the untouchables. He also started to organize various seminars and conferences to let people be aware of the injustice that is going on in society. He wanted to spread the message about the torments, and the sufferings of these underprivileged communities. He started to speak about equality, equal human rights, and respect for everyone. So, he started to fight for the emancipation of the Dalits- “the untouchables”.

At around 1920 he again went to London and enrolled in the London School of Economics and was also admitted to Gray’s Inn to study law. In 1923 he became the first Indian to acquire a doctorate degree from LSE. At the same time, he also qualified as a Barrister. Though he was highly qualified and an eloquent speaker, the upper-caste litigants were unwilling to hire him. Ambedkar was hurt but his spirit was indomitable. His daunting personality and determination were his fuel. Though initially, he has to work in subordinate courts he was waiting to practise in High Court with full dignity. He was extremely courageous and confident. As the freedom movement was going in its full swing during this time Mahatma Gandhi and Veer Savarkar were also working for the betterment of the untouchables and wanted to consolidate the Hindu society. Ambedkar also started to speak and organize meetings for the eradication of countless stigmas and restrictions for the untouchables. Ambedkar firmly believed that only speaking about the upliftment is not sufficient but a complete reshuffling of the Hindu society is needed for true equality in perspective and in practice.

In 1924, Ambedkar formed an organization named “Bahiskrit Hitakarini Sabha” and the main purpose of the Sabha was to spread awareness, schools, libraries, education, and opportunities. Through this Sabha, he was actively working to remove untouchability.

Ambedkar started to be noticed as he sent a letter to Royal Commission about Indian Currency and Finance and cogently presented his argument also by the year 1926, he successfully defended as the lawyer some non-Brahmin leaders who were falsely accused of defaming the Brahmin community. Thus, he was able to build a convincing ground as a trustable spokesperson and leader of the downtrodden, the untouchables, and also becoming a reputed lawyer.

In 1927, Ambedkar became so influential that he was nominated as a member of the Bombay Legislative Council. In the same year, he guided a conference at Mahad and started to spread the message of self-respect and self-elevation. He was determined to eradicate any injustice towards the lower caste people. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar made them realize their true humanity and thus lead a procession towards the Chowdar Tank from the conference hall where he made the untouchables drink water from the tank and it was a historic movement. Thus, he ignited courage in the lower class to have equal opportunity to get access to any public facility. He also arranged for a Satyagraha or a non-violent agitation to enter a temple at Nasik named Kala Ram Temple. The Satyagraha continued for a month and gained 'permission' to participate in the annual festival though they were even attacked and harassed by throwing stones at them.

In 1930 the British Government asked for a Round Table Conference in London noticing the country's hostile attitude towards the British regime. Babasaheb Ambedkar was representing the lower caste people at that conference. He delivered a remarkable speech there. He stated, "While I want to emphasize the fact that one-fifth of the total population of British India – a population as large as the population of Britain – has been reduced to a position worse than that of serfs or slaves... Has the British government done anything to remove it?" He further added, "We need a Government in which men in power will give their undivided allegiance to the best interests of the country ... not be afraid to amend the social and economic code of life". Soon, a second conference was also arranged and Mahatma Gandhi represented the Congress Party there. In this second conference, Babasaheb demanded a separate Electorate for the Depressed and repressed class as he believed that Hinduism has thrown at them insults and injustice. Gandhi and Babasaheb both had immense respect for each other but their value differed. Gandhi thought that a separate electorate will increase the breach between the separate castes. He was hugely grieved and started fasting until death. Babasaheb was also determined to go to any extent to preserve the rights of the depressed class but later upon the insistence of many Congress leaders, he agreed to sign the famous Poona Pact. It was an agreement that the

depressed classes will have seats reserved in the Provisional legislatures within the general electorate.

In 1932, the "Poona Pact" was formed that allowed reservation for the depressed class in the regional legislative assembly and central council states. In 1935, he founded the "Independent labor party," which obtained 14 seats in the Bombay election. In 1935, he published books such as *Annihilation of Caste* which challenged orthodox Hindu beliefs, and the very next year, he published another book titled *Who Were the Shudras?* in which he explained how the untouchables were formed and exploited. After India got Independence, he served as the minister for labor for the 'viceroy's executive council.' His dedication to the work made him India's first law minister. He was also the first chairman of the drafting committee of the Constitution of India.

That's why he is known as the chief architect of the 'Constitution of India.' For this special responsibility, somebody should have great knowledge of the constitutions of many countries in the world and a commendable knowledge of the law. Alongside this, he should know about the root of India and the significance of Indian history. He was the one to be most fitted for the role because of his vast knowledge and experience and inclination towards truth and relentless passion in his work. The draft of the Constitution of India was presented to the Constituent Assembly on November 4, 1948, and was dedicated to the people of Independent India. He said while submitting the draft that, "I appeal to all Indians to be a nation by discarding castes, which have brought separation in social life and created jealousy and hatred". Because of the humiliation that he suffered in his life for belonging to a backward caste he wanted to leave the Hindu religion and follow Buddhism. He took the firm decision and in 1956, he converted to Buddhism, as he thought Buddhism is the most scientific religion so far. He thought this to be his best decision and showed his honesty as a human being. He also inspired and led a huge gathering to embrace Buddhism on 14<sup>th</sup> October, 1956. The place is now known as "Deekshabhoomi".

### **A LIST OF WORKS BY B.R. AMBEDKAR IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER:**

Ambedkar has written many significant books. Some of them are-

- i. *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development* (1916)
- ii. *Mook Nayak* (weekly), (1920)
- iii. *The Problem of the Rupee: its origin and its solution* (1923)

- iv. *Bahishkrut Bharat* (India Ostracized), (1927)
- v. *Janta* (weekly), (1930)
- vi. *The Annihilation of Caste* (1936)
- vii. *Federation Versus Freedom* (1939)
- viii. *Thoughts on Pakistan* (1940)
- ix. *Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah* (1943)
- x. *Mr. Gandhi and Emancipation of Untouchables* (1943)
- xi. *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables* (1945)
- xii. *Pakistan Or Partition of India* (1945)
- xiii. *State and Minorities* (1947)
- xiv. *Who were the Shudras?* (1948)
- xv. *Maharashtra as a Linguistic Province* (1948)
- xvi. *The Untouchables* (1948)
- xvii. *Buddha Or Karl Marx* (1956)
- xviii. *The Buddha and his Dhamma* (1957)
- xix. *Riddles in Hinduism* (2008)
- xx. *Manu and the Shudras*

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**UNIT: 2 (A): THE CASTE SYSTEM AND THE UNTOUCHABLES OR DALITS  
IN INDIA**

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The caste system of India is among the world's oldest forms of existing social categorization, surviving for more than 3000 years. There are lots of complexities attached to it. The system divides Hindu people into inflexible hierarchical groups. *Manusmriti*, is widely considered to be the most crucial and authoritative book on Hindu religion. It validates and sanctifies the caste system as the foundation of order and maintenance of society. The caste system separates Hindus into four main categories - Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and the Shudras and the groups are believed to be generated by Brahma, the Creator. The top position belongs to the Brahmins whose occupation primarily was teaching and living intellectuals and are believed to have originated from Brahma's head. After Brahmins, the second rank belonged to the Kshatriyas. They were supposed to be created from the arms of Brahma and were the

rulers and mighty warriors. Third was the Vaishyas, or the traders, believed to be created from Brahma's thighs. At the bottom of the ladder were the Shudras, who appeared from the feet of Brahma, and according to law they are supposed to do all the degrading tasks. There were thousands of sub-castes attached with the caste system. The Dalits or the untouchables were the *achhuts* who were basically out of any status or rank.

For centuries, caste has dominated and directed almost every facet of Hindu religious and social life, traditions, and customs with each group doing their job in accordance with the hierarchy. Indian communities have been regulated on the basis of castes for a long time. The system was so derogatory and humiliating those the upper and lower castes almost always lived in separate areas, and the public water wells were not accessible to the lower caste people. Brahmins looked down upon others and did not accept food or drink from the Shudras. Marriage was always restricted to one's own caste. The system conferred many benefits for the upper castes while warranting suppression and oppression of the backward caste people.

The system was condemned for being inequitable and denigrating, but it remained virtually consistent for centuries, deceitfully binding people into firm social orders from which it was difficult, almost impossible to get away. In spite of the obstructive scenario and all the challenges, some Dalits and other low-caste Indians marked their place in the history of India's independence and progress. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar fought vigorously for the respect and rights of the Dalit people. He became so much educated and competent that he was trusted to be the prime designer of the Indian constitution. Another son from the Dalit community K.R. Narayanan proudly gained a prestigious position and vowed as the nation's first Dalit president.

Dalits still suffer from various violence and terror activities against them. It is normal to constantly humiliate them which hinders in developing a true identity of themselves. They are made to feel excluded from the so-called elite, civilized society. What we see in theory and practice is very different. It is preached that untouchability must be abolished but in reality, the untouchables have to face a lot of stigmas and discrimination. They are denied equality. They cannot grow self-respect. If they protest or challenge the harassment, they will be more traumatized. Upper caste people threaten to inflict more atrocities if any complaint is made against them. Law assures them many facilities but they are still not able to enjoy even their basic rights. Law enforcement personnel many a time refuses to take adequate action against any complaints from the lower caste people.



They are culturally, socially, and also economically deprived and weaker section. Indian society is unable to become humane because of the wrong practices against the untouchables or more precisely on the lower caste people. The word 'Dalit', literally means 'oppressed' or 'broken'. For the British Dalits were the scheduled caste people but nowadays the term has a wider range. It has gained a cultural context and can mean anyone who is oppressed or deprived of their legal rights. They are deliberately kept aside from any humane condition. The Dalit Panthers reused the term and their 1973 manifesto included all the landless impoverished peasants, Scheduled Tribes, women, Neo-Buddhists, the working class, and all those who are being mistreated and exploited and thus the term has been used for expanded context.

Traditional discrimination against the Lower castes still persists in some areas of the country. Dalits are not allowed to drink water from the same utensils and the same well. Dalits cannot enter many temples which are reserved only for upper castes. Dalits are not allowed to take the position of priest. Their education seems to be insignificant. Most of the dropouts from government schools belong to the Dalit caste. Thus, Dalit children get deprived of basic human rights also. Dalit children are made to work with extremely low wages for the money that their family borrows from rich moneylenders. Dalit girls are often chosen as *devdasis* or servants as sex workers for the temple persons. Very few people from this community get the opportunity of higher education and the job perspective of these people is still very low key. They are still considered suitable for all menial jobs. The existence of reservation helps them to secure a government job but to rise up to that status is also a matter of great effort for them. As the upper caste people think that the practice of reservation is very unjust as it gives undeserving candidates a position that becomes very difficult to achieve for a candidate belonging to the upper caste. So, it fuels the disdain of the lower caste people. Obtaining a job in the private sector is even more difficult due to the contempt and discrimination. In this way, the actual bond between different castes remains a distant dream. Because though India is progressing in many ways the abuses and wounds of the caste system are not fully erased from the Indian society. The upper caste people still want only an upper caste spouse for their sons or daughter. The newspapers are full of such advertisements. So, despite the efforts and actions of many social thinkers and activists, the caste system is still a glaring truth in India.

Dalits are the easy targets of hate crimes and violence. According to the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, a total of 98,349 cases of crimes against lower castes were reported between 1994 and 1996, including 1,660 murders and 2,814

rapes. Outside this many incidents are not even reported. Human rights organizations and newspapers tell countless stories of Dalits who have been beaten, unlawfully detained, tortured, raped, killed, and lost their homes. The caste system can only give a life of degradation for Dalits. Dalits accept occupations that the rest of Indian society found ritually contaminated. Jobs like handling carcasses, disposing of human waste (manual scavenging), sweeping streets, or cobbling are specially laid aside for them. Whereas in India the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act of 1993 (1993 Act) prohibits the employment of manual scavengers in the interest of human dignity and public health. Additionally, the 1993 Act bans the use of dry latrines, which require manual scavengers to remove human waste. Arundhati Roy in her essay “The Doctor and the Saint”, written as an excellent introduction to Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s *Annihilation of Caste*, has given a true statistical report of India. She says, “According to the National Crime Records Bureau, a crime is committed against a Dalit by a non-Dalit every sixteen minutes; every day, more than four Untouchable women are raped by the touchables; every week, thirteen Dalits are murdered and six Dalits are kidnapped. In 2012 alone, the year of the Delhi gang rape and murder, 1574 Dalit women were raped... 651 Dalits were murdered. That’s just the rape and butchery. Not the stripping and parading naked, the forced shit eating (literally), the seizing of land, the social boycotts, the restriction of access to drinking water”.

So, the situation for the lower caste people is very ironical in Indian society. Law may be speaking of equality but it is far from being believed and practiced.

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## **UNIT 2 (B): THE BURNING OF *MANUSMRITI* BY DR. B.R. AMBEDKAR**

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In 1927 Dr. B.R. Ambedkar took a historical and remarkable step towards the annihilation of the caste system. In front of thousands of people, a funeral pyre was arranged. Here, Babasaheb burned one of the most ancient and crucial texts which gives caste-based Hinduism a religious sanctity, *Manusmriti*. This incident is known as ‘Mahad Satyagraha’. The aim of Mahad Satyagraha was to assert the Dalit’s right to access public water, temple entry and also to impart humanity and dignity. This day is also known as Manusmriti Dahan Diwas. Upper caste people were barring the Dalits to enter the water, and temple despite permission from the authorities. Brahmins in that area were trying their best to stop the Mahad protest. Protestors were even not getting any public ground to use for meetings. Finally, a wise man named Fatte Khan gave his

private land for the protestors to use. A pledge was to be taken by the volunteers who participated in the protest. They all had to vow that they do not believe in the hierarchy of caste or the distinction of caste on the basis of birth. They knew that untouchability is a curse for Hindu society. So, they will give all efforts to protest against this malpractice of society. On the scheduled day in front of a huge crowd, he delivered his soul-stirring speech. The 'vedi' or the pyre was created beforehand and after the address they moved to burn *Manusmriti*. Slogan arose to destroy untouchability and bury Brahminism.

The reasons behind burning *Manusmriti* were quite obvious. To eradicate the caste system, this event was extremely significant as *Manusmriti*, also known as 'Manava-Dharmasastra' was considered to be the first ancient legal text among the many Dharmasastras of Hinduism. *Manusmriti* is variously dated to be composed and practiced from the 1st century to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE. *Manusmriti* prescribes Hindus their religion and their code of conduct. On the ground of religion, it gives the list of duties in society. *Manusmriti* has 12 chapters in it containing thousands of slokas. The very first chapter deals with the creation of the universe and world, the four 'yugas', the four castes, their profession, and the supremacy of Brahmins are discussed. It categorizes humans on the basis of caste and also prescribes respective duties. The second chapter contains the phase of "Brahmacharya". The third chapter deals with the choice of a wife and about rules of marriage for all castes. The fourth chapter deals with the manner of living befitting the Brahmins. It is about the duties of the householder. It also talks about different types of Hell. The fifth chapter deals with the duties of women, their purities and impurities. The sixth chapter deals with the duties of a king and shows how a king should conduct himself. The eighth chapter deals with the civil and criminal proceedings and of the proper punishments to be meted out to different castes. The ninth chapter speaks about ancestral properties. The tenth chapter deals with the lawful occupations for each caste. *Manusmriti* thus deals with various pillars of society like rights, crime, statements and justice. *Manusmriti* is also called 'The Law Book' of the Hindus. *Manusmriti* is so much controversial as it sanctifies the hierarchical order of Hindus by birth. The book gave the status of twice-born to the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas which it considered Sudras as unclean and unfit to read Vedas. The Sudras thus don't get any access to the knowledge of Vedas. They were not allowed to learn laws and religious codes. It is not necessary to teach them anything valuable. If anyone disregards the law of Manu he or she will go to hell. The only duty of Sudras is to serve their masters. *Manusmriti* kept Dalits or untouchables outside the four-fold 'Varna System'. These Dalits don't have access to any rights. *Manusmriti* strictly prohibits any inter-caste marriage. The book also talks about controlling women. It says that before marriage a girl should be

under the control of her father and after marriage, her husband will be her master. After the death of her husband, she will be under the control of her sons. But not in any condition she is supposed to be free or independent. It also declares in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter that a hundred years old Kshatriya should treat a ten-year-old Brahmin as his father. *Manusmriti* allows an uneducated Brahmin to become a judge. It's not even essential for the Brahmin to study Vedas. He is superior only by birth. But a Shudra how much knowledge he possesses can never teach or preach to anybody. If any Shudra ever dares to insult any Brahmin, he can be bestowed harsh punishments.

After knowing the above-mentioned facts, it gets very obvious why Dalit leaders or any believer in social equality will oppose the *Manusmriti*. Jyotiba Phule was one of the visionary reformers who criticized *Manusmriti*. B. R Ambedkar also censured *Manusmriti* and wanted to perish its ideology forever. And that's why he took the revolutionary decision to burn the book. In an issue of the Bahiskrit Bharat, Ambedkar propagated the view that *Manusmriti* does not at all believe in any equality and social justice. So *Manusmriti* was burnt as a protest against the idea it represented. In this way, the book which was symbolizing discrimination and oppression is destroyed. Babasaheb believed that any person who follows *Manusmriti* will never do any work for the progress of the untouchable communities. This act also corresponds to the burning of foreign cloth by Gandhi. Thus, this act challenges the age-old discriminatory ideas and the baseless supremacy of the Brahmins. It gave Dalits new strength to fight for their rights.

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### **UNIT 3: SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS OF THE ANNIHILATION OF CASTE**

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Here in this book Dr. B. R. Ambedkar speaks about the eradication of the caste system in India. He gives us some of the ways in which this vicious practice can be abolished. This book is meant to destroy the roots of the caste system. This was a speech written and to be delivered for a conference to be held in May 1936, organized by The Jat-Pat Todak Mandal. It is an organization of caste-Hindu social reformers wanting to erase the caste system from Hindu society. The conference was cancelled for some reason. The reason was that the caste Hindus who were organizing the conference wanted Babasaheb to change some words and opinion but Babasaheb did not concur to change anything, not even a comma. Babasaheb Ambedkar decided to print the entire speech prepared as it is. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar said, "As a rule, I do not like to take any part in a movement which is carried on by caste Hindus. Their attitude

towards social reform is so different from mine that I found it difficult to pull on with them.” What is the main difference between the perspectives of the caste Hindus and that of Babasaheb Ambedkar will be discussed and understood by reading and analyzing the famous book *Annihilation of Caste*.

The book is full of wisdom and vision to eradicate the caste system. Though the conference was cancelled Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar decided to publish the address as a book in English and within two months of the publication it sold around 1500 copies and the book has been widely translated into many regional languages like Gujarati, Tamil, Marathi, Hindi, Punjabi and Malayalam. At the beginning of the book, Babasaheb gives an epigraph which is a quote by Buddha. It says, “Know truth as truth and untruth as untruth.” So, it can be justly observed that Babasaheb was only keen to expose the deeply rooted problem of caste based on birth and he wanted to reveal some genuine methods to annihilate the caste. He then again puts a quote from H. Drummond which says, “He that will not reason is a bigot. He that cannot reason is a fool. He that dare not reason is a slave.” So, it can be aptly surmised that he was ready to reveal some of the most reasonable, genuine, and groundbreaking ways to eradicate the heinous system of caste.

Ambedkar knew that politically as well as religiously minded people may get offended by the content of the book. According to the revered Hindu shastras the Brahmins are selected and appointed in society by the Almighty God to teach the other three Varnas. So it is practiced in society that it is the birthright of the Brahmin. They are chosen to be the most privileged and most respected among all the other Varnas of Hindu society. Even though someone can be well-versed and intelligent to be a Guru he or she is not allowed to teach if he or she is from another caste.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar provides an example by putting forward the opinion of Saint Ramdas. In his book *Dasbodh* a spiritual text of the 17<sup>th</sup> century he asks the Hindus “Can we accept an *antyaaja* to be our guru because he is a pandit i.e., learned. He gives an answer in the negative”. So, the upper caste Hindus will never accept someone from lower caste birth to be their teacher even if he or she is highly qualified for that. According to Babasaheb Ambedkar in India for any social reformation, there are fewer supporters but many critics. Critics in India are also divided into two types – the political reformers and the socialists. The Hindu society was already suffering from lots of evil customs and to fight with these wrong systems the foundation of the National Congress was also accompanied by the foundation of the Social Conference. The main motto of the social conference was to eradicate evil practices from

society. National Congress wanted to define weak points in the political organization whereas the social Conference wanted to remove the weak points of Hindu society. So initially these two organizations were like “two wings” with the same ambition. But gradually these two wings developed into two separate parties, one was known as the “political reform party” and the other as the “social reform party” and between them there spurred ferocious controversy. Dr. Ambedkar says, “The two bodies thus became two hostile camps. The point at issue was whether social reform should precede political reform.” There was serious enmity between these two parties, and with the passage of time Social Conference was completely washed out. Mr. Tilak and Mr. Bonnerjee could not save the Social Conference.

Babasaheb also speaks on this matter and he strongly believed that social reform is way more important than it is thought. He brings into light the situation of the Untouchables from various parts of the country. He points out how inhumanly the untouchables were treated under the rule of Peshwas in the Maratha country. The Untouchables were not allowed to walk over the public streets as his shadow may pollute a Hindu walking the same street. The untouchables even carried a black thread on the wrist or around the neck to protect the Hindus from getting polluted by mistake. In Poona, they have to carry a broom around their waist, strung from behind. The logic was when they walked, they are supposed to clean the road again. In Poona itself, they had to carry a pot to be hung around their neck so that their spit doesn't fall on the street and pollute the upper caste Hindus.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar then gives some more facts about the recent past which is during 1928. In a report in the *Times of India* on 4<sup>th</sup> January, 1928, it was mentioned that the high-caste Hindus informed the Balais community to conform to certain rules in order to stay among them which are really derogatory. Some of the rules are they cannot wear gold-lace-bordered pugrees, they cannot wear dhotis with fancy borders, Balais women cannot wear gold or silver ornaments or even fancy dresses, Balais must serve the Hindus without demanding remuneration, etc. In order to stay in their respective villages in the Indore district they must abide by these rules. Balais refused to follow the restrictions imposed upon them and they saw the hostility of the Hindus. Gradually they left their hometown and moved to other districts. Some untouchables were not allowed to use metal pots to fetch water and some were not allowed to even use ghee in their meal as “ghee is undoubtedly a luxury for rich”. So, if a politically aware person doesn't think about the equal status of all the castes, the same opportunities, and respect of a large section of the population of the country he or she is not appropriate as a political leader according to Babasaheb.

Then Babasaheb scrutinizes the reasons why the Social Reform Party failed to prove its value. He believes that it failed as it was only motivated to reform the high-caste Hindu families. No one among them showed the courage to bring about true change by abolishing the different statuses of human beings only on the basis of caste. No one was interested in the reorganization of the entire Hindu society. So, for the positive reconstruction of the society Social Reform is more valuable than Political Reform. Babasaheb gives the example of the Irish Home Rule of Ireland where the majority of South Ireland was eager to provide any political safeguard to the minority leader Ulster but he refuses to take the help and the problem there was Catholic vs Protestant. This type of social problem prevented the probabilities and possibilities of political reform. When the republican constitution of Rome was being formed it also had to face the division between patricians and plebians.

Babasaheb Ambedkar robustly states that “political revolutions have always been preceded by social and religious revolutions.” The religious reformation started by Martin Luther led to the Emancipation of the European people. The religious revolution started by the prophet Mohammad brought Political power to Arabs. In India also the religious and social revolution of Gautama Buddha facilitated the revolution led by Chandragupta Maurya. In the same manner, the political revolution of Shivaji was preceded by the social and religious reforms made by the saints of Maharashtra. With the religious reformation done by Guru Nanak, the political revolution of the Sikhs happened. So finally, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar asserts that “the emancipation of the mind and the soul is a necessary preliminary for the political expansion of the people.”

Babasaheb goes on to speak about the fallacies of Socialists. According to the Socialists, property is the only source of power. They interpret everything with the doctrine of the economy and prioritize equalization of property. According to the socialists, “equalization of property is the only real reform.” But Babasaheb firmly believes that people will not attach to any revolution unless and until they think that after the revolution justice and equality wait for them. As the poor or the proletariat of India are not only conscious of their economic deprivation but also are aware of their respective caste or creed. So socialists in India can only perform well when they combine their ideology to erase the economic imbalance as well as the high and low caste distinctions. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is grieved by the fact that still in India there are many defenders of this obnoxious practice of caste. For the defenders, the caste system actually means the division of labour which is extremely important for maintaining the balance of society. But for Babasaheb, it is unacceptable as a civilized society may absolutely need a

proper division of labour. But in India, society is dividing the labourers unnaturally and creating an unhealthy hierarchy based on the gradation of labourers. Moreover, this so-called division of labour is not based on natural aptitudes. So, it's not natural as the "division of labour brought about by the caste system is not a division based on choice. Individual sentiment, individual preference, has no place in it." That's why the system is pernicious and is a hindrance to the true development of the country.

New ethnologists opine that pure race doesn't exist anywhere in the world. So different races in India are also commingled. But some critics believe that the distinction of race and the distinction of caste are the same thing. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar clarifies that race and caste are not the same thing in India. It is a grand mistake to think of them to be one. Babasaheb illuminates the readers that "the caste system is a social division of people of the same race." The caste system doesn't have any scientific origin or reason attached to it.

Then Babasaheb attacks the Hindu society vehemently and more powerfully. He claims that Hindu society itself is a myth. The very name Hindu has a foreign origin. The Mahomedans gave the name to the natives to distinguish themselves from the natives. The Sanskrit works didn't have the word Hindu before the arrival of the Mahomedans and the conception of this very name occurred just to distinguish the identities. Hindu society as a whole is only a collection of different castes. That's why the caste system is so difficult to be uprooted or even neglected. Each caste here has its own distinct culture, traditions, habits, customs, etc. They celebrate festivals for parallel concepts but still, this similarity could not bring them closer and make them into an 'integral whole'. Hindus in general don't have any 'consciousness of kind'. They don't have any interest to share and participate in each other's activities. In every Hindu, the consciousness of caste is stronger than the consciousness of kind. For the same reason the Hindus have to witness some anti-social activities and this spirit is so deep that it penetrates not only the caste but the layers of sub-caste as well. In Babasaheb's own province, there are many types of Brahmins like – Golak Brahmins, Deorukha Brahmins, Karada Brahmins, Palshe Brahmins, and Chitpavan Brahmins and basically, so many classifications have increased isolation and prevented solidarity and unity and also peace. There are around thirteen million aboriginal tribes in India. Though India boasts of a long heritage of eminent civilization yet most of these aboriginal tribes belong to the primitive uncivilized caste. They are considered uncultured and savage. The Hindus have never taken them into consideration and thus have denied them all the duties of humanity. These 'savages' are very much prone to be reclaimed and converted to other faiths that promise and practice equality. The Hindus have many



accusations against the Mahomedans and Christians that they are sometimes brutal during the process of conversion but in reality, the Hindus have disregarded the 'savages' most. They didn't allow the uncivilized any chance to be civilized. Hindu religion constantly kept them in darkness as the abominable other. So, the Hindu religion cannot be called a missionary religion as it is not uniform but only a bunch of castes and sub-castes.

Thus 'suddhi' and 'sangathan' both have been impossible for Hindus. They don't believe in true inclusion so conversion gets easier for the lower caste people. There is no uniformity and strength in this religion but a Sikh knows that another Sikh will always be there in danger to rescue, a Mahomedan will rush to save another Mahomedan. Thus, the Hindu religion is weakened by an increased sense of cowardice and timidity. There is no assurance in the Hindu community to stand by each other. Sikhs and Mahomedans have developed social cement which is not present in Hindu society. This lack of association has generated a lack of confidence and thus they are timid and indifferent in most matters. They have the image of being tolerant as they don't have the courage to be intolerant. They are ready to digest any insult as they know no one of the religion will come by their side. So, this ideology of indifferentism is closely knit with the caste system.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar asserts that the effect of the caste system is very disgraceful as it has destroyed the public spirit. According to him, "caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. A Hindu's public is his caste. His responsibility is only to his caste. His loyalty is restricted only to his caste. Virtue has become caste-ridden, and morality has become caste-bound. There is no sympathy for the deserving. There is no appreciation of the meritorious. There is no charity to the needy." Through this statement, Babasaheb pinpoints how seriously the caste system is posing a threat to the fraternity, liberty, and equality of its country's people.

In Hindu society, there are many reformers who have different values. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar speaks about Arya Samajists but their ideal social construction was possible by practicing the 'chaturvarnya'. It is the system that upholds the rule of the division of labour into four classes and not castes. They wanted to be a little relevant by proclaiming that they believe in *chaturvarnya* which is based on worth and not on birth. So, basically, they also liked this hierarchical division of humans into Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Thus, they go on to recall the old notions. But for Babasaheb this entire system of *chaturvarnya* is abominable and he says his "whole being rebels against it". He thinks that it is an impracticable and harmful system as no one who is born into higher status will vacate their status easily or

willingly. It is an illogical idea. Plato in his *Republic* also labelled people into different classes. But these classifications are very irrelevant and superficial. He gives the example of Lord Rama killing Shambuka. Rama was strictly bound by rules and it was a society based on the *chaturvarnya* hierarchy he had to kill Shambuka when he tried to transgress his class and wanted a higher status. So, the idea of penalty is automatically associated with *chaturvarnya* system. *Manusmriti* also prescribes many such horrible and torturous penalties. The defenders of the *chaturvarnya* system proclaim that the lower castes need not earn wealth as the upper castes will support them. This is truly a baseless point because if the other castes stop bothering about the lower class their life will be troublesome. There is always the possibility that the upper castes may dispose of their duty and refuse to help the Sudras. Babasaheb asks, "What is to happen to the Shudra if the three classes refuse to support him on fair terms"? He firmly believes that no human should rely on another for even his or her fundamental needs. Education is a vital right of everyone. Every man also has the right to protect himself or herself and their paramount right of self-defense.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar declares that this *chaturvarnya* is "as old as the Vedas". In the *Mahabharata* and also in *Puranas*, there are numerous stories of the feud between Brahmins and Kshatriyas. They have tried to eradicate the other caste brutally. In any other religion like Mahomedan and Sikh, there are no such strict dogmas. Castes exist in those religions also but they are strongly united as a whole community. If a person is Mahomedan no one asks him what his caste is like, Shia or Sunni, Sheikh or Saiyad or Khatik or Pinjari. So is the Sikh community. But caste unfortunately in the Hindu religion is not only just a system but a sacred institute. For the Hindus, this system is a virtue.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar himself tries to figure out ways to bring reform to the Hindu social order. He thinks that the general view that abolishing sub-caste must precede the eradication of caste is erroneous. As the fusion of Brahmins of the South and the Brahmin of the North is never possible, there is no surety that fusing the sub-caste will abolish the caste system. The notion that inter-caste dinner or inter-caste marriage can be a remedy is again faulty. Some social critics think that the fusion of blood through marriage can be a paramount way to abolish the caste system. But this idea is also gross and futile. The only way is to illuminate people in such a way that they can disbelieve the stringent dogmas of the shastras, the religious texts. Through forced or artificial ways only superficial change may be seen. But true reformation can come by purgation of the minds, by discarding the dictums of shastras. Only through love and peace, human beings can release themselves from these inhuman bondages and practices.

Hindus believe that the social order is sacred, having a divine basis. So, giving up their caste will be like denying the fundamental convictions of the religion. Brahmins can be part of political reform and also of economic reform but they are unwilling to break the barriers of caste. Brahmins can never lead in such a movement the end result of such a reformation will be “to destroy the power and prestige of the Brahmins”. But Babasaheb makes it clear why such a small community, the Brahmins are criticized with such intensity. He says that though small they are considered the most intellectual caste of the society. They are revered as *Bhudevas* (gods on earth). And in any society for its evolution or revolution, the views and actions of the intellectual class matter the most. They think themselves to be the most intellectual and thus tries to hold all the other lower community under their control. They are enjoying an elevated status, they are enjoying a kind of sovereignty and power that they will not want to lose easily. Hindus cannot deviate from the rules of their shastras as using rationalism is also condemned in the religion. Hindus must abide as “Caste and varna are matters which are dealt with by the Vedas and smritis, and consequently, appeal to reason can have no effect on a Hindu”.

Babasaheb very smartly makes a distinction between rules and principles. Rules make everything very artificial or mechanical but the principle is intellectual. Religion also must be a matter of principles. But unfortunately, the Hindu religion doesn't have any principles but it only has rules and regulations to be followed unquestionably, leaving the reason or logic or intellectual insight aside. For Hindus, their religion is a law that is deprived of morality and freedom. These declarations may make anyone assume that Babasaheb was anti-religion. But he again proved everyone wrong. His thought matches with Burke's when he says, “True religion is the foundation of society”. But he also strongly believes that religion can be future-ready when it is open, kind, and ready to destroy the old set of rules. Religion must modify and evolve with time. Time has its own demand and religion should respond to it. But for him, religion must be following principles. Religion must follow what is genuinely beneficial for humanity and for society. It must be following principles and not rules and laws. As there must be some sort of proficiency to conduct a ritual or to worship God. But a diseased man or an idiot may enter a temple and conduct puja as he is Brahmin by birth and such kind of unjust practices are totally unacceptable and abominable to Babasaheb. To preserve the divinity of the religion is like killing its moral values. Babasaheb is a strong advocate of liberty, equality and fraternity. To establish such values will be to perish the old outlook as “the old must cease to be operative before the new can begin to enliven and to pulsate”.

Hindus must accept that nothing is fixed and every old order must change as change is the only constant. Towards the end of this address, he vehemently asserts that he will never falter to stand for the truth and his life is devoted to the upheaval and liberty of the poor and the oppressed.

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#### UNIT 4 (A): GANDHI VS. AMBEDKAR

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Mahatma Gandhi and Babasaheb Ambedkar are two brave sons of the soil and great freedom fighters of our country. Both are highly educated and thought for the independence and progress of the country but between them, there were differences in ideologies and opinions. They had serious disagreements and debates over the issue of the caste system in India. Ambedkar was born in a Dalit caste family and from childhood, he had seen much discrimination and oppression. Despite being highly educated he suffered only due to his caste. That's why he hated the Hindus who follow their scriptures blindly and support casteism. In many of his writings, he harshly criticized the Hindu religion. He had studied Sanskrit and disregarded Vedas as worthless for its propagation of casteism. He knew as long as there will be caste system people can never be united and find peace and equality. He did not want friendly behavior among the castes but he actually wanted to break or annihilate the entire caste system on which Hinduism was based.

On the other side, Mahatma Gandhi was a religious Hindu and most of his principles and strategies came from the benevolence in the religion. Gita was his spiritual dictionary. He not only respected the Hindu religion but other religions were equally regarded by him. One of his primary visions was communal harmony. So, obviously, someone who is so respectful and religious will not question anything written in the religious scriptures. That's why Mahatma Gandhi's views on society and religious principles were very orthodox initially. He believed that caste is a fundamental and indispensable part of Hinduism. The caste system, or more particularly the *chaturvarnya* system was accepted as natural and essential to smoothly run the society. But at the same time, he believed that the caste system is vital but equal status and respect for all the caste is also necessary. So, he believed in what the scriptures said but he didn't believe in the hierarchy. He was more humane in his approach. There should not be any sense of superiority or inferiority among different castes. He also believed that untouchability was not a part of Hinduism. Untouchability is like a sin for the Hindus. All humans are born

from the same creator, from the same source. So, differentiation, suppression, and oppression are all unjustified from the humanitarian ground. For this reason, in 1932, he founded the All India Anti Untouchability League which was later renamed as Harijan Sevak Sangh. So, though he believed in equality he separated the untouchables from the others with another term, with another label, i.e. Harijan. In 1934, in the Vaikom district of Kerala, he launched the Vaikom Satyagraha. It was a movement against the discrimination of the Dalits. Many other remarkable social reformers of the time also took part in the movement. Mahatma Gandhi's views at the beginning were quite problematic as he was very conservative. He didn't openly criticize casteism. In the 1920s he publicly stated that he did not support intermarriage or inter-dining between the castes. Mahatma Gandhi's son Manilal fell in love with a Muslim girl Fatima but Gandhi strongly opposed the marriage. But in 1927 his second son Devdas wanted to marry a girl named Lakshmi who belonged to a different caste and as usual, Mahatma Gandhi was against the marriage. But with time Gandhi and his ideologies also changed and became progressive. In 1932, he changed his opinion regarding inter-caste marriage and acknowledges that he was wrong previously. He accepted that the prohibition on inter-caste marriage is in reality weakening the Hindu society. And after this the next year his son Devdas finally got to marry Lakshmi. In 1946, he stated that in his ashram he will not allow the men and women to get married until and unless one of them was Harijan. So it was wonderful that in one lifetime we got to see the transformation of thoughts regarding casteism in Mahatma Gandhi.

Dr. Ambedkar was extremely critical of the Hindu religion and at a conference in 1935, he declared that he wanted to leave Hinduism. He said, "I had the misfortune of being born with the stigma of an Untouchable. However, it is not my fault; but I will not die a Hindu, for this is in my power". In 1909, the British government in India had given separate electorates in India. In 1919, the Christians, Anglo-Indians, Europeans, and Sikhs were also given separate electorates. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar wanted separate electorates for the Dalits as well. But Mahatma Gandhi was absolutely against such a proposal. During 1931, in the round-table conference in London Gandhi went to put the demands of the country in front of the British Government. He stated that the Untouchables are also Hindu and they should not be given minority status. But Ambedkar wanted that Dalits should also be declared as minorities and be given separate electorates. In 1932, British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald announced a communal award that also said that Dalits will be treated as separate minorities and Dalits will also gain separate electorates. But Gandhi did not like the statement. Gandhi believed that through the implementation of so many separate electorates, the unity of the country can be hampered. Gandhi was so determined that he started a fast unto death. Dr. Ambedkar got pressurized

because of such a decision by Gandhi and ultimately concurred with Gandhi and the historic Poona Pact was signed. Both of them compromised a little bit and the joint electorates were formed. In joint electorates, the elected politician will belong to a specific minority community but in the process of voting all the voters of that constituency would be able to vote.

As a social reformer, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's contribution is unforgettable. His simple agenda was to educate, agitate and organize. So in 1927, we can see Mahad Satyagraha. Mahad is a municipality in Maharashtra where with innumerable followers Babasaheb went to drink water from a tank. The movement was not only about drinking water but also about human rights about revolution against any oppressive system. He wanted a total reconstruction of society, to break the old order, and to establish more progressive ones. Upper-caste Hindus could not tolerate it and they were totally against it. A riotous situation was created and police had to interfere to control the situation. These upper-caste Hindus later 'purify' the water tank with milk and curd. In the same year, on 25<sup>th</sup> December, Babasaheb and his followers started a campaign to burn *Manusmriti*. Another very famous movement of Babasaheb Ambedkar was at Nashik's Kalaram Temple. The Dalits were restricted to enter the temple. He started a procession march against it. He also brought the Hindu code bills which were very progressive for the Hindu women. Babasaheb was very much inspired by the ideas of the French Revolution. He strongly believed in liberty, equality and fraternity. He mentioned these in the Constitution of India but he mentioned these in the Preamble as well.

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#### **UNIT 4 (B): RELEVANCE OF ANNIHILATION OF CASTE IN TODAY'S WORLD**

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“What *Communist Manifesto* is to the capitalist world, *Annihilation of Caste* is to caste India”, wrote Anand Teltumbde, author of *The President of Caste: The Khairlanji Murders & India's Hidden Apartheid*. *The Annihilation of Caste* is a groundbreaking masterpiece. It is a wonderfully brilliant work by one of the most genius people. He made such a great effort to bring forward what is the root cause of nurturing the old-dated ideas and how much harmful that is to the growth of the country. Through his pen, the truth has been revealed and it is the duty of every conscious citizen to read the text at least once in his or her lifetime. So that the tyranny practiced by the upper castes on the lower castes especially the untouchables can hit many hearts and open many eyes. The new India, the modern India needs to know the truth. The history that is described here is so very recent and still is a part of many families. Without

taking into account the plights of the Dalits no true reconstruction or social reform is possible. Breaking the caste system for Ambedkar is mandatory as no caste should be given so much authority to rule over the other caste. Babasaheb Ambedkar took a direct approach with the audience in this book as it was originally intended to be a speech to be delivered in front of privileged-caste Hindus. But they understood that the speech is going to be an insult on the very basis of Hinduism they tried to moderate the speech. Ambedkar was adamant to keep the speech as it is and that's why the conference was cancelled. This determination, this gut is something that the new generation should learn from him how to be an unbreakable force to highlight the truth. Not only the Dalits it is the duty of every Indian to go through and realize this thought-provoking book. It is an undaunted mirror image of the Hindu society. Every politically, socially, and religiously aware person must know the book. They must discuss the book and spread the message to everyone for a better future. India must shine and for that noble purpose caste must be annihilated. It is an inescapable process. The irony of India is that even now some upper caste people support marginalization they try to legitimize and sustain the dominance of the 'upper castes'. The goal of this book is to bring Ambedkar's essay back into our focused consciousness and awareness. *Annihilation of Caste* needs to be read, understood, and implemented in all seriousness and must be brought back as a living text into our political conscience.

In the article "Dr. Ambedkar: Abolishing Discrimination," available in Drishti IAS blog, the author Uma Sathwika Manda justly says that Ambedkar "advocated that people belonging to the 'lower castes' can achieve parity with other members of the society only when they build self-respect, get educated, convert to 'less unequal' religions such as Buddhism, gain political power, and take up a variety of occupations. The *Annihilation of Caste* provides insight into Ambedkar's ideas on social justice - he believed in liberty, equality, and fraternity. Ambedkar ensured there was total inclusion of the excluded groups and did not support discrimination on any grounds."

Arundhati Roy says caste is like apartheid in India. But it is not colour-coded and that's why it's not easy to see. The book is a radical text and will make everyone notice caste-based violence in society. If the book is fully read and understood it will definitely raise the awareness of people about the injustices done to a certain category of people on the basis of caste. The book gives insights into how the Hindu society has to reform itself and for true development the reformation is necessary. To produce some open-minded youth total caste system must be

abolished. A youth can grow fully when he or she is free from any kind of prejudice against any particular community. They must not be taught the faulty ideologies of their senior members of the family to look down upon the untouchables. Because a true human being is created only by true education and by coming out of any selfishness and embracing everyone as equals. A society must be built where Dalits will have to get a proper education. They will not be mistreated in any way. They will be respected for their contribution to society. Dalits will feel included and the trauma or psychological pressure will vanish. The dropout rate or suicide rates among the Dalits need to be curbed. All types of jobs whether government or private must be given to the deserving candidate irrespective of his or her caste. A country can never progress by neglecting a huge portion of its population. Only when the Dalits start to dream, the Dalits start to fulfill their dreams, they start to contribute to the economy of the country the country will upgrade. More and more opportunities should be created among both Dalit men and women so that their participation increases and the wheel of advancement runs smoothly. Equality is the only tool to bring change. Arundhati Roy says in the introduction of S. Anand's edited book that, "*Annihilation of Caste* is often called (even by some Ambedkarites) Ambedkar's utopia – his impracticable, unfeasible dream". But she also believes that such utopian thinking is absolutely necessary. She likes the anger in Ambedkar and says, "how depleted and how pitiable we would be as a people if even this – this rage, this audacious denunciation – did not exist in our midst. Ambedkar's anger gives us all a little shelter, a little dignity". So, it's the responsibility of every citizen of India to make his dream come true. Texts like the *Annihilation of Caste* must be taken seriously and the message must be spread in every corner, in every consciousness so that any prejudice is washed away and a new India is created.

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## ASSIGNMENTS

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### Long-Answer type Questions:

1. Why does Dr. Ambedkar think that political reform is always preceded by social or religious reform?
2. How are the Untouchables treated in India? Which illustrations are put forward by Dr. Ambedkar?
3. What are the fallacies of Socialists according to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar?
4. Why does Dr. Ambedkar say that Hindu society is a myth?
5. Why does Babasaheb Ambedkar hate the concept of *Chaturvarnya*?
6. What are the processes to bring reform to the Hindu social order?
7. What is the distinction between rules and principles?
8. Why is the caste system so difficult to be uprooted?
9. What are the differences between Mahatma Gandhi’s and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s views regarding the caste system in India?

### Short-answer type Questions:

1. What is the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal and what’s its role in producing *Annihilation of Caste*?
2. What is the *Annihilation of caste*? Is it a book or an address?
3. When was the *Annihilation of Caste* first published and how many copies were sold within two months?
4. What do the epigraphs of the text denote?

5. What were the rules against the Balais community?
6. Who wrote *Dasbodh* and Who is an *antajya*?
7. Which were the “two-wings” with the same ambition?
8. Why do inter-caste dinners and inter-caste marriages are not sufficient to eradicate caste distinction completely?
9. Why does Ambedkar say that caste has destroyed public charity?
10. What is the role of *Manusmriti* in preserving the caste system?
11. Who are the *Bhu-devas*? How are they treated in India?

**BLOCK – II**

**UNITS: 5 – 8**

**“WHAT IS DALIT LITERATURE?” BY SHARATCHANDRA MUKTIBODH**

**“EXPERIENCE, SPACE AND JUSTICE” BY GOPAL GURU**

**“HEGEMONY AND CONSCIOUSNESS-BUILDING PROCESSES IN  
DALIT LITERATURE” BY MAURO PALA**

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**CONTENT STRUCTURE:**

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Unit 5: General Introduction to the essays “What is Dalit Literature?” by Sharatchandra Muktibodh, “Experience, Space and Justice” by Gopal Guru and “Hegemony and consciousness-building processes in Dalit literature” by Mauro Pala.

Unit 6: Critical discussion of Sharatchandra Muktibodh’s “What is Dalit Literature?”

Unit 6 (a): Dalit consciousness, Dalit point of view and literature

Unit 6 (b): Dalit viewpoint versus Dalit vision

Conclusion

Unit 7: Critical discussion of Gopal Guru’s “Experience, Space and Justice”

Unit 7 (a): Introduction

Unit 7 (b): Spaces and the Language of Mobilization

Unit 7 (c): How social thought emerges through experiential space and space as a culturally constructed phenomenon

Unit 7 (d): Hierarchy of spaces and how different concepts arise from them

Conclusion

Unit 8: Critical Discussion of Mauro Pala’s “Hegemony and consciousness-building Processes in Dalit literature”.

Unit 8 (a): Gramscian notions of “Hegemony” and the “Subaltern” and their affinities with Ambedkar

Unit 8 (b): Dalit autobiographical literature

Unit 8 (c): A Gramscian reading of Dalit Literature: theory and Praxis

Conclusion

References

Suggested Readings

Assignments

## UNIT - 5

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### UNIT 5: GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE ESSAYS

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#### **“What is Dalit Literature?” by Sharatchandra Muktibodh**

Sharatchandra Muktibodh’s “What is Dalit Literature?” was published in the anthology of Dalit writings *Poisoned Bread*, edited by the renowned Marathi scholar, activist and founding member of the Dalit Panthers<sup>1</sup>, Arjun Dangle. When the book was published in 1992, it was the first anthology of Dalit writings to be published and clubbed together short stories, poems, speeches and essays under one cluster: Dalit literature. Thus, it was a landmark volume in the history of Dalit literature in particular and protest writing in general. Muktibodh was a prominent Marathi literary figure like all of the eighty-plus writers included in the anthology. He was a poet, novelist and critic who was also a Sahitya Akademi awardee. The essay, “What is Dalit Literature?” was originally written in Marathi, like all of the other writings, and was published in the anthology translated into English. Anil Raghunath Kulkarni translated Muktibodh’s essay for the volume. The essay is a remarkable deliberation on the nature of Dalit literature written when Dalit literary discourse was in its nascent period. It was one of the early

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<sup>1</sup> The Dalit Panthers were a social organisation that sought to end caste discrimination. It was inspired by the Black Panthers, a socialist organisation that fought against the racial and economic discrimination of African-Americans during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States of American. Led by Marathis, the Dalit Panthers were influential in the politics of the 1970s and 1980s.

texts to establish the link between Dalit literature and Dalit consciousness and provides an important defence of literature emerging from a particular standpoint or point of view, thus of political literature.

### **“Experience, Space and Justice” by Gopal Guru**

Gopal Guru’s essay “Experience, Space and Justice” was published as a chapter in the book *The Cracked Mirror, An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory* (2012) by Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai. The book is written in a dialogic form, as a dialogue between the two thinkers, Gopal Guru, a political scientist and Sundar Sarukkai, a philosopher, where they debate on the ways lived experience influences the creation of epistemologies while keeping Dalit experience at the core of their thinking. Published in 2012, this book remains one of the most important works of original theory emerging from the subcontinent. Sheldon Pollock referred to this book as one of the best examples of theory from the Global South.

In the essay, Gopal Guru develops on the interconnections between space as a concept, subjective lived experience and social justice. He proposes the thesis that there is a ‘logic of space’ which ‘objectively’ produces a ‘subjective experience.’ The hegemon or dominant demographic is able to mould these spaces so that they remain oppressive for the dominated and the subaltern. In this way, spaces have been configured to produce civilizational violence and it is only with the reconfiguration of spaces and the expansion of spaces that new epistemological concepts can arise and thereby the possibility for reaching justice in actuality can arise. Guru’s essay draws on the examples of Gandhi and Ambedkar, both from their theoretical concepts as well as lived life instances to further Guru’s theoretical claims and positions. “To draw a stark difference between ‘experience’ and ‘lived experience’ Guru creates a creative bulwark when he brings in the articulation of both Ambedkar and Gandhi into the scene. He claims that Ambedkar was ‘epistemologically’ and ‘ontologically’ well equipped due to his ‘lived experience’ of being from a particular caste location, which overarches Gandhi’s imagination which lacks ‘lived experience.’” (Pant) It is with the use of the differences in concepts between Ambedkar and Gandhi, that Gopal Guru articulates his claim that only those who have lived lives as subalterns can accurately represent and theorise them. This claim has been influential, especially in the context of the ethics of theorization not just for Dalit studies but for the studies of all marginal communities. Sundar Sarukkai in an

essay that follows Guru problematises this claim. Hence, this essay, as well as, the book, remains a seminal text in the theoretical tradition of Dalit studies.

**“Hegemony and consciousness-building processes in Dalit literature” by Mauro Pala**

Mauro Pala’s “Hegemony and consciousness-building processes in Dalit literature” published in the book *The Political Philosophies of Antonio Gramsci and B. R. Ambedkar: Itineraries of Dalits and Subalterns* (2013), edited by Cosimo Zene, attempts to understand the formation of Dalit consciousness through literature using the Gramscian framework. Pala is a Professor of Comparative Literature and contemporary scholar who attempts to examine the political philosophies of inclusion of subalterns/Dalits in Gramsci and Ambedkar’s political philosophies. Pala’s focus remains on Dalit autobiographical writing and the possibilities of emancipation arising from it. He takes up particularly the Gramscian notions of hegemony and the subaltern in order to evaluate how Dalit literature helps build oppositional and emancipatory consciousness among Dalits.

The book published by Routledge in 2013 attempts to locate Gramsci’s ‘philosophy of praxis’ within the context of South Asian societies, and critically evaluate and appreciate his thoughts. Pala’s essay broadly aligns with these objectives. Along with this, the essay does a comparative study of Ambedkar’s thought alongside Gramsci and thus takes Ambedkar’s philosophy to an international stage. The essay is an important contribution to Dalit literary theory and provides crucial critical insight into the comparative politics of Gramsci and Ambedkar in the context of literature.

## UNIT - 6

### “WHAT IS DALIT LITERATURE?”

BY

SHARATCHANDRA MUKTIBODH

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#### UNIT 6 (A): DALIT CONSCIOUSNESS, DALIT POINT OF VIEW AND LITERATURE

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The starting point of a conceptualization of Dalit literature is that literature is a product of social consciousness – and thus Dalit literature is a product of Dalit social consciousness. Furthermore, this literature is not just a reflection but also at once an intervention into social consciousness, aiming to bring changes through rebellion against the structural subjugation of Dalits within the varna system and upholding an inspired vision of human freedom. Thus, to reach a common conception of Dalit literature it presupposes that there is a social experience common to all Dalits or that all Dalits have a certain commonality in their social experience of Dalithood and thus Dalit consciousness is at once both subjective and social.

Dalit literature and Dalit consciousness are firmly rooted in the Dalit point of view: that is a gauging of social reality from the standpoint of a Dalit. Dalit literature ideally presents Dalit life from a Dalit point of view but it most definitely and mandatorily embodies a Dalit point of view. Muktibodh, adds an important qualification that though a Dalit writer is bound to have a Dalit point of view, as may an orator, essayist, or social worker, it is not enough for a literary artist. Any work of literature necessarily transforms a point of view into an insight into life. It presents a vision by integrating a political point of view with an individual experience of the totality of life.

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#### UNIT 6 (B): DALIT VIEW POINT VERSUS DALIT VISION

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Muktibodh suggests that a Dalit point of view or any point of view is an “intellectual cartograph” of a single aspect of life, which it brings into prominence and explores. However, an artist’s vision is integral to the vitality of art. An artist can have a vision emerge only when

“a view of life is experienced by a writer in its multiform, distinct totality”—since life does not only unfold with experiences that prove only a certain point of view (271).

He illustrates his point with the example of Haribhau Apte’s *Pan Lakshat Kon Ghetto?* (*Who Cares to Heed?*) While Haribhau had a vision of feminine bondage, his artistry did not reach the level of Saratchandra Chaterji (sic) as in order to depict Yamu’s suffering he resorted to the simplification of the representation of her life limiting it to a certain set of circumstances. Muktibodh asserts that it is such “simplification of life to the extent that it helps to assert and prove the point proposed by the writer” (272), which illustrates the formalist critic’s criticism of writers who write from a particular viewpoint: as limited art. Formalists “contend that the artist’s point of view limits the artistic merit of his creation (272)”. However, Muktibodh opines that the Formalist viewpoint is a distinct view from a particular viewpoint – hence they are implicated in their own criticism. Furthermore, he disagrees with their view that everything that is asocial is artistic.

On, the other hand, literature that is individualistic, that is, not engaging with the social is also restricted to a certain viewpoint. This point of view ultimately presents an individual crushed between the individual’s internal primitive passions and an unpredictable, cruel destiny. Hence, this restricted viewpoint also sets a limit to its artistic merit. Thus, Muktibodh opines, that literature does limit its artistic quality if extremely committed to a particular point of view. However, writers can transcend this limitation if they treat their point of view not as an abstract thought but a concrete vision rooted in experience.

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## CONCLUSION

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In conclusion, the idea of a standpoint: a view of society from a particular vantage point has been borrowed from Marxist consciousness by many kinds of literature that seeks to make a political point – feminist, black and others—Dalit literature is no exception. However, Muktibodh introduces an important qualification, that for a commendable artistic literary work to emerge, a point of view must blossom into a vision through the writer-artist’s experience of the myriad colours, emotions and experiences of life. At the same time, he defends literature emerging from a particular viewpoint suggesting that all literature and critical perspectives emerge from distinct points of view, however, great art carries at the same time a commitment to life. Muktibodh writing the essay at the very dawn of Dalit literary tradition states that



“original and important Dalit work of literature would emerge only when a Dalit point of view would visualise itself through concrete experience” (273). This literature emerging out of a Dalit vision would penetrate Indian life and present a powerful picture of human life thirsty for freedom.

## UNIT - 7

### “EXPERIENCE, SPACE AND JUSTICE”

BY

GOPAL GURU

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#### UNIT 7 (A): INTRODUCTION

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Gopal Guru begins his essay with an introductory exposition of his main arguments. He states at the onset that the three terms from his title, experience, space, and justice are intimately connected conceptually, and together they present the epistemological claim (a claim that Guru also makes) that “a concept of space embedded in experience” is the source of both the “formation of thought and thought’s articulation” (Guru 71). Such an epistemological claim addresses a gap in theorization about Indian social reality as Guru notes the inadequacy of the materialist (Marxist) and idealist theories as universalist modes of thought to capture the complexities and complex particularities of the Indian subcontinent.

Guru’s main claim which since has been influential in social theory as well as contested, is that: the theory of social reality, thereby theoretical representation of experience cannot predate experience, in other words, first-person experience of social reality, particularly forces of domination, is necessary for the emergence of effective theory that can represent that experience and can be reflectively realised. In the absence of such lived experience, experience simply becomes a tool that the theoretician uses for the purpose of theorization and this is done at the cost of objectification of the victim. In doing so the theoretician is no different from the tormentor for whom experience “acts as a political condition to maintain dominance” over the victim who is objectified (Guru 72). “Though Guru is not writing flagrantly; one can sense that he situates his stand that it is ethically inappropriate to become an author of somebody else’s experience” (Pant). Guru arrives at this claim using Lefebvre’s idea of experiential space, arguing that experience which is realized subjectively but “objectively produced through the logic of space, finds its theoretical representation mediated by experiential space” (Guru 72). Thus, the reflective realization of a theory depends upon experience that “acquires expression (sometimes violent) within a specific space” (Guru 72). Furthermore, Guru posits, spaces are constructed along different planes, such as economics, colonial, and discursive, and in this way,

these spaces produce fragmentary forms of experience. The production of experience finds stability and continuity as spaces are restructured across time on the basis of ideology. For example, spaces are reconfigured by the tormentor to produce a particular kind of experience that can paralyse the victim morally into submission and allow the tormentor to regulate the victim and maintain his hegemony and domination. On the other side, the victim also seeks to reconfigure space for the purpose of stripping it of its humiliating or tormenting meaning and in favour of egalitarianism. And importantly, Guru claims, the victim uses space-bound experience for collective mobilization.

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### UNIT 7 (B): SPACES AND THE LANGUAGE OF MOBILIZATION

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Mobilization is what allows the victim to break out from dominant spaces, as such spaces are necessarily closed. However, this can only be done according to Guru by grasping the experience underlying the space and intensifying it through an abstract language. Mobilization is done by invoking morally and politically motivating categories such as dignity, self-respect, freedom, equality and social justice and this allows the servile victim to reconfigure space to their advantage. Adopting such a new vocabulary (for example a language of self-respect and dignity) also allows the servile victim to intensify their experience. Guru uses the case of Ambedkar and Gandhi to illustrate his point.

The intellectual or political mobilization of Dalit masses by Ambedkar and peasantry by Gandhi testifies to this intensification...Both these thinkers deploy experience as well as space in order to produce sets of categories that are morally (in the case of Gandhi) and politically (in the case of Ambedkar) motivating as far as the mobilization of masses is concerned. Both these thinkers seem to be approaching their respective social constituencies with a different set of categories emanating from differential experience. (Guru 74)

Connecting this to the initial claim of the essay that experience provides an initial epistemological condition for the creative reflection or theoretical representation of experience, Guru, opines that both Ambedkar and Gandhi drew upon experience for their epistemological formulations. Gandhi proposes the concept of *seva* to produce the mobilization required for achieving Indian independence while Ambedkar proposes self-respect to produce the mobilization required for the transformation of *Bahishkrut Bharat* (India of the excluded—the

untouchables) into *PraBuddha Bharat* (India of the enlightened people). However, Gandhi's conceptualisation was mythical and a historical, while Ambedkar's conceptualisation was fundamentally historical as he located the source of *Bahishkrut Bharat* in historical processes. Apart from this fundamental difference, Guru, suggests that the Gandhian project, which experimented with himself and others effectively objectified Ambedkar and his entire community. On the other hand, Ambedkar and his people, the untouchables, were born into the spatial experience of untouchability and did not require experiments to produce experience. This difference was the result of the difference in their lived experience, thus illustrating Guru's thesis, even as they both drew upon experience for their theoretical formulations.

Both Gandhi and Ambedkar did not generate their moral and political formulations a priori, favouring some universal principle. Rather they shaped their epistemological categories through detailed knowledge of what they were producing. They did not just read texts but also experienced the context in varying degrees. "Both these thinkers of modern India gained an understanding of social nuances and an adequate understanding of India through voyages across Indian regions" (Guru 76). The very formation of their ideas was built upon the specificity of experience, even as modern commentators seek to universalise their formulations.

This, Guru refers to Manu Goswami's *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Economy* (2004) which had critiqued the formulations of the postcolonial framework for failing to incorporate space as a category. Goswami had identified the deficiency of the framework on the overdependence on the discursive content of European tradition that could not understand the full impact of colonialism as it did not take Indian space or space as a category. This Guru agrees with, even as he recognises the important contribution of "the postcolonial perspective for understanding the derivative impact of the European Enlightenment on Indian political thought during the nationalist era" (Guru 76-77). However, Gopal Guru opines that even Goswami's work that quotes Lefebvre only selectively suffers from the same limitation and deficiency. Particularly, Guru identifies the glossing over of the damaging impact of local lords over several social groups in the context of colonial configurations of power as a central problem. These lords were critiqued by Jotirao Phule as Shetji & Bhatji and by Ambedkar as Brahmanshai and Bhandwal shai, that is Brahminism and Capitalism, that maintained hegemonic dominance over the colonial and post-colonial social power structures.

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## UNIT 7 (C): HOW SOCIAL THOUGHT EMERGES THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL SPACE AND SPACE AS CULTURALLY CONSTRUCTED PHENOMENON

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In this section, Guru is interested in theorising how space and experience intersect and how this interplay results in the development of epistemologies. The local power structure, politics, special organisation, broadly speaking local configuration intimately informs social thought in India. This essay in trying to understand such configurations borrows from both Lefebvre and Foucault to propose that “experiential space is a culturalized phenomenon and not merely the geography or an empty, socially neutral space” (Guru, 78). This culturalized phenomenon serves to control people in finite, enclosed and divided sites. However, Guru makes an important qualifying point that spaces on their own cannot provide conditions that can lead to the development of thought, rather it is the case that spaces when infused with some degree of experience lead to possibilities for the development of epistemological thought. The particularity of thought is dependent upon the particularity of different experiences embedded in different spaces. For example, non-Brahmin thinkers like Ambedkar, Phule and Periyar because of their own experiences of caste-based discrimination, in their epistemological positions prioritized social thought over the political.

Thus, one “experience introduces into spaces” (Guru, 78). Second, spaces are thus dynamic. The configuration and reconfiguration of spaces spew up old and new concepts. The relationship between new and old concepts is often marked by tension as old spaces resist new concepts. It is the dynamic nature of space that allows for possibilities of the development of a new vocabulary of emancipation as space is reconfigured through experience. Such example of reconfiguration of space, in Ambedkar’s vocabulary of liberalism that “seeks to demobilize the Dalit masses from the truth that is given by tradition. It also promises to create a critical energy among the Dalits, who can then invest this energy in search of a new truth” (Guru, 79). Thus, the spirit of liberalism attacks the fixed hierarchy established by an old space lead people to question their position in that hierarchy and also visualize a new more egalitarian space.

Taking India as a case study, Guru opines that Sanskritization is the product of the hierarchical ordering of space. The dynamics of rigid space give rise to the concept. On a similar argument, the dynamics of relatively open spaces would give rise to different vocabularies such as individualism, civil society, dignity and self-respect, while colonial spaces would produce concepts of self-rule and freedom within the nationalist framework. Interestingly, Guru theorizes:

- (i) That while the construction of space provides the initial condition for conceptual vocabulary, it has no control over the articulation of such vocabulary. For example, the nationalist construction of space can render space sacred as articulated by the concept of Mother India, thus beyond scrutiny and such construction would oppose any vocabulary outside that of self-rule and freedom. Thus, the vocabulary of self-respect and social justice emanating from the Dalit perspective would be challenged by the nationalist vocab. Through this example, Guru shows how certain articulations of conceptual vocabulary arising from the construction of spaces can be authoritarian.
- (ii) It is the fluidity and flexibility of spaces that are inhabited by diverse and socio-culturally fragmented people that allows for the expansion of ideas. Therefore, the expansion of modern ideas operates alongside the expansion of spaces. Taking up India as an example Guru says “Ambedkar’s social and political movement sought to expand the spaces through counter-sterilizing them (80). Such an act reclaims space already ‘sterilised’ by Hindu priests, and reaches out to the sensibilities of a cross-section of Hindu society. Additionally, it disrupts the one-dimensional imagination of caste Hindu society by evoking reasonable values such as mutual respect, social justice and equality. It is such values made normative by modernity that make society egalitarian and Ambedkar’s adoption of modern vocabulary was aimed at denting the domination of the twin forces of Brahminism and Capitalism.

Guru takes up Lefebvre’s category of experiential space in order to extend its philosophical framework to India and understand how the notion that space is experienced in its depth, duplication, echoes and reverberations can be used to understand untouchability. Notably, both the body and the shadow of the ‘untouchable’ was used to map space in favour of the dominant caste and produce a humiliating experience for the former. Lefebvre (also Foucault) theorized how experiential space is a culturalized phenomenon, with the primary aim of controlling populations within divided finite sites. Guru proposes that space is culturally constructed, it is structured and restructured through specific actions by historically dominant social groups who maintain their hegemonic rule through civilizational violence against social groups who remain the recipient of that violence.

While this conceptualization can be extended to diverse forms of violence exercised by different social groups (for example the patriarchal organization of space which leaves only the

private space specifically the kitchen as the sole sovereign space for women), Guru is strict in his definition of civilizational violence. He does not consider patriarchal violence as an example of civilizational violence. “Physical violence leading to the annihilation of a corporeal being fulfils half the condition of the definition of civilizational violence. The elimination of certain groups like the untouchables from social and culturally active relations ironically provides the full definitional conditions of civilizational violence”, writes Guru (83). In other words, communal violence against Dalits and minorities that lead to pogroms is one-half of the criteria of civilizational violence, the other accompanying half is the deliberate debarring of untouchables and such social groups from participating in the mainstream cultural and social life of the community and the nation: the ‘civilisation’.

Again, to take the case of India, Ambedkar traced such civilizational violence through his exposition of the socio-historical circumstances of the emergence of untouchability. He had developed the theory of ‘broken men’ in order to understand how a particular restructuring of social space had expelled a large section of the population beyond the scope of human interaction. Ambedkar argued that it was with the settlement of human beings on plains and the invention of agriculture that the issue of surplus grain and who had control over it cropped up. The few who gained control over the surplus used physical violence as well as ideology to maintain control. Ambedkar suggests that Brahmins, who called themselves twice-born, first used ideology to create the category of untouchables and then employed them to defend the surplus from being plundered or destroyed. Untouchables were in this way used as shock absorbers and the settlement was spatially organised around the ideology of purity and pollution. Ambedkar called the untouchables who were thus forced to live outside the main village as broken men. These people were restricted to lives inside their dark holes or ghettos, neither close nor far from the village and untouchable, uncrossable, unseeable, unhearable, unapproachable, and uncommunicable. Even as they were expected to warn the villagers of impending danger either from enemies or wild animals and use their physical bodies to defend the main village from such attacks. Guru notes that civilization depends on human beings seeing, sensing and appreciating each other and each other’s creations as well as on language and communication between human beings. These avenues were closed to untouchables who were therefore the recipients of civilizational violence. However, Guru also notes while the movement of untouchables was restricted, the ideological demand that the caste Hindus avoid interaction with their body and their shadows, also rendered the untouchable’s shadow with power that could regulate the movement of the upper-caste body and in this was untouchability was maintained through reciprocal acts of mutual constraints.

Now, on one hand, while social space was organised in a manner so that the untouchable was restricted to his dark hole (both physical and mental) within the Brahminical system, on the other hand, the body of the untouchable was turned into cultural space which the system to write on and regulate at will. The body of the untouchable was inscribed with meaning through the attaching of cultural symbols. For example, in nineteenth-century Pune, the untouchable was required to tie an earthen pot around their neck and tie a broom around their waist. Linked to the turning of the untouchable's body into cultural space was the dynamic interaction between the universal sovereign space, the Puritan inner, the *agrahara* and the particular sovereign, the untouchable's ghetto, the impure exterior, the *dalitwadas*. Dalits could be sovereign within their own space, the dark hole, the *dalitwadas* and within their own time, noon or night, as dictated to them by the demands of the universal sovereign (when the untouchable came inside the main village space to service the caste population) and the Dalit became servile outside of it. This dynamic was effectively brought to life in Baby Kamble's autobiography, where she wrote about how the regulation of movement affected the space of her father's body showing how the body language of the Dalit within his ghetto and outside of it, in the main village, was completely different. Guru observes that: "The predicament of Kamble's father thus suggests a complex relationship of space to subjectivity. The untouchables were caught up in their own subjectification as they responded to the social relationship that had a constraining impact on their subjectivity." (Guru 87)

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## **UNIT 7 (D): HIERARCHY OF SPACES AND HOW DIFFERENT CONCEPTS ARISE FROM THEM**

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In the chapter, Guru throws up instances of civilizational violence within local configurations of power within the society of the colonized, outside and despite the power struggle between the colonizer and the colonized, in order to effectively demonstrate the limitations of post-colonial theorists who do not adequately address the hierarchy of power within Indian society. But Guru observes, both Gandhi and Ambedkar were aware of this barbaric aspect of Indian civilization, and thereby critical of their own traditions, however to different degrees. While the division of space into sacred and profane plays a role in the development of both their thought processes, Gandhi lacked authentic experience and so his efforts required him to identify with the experiences of others. This forced him to generate moral categories like self-rule and *seva* or selfless public service. These, on one hand, became sovereign viewpoints and



on the other allowed him to find historical conjecture. Ambedkar's viewpoints according to Guru, show the limits of Gandhian imagination. Ambedkar had first-hand and thereby 'authentic' experience of untouchability and this led to the development of an ontological wound in him. His own experience was his primary epistemological source and so he created a different set of categories such as self-respect, social justice and egalitarianism. Guru writes: "in Ambedkar's thought, unlike Gandhi's, we find a constellation of intersecting categories: *manuski* (self-respect), *mankhandana* (humiliation), *puraskrut* (harmonious), *bahiskrut* (socially ostracized), *adhikar* (rights), *seva* (service), *shram* (labour), *vethbegari* (unpaid labour) and finally social justice-injustice. Ambedkar had great faith in the political promise of the modern social space, as was emerging from the pressures of colonial modernity. Industrialization, urbanization and modern education allowed space for Dalits to question their degrading experience and Ambedkar believed that such spaces would lead to a genuine sense of justice that would sterilise hierarchies and lead to secular hierarchies based on capacity rather than caste. Additionally, urbanization would allow the untouchable to leave their quarantined spaces, their dark hole and the anonymity offered by urbanized spaces would allow the untouchable to leave his degrading identity behind and become a placeless individual.

Guru dedicates the rest of the chapter to reading three categories from Ambedkar's thought: social justice, self-respect and nation. As these concepts are analysed through specific social contexts and situations that Ambedkar and Gandhi encountered and theorised about, Guru elaborates at length on the patterns of urbanization and industrialization in India that despite Ambedkar's optimistic hopes replicated caste-based discriminatory social morphology. Urbanization rigidified caste boundaries as untouchables who migrated to colonial cities were restricted to slums. They remained separated from upper-caste populations both physically and in perception, as they continued to be viewed as mobile dirt and in turn, mobile dirt was seen as untouchability. These urban spaces remained static spaces, as they maintained the same hostility towards the untouchables, as seen in traditional village spaces and untouchables could not appear here without the same sense of shame. "Thus the continuous production and reproduction of mobile dirt suggest a spatial dimension of ontology" (91) writes Guru. Similarly, an incident from Ambedkar's own lifetime blatantly displayed the continued practice of untouchability in industrial spaces. Middle caste workers (Marathas) opposed the entry of untouchable workers into the weaving section of textile mills of Bombay in the 1930s. Ambedkar read this incident as an instance of caste Hindus using the ideology of untouchability to protect their material interests. Since Marathas were fewer in number than the untouchable Dheds and hence were insecure about their position. Further, Dheds have traditional skills in

weaving and were forced to weave their own clothes since no one would trade clothes with them, which the Marathas lacked. Marathas did not want competition from untouchables in the weaving sections and sought to restrict them to manual labour and sanitation. They found untouchability as an effective force in achieving their end. Again, in a similar strain, the share market of Bombay did not accommodate or appreciate Ambedkar's skill and expertise. He was almost thrown out and a Gujarati newspaper revealed his caste. These instances showed how hierarchical space organized around caste spilled onto both urban and industrial spaces as well as financial markets. Guru with these contexts in mind and in light of this overlap between financial space and social space in the Indian context, delves into the study of Ambedkar's concept of self-respect and social justice.

### **1. Material spaces and social justice**

Ambedkar opposed the social exclusion of untouchable workers from the weaving section of Bombay Textile mills on the concept of social justice. He found two major problems: one was that the principle of proportionality was being violated, as Dheds formed the largest chunk of workers but were almost entirely restricted to the manual section. Hence there was a disproportionate distribution of labour force. Secondly, exclusion from the weaving section constituted cultural injustice towards untouchable workers since Maratha workers did not have the necessary expertise in weaving to back their exclusive claim (whereas Dheds to a great extent did) and because the exclusion would lead to deskilling of Dheds over time.

Ambedkar had arranged for trained untouchable workers from another region to come and train these untouchables the necessary skills so that they could be employed in the weaving sections, however, the Marathas did not even allow them entry. Now Guru shows how the Gandhian framework which linked labour with justice and self-respect was grossly inadequate to theorize this situation where untouchables were not allowed the opportunity for performing labour and Gandhi linked self-respect to labour performed in actual time and space. On the other hand, Ambedkar linked self-respect to the larger concept of cultural justice. This is elaborated upon by Guru using the example of another experiential space: the sacred temple space. Ambedkar used the principle of labour contribution to assert the untouchable's moral right to enter the temple space as it was their labour which has constructed the temple and exposed the

unreasonableness of the upper caste Hindus who denied the untouchables that right. To not enter the temple would diminish the untouchable's self-respect. The temple entry movement showed that for Ambedkar, self-respect was linked to the language of rights, hence a political category. He employed the sacred space of the temple for radical politics that would produce subversive consciousness in the Dalit, shame upper-caste rigidity, and foreground a notion of justice – social and cultural. Gandhi also commented on the temple entry issue; however, his stand was based on moral reason suggesting that it was the moral duty of the high-caste Hindus to allow untouchables to enter the temple and he deployed tradition for his reasoning. Thus, Ambedkar differed from Gandhi in that he did not use the issue to grant legitimacy to sacred space but use it for the political articulation of concepts of social justice and self-respect.

## **2. Self-Respect particularly in the context of sexual labour**

Guru develops Ambedkar's conceptualization of self-respect further, through his commentary on two systems of sexual labour that affected untouchable women: the *devadasi* system and the *tamasha* performance space. Ambedkar suggested that *manuski* or self-respect arose fundamentally: (i) Through the process in which the untouchable (woman or otherwise) use their labour power to interact with material properties such as nature, land and industry thus to create material products or in which they use their sexual labour power to contribute to the moral economy of the untouchable household. (ii) In terms of the capacity to exercise autonomy over the distribution of value produced by one's social labour.

The first definition is discussed in the context of the devadasi system, which Ambedkar stated to be a system that humiliates and thereby withers the self-respect of untouchable women. As a devadasi, an untouchable woman would be married to gods and goddesses but would be available freely to upper caste local lords and upon leaving the temple space would often end up in prostitution dens. They were thus widely regarded as moral plague in society and ironically it was the "sacred" space of the temple that was the source of their shame and humiliation. Ambedkar believed that these women could gain self-respect by walking out of the temple and by integrating into civil society through marriage. Thereby they would use their sexual labour power in a domestic setting and within the matrix of the institution of marriage, thereby contributing to the moral

economy of the untouchable household (to Guru's credit, he registers the problems in this framework as postulated by Ambedkar). Secondly, the devadasi could also gain self-respect by taking up other professions where they can use their labour power to productive ends and not dissolve themselves into mere symbols of power.

The second definition, autonomy in the capacity to distribute the fruits/value of one's labour is discussed in the context of the Tamasha folk theatre. Ambedkar critiqued this particular form of folk theatre as he felt that it provided space for the upper caste to use Dalit women as objects. The upper caste then lost self-respect because as a free rider or "*Kushal Chendu*" he was having the power to distribute the fruits of someone else's labour, while the Dalit woman lost self-respect because she did not have the same power. Ambedkar maintained his stance even in light of the situation where Patthe Bapurao, a Brahmin balladeer eliminated the distinction between the *agrahara* and the *daliwadas*, and married Pawdabai, an untouchable skilled performer. Guru notes the possibility for counter-argument where the Tamasha could be regarded as providing a liberating space for those bodies already liberated like upper castes. However, Guru notes that for Ambedkar, Patthe Bapurao loses self-respect as he uses untouchable women as commodities to get fame and wealth and money made from Tamasha lacked moral calibre because the form involved not pure aesthetic appreciation of skill but also the objectification of the physical body which is used to satisfy sexual urges.

Thus, "in Ambedkar, self-respect emerges from an affirmative link between the moral quality of labour and the claim that can be made over the distribution of the fruits of that labour" (Guru 100).

### **3. Nation as space**

Finally, Guru turns to the Ambedkar imagination of the nation in terms of space. Ambedkar came up with the term '*Bahishkrut Bharat*' or India of the ostracized and subsequently moved to *PraBuddha Bharat*. Within the space of his conception, he consistently critiques local configuration of power, upper-caste men and women. This marks his difference from Gandhi who proposed the idea of *Ramrajya*, primarily taking up the peasant as his constituencies while continuously shifting the location of his adversary between local lords, upper-caste men and women and the British when

mobilising the peasantry for his cause. This Guru states is because of the difference in lived experience between Gandhi and Ambedkar. Both men travelled across India and Guru notes with admiration that their theoretical concepts emerged from her lived experience of the space of the nation. However, Gandhi, a bania, had a favourable social space available to him and so he could expand his social space and by expanding conceptual space to become the Mahatma for the majority of Indian people. While imagining the nation, he finds the sociological similarity (thereby the uniting factor) in the experience of the peasant. He, thereby symbolically becomes a peasant by putting on a peasant's attire. However, in lived experience, while on his voyage across India, he could occupy both central spaces, houses of lords, and town centres just as he could visit the house of a scavenger. As he was allowed vertical movement of space and he did not discover India as *Bahishkrut*. Ambedkar, on the other hand, due to his caste could never transgress spaces vertically. Since, restrooms designed for travellers were foreclosed to untouchables, an untouchable could tour India only with the advent of the colonial modern railways. Ambedkar, even as he used the railways could only move horizontally from one *dalitwada* to another. He could never transgress vertically. All upper-caste men who associated with Ambedkar could not invite him into their homes because of social stigma as well as because of opposition from their wives, as upper-caste women also safeguarded the domestic. Guru opines that it is this difference in lived experience that caused Ambedkar to prioritize the idea of self-respect and social justice, over self-rule.

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## CONCLUSION

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Ideas are ontologically related to the social existence of people. Experience regulates the way conceptual space discursively collides and overlaps with social space (as in the case of Ambedkar). Epistemological frameworks that can create concepts and categories to adequately read and address the complexity of a space like India needs to arise from the authentic experience of the constructed nature of that space. This is the main argument of the piece, a position that Sundar Sarukkai in the following essay problematizes and thereby allows the volume *The Cracked Mirror* to exist in the form of a debate and dialogue between the two thinkers. However, this is a position that has been extremely influential within not just the field of Dalit studies but also critical theory emerging from the Global South.

## UNIT – 8

### **“HEGEMONY AND CONSCIOUSNESS-BUILDING PROCESSES IN DALIT LITERATURE”**

**BY**

**MAURO PALA**

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#### **UNIT 8 (A): GRAMSCIAN NOTIONS OF “HEGEMONY” AND THE “SUBALTERN” AND THEIR AFFINITIES WITH AMBEDKAR**

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Mauro Pala’s essay on applying the Gramscian theory of hegemony and the idea of subalternity to the study of Dalit literature focuses particularly on Dalit autobiography as the site of his investigation and analysis. The idea of the subaltern drawn from Gramscian thought has been extensively used by the Subaltern Studies Group to name “the general attribute of subordination in South Asian society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way” (Pala 145) although Gramsci had originally plucked the term ‘subaltern’ from its military and logical uses to employ it to refer to a group without class consciousness. Pala’s study returns to the Gramscian notion of subaltern as he states clearly “it is my contention that resorting to Gramscian categories of subalternity and hegemony helps us to understand the formation of a Dalit consciousness through literature” (Pala 146).

Here it is relevant to pause and discuss in brief the Gramscian notions of hegemony and the subaltern. Antonio Gramsci, in his *Prison Notebooks*, presented in detail his widely influential idea of hegemony or dominance by a particular class over others through the manufacture of consent. There are two modes of power relations according to Gramsci: *Dominio* (or coercion) and *Direzione* (or consensus). Corresponding to these two modes of power relations Gramsci saw the capitalist state as constituted by two overlapping spheres, a political society that used force or coercion to rule and a civil society that used consent to rule. Gramsci observed that most state structures were marked by the rules of civil society and thus dominance over a certain class or a certain group of people was maintained through consensual means. Such consensus was arrived at through the dissemination of ideals, cultural thought and consciousness that serve the interests of the dominant (hegemonic) class. This dissemination is accepted as common sense and normal and thus allowing for the maintenance of a certain

hegemony. The manufacture and retention of this consent is an ongoing project thus hegemony is a process. The subaltern is the group of people who suffer under hegemonic dominance. They are denied the basic agential status of creating their own history and culture within the context of a nation-state and thus are unable to have their own class consciousness. Gramsci specifically had workers and peasants in mind as subalterns in his writings.

Now, to continue, Mauro Pala arrives at the aforementioned contention that-- Gramscian categories of subalternity and hegemony allow an understanding of Dalit consciousness through literature-- on the basis of two arguments:

- i. The first argues that the application of Gramsci's theory of the subaltern would allow for the tracing of the processes of social transformation within the Dalit community. Such a study would track how subjects/forces who occupy subordinate positions within a dominant political and ideological hegemony can move from their historical position of exclusion to a position where they can counter the dominant ideology and hegemony and win. This is important for Pala as he is interested in the moments where the Dalit consciousness triumphs over self-pity and subordination to arrive at a consciousness of emancipation.
- ii. The second argument draws on the resonances between Ambedkar and Gramsci to show that the Gramscian framework is apt for the critical studies of Dalit emancipation within the post-colonial context, as both saw the problem of the subaltern/Dalit as a political problem (not a moral or social problem like Gandhi). Gramsci had argued that "political independence does not necessarily lead to political autonomy" (Pala 146) and Ambedkar had differed from the Gandhian approach to addressing the violence against Dalits, by stating that the problem of untouchables was not a social problem but rather a political problem. Ambedkar's studies on the emergence of the caste system interpreted it as the result of historical socio-political conditions and dissociated it from its religious context. Pala supports Ambedkar's position by stating two examples which showed that the continued discrimination and violence against Dalits was a failure of Indian politics. While Article 14 of the Indian Constitution had promised equality such equality was not achieved in the Indian polity as courts which interpreted the law did not treat equality as absolute. Additionally, the various compensatory schemes promised by the postcolonial Indian state suffered due to various political and economic crisis

and thus untouchability continued to be practised well into the late twentieth century.

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## UNIT 8 (B): DALIT AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL LITERATURE

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With these frameworks in mind, Pala arrives at the site of Dalit literature which he calls “the multifaceted mirror” (Pala 147) of the oppressed condition of the Dalits. Pala identifies the core brutality of Indian caste society as the alienating effect that the practice of caste in everyday life has on the individual, to the extent that it forecloses any possibility for emancipation through education. Such has been the scenario in India that even Marxist politics and Marxist scholarship led and practiced by an upper caste leadership did not revolt against the caste system and could not detach themselves from the traditional social structures in which they were brought up no matter the philosophy and politics they professed to espouse. Hence the Dalits in India did not find recourse in orthodox Marxism.

The central characteristic of Dalit literature according to Pala is the feeling of rebellion against the Indian establishment. He thus calls Dalit literature negative in nature and neither dealing with the imaginary nor oriented towards entertainment. Instead, Dalit literature Pala suggests is geared towards the construction of Dalit identity and towards the building of a consciousness that can allow the community to transcend the traditional socio-political exclusion and notions of pollution that were attached to both their history and identity. In fact, Pala correctly identifies that the act of claiming a name from within the community: ‘Dalit’ itself is a political assertion of identity and subjecthood that can contest the negative descriptions of the community within a traditional caste society. Dalit literature (particularly the autobiography) presents an authentic representation of that Dalit experience by engaging relentlessly with social reality and combining “the ideal of Dalit consciousness (*chetna*)” and “emerging Dalit aesthetics (*saundaryashastra*)” (Pala 148).



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## UNIT 8 (C): A GRAMSCIAN READING OF DALIT LITERATURE: THEORY AND PRAXIS

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Two main aims motivate Pala's reading of Dalit autobiographies using Gramsci. One is that he believes that "Dalit literature seems to represent a case study for gauging the cogency of Gramsci's ideas about subalternity as human relation" and the second is that this can lead to an "understanding (of) a specific hegemony as part of a national conflict" (Pala 149). As already stated earlier, Pala is interested in the consciousness-building process leading to emancipation from subjection and thus, he identifies that it is literature which attempts to narrativize the self as well as claim an oppositional identity through critique of the caste system that is the location of Dalit exceptionalism.

It is through literature that the Dalits as subalterns can rise above the policies and initiatives that they are subjected to by the dominant/ruling group. Now, Gramsci's critique of subaltern leads to two important points both of which become relevant for evaluating the purpose and function of Dalit literature. First, he argues for a strategy for "retrieving subaltern consciousness" and two he charts subject positions and their effects constructed both by historiography from above and from antagonistic sources. Dalit literature as such an antagonistic source in Gramscian terms then can be said to feature the collective consciousness that Gramsci saw as the outcome of the new historical discourse and thus created horizontal comradeships. And Pala, (like other Dalit scholars) points out that in the context of post-colonial India, it is Dalit literature that has managed to escape essentialisms and look beyond undivided humanisms which Indian nationalist historiography has fallen prey to, to actually present a collective consciousness of the oppressed.

In such an enterprise, Dalit literature has assimilated the Gramscian notion that a class must attain political hegemony before it can attain political power and rule. Dalit authors have thus engaged in cultural resistance and attempted to present possibilities for achieving socio-political power by the subalterns. Furthermore, Dalit literature has been able to transform the passive subject who is the recipient of the inscription of a "caste-oriented nationalist ideology" into a subject who rewrites the self through "self-fashioning" and "confrontational self-representation" (Pala 150). This "war of position" is in the Gramscian sense the very "concept of hegemony" (Pala 151). Dalit literature is motivated by suffering and records how domination is experienced and internalised in everyday life. In this way, it confirms Gramsci's discussion of hegemony as that which transcends the merely economic and flows into the realm of cultural,

ideational and consciousness. Lived hegemony is a continuum of social processes and just as Gramsci has emphasised the creation of a new hegemony, Dalit literature attempts to construct a counter-hegemony by narrativizing trauma. In fact, a trauma in Dalit autobiography paves the way for the reconstruction of the Dalit self. Pala comments on the subversive cultural politics that Dalit literature engages in. This is evident from the momentum that Dalit writing has gathered from the middle of the twentieth century, as authors like Arjun Dangle assert that Dalit literature ultimately aims at social change and the regularity with which Dalit writings engage with the theoretical and philosophical concerns of the Ambedkarite movements. Autobiographies like Bama's *Karukku* reveal the structure of oppression, while most Dalit writings are narratives of "trauma, pain, resistance and social change" (Pala 152). Dalit literature confronts caste Indian society as it portrays the significant moments in the everyday life of the Dalit, especially the fragmentation that is the result of the conflict between modernity and deep-rooted traditional caste structures.

Mauro Pala also identifies certain common challenges and objectives that concrete political action as envisioned by Gramsci, and Dalit activism through literature is faced with in the context of the nation-state. Gramsci's interest in Machiavelli was because he was attempting to unite philosophy and history in establishing a new state, what Gramsci called absolute historicism, through political action (political action itself could be conceptualised as the unity of theory and practice). Pala observes that in both Gramsci's "The Modern Prince" and in Dalit short stories published in volumes like the Arjun Dangle edited *Poisoned Bread* "the challenge is how to intervene in a concrete reality in order to bring about a change". Secondly, while Gramsci projected the idea of a new state and a new historical bloc formed through the political struggle of a working-class party, he never detailed what he envisioned as this new state. Similarly, the Dalit goal: a just new community is never explicitly described. Instead, Dalit literature presents a canvas of conflict within the context of the colonial and post-colonial state with restrictions rooted in religious feudalism. And finally, just as the Gramscian party has the potential to create a well-functioning consensual new civil society that rests on a new type of man and citizen and envisions a new civilisation, the Dalit plan as envisioned by Ambedkar looks forward to the creation of a civil society where self-governance becomes the norm. Both of these visions build on politics that "rests on a new hegemony intended to unite a whole spectrum of the population, notwithstanding individual differences of class and income" (Pala 153).

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## CONCLUSION

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Dalit narratives according to Mauro Pala detotalizes the official narrative of India. It attacks the everyday common sense on the basis of which caste discrimination thrives. Gramsci equated common sense with ideology and observed that popular belief often had the same material strength as a material force. Common sense is adopted by the dominant class to maintain hegemony. This shapes state structure and defines the field of historically defined relations. These relations are thus defined by what Gramsci called ideology which is the source of individual everyday decisions, while the decisions are in turn shaped by hegemonic class struggle. Very often, however, such individual decisions appear as uncritical choices as they are driven by the need for social identity.

The Gramscian project is also necessarily educational. It attempts to nurture an innovative type of consciousness and thereby allow the subaltern to locate the symbolic order, that is, the system of dominance built around them. Dalit literature and Ambedkar's strategy share the educational motivation of the Gramscian project and attempt to transform the Indian state by nurturing such a new and radical consciousness. The Gramscian focus on the role of passion in politics for the consciousness-building project also finds resonance in Ambedkar's speeches and Dalit writings. Gramsci suggested that the proletariat could achieve hegemony only through the creation of alliances that could mobilise the masses, the Dalit too in order to successfully transform society needs to "reach a distinctive form of consciousness". And since its inception, Dalit literature has played an important role in the consciousness-building project. It has been concerned with community identity formation. Dalit narratives and political speeches then through testimony and self-revelation create a hegemony that provides the discursive space to claim agency and resist casteist culture.

Gramscian thought provides important tools for reading Dalit writings of the self. The Dalit is the territorially displaced masses within the nation-state and Gramsci recognised the role territory plays in the process of political socialization. For him, civil society was not only based on economic structure as it was for Marx, but he had recognised the "geographically specific intersection of private hegemony apparatus". The narrative of a community is rooted in shared space and the bustee/vasti/urban slum and the caste-based territorial organisation of traditional village spaces are integral to the Dalit experience and are mobilised in Dalit narratives for the consciousness-building process. Dalit authors in doing this, Pala, observes have performed very much like Gramsci's integral historian. It is the task of these historians to

record the initial social phases marked by constraints of dominant hegemonies and discover the path that can lead towards emancipation and integral autonomy.

Pala concludes by stating that readings of Dalit literature can only be done when placed in their proper political (read both historical and philosophical) contexts. He has attempted the same and his reading led him to the complex presence of historical actuality and a mode of social presence in the texts.

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## ASSIGNMENTS

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### Long-answer type Questions:

1. Discuss the idea of Dalit vision as it relates to Dalit Literature.
2. Dalit literature is the product of Dalit consciousness. Discuss
3. Sharatchandra Muktibodh provides a defence of literature from a particular point of view. Discuss.
4. Discuss the concept of experiential space and how it can be constructed to create social justice.
5. Elaborate on Ambedkar's category of self-respect as taken up by Gopal Guru in his essay.
6. What are the differences in thought between Gandhi and Ambedkar? What reason does Gopal Guru give for it? Discuss with reference to the essay "Experience, space and justice".
7. Discuss Ambedkar's concept of 'broken men' in the context of the socio-historical circumstances of the emergence of untouchability.
8. Elaborate on the temple entry issue.
9. "Gramscian categories of subalternity and hegemony help us to understand the formation of a Dalit consciousness through literature". Discuss
10. What are the central characteristics of Dalit literature identified by Mauro Pala?
11. How has Dalit literature managed to present a collective consciousness of the oppressed?
12. What are the common challenges and objectives that concrete political action as envisioned by Gramsci, and Dalit activism (through literature) is faced with in the context of the nation-state?

### Short-answer Type Questions:

1. Define civilizational violence.
2. Define "dark hole".

3. Why does the tormentor configure space?
4. How can the victim mobilize?
5. Discuss the binary of the *agrahara* and the *dalitwada*.
6. Discuss the problems of the *devdasi* system.
7. How does the city space replicate the traditional organisation of space as seen in villages?
8. Define the idea of *Bahishkrut Bharat*.
9. Why did Ambedkar disapprove of the Tamasha performances?
10. How does the concept of Sanskritization arise?
11. What is the source of Dalit Literature?
12. Briefly state the formalist criticism of literature from a particular perspective. How does Muktibodh oppose such criticism?
13. What are the problems with individualistic literature according to Muktibodh?
14. How does Gramsci define 'hegemony' and 'subalternity'?
15. How did orthodox Marxism fail the Dalits in India?
16. What according to Mauro Pala is the location of Dalit exceptionalism?
17. What does Mauro Pala identify as the 'war of position'?
18. How can the proletariat/Dalit achieve hegemony?

**BLOCK III**

**UNITS: 9 – 12**

***JOOZHAN***

**BY**

**OMPRAKASH VALMIKI**

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**CONTENT STRUCTURE:**

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Unit 9 (a): Life and Works of Omprakash Valmiki

Unit 9 (b): Brief Introduction to *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*

Unit 9 (c): *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* – Brief Summary

Unit 10 (a): Appropriateness of the Title of *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*

Unit 10 (b): Narrative Techniques Applied by Valmiki

Unit 10 (c): *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* as an Autobiography

Unit 11 (a): *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* – As a Dalit Narrative

Unit 11 (b): Depiction of the Social Life of the 'Chuhras'

Unit 11 (c): *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* – As a Narrative of Pain

Unit 12 (a): *Joothan, A Dalit's Life* – As a Story of Untouchability

Unit 12 (b): *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* – A Subaltern's Voice?

Unit 12 (c): A Quest for Revolt

Conclusion

References

Assignments

## UNIT - 9

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### UNIT 9 (A): LIFE AND WORKS OF OMPRAKASH VALMIKI (1950 – 2013)

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Omprakash Valmiki is a prominent figure among Hindi Dalit writers. He is a forerunner among the writers who laid the foundation for Dalit literature in Hindi. He was born on 30th June, 1950, in Barla District, Muzaffarnagar, Uttar Pradesh to a low-class Dalit family. He was the only person in his family who had ever gone to school. The country had become independent, when in July 1956 his father put him in the village primary school. Those were the times when Dalit children were not allowed to study in schools. He could remember all those teachers of his school who never addressed him by name but by his caste. Valmiki was brought up in a social setup that was feudal and Brahminical, conforming to the prevailing caste hierarchy. His stories were fed and nourished by his hellish experiences. He came in contact with the Dalit movement while he was in Maharashtra.

Dalit writers like Valmiki have been producing literary analysis and literary theory simultaneously with their literary creations. On the one hand, their work has broken the hegemony of high caste literary establishment, and on the other, by producing their own discourse and publishing it in Dalit-run little magazines. Apart from *Joothan*, he published three anthologies of short stories named *Salam* (2000), *Ghuspaithiye* (2003) and *Chhatri* (2013). The ugliness of the caste system and advocacy of Dalit rights are the central themes of his works. “Yah Ant Nahin”, “Main Brahman Nahin Hoon”, “Dinesh Jatav Urf Digdarshan” and “Brahmastra”, “Ab Aur Nahin”, “Safayi Devta”, “Dalit Sahitya ka Saundaryashastra”, “Dalit Sahitya: Anubhav”, “Sangharsh Evam Yatharth”, “Sadiyon ka Santaap”, and “Bas Bahut Ho Chuka” brutally expose the mentality that pervades the caste system and actuates its patrons.

After fighting cancer for a few years in Delhi, he was brought to Max Hospital in Dehradun where he passed away on 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2013, at the age of 63. Literary, cultural, and socio-political movements against oppression and inequality have lost a true companion like Valmiki. The English literature and literature of other Indian languages cannot be called truly progressive and people-oriented without the realistic and heart-warming depiction of Dalit life which has come into English literature through his writings. His literary and critical works are of lasting importance not only for English literature but for the whole of Indian literature.



He always made a significant contribution to making Indian literature democratic and public-friendly, fighting against Brahmanism, feudalism, capitalism, and gender discrimination.

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### UNIT 9 (B): BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO *JOOOTHAN: A DALIT'S LIFE*

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Among his many published works, *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*, his autobiography has been the focus of critical appreciation and debate. It was first published in Hindi in 1997 and was translated into English by Arun Prabha Mukherjee in 2003. All his creative works on the aesthetics of Dalit literature dare to swim against the tide and these works are identified as pioneering attempts to create an attitude of self-criticism among the Dalits. *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* (1997), besides being the autobiography of an individual, is also the tragic tale of the community to which the writer belongs. In the preface to the Hindi edition of the book, he talks of many pressures – internal as well as external, that initially inhibited the telling of this story. Yet Valmiki fights off all these pressures and goes ahead with his plan to tell his story.

Arun Prabha Mukherjee in her criticism "Joothan, A Dalit Literary Text" says that *Joothan* presents "Experiences that didn't find room in literary creation." An experience like Valmiki's - birth and growing up in the untouchable caste of Chuhra, the bottom slot preassigned to him because of this accidental birth in the Chuhra community, the heroic struggle that he waged to survive this preordained life of perpetual physical and mental persecution, his gaining consciousness gradually under the influences of Ambedkarite thought and his transformation into a speaking subject and recorder of the oppression and exploitation that he endured not only as an individual but as a member of stigmatized and oppressed community had never been in the annals of Hindi literature.

*Joothan, A Dalit's Life* is an account of Valmiki's life that opens up a filthy side of an unequal society. This is a pioneer work in the genre of Dalit Literature. Autobiographies are often regarded as an edited narration of one's life yet this book is important not only as an account of a Dalit's life but also as a mirror to those high caste individuals who never let a person forget his/her Dalit identity. This book provides a vivid picture of many levels and layers of discrimination against the Dalits. It opens with a description of a village that shows a segregated social structure based on caste hierarchies and locates the Chuhra caste amid that

hierarchical framework. Filth, shit, and staleness are the recurring tropes in the book. The readers witness women sitting together in ‘a round table conference’; a student sweeping the ground of his school where he should be sitting in the classroom with other students; a student being ruthlessly beaten up by the teacher; people waiting to collect the leftover in marriage and many such scenes are to be witnessed. The point is that these experiences cannot be glamorously put and also cannot be ignored. Valmiki’s story is a story of sorrow, oppression, unimaginable grief, oppression, and also a constant strategy of survival leading toward a hard-earned success.

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### UNIT 9 (C): *JOOZHAN: A DALIT’S LIFE* – BRIEF SUMMARY

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*Joothan: A Dalit’s Life* begins with a detailed description of the poor living surroundings of the Chuhra community where poverty reigns supreme. The lack of basic civic amenities and poor sanitation facilities were the sad realities of that dwelling place. Animals like pigs and human beings shared the same living place as there was no other place to go. The writer’s childhood was spent amidst this surrounding and it had a formative influence on his character. The Chuhras worked for the Tagas, an upper-class people who ill-treated the Chuhras in a number of ways. Untouchability was one social evil that the writer confronted as he grew up. He says:

“Untouchability was so rampant that while it was considered all right to touch dogs and cats or cows and buffaloes, if one happened to touch a Chuhra, one got contaminated or polluted. The Chuhras were not seen as human”

(*Joothan*, 2).

The narrator goes on to describe the hardships he had to face in the educational institutions. The upper-caste boys used to tease the writer in every possible way. They used to laugh at his clothes which were nothing but rags. Even the teachers and the headmaster were not different in this respect. The Chuhras were always entrusted with the task of sweeping the homes and public places. It was considered their duty. Hence the headmaster of the school asked the writer to sweep the school even when he was a student. The Dalit people felt that it was a waste of time to get their children educated. When the writer’s father asked his fellow Dalits to send their children to school, they blatantly refused it. According to them: “What is the point of sending him to school? When has a crow become a swan?”.

Thus, the Dalit children were tortured and abused everywhere except in their own homes. The writer was fortunate enough to be born in a household where everyone loved and cared for him. The support and encouragement he gained from his family enabled him to face the dangers of being a Dalit. Right from the early stages of his life, the writer was conscious of the importance of studies. He was bright and hence he always stood first in class. Reading and writing made the writer an enlightened being. He began to read voraciously. His results raised his self-confidence. He was selected as the class leader after the examination and his seat was moved from the back of the class to the front. Though some teachers behaved in an unfriendly manner, the writer loved going to school. This was because most of the students and a majority of teachers belonged to the Tyagi community. The writer talks about the discrimination they had to face in the school at different points in his autobiography. He says: "During the examinations, we could not drink water from the glass when thirsty. To drink water, we had to cup our hands. The peon would pour water from way high up, lest our hands touch the glass" (16).

While talking about his memories in school, the writer talks about a number of teachers who encouraged him and also about the ones who ill-treated him. Valmiki repeatedly narrates his experiences of pain and exclusion due to the continued practice of untouchability. He writes:

"I was kept out of extracurricular activities. On such occasions, I stood on the margins like a spectator. During the annual functions of the school, when rehearsals were on for the play, I too wished for a role, but I always had to stand outside the door. The so-called descendants of the Gods cannot understand the anguish of standing outside the door" (16).

When he reached the tenth standard, he was determined to study well in order to get good marks which would fetch him an opportunity to study in a college. But on the eve of his mathematics examination, he was made to do forced manual labour. He spent one whole day sowing cane under the instructions of a Tyagi. He felt humiliated and tortured. He says: "My mind was set aflame by his swearing. A fire had engulfed my inwards that day. The memories of these crimes of the Tyagis continue to smoulder deep inside me, emitting red hot heat"(57). When the narrator was offered proffered rotis to eat, he refused to touch it. He said he won't eat it as he knew very well that the rotis were offered not out of love but with the aim of making them work more and more. His refusal infuriated the Tyagi and he decided to beat the writer.

But somehow, he managed to escape from the scene of torture. When he narrated the whole incident to his father, he too became agitated.

According to the narrator's father, one should improve one's caste by getting an education. But the writer had different thoughts in mind. As he says: "He [the writer's father] did not know that 'caste' cannot be improved by education. It can only be improved by taking birth in the right caste" (58). The writer narrated the tragic circumstances under which they wrote the board exams. There was no electricity and hence they depended on lanterns and oil lamps. Moreover, it was difficult to concentrate while the neighbours were making a lot of noise. They were all indifferent to the narrator's interest in studies. They all wanted him to drop from school and do the menial jobs entrusted to the Chuhras. They wanted him to clean public places, bury dead cattle, etc., and lead a life that was expected of them. It was during these days that he began to read the works of Premchand, Sarat Chandra, and Rabindranath Tagore. In spite of all the hardships, Valmiki passed the high school examination with good marks. He was very happy to see his name in the newspaper. It was the first time that someone from the Chuhra community passed the examination. It was indeed a time for celebration in the whole *basti*. The writer specially mentions the name of Chamanlal Tyagi, who came to congratulate the writer on his hard-earned success. This simple act of kindness from the part of an upper caste Tyagi boosted the confidence of the narrator who began to feel that education can bring respect and self-dignity. During this time, the narrator was made acquainted with the *Bhagavad Gita* and though he was too young to understand the complex philosophical ideals mentioned in the book he felt happy that he could read it. After passing the board examination, Valmiki went on to study further. He took science as an optional subject. But even at this stage, his low birth became the butt of ridicule. He talks about a teacher named Omdatta Tyagi, a caste-minded teacher who insulted students based on their caste. He also mentions the name of the so-called progressive-minded mathematics teacher. He had a post-graduate degree but was scared that he would lose his caste if he drank water from a Chuhra's hand. Thus, the writer makes it very clear that education had not altered the degenerated mindset of the people. Valmiki transferred all his anger and frustration to his studies. When he reached class twelve new problems began to crop up and this time it was in the form of a chemistry teacher named Brajpal. He dashed all his hopes of securing good marks in the examination. This caste-mined teacher did not like the idea of an 'untouchable' studying in the school. Hence, he decided to torture the narrator by not allowing him to do practicals in the lab. The narrator says: "I felt that whenever I went to the lab for practicals, Brajpal would keep me out on some pretext or

the other” (65). When the results were announced, the writer’s name was featured in the list of failures. He had secured good marks in all other subjects but had failed the lab test of the chemistry paper.

This turn of events put a terrible obstacle in his path to continuing education. According to him “I no longer felt interested in studying. I couldn’t make up my mind as to what to do next. I felt surrounded by darkness” (66). The narrator’s older brother Jasbir was working in Dehradun and he was staying with their mama. He was the one who inspired him to study. He reassured him by saying: “Come on, let this village go to hell. Come to Dehradun and study there. I will get you admitted to DAV College. Why are you worrying? You will definitely pass next year” (66). He joined the DAV College in Dehradun. Things were much better. Though there were occasional conflicts with the members of the Jatava community, the writer was not bothered by that. It was during his stay in Dehradun that he got acquainted with Dr. Ambedkar’s writings. Dr. Ambedkar’s lifelong struggle for eradicating untouchability inspired the narrator. He was extremely grateful to Hemlal, his companion who asked him to read the biography of Ambedkar. Moreover, it was only after reading that book the writer came to realize his misconceptions regarding the teaching of Mahatma Gandhi. He says:

“After reading Ambedkar, I had realized that by naming the untouchables Harijans, Gandhi had not helped them to join the national mainstream, but had saved the Hindus from becoming a minority. Guarded their interests, in fact and yet, these upper castes were angry with him because he had turned Harijans’ heads! The Poona Pact episode had completely erased any illusions I had harboured about Gandhi. It was the Poona Pact that had made Ambedkar lose heart”. (72)

He continues: “A new word ‘Dalit’ entered my vocabulary, a word that is not a substitute for ‘Harijan’ but an expression of rage of millions of untouchables” (72).

The friendship with Hemlal was the beginning of a new chapter in the writer’s life. It was a bond that strengthened the will of the narrator to achieve great things in life. During this period the narrator became an active participant in various activities in the college. In Dehradun protest against the English was in full swing and the writer plunged into the middle of the action much to the distress of the family members. He was even thrown out of his uncle’s house on account of his late ‘working’ hours in college. He was infuriated and threatened to send Valmiki back to the village. Valmiki didn’t want to compromise his studies for a second time. So, he

decided to agree to whatever his uncle ordered. He had to suffer a lot during his stay in Dehradun right from the cold winter to the icy cold treatment he had to receive from the upper-class caste Hindus. However, his period of distress got lessened when he got a job. He abandoned his college education when he got admitted to the Ordnance Factory as an apprentice.

When he informed his father that he had got the job, his father responded in a positive way. He said: "At last you have escaped 'caste'" (78). But by this time the writer knew very well that no one can escape the intricate labyrinths of caste created by the upper-class society. As he says: "Caste follows one right up to one's death" (78). With a job in hand, Valmiki was happy as it meant a life of self-reliance. He began to receive a monthly stipend of one hundred and seven rupees a month during his apprenticeship, which seemed a princely sum to him then. Even during this time, Valmiki never abandoned his reading habits. He proclaims: "Books were my greatest friends. They kept up my morale" (79).

After a year's training at the Ordnance Factory, the writer appeared for a competitive examination and was selected. Hence, he was sent to Jabalpur for further training. It was indeed a new experience for him as he says: "The new surroundings and the new environment gave me new experiences. The hostel was huge, large enough to accommodate up to five hundred students. The rooms were very large and ten to twelve students shared a room. The students had come from different parts of the country" (84). The new atmosphere also brought him in contact with Marxist ideals. This was because there were many students who had Marxist leanings studying in that institution. The writer started to read Marxist literature after coming into contact with them. He was particularly attracted to Marxism Gorky's novel *Mother* and also by Anton Chekhov's brilliant short stories.

The writer was so interested in the ideas propagated through these works that he decided to join a theatre group with the aim of keeping alive the Marxist tradition. He also started writing poetry, began to write short one-act plays and to stage them and later acted in them. Thus, the writer, a poor Dalit boy, was becoming transformed from being an ugly duckling to a swan through his courage and perseverance. He says:

"Jabalpur changed me. My speech patterns changed. My manners also changed. I made friends who were deeply interested in contemporary issues and constantly argued about them. I took part in seminars and cultural functions. I

became involved in Jabalpur's literary life. I also began to develop my own views on literature. I was more attracted to social realism than to aestheticist and formalist types of writings" (85).

During this period, the Ordnance Factory Training Institute in Bombay sent out a call for applications for draftsman training. The writer applied and he was selected to come to Bombay to appear for an interview. The family's financial situation was miserable at that time but he managed to go to Bombay due to the kind-hearted gesture shown by Mr. Thomas, a senior lecturer in the institute. Valmiki soon got acquainted with the atmosphere of Bombay, particularly with the hostel library. It was in that library that he read Boris Pasternak, Hemingway, Victor Hugo, Pierre Louis, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Oscar Wilde, and Emile Zola. It was here that he read the entire works of Rabindranath Tagore and Kalidasa.

It was during his stay in Bombay that he learned more and more about Dalit Literature and Marathi Dalit Literature in particular. The words of Daya Pawar, Nemdev Dhasal, Gangadhar Pantavane, Baburao Bagul, Narayan Surve, and Vaman Nimbalkar were igniting sparks in his veins. Their ideas exhilarated the writer and the sparks of their writings inspired Valmiki to champion the cause of Dalits and the downtrodden masses to which he too belonged. In matters of untouchability the people of Bombay were no better than the simple villagers amidst whom the writer had spent his childhood. He says:

"My village was divided along lines of touchability and untouchability. The situation was very bad in Dehradun and in Uttar Pradesh in general at a time when I saw well-educated people in a metropolitan city like Bombay indulging in such behaviour, I felt a fountain of hot lava erupting within me" (95).

He also talks about a family who became very close to him thinking that he was a Brahmin. They thought that the surname Valmiki was certainly a Brahmin surname and hence he was allowed to visit their household and was given certain privileges. Kulkarni's daughter Savita had even fallen in love with Valmiki and later when she realized that he was a Dalit her attitude underwent a sea change. This incident created a deep scar in the mind of the writer who understood that love, respectability, adoration, and privileges were all attained only if the person is born in a high caste. The Dalits are not treated as human beings and this was made clear by the attitude of the Brahmin girl who loved a caste Hindu and not Valmiki as an individual. With deep wounds in his mind, Valmiki left the place when he was appointed at the

Ordnance Factory in Chandrapur. It was during his Chandrapur days that he became totally absorbed in the strong currents of Dalit Movement. According to him:

“It was in this part of the country I came across the marvellous glow of dalit consciousness. The self-fulfilment that I experienced in connecting with the Dalit Movement was a truly unique experience for me. The deeper my involvement became with the movement, the further many of my friends moved away from me. In their eyes, I had wandered away from the right path and was bent on destroying my talent and creativity” (100).

Valmiki married Chanda around this time and despite the protestations his Pitaji accepted her as his daughter-in-law. Since the writer was not allotted a house in the government colony, they had to struggle a lot during the initial days of marriage. But it was soon settled and both Valmiki and Chanda started a happy married life. Later Valmiki became actively involved in social work with the main aim of providing self-dignity to the Dalits. Thus, he became a member of the Dalit Panthers and together with many leaders started a battle for the Dalit self-hood that Dr. Ambedkar had asserted. *Joothan* gives us a key to realize how marginalized groups enter the stage of history.

## UNIT - 10

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### UNIT 10 (A): APPROPRIATENESS OF THE TITLE OF *JOOOTHAN: A DALIT'S LIFE*

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Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* is an autobiographical account of his growing up years as an untouchable in a village in Uttar Pradesh in the newly independent India of the 1950s. In his Preface, Omprakash Valmiki admits that the title of the autobiography *Jhoothan: A Dalit's Life*, was suggested by one of his friends, Rajendra Yadavji. The Hindi word, 'Jhoothan' literally means food left on an eater's plate, usually destined for the garbage pile in a middle-class, urban home. However, such food would only be characterized 'joothan' if someone else besides the original eater were to eat it. In another sense, it also means polluted or unfit for consumption by another person. Yet for centuries, the Dalits have been forced, under various circumstances, to eat 'joothan' for their subsistence. Thus, the title of the book *Joothan* conveys the pain and humiliation faced by the author and his community, which has remained at the bottom of the social ladder for centuries. The community has been treated like 'joothan', to be used and thrown away in the dustbins by the upper castes. Valmiki's account of his early life is an



account of the heroic struggle by a Dalit boy from the sweeper caste (Bhangi, Chuhra) against impossible odds to get an education.

The title itself is very much suggestive and while translating in English Mukharjee kept it intentionally unchanged. The word “joothan” means leftover food, the food that remains in the plate of the eater. Due to dire poverty, the Dalits from Chuhra caste were to survive through this joothan. Valmiki had very insulting experiences regarding this joothan. Valmiki’s mother would work at Tagas, the High Caste in the village. She would get five seers of grain per two animals and leftover roti at every afternoon, especially made from husk and flour. Moreover, the leftover food, scraps would be there with rotis in her basket. During marriage ceremonies at Tagas the Chuhras would wait outside of the house for the leftover food with huge baskets. Having finished their meals, they would put the dirty pattals in the Chuhra’s baskets and they would carry them to their homes to enjoy the sticking food. They were enjoying the short pieces of pooris, crust of sweets and little vegetables. Valmiki recalls such incidents and writes: “The joothan was eaten with a lot of relish. The bridegroom’s guests who didn’t leave enough scraps and their pattals were denounced as gluttons. Poor things, they had never enjoyed a wedding feast. So, they had licked it all up. During the marriage season, our elders narrated, in thrilled voices, stories of the baratis that had left several months of joothan.” The pooris would be dried in the sun. These dried pooris were very helpful during hard days. This is how the community would get their delicious food only on the occasion of wedding ceremonies at Tagas. Actually, it was leftover, but it was no less than relishing food for them.

The title of this narrative is highly arresting due to the meaningful and deliberate implication given by the novelist and reveals in a nutshell the injustice, oppression, humiliation, violence and deprivation that has been meted out upon the untouchables for ages together in the name of God, religion and caste system. The untouchables are forced to live on the outskirts of the village/town proper as their living amongst the caste Hindus is considered to be a pollutant to them. Arun Prabha Mukherjee has rightly pointed out: “How far removed Valmiki's subject matter is evident from the very title, *Joothan*. It proves the truth of Dangle's claim that Dalit writing demands a new dictionary, for the words that it uses are as new as the objects, situations, and activities that they describe”. The word carries the connotations of ritualistic purity and pollution, because ‘jootha’ means polluted.

The elite culture refers to the customs, law, religion, civilization, language of the dominant group of people who are in power and whose voice is heard and history is recorded. Such elitism is depicted as pervasively Valmiki writes:

“In Sukhdev Singh Tyayi's daughter marriage, my mother used to clean their place. When all the people had left after the feast, my mother said to Sukhdev Singh Tyagi as he was crossing the country-yard to come to the front door Chaudhuri "all of your guest have eaten and gone ... please put on a leaf plate for my children. They too have waited for this day." Pointing at the basket full of dirty leaf plate he said "you are taking a basketful of jhoothan don't forget your place, Chuhri, pick up your basket and get go in it. (10)

This act clearly exposes that through cultural practice, elite people always try to subordinate marginal people. Valmiki in *Joothan* presents the traumatic moments of their encounter with his persecutors as dramatized scenes and as cinematic moments. His narration of the event captures the intensity of the memory and suggests that he has not yet healed from these traumas of the past. We see a full-dress re-enactment of the event from the perspective of the child or the adolescent Valmiki. Many Dalit texts share this strategy of staging encounters between the Dalit narrator and people of upper castes. Often these encounters are between a Dalit child at his or her most vulnerable and an upper caste adult in apposition of authority. The fullness of detail with which they are inscribed suggests how strongly these past events are imprinted in the narrator's mind.

Indeed, *Joothan* demands a radical shift from the upper-caste and upper-class reader by insisting that such readers not forget their caste or class privilege. Unlike canonical Hindi or English writing where the reader's or the writer's caste and class are often considered irrelevant, *Joothan's* dual approach problematizes the reader's caste and class. While Valmiki directs his irony, satire, harangue, and anger at non-Dalit readers, he sees Dalit readers as fellow sufferers. While the indictment of an unjust social system and its benefactors is one thrust of the text, its other important preoccupation is a substantive examination of Dalit lives. The pangs of the pain and trauma inflicted upon the Dalits through such inhuman social practices are, thus, aptly registered and expressed through the title of this autobiography.

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## UNIT 10 (B): NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES APPLIED BY VALMIKI

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*Joothan* combines representations of struggle with the external enemy and the enemy within, the internalization by Dalit people of upper-caste Brahminic values, the superstitions of Dalit villagers, the patriarchal oppression of Dalit women by their men, the attempts by Dalits who have attained a middle-class economic status to 'pass' as high caste and attendant denial of their inferiority complex which makes them criticize the practice of rural Dalits of rearing pig—all these aspects of Dalit struggle are equally important aspects of *Joothan*. This self-critique has earned him brickbats from many Dalits who find the frank portrayal of Dalit Society to be humiliating for them, it is tantamount to washing dirty linen in public. Valmiki accuses these Dalits of succumbing to Brahminism. His frank critique of his own family members who hide their caste and therefore deny their relationship to Valmiki in public must have been painful for the people involved, particularly because he named them.

*Joothan*, therefore, is a multivalent, polyvocal text, healing the fractured self through narrating, contributing to the archive of Dalit history, opening a dialogue with the silencing oppressors, and providing solace as well as frank criticism to his own people. Thus, on the one hand, Valmiki's becoming a speaking subject shows that Indian democracy has opened some escape hatches through which a critical mass of articulate, educated Dalit has emerged. On the other hand, the harsh realities that he portrays so powerfully underscore the failure to fully meet the promises made in the constitution of independent India. *Joothan* stridently asks for the promissory note, joining a chorus of Dalit voices that are demanding their rightful place under the sun. A manifesto for revolutionary transformation of society and human consciousness, *Joothan* confronts its readers with difficult questions about their own humanity and invites them to join the universal project of human liberation.

In an interview with Suresh Chandra Dwivedi, Omprakash Valmiki has admitted his indebtedness and respect towards Dr. Ambedkar. "The Life Struggle of Dr. Ambedkar and his ideology prepared the emotional base of my poems, short story, and autobiography" (32). The pain and humiliation of those bitter experiences in life could be communicated with their authenticity and immediacy only in a language and style which openly questioned and subverted the conventional aesthetic canons and frameworks. He cultivated a style and dignity of his own for presenting the hideous realities of Dalit life. So, he uses very direct and simple language. Valmiki himself has commented about his style. "Their suffering is not just the suffering of the individual, and there is nothing romantic about it. Their problem is neither

ideological nor philosophical. They do not seek poetic beauty. Similes, metaphors, and symbols are not important. The reality of their life is too hideously shocking, beyond the capacity of fantasy or imagination".

Valmiki, in his attempt to achieve this feat of re-living his traumatic life experiences while registering a strong protest against inhuman practices like untouchability, incorporates some very important narrative techniques. He gives a brief description of the physical as well as the psychological space occupied by the Chuhras in the village as a matrix of their social existence. He describes, very briefly, the day-to-day struggle of the untouchables to arrange two square meals for themselves. At the same time, he is able to demonstrate that the economic deprivation of the untouchables is the consequence of the Hindu caste order. He chronicles his own struggle to get an education in the village school. His story demonstrates that it is indeed possible for the untouchables, despite the hardships and deprivations, to emancipate themselves by persistent struggle and determination.

*Joothan*, a self-conscious Dalit literary text, makes a powerful statement against the oppressive caste system still prevalent in most parts of India. Valmiki's use of autobiography helps him to occupy a vantage subject position from which he presents a Dalit's lived experience. The 'true to life' format of the autobiography helps him to lay bare the brutality inherent in the caste system, which consequently becomes a powerful argument in favour of dismantling this undesirable form of social organization. At the same time, Valmiki's own struggles and success, acts as motivation for others to struggle and achieve their goals. *Joothan* symbolizes the struggle for dignity and human rights and demonstrates that a revolutionary transformation of society is not just desirable but possible as well.

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### UNIT 10 (C): *JOOTHAN: A DALIT'S LIFE AS AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY*

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Dalit literature is the literature of the untouchables. It is a protest against all forms of exploitation based on class, race, caste, or occupation. Dalit autobiographies, hence, are realistic depictions of the life of torment and anguish experienced by the untouchables. The pain, intense suffering, and sense of isolation revealed through Dalit autobiographies are very disturbing. According to Prof. Waman Nimbalkar, "The autobiographies in the Dalit literature are records of the Dalit Cultural Revolution". In fact, Dalit autobiographies are the graphs of their pain and agony. In the genre of autobiographies in Dalit literature, many rich and

substantial books have been published. Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* is one of the prominent autobiographies in Dalit literature. In this work, he presents his birth and growing up in the untouchable caste of 'chuhra' and the heroic struggle that he waged to survive this preordained life of perpetual physical and mental repression and his final transformation into a speaking subject.

In his preface to the Hindi Edition of the book, Valmiki himself has stated the motive behind writing the autobiography. According to him "Dalit life is excruciatingly painful, charred by experiences. Experiences that did not manage to find room in literary creations". Dalit autobiographies provide a record of the neglected social history of the lowest sections of India's population. This literature has breathed a new life into the emotional world of the Dalit community because it has blossomed to provide expression and meaning to the life of a set of people who had been undergoing severe oppression and isolation for many years. This new literature started questioning the atrocities and injustice inflicted upon the Dalit's life.

Omprakash Valmiki's autobiography provides us with information about the pains of his community too. Though autobiography as a literary form delineates an individual's life, Dalit autobiography is rather a distinct experience. In this autobiography Valmiki portrays his humiliated life; his painful story of eating leftover food to survive. He gets insulted for leftover food just because he was born in a caste Chuhra. Since he belongs to low caste he had to suffer from caste-biased mentality. Being Hindu, he was denied human rights by the so-called upper caste Hindus.

*Joothan: A Dalit's Life* is also a remarkable record of a rare Indian journey through the narrow lanes of casteism. In this book, Valmiki portrays the life a boy from extremely wretched social and economic conditions to prominence as an author and social critic. The autobiography is an exceptional piece of literary work, which describes the agony and pain felt by the author. This autobiography is about the trials and tribulations the writer had to face while fighting for the rights of the Dalits. He also talks about how his surname created a furore in the literary and social circles. While every Dalit wishes to conceal the fact that he is a Dalit, Omprakash Valmiki was bold enough to keep it as his surname which was like a slap on the face of upper caste superiority that had engulfed the nation from time immemorial. He proudly talks about the surname in these lines:

“This surname is now an indispensable part of my name. Omprakash has no identity without it. ‘Identity’ and ‘recognition’, the two words say a lot by themselves. Dr. Ambedkar was born in a Dalit family. But Ambedkar signifies a Brahmin caste name; it was a pseudonym given by a Brahmin teacher of his. When joined with ‘Bhimrao’ however it becomes his identity, completely changing its meaning in the process. Today ‘Bhimrao’ has no meaning without ‘Ambedkar’”. (132)

Valmiki concludes his autobiography by pointing out the fact that caste still remains an indispensable part of their lives.

Thus, *Joothan* is not just a remembering of things past. It is the structuring of events in the life of a Dalit in such a way as to enable one to analyze and understand the social order that shaped the life. The narration encapsulates the pain, humiliation, and poverty of Valmiki's community which had to rely on ‘joothan’ for satisfying their hunger. The autobiography is a re-living of his past. It tells how ‘his story’ becomes history. This re-living of the past burns him with renewed pain and humiliation in the present. As Arun Prabha Mukherjee has noted in the introduction "Valmiki moves from memory to memory, showing how the present is deeply scarred by his past despite the great distance he has travelled to get away from it" (xxxii).

According to Ashok Boyar "The Dalit writers have to be a spokesperson of his community. He carries the burden of his society on his shoulders. He is a bard and he can even be the prophet to lead his people to the Promised Land" (64). Dalit literature has not yet been acknowledged as a literature in its own right and no reference to it is found in the standard literary journals of India. But its reverberations are now being heard all around the globe. But no moral or political organization has the courage to openly associate with them. Autobiography has been a favourite genre of Dalit writers. Dalit autobiographies provide a record of the neglected social history of the lowest sections of India's Hindu population. They are of decisive value as sociological document. But Dalit literature is not merely a literature of protest. They are also the depiction of external emotions of love, suffering and sacrifice. Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* is the most suitable example for Dalit autobiography. This is an autobiographical account of Valmiki's journey from his birth and upbringing as an untouchable in the newly independent India of the fifties to his present as a Dalit writer.

## UNIT – 11

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### UNIT 11 (A): *JOOTHAN: A DALIT'S LIFE – AS A DALIT NARRATIVE*

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#### **What is Dalit Literature?**

‘Dalit’ is the term used to describe the nearly one hundred and eighty million Indians who were placed at the bottom of the traditional caste system. The term ‘Dalit’ a derivative of the Sanskrit word ‘Dal’ which means to be crushed and destroyed, refers to the poor and the downtrodden. According to Ghan Shyam Shah, “Dalit includes those termed in administrative parlance as Schedule Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward classes”. Traditionally, in the Hindu social order, they are placed at the bottom of the hierarchy, considered Ati-Shudras or Avarna and are treated as untouchables. Dalits are a mixed population of numerous castes and in Hindu society, the Dalit state has been historically associated with occupations regarded as ritually impure such as leather work, butchering or removal of rubbish, animal carcasses and human waste. In pre-independence India, Dalits stayed outside the village and worked as manual labourers and sweepers. They were segregated and banned from full participation in Hindu social life. Unfortunately, even after independence, discrimination against Dalits still exists in rural areas in routine matters such as access to eating places, schools, temples, and water sources, though it has largely disappeared in urban areas and public spheres. Basically, “caste is a lived social experience in India more than a prescribed mode of social stratification” (Davy XV). Despite the massive changes brought about by urbanization, industrialization and globalization, the grim reality of caste convention still looms large over the Indian social order and has not shown any substantial signs of reduction. The Dalits are treated worse than animals by the high castes. Their presence is usually banned from upper-class localities. They continue to face physical violence, including mass killings, rapes, and other cruelties by high-caste landowners. When they ask for their wages and freedom from molestation, they are ill-treated and punished. Dalits struggle against this injustice using political as well as cultural means.

The word ‘Dalit’ gained currency in the second half of the twentieth century in India, when a group of young Marathi writer-activists founded an organization called Dalit Panthers. The word Dalit is a common usage in Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati and many other Indian languages, meaning the poor and oppressed persons. Dalit literature has come to occupy a

unique status in the domain of Indian literature despite the charge of being propagandist and negative in its approach, levied against it. Repudiating the remarks, noted Hindi Dalit writer, Omprakash Valmiki says, “Dalit literature is the portrayal of the wishes and aspirations of the oppressed Dalits”. Non-Dalit writers belonging to high caste have, no doubt, portrayed the sufferings of the Dalits, however, Dalit writers feel that only Dalits can represent Dalits in an authentic manner. This claim of Dalit writers finds a parallel in the aboriginal writers in the USA and Canada. Valmiki’s autobiography *Joothan* captures the misery and poverty of Valmiki’s community. Valmiki relives the traumatic experiences of his past and present in the pages of his autobiography, bringing to the fore the exploitation suffered by the Dalit at the hands of upper caste people.

Dalit literature thus becomes one of the major tools for showing their resistance. In recent years, a vibrant field of Dalit literature has appeared in India, and some of these works are beginning to be translated into English. So, Dalit literature has to be analyzed and studied with a view to incorporating it into mainstream Indian literature as it articulates the consciousness of the historically suppressed people. Autobiographical writings constitute a significant subgenre of Dalit literature, conveying the first-hand, raw experience of the writers who are themselves, subjected to the scorn and contempt of the people who had no other qualities or distinctions in life except that they were born into upper caste families. Dalit literature has many qualities, which distinguish it from mainstream literature. It has a fiery strength, authenticity, a sense of social mission and expressive vigour and vibrancy. It is a literature that calls for a change in the attitude of society towards certain basic issues concerning individual relationships, social organization and caste-based discrimination. Its message is clear and resounding. Its quality of literary expression is also of a high order.

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### UNIT 11 (A): *JOOOTHAN: A DALIT’S LIFE* – AS A DALIT NARRATIVE

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#### **A Dalit Chetna (consciousness):**

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Valmiki, and other Dalit writers have tried to build up a critical Dalit consciousness in their writings that allows for pride, self-respect, and a vision of the future. Valmiki and others felt the need for a separate Dalit consciousness or ‘Dalit Chetna’ because Indian literature, more or less, had ignored the Dalit voice. Often the Dalits were portrayed as



villains of an unjust social system in need of saviours and the sympathy of the higher castes. Even a writer like Premchand, felt Valmiki and others, had failed the Dalits. Though Premchand is extremely sympathetic to the Dalits, he failed to give them a voice or agency. The Dalits in his stories, most evidently, in “Deliverance” suffer but hardly ever protest. In other words, Valmiki and others felt that even Premchand lacked the Dalit consciousness. His story “Kafan” on the other hand is considered as anti- Dalit because the Dalits in the story are presented as lazy and drunk. It is in this context that the contribution of Valmiki and other Dalit writers assumes importance.

Valimiki, in his book *Dalit Sahitya Ka Saundarya Shastra* defines ‘Dalit’ as people deprived of human rights on a social level. Thus their ‘chetna’ or consciousness is ‘Dalit Chetna’. ‘Dalit Chetna’ is a revolutionary mentality connected with struggle. It strives to make the Dalits conscious of their ‘Dalit condition’, which is a by-product of an oppressive caste order. This emancipatory ideology is rooted in Ambedkarite thought. Some of the key features of ‘Dalit Chetna’ are: i) It is based on the welcoming vision of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on the question of freedom and independence. ii) It rejects the caste system, casteism, communalism, and all hierarchies of language and privilege. iii) It rejects Brahminism, feudalism, and all notions of supremacy. iv) It rejects traditional theories of aesthetics as elitist and motivated.

Consequently, Dalit critics as well as writers have focused their attention on devoting an alternative aesthetics of Dalit literature. Quite appropriately, they begin by examining the location and socio-political stance of the existing literature in relation to Dalits. The focus is on writing that includes Dalit characters, description of Dalit life and experience so that the Dalit is accorded a subject position. In other words, the attempt is to have the Dalit writing rather than being written about.

### ***Joothan: A Dalit’s Life as a Dalit Narrative:***

*Joothan: A Dalit’s Life* by Omprakash Valmiki is one such work of Dalit literature. The lowest caste in Indian society ‘chuhra’ is a community of illiterate untouchables. He describes from his personal experiences, the torments of the Dalits who even have no right to fight for education or food but whose ordained job was to sweep the roads, clean the cattle barns, get shit off the floor, dispose of dead animals, work in the fields during the harvests and perform other physical labour for upper caste people including the Tyagi Brahmins. *Joothan: A Dalit’s Life* is an

autobiography of the untouchable by the untouchable and yet not merely for the untouchable but for everyone's reading.

According to Valmiki, Dalit consciousness is elemental in opposing the cultural inheritance of the upper castes, the notion that culture is a hereditary right for them and one that is denied to Dalits. Defining Dalit consciousness further, Valmiki says “Dalit consciousness is deeply concerned with the question, “Who am I? What is my identity?” (Valmiki, 28). It is this consciousness that gives Dalit literature its unique power and separates it from traditional Hindi literature describing Dalit characters. According to Valmiki, “Dalit consciousness does not just make an account of or give a report on the anguish, misery, pain and exploitation of Dalits, or draw a tear-streaked and sensitive portrait of Dalit agony; rather it is that which is absent from “original” consciousness, the simple and straightforward perspective that breaks the spell of the shadow of the cultural, historical and social roles for Dalits. That is Dalit consciousness. “Dalit” means deprived of human rights, those who have been denied them on a social level. Their consciousness is Dalit consciousness”. (Valmiki, 29). It is a staunch feeling of protest against the imposed lower caste status and evil of untouchability and a sense of self-respect and pride for a new social order based on the values of liberty, equality, justice and fraternity. It is this protest that lies embedded in Dalit literature as is evident in *Joothan*, where Valmiki poses a string of questions wondering “why does one have to be a Hindu in order to be a good human being----. I have seen and suffered the cruelty of Hindus since childhood. Why does caste superiority and caste pride attack only the weak? Why are Hindus so cruel, so heartless against Dalits?” (Valmiki, 41).

Dalit literature represents a significant historic phase in the awakening of a large mass of suppressed people in India. It is their voice for liberation as well as of protest, dissent, and rebellion. The caste system is a burning reality of Indian society and has made a large number of people, the victim of this inhuman exploitation and persecution. Dalit writing aims at eradicating social discrimination and ushering in an egalitarian and democratic society. Valmiki’s writings pose very simple, but hard-hitting questions at the feudalistic society. This spirit of interrogation is a characteristic feature of all his works and is very prominent in *Joothan*.

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## UNIT 11 (B): DEPICTION OF THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THE 'CHUHRAS'

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The title 'joothan' means the leftover remnants of food from weddings and other feasts that were relished by the Chuhras. They used to eat them and also saved pieces of it to feed themselves during hard times. The writer says: "What sort of a life was that? After working hard day and night, the price of our sweat was just joothan" (10). The social problems faced by the Chuhras haunted Valmiki's mind from his childhood right up to his adulthood. As a child, the writer always wished to go to school in neat ironed clothes. But the dhobi refused to wash clothes for a low-caste Chuhra boy. Thus, the writer realized that one can somehow get rid of poverty and deprivation but it is not possible to get past the social deprivation caused by caste.

The social and psychological deprivation is compounded by economic deprivation as well. Though every member of the Valmiki household worked it was difficult for them to arrange for two decent meals in a day. This economic deprivation is also a consequence of the caste order. The Chuhras did all kinds of work for the Tagas (upper caste people) and often without pay because they dare not refuse the Tagas. Due to their lowly social position, they were often abused by the upper castes and made to work for free. They were considered polluted and less than human. Ironically, one could touch animals but not Chuhras. Thus, they were regarded as things to be used and abused at the convenience of the upper castes. It is within this sub-human context that Valmiki's struggle for education begins. The government schools, though officially open for the untouchables, refused admission to them. It was a generous Sevak Ram Masihi, a Christian, who took Valmiki into his open-air school. But after a tiff with Sevak Ram, Valmiki's father took him to the Basic Primary school. After a prolonged period of begging and cajoling, Master Har Phool Singh allowed Valmiki into the school.

It is important to remember that all this was happening eight years after India became independent. The practice of untouchability was very much a feature of this school. The untouchables, there were two more of them in Valmiki's class, were made to sit away from the others. What is heartening though is that the three untouchable children, though from different castes, had a bond of solidarity. Despite the humiliation by fellow students as well as the teachers the three of them persisted and continued in the school. The experience at the school, described vividly, highlight the cruelty and heartlessness of the teachers and fellow students. It

got worse with the new Headmaster Kaliram. They were openly abused in the classroom by the teacher and often beaten up as well. Valmiki takes the opportunity to highlight the fact that the Brahmin teacher in their school used swear words on a regular basis. This is a very effective reply to the critics who frowned upon the use of swear words in Valmiki's stories. He has tried to point out that when swear words are used in real life by people who are supposed to know Brahma (Brahmins) then it is legitimate to portray that reality in creative writing as a true depiction of lived experience. The experience at the school leaves a lasting impression on the young Valmiki. For instance, the image of the guru that Valmiki would remember throughout his life is that of a man who would swear about his mother and sister and who would sexually abuse young boys.

However, the turning point for him as well as his father was an especially humiliating experience forced upon the young Valmiki by the Headmaster Kaliram who seems to be a rabid casteist. He orders the frail boy to sweep the school compound day after day. Valmiki suffered this indignity for three days. On the fourth day his father discovered him with a broom in his hand sweeping the school compound. In one decisive gesture his father, instead of quietly suffering the indignity, confronts the Headmaster. The courage and fortitude shown by his father is indeed remarkable. Expectedly, Valmiki was thrown out of the school. But his father was not going to give up easily. He promised the Headmaster that Valmiki would indeed study in the same school and that he will ensure that more untouchables would follow Valmiki to the school. With dogged determination Valmiki's father, with the help of the village Pradhan Chaudhri Saheb, managed to send him back to school thus ensuring that his own son as well as others are not denied education in the village school because of their caste.

Through the first part of his narrative Valmiki, very quickly, paints the sub-human living conditions of the Chuhras in the village. The Chuhras, Valmiki's own caste, lived across the pond, which acted as a natural barrier between the upper caste quarters and the untouchables. It demarcates not just the physical space occupied by the upper and the lower castes, but the two different worlds of existence. The Chuhras exist among filth and deprivation. The description of the basti gives us a sense of the utter deprivation faced by the untouchable community. There is an all-pervading stink and one could see pigs, dogs, and children roaming around in the narrow streets of this basti. In short, the Chuhras lived in a physical and social space devoid of human dignity, obviously as a consequence of the caste system. Thus, Valmiki's autobiography turns out to be a remarkable portrayal of the lived realities of the Chuhra community which is marked by this utter deprivation and lack of dignity.

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## UNIT 11 (C): *JOOZHAN: A DALIT'S LIFE – AS A NARRATIVE OF PAIN*

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Omprakash Valmiki has written his autobiography in Hindi and later it was translated into English by Arun Prabha Mukherjee. Unlike non-Dalit autobiography, this autobiography is full of painful memories of Valmiki. It highlights the pangs and humiliation of the defenseless society and its exploitation over a period of thousand years. Omprakash narrates the tale of oppression and subjugation in his autobiography. His experiences make this autobiography a narrative of pain. The high-caste Hindus exploited their own brethren (the low-caste communities) in the name of caste and culture. They laughed scornfully at their economic and social conditions instead of offering them helping hands to live a life of dignity and respect. Human beings of similar orders were discriminated against due to their birth in a typical society which is totally not in our hands. From his schooling to growing up as a successful writer Valmiki suffered from the mania of caste divisions developed by the High caste people. Nature had not discriminated against them, nevertheless, man overcoming Nature created his own order.

It is hypothesized that all Dalit autobiographical narratives are the narration of pains. Valmiki's hostile condition helped him to grow as successful human being. Every Dalit autobiography shows upward social mobility. Valmiki suffered more just because of his birth in low Caste. There are many painful incidents in the autobiography. When Valmiki grew old, he would recall those bitter memories. It makes him shed tears at the typical social condition. He, in his autobiography, narrates these memories: "When I think about all those things today, thorns begin to prick my heart. What sort of life that was? After working hard day and night, the price of our sweat was just joozhan. And yet no one had any grudges. Or shame. Or repentance". It is even after many years Valmiki is unable to forget those bitter and insulting experiences. The wounds are still fresh in his mind and seem the scratches of the iron on the mirror. The deep imprint of all those humiliating, inhuman experiences charred his life completely.

Ironically, the teachers Valmiki got in his school did not possess any of the desired qualities that a teacher is generally expected to have and had their contribution in the abundance of painful experiences that he had to go through. They were the 'goondas' as Valmiki remembers them. He said he can remember all those teachers who used to swear about mothers

and sisters. “The teachers of Tyagi Inter College, Barla, thrashed the boys with kicks and fists. These kicks and fists were not those of a teacher but of a goonda. How a teacher could beat his pupils so heartlessly.” He narrates one of painful and humiliating experiences in school. The headmaster of the school calls him and asks for his name. In reply Valmiki discloses his belonging to the caste of Chuhra, a scavenger. Knowing his caste, the headmaster asked him to make broom of some of the twigs of the tree to clean the entire ground as clear as mirror. The other students in his school were studying and he was busy in sweeping and cleaning the ground consecutively for three days. On the third day when he was trying to hide himself from the headmaster’s gaze, he was picked up; pounced on his neck; dragged out of the class and thrown on ground by headmaster. The headmaster groans, “Go sweep the whole playground.... Otherwise I will shove chilies up your arse and throw you out of the school.”

This is how Valmiki was humiliated by the head of the school. He was insulted and all strategies were used by the teachers and students to remove him from school. Their beating was animal-like. Moreover, the series of maltreatment does not end here; ironically it was growing as he was growing old. He narrates one such incident of his teacher’s maltreatment. A physical education teacher in the school where he was pursuing education was terrorizing students. One day it so happened that at the time of prayer Ram Singh, a schoolmate of Valmiki was up to some mischief. The physical teacher scolded Ram Singh by calling him Kala Dogra. At this word, all the boys standing in queue laughed loudly. This made the physical education teacher angry. But leaving all students the teacher started to kick and slap Surjan Singh, Valmiki’s cousin. He was beating Surjan without showing any pity towards him. In Valmiki’s language, it was going on as a ruffian was beating an innocent victim. He was beating him continuously with a belt and kick. The physical education teacher in fury said some sharp words which, Valmiki says, he remembers even today. The teacher said: “Abey, brother-in-Law, progeny of Chuhra, let me know when you die. You think you’re a hero. Today I am going to draw oil from your tresses.” This comment, Valmiki says, ‘is still etched in my mind like a scratch on glass.’ These painful memories stir one’s heart when one reads them in the autobiography. At the intermediate Valmiki’s Chemistry teacher intentionally kept him out during the practical classes without ever giving him any explanation. Even the headmaster’s intervention didn’t work. As it seems this was not enough, he was given low marks in the examination against his excellent performance in the examination. This is why he failed in intermediate. He had acquired good marks in all subjects except Chemistry. He was failed by his teacher.

The treatment based on caste never changed in case of Valmiki. Whenever he disclosed his caste, he had tormenting experiences. His upward social mobility underlined a message that birth in a typical society never affects the talent one possesses but many talents had been wiped out by the caste system in India. It can, thus, be summed up that the autobiography is full of the painful experiences of the author. He has gone through all these insulting and humiliating experiences due to his birth in low caste only. His struggle with the conditions and caste-biased mentality proved that calibre is not something one gets because of his birth in an affluent family and so-called high caste. Being a part of Hindu society, he was exploited by his fellow brethren; they created obstacles in his road to success but he won the battle against all odds. Dr. R. P. Singh comments in his book about this autobiography: “This belongingness of the experiences of insult and indignity strikes the readers in this autobiography.” Thus, the autobiography is a series of painful struggles of a human being for dignity and respect. His calibre helped him to put those bitter experiences in front of the world in the hope of a new dawn for his upcoming generation.

## UNIT – 12

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### UNIT 12 (A): *JOOTHAN: A DALIT'S LIFE* – A STORY OF UNTOUCHABILITY

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*Joothan* is one of the best works of Dalit literature. This is a book about caste discrimination and the Brahmanical atrocities and humiliations that India brings to its own. In 1950, the practice of untouchability was legally abolished. Om Prakash Valmiki's autobiographical novel, *Joothan* highlights that untouchability was practiced by teachers, educated-like-minded upper-caste people and their relatives belonging to the same community. Through *Joothan*, he reveals that the instances of enmity caused by caste organization remain etched throughout life. Omprakash through his endeavour portrayed the importance of literature in providing a platform for the dissemination of knowledge about Dalit life and their experiences. His work stands out remarkably for its realistically sensible description of caste supremacy but still struggles to be included in mainstream literature in the nation. Along with his non-linear style of script, his work is a compilation of memoirs, including detailed accounts of racial aggression during his school and adult life.

In this book, readers are drawn into a world where cruelty and deprivation seem to be the only reality, and they become aware of the complexities of caste oppression. Omprakash

Valmiki talks of growing up in Chuhra, an untouchable caste, long before the word 'Dalit' was coined in a village in North India. It is a story of overcoming great obstacles, terrifying suffering and oppression, of surviving, and emerging as a free man. As Valmiki's uncompromising candour makes clear, India's class system has legitimately survived abolition as a powerful cultural reality that has removed millions of untouchables from social taboo, degrading labour, and depressing scarcity. Valmiki details these harsh realities as he tells them of living in the dilapidated huts of the settlement, cleaning flesh and leather from rotten streets, and suffering ridicule and oppression by social superiors. But Valmiki also shares with his readers the inspiring story of how he and other untouchables – who called themselves Dalits– created a strong social and political pressure group for their rights as Indian citizens. Though often angered by the Hindu elite, Dalits have pursued their cause with extraordinary confidence and courage.

As an editor and writer, Valmiki has done much to make room for Dalit literary expression, which is well exemplified in this story. As Valmiki's uncompromising candour makes it understandable, India's class system has survived lawful abolition as a powerful cultural actuality that has removed millions of untouchables from social barring, humiliating labour and depressing dearth. Valmiki details these harsh realities as he has gained knowledge about them through living in the dilapidated huts of the basti, cleaning flesh and leather from rotten streets and suffering mockery and persecution from social superiors. But Valmiki also shares with his readers the inspirational narrative of how he and other untouchables—who called themselves Dalits–created a strong societal and political pressure group to push for their rights as Indian citizens. Though often annoyed by the Hindu leaders, Dalits have pursued their cause with extraordinary self-confidence and guts.

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**UNIT 12 (B): *JOOZHAN: A DALIT'S LIFE* – A SUBALTERN'S VOICE?**

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*Joothan: A Dalit's Life* is not merely an autobiography but it is the voice of the innumerable voiceless people who face all sorts of subjugation and torture because they are born in a lower class where self-esteem, and self-identification are least important. The author depicts his distressing Dalit experience from childhood to adolescence. The Dalit personalities in his stories carry on a persistent movement against caste conspiracies and persistently fight to safeguard their pride and self-esteem and they act as spokesmen of the community. Their fight



is also for abolishing the whole evil of caste structure and caste ladder. Gail Omvedt's observation of Dr. Ambedkar's approach towards the Dalits is factual in the case of Omprakash Valmiki as well. His stories bring to the surface the veiled aspects of the Dalit society.

In the present world, where Dalits are still treated as outcastes, this work by Omprakash Valmiki gets great significance since it conveys a message to the Dalit community to fight against these deprivations and to make their voice heard and reverberate throughout the world. *Joothan* is significant in the sense that it is a reminder for the government to act efficiently to uplift the suppressed Dalit community. The provisions and measures provided by the government seem inadequate. The atrocities and exploitation experienced by the Dalit community are unsolved even in this era of liberalization and globalization. Valmiki's narrative voice in *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*, brims with a sense of outrage at what he had to endure himself as a human being. The highest purpose of Dalit writing is not beauty or craft, but the authenticity of experience presented in a very simple style. Valmiki gives us an anatomy of his experiences in life. His story is the voice from the heart of India that has been voiceless for countless generations. He has created an opening for our understanding and knowledge about people who are marginalized.

The suppressed voice of a Dalit's life is well presented in *Joothan*. What makes this work unique is its keen observation and detailed description of the oppression and atrocities faced by Dalits in this world conditioned by caste laws. The success of *Joothan* is a symbol of the development of the Dalit community. Valmiki knows that the best way of expressing the conditions and situation of the Dalit community is through narrating his own experiences as a Dalit. Autobiography has the power to inspire readers and in that sense Valmiki's autobiography can be the source of inspiration for the young generation of the Dalit community to attain success in their lives, disregarding their limitations. By narrating his own successful life, Valmiki asserts that the lack of opportunities faced by the Dalit community cannot be the solid reason that obstructs them from paving their own way in this indifferent world.

In *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*, Valmiki questions the relevance of the caste system and exposes it as a sword pointing towards the untouchables. By giving the title, *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*, for his autobiography, Valmiki proclaims his intention to represent the life of the untouchable through his life story. Valmiki's struggle described so graphically is symptomatic of the extent of the challenges involved in the process of reclaiming dignity for himself and his community. Omprakash Valmiki, through this work, presents himself not as a writer, but as a

member of the Dalit community who makes the unheard voice of these suppressed people echo in this world of literature.

The high-caste Indian writers presented Dalits as ‘mute’ and pathetic characters unable to act or speak about their oppression and alienation. Through this book, Valmiki proves that the Dalit, the subaltern can also speak. The autobiography, *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* thus becomes the story of the magical transformation of the Dalit's muteness into voice. The project is a sincere attempt to highlight Valmiki's efforts in voicing the misery and alienation experienced by the marginalized Dalit Community of India even after Independence. Their story seldom appears in mainstream literature. *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* is also a remarkable record of a rare Indian journey- one that took a boy from an extremely wretched socio-economic condition to prominence. Omprakash Valmiki shares his heroic struggle to survive the life of perpetual oppression and narrates the story of his transformation into a speaking subject. Thus, Valmiki's *Joothan* proves that the Subaltern can speak. *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* tells the story of this magical transformation of his muteness into voice.

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#### **UNIT 12 (C): JOOTHAN: A DALIT'S LIFE – A QUEST FOR REVOLT**

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Through *Joothan*, Valmiki reveals that the instances of violence caused by the caste system remain faced throughout life. Om Prakash Valmiki provides a chilling account of caste oppression in the newly Independent Indian state. His autobiographical article brings to light one of those rare, detailed, and lively accounts of Dalit life. *Joothan* marked the first Dalit autobiography in Hindi literature and was later translated into English by Arun Prabhakar Mukherjee in 2003. Om Prakash Valmiki through his work highlighted the importance of literature in providing a platform for the dissemination of knowledge about Dalit life and their experiences. His work stands out except for its very realistic description of caste oppression but still struggles to be included in mainstream literature in the nation. Along with his non-linear style of writing, his work is a collection of memoirs, which contain detailed accounts of caste violence during his school and adult life.

Dalits today constitute about one-sixth of India's population. They are spread across the country, speaking many languages and belonging to many religions, and they have become a key political force. As a document of the long-silenced and long-denied sufferings of Dalits, *Joothan* is not only a gift to the archives of Dalit history, but a policy for a revolutionary change

of society and human realization. Omprakash Valmiki described his life as an untouchable Dalit in the newly independent India. The non-linear nature of the story prevents the monotony to put a heavy burden on the mind of the readers. Rather it encapsulates the memories of the writer's childhood filled with difficulties belonging to the 'Chuhra' community.

Throughout the text, Valmiki makes a point of emphasizing the undeniable differences between the untouchables and the upper caste people, which were already created by the caste hierarchy of society. The Indian social system not only took away the fundamental rights of Dalits but also forced them to lead a miserable life and imposed strict laws on them. This story attacks the varna-system, brahminical, feudal system with sternness. The author has also told how the Dalits had to do 'begar' in *Joothan*. The upper caste zamindars used to force the Dalits to work in their fields. If someone did not, he was also punished. This practice has crushed the honour and dignity of the Dalits. Valmiki is highly controversial for reacting to Gandhi's 'hypocrisy' of calling the untouchables the children of God as well as urging for the preservation of the varna system of Indian society. *Joothan* is an expression of the oppression of the Brahminical, feudal mindset of western Uttar Pradesh, India. It is a poignant expression of a Dalit struggling for education in the rural areas of eastern Uttar Pradesh. This is a typical story of Dalit literature. The feeling of instilling self-respect and self-confidence in Dalits prepares the land. The outrage that thousands of years of oppression have aroused among Dalits is naturally expressed in this story.

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## CONCLUSION

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This story tries to awaken human feelings by connecting the pain and struggle of the Dalits with the feelings of the reader. India's untouchables have been forced to acknowledge and eat leftovers for centuries and the word 'joothan' encompasses the pain, disgrace, and poverty of the community forced to live at the bottom of India's social pyramid. Valmiki concludes by saying that even if India has changed and now has a superior culture, the situation of Dalits remains the same. He has also mentioned that the one who has experienced those bitter experiences knows the sting of it. The caste organization is seen as a vital weapon to defend civilizing homogeneity. Valmiki's account attempts to challenge this notion and disclose the contrasting experiences of caste oppression. He cited various examples of facing disgrace

because of his class identity. The question of the caste system that has been created in Indian life has been raised with deep concern in this work.

In *Joothan*, Omprakash Valmiki deals with the issue of humiliation meted out to the Dalits by Indian society, no matter where they lived. This humiliation stems from the fact that Dalit inferiority has got embedded in the psyche of the upper caste, the members of which have developed an extraordinary repertoire of idioms, symbols and gestures of verbal and physical denigration of the Dalit over centuries. It is embedded in the literary and artistic imagination and sensibility of the upper caste. *Joothan* is a representative Dalit literary text that not only exposes the pain and humiliation one suffers from in a caste-ridden society but also by maintaining solidarity with the Dalit movement, proposes to resist discrimination and liberate the otherwise suppressed castes and classes.

The Dalit characters in his stories carry on a relentless crusade against caste conspiracies and relentlessly fight to safeguard their dignity and self-esteem and they act as spokesmen of the community they belong to. Their fight is also for abolishing the whole body of caste structure and caste hierarchy. Valmiki's stories bring to the surface the hidden aspects of Dalit society. Political issues created by his work *Khanabadosh* now has become public knowledge. His other work *Shavayatra* was greeted with accusations of dividing and sabotaging the unity and identity of the Dalits. They were of the opinion that by writing *Joothan*, Valmiki was contributing to the inferior status of his people. According to Valmiki encountering these situations has been a part of his creative evolution. It is due to this fact that whenever his stories encounter any comment upon social relations, the ugly truth of caste hierarchy and caste system and the ironies and cruelties hidden beneath them come out in their unconcealed nakedness and bitterness. His stories do not shy away from expressing anger and remorse. They explore the social realities from a definite angle of Dalit sensibility. He claims that only a Dalit can know and express the pain and misery of Dalits in all its rawness and immediacy.

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## ASSIGNMENTS

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### Long Answer-type Questions:

1. Justify the significance of the title, *Joothan, A Dalit's Life*.
2. Comment on the relevance of descriptions in the opening section of Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*.
3. *Joothan, A Dalit's Life* is a narrative of pain, resistance and hard-earned success. Discuss.
4. How does *Joothan, A Dalit's Life* deconstruct the narratives of respect for elders, teachers and colleagues? Elaborate.
5. How did Omprakash Valmiki reveal the evils of the caste system in *Joothan, A Dalit's Life*?
6. Discuss the autobiographical elements used in *Joothan, A Dalit's Life*.

### Short Answer-type Questions:

1. Describe in brief the depiction of the Chuhras in *Joothan, A Dalit's Life*.
2. What decisive turn did the narrator's father give to the boy's future in *Joothan, A Dalit's Life*?
3. What impression do you form about the family of Valmiki from the autobiography *Joothan, A Dalit's Life*?
4. What is the meaning of the word 'joothan'?
5. What did the headmaster ask Valmiki to do when he was a student?

**BLOCK - IV**  
**UNITS: 13 - 16**

**DALIT POETRY**

**SELECTED POEMS BY SIDDALINGAIAH, NAMDEO DHASAL AND  
MEENA KANDASAMI**

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**CONTENT STRUCTURE:**

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Unit 13 (a): An Introduction to Dalit Literature

Unit 13 (b): Features of Dalit Literature

Unit 13 (c): The Creation and Evolution of Dalit Literature

Unit 13. (d): Dalit Poetry as a distinct genre

Unit 14 (a): The Life and Works of Siddalingaiah

Unit 14 (b): About the Poems

Unit 14 (c): Texts and Interpretation of the Poems

References

Unit 15 (a): The Life and Works of Namdeo Dhasal

Unit 15 (b): About the Poems

Unit 15 (c): Texts and Interpretation of the Poems

References

Unit 16 (a): The Life and Works of Meena Kandasami

Unit 16 (b): About the Poems

Unit 16 (c): Texts and Interpretation of the Poems

References

Suggested Readings

Assignment

## UNIT – 13

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### UNIT 13 (A): AN INTRODUCTION TO DALIT LITERATURE

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It is difficult to define Dalit literature by one definition. Etymologically, the term Dalit means “ground”, “suppressed”, “crushed” or “broken to pieces”. The term can be used both as an adjective and noun referring to people who remain marginalized and ‘subaltern’ in Indian society for a long time. In the larger sense, the term ‘Dalit’ includes landless farmers, labourers, Adivasis, Nomadic, and people of different castes and sub-castes as well. But there is contention among writers and critics about what exactly the term ‘Dalit’ refers to and over the years the term has gained a caste-based connotation.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century Maharashtra, Jotirao Phule a writer and social activist first used the term in the context of the ‘sudras’ and outcastes who even do not come under the four-fold ‘varnasrama’ system of Hinduism. The word Dalit was also used later as a Hindi and Marathi translation of the official term “depressed classes” and later British government termed and classified these outcastes as SCs, and STs. Dr. B.R Ambedkar bestows the term ‘Dalit’ a dignity, authority, and identity in preference to the term ‘Harijan’ suggested by Mahatma Gandhi for the so-called “untouchable” castes. ‘Harijan’ meaning children of God is a word borrowed from the ‘Bhajans’ of the medieval Gujarati poet Narsinh Mehta. But Ambedkar rejected to be treated in a way that is apparently kind but that betrays a feeling of superiority, hence patronizing. However, the term Dalit came into widespread use only in the 1970s with reference to the political mobilization by parties representing the interests of the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and all other such groups that were discriminated against and exploited on the basis of birth-based identity or economic reasons. A more expanded idea of Dalit also includes classes like landless labour, minorities, and all others who are poor as mentioned before but such a wide definition of the word Dalit is likely to make it irrelevant for social analysis.

Marathi poet and writer Sharatchandra Muktibodh and veteran thinker Vasant Palsikar differentiate between Dalit consciousness and class consciousness. They make a distinction between class-based Dalits and caste-based Dalits. Palsikar views class and Dalit consciousness as different and argues that “Dalit consciousness militates against unity” (Palsikar 118). Accordingly, writers and critics attempt to define Dalit literature from different perspectives. Though fundamentally, Dalit literature is the literature of the marginalized and



oppressed but Dalit literature denotes protest literature against the caste system. In “the first conference of Dalit writers” held in 1958 in Bombay, Resolution 5 states that “the literature written by the Dalits and that written by others about the Dalits in Marathi be accepted as a separate entity known as Dalit literature” (Dangle 242). But later in another seminar in 1967 organized by Maharashtra Sahitya Parishad at Mahabaleshwar, there was a controversy on the non-Dalitism of other writers and on the question of monopoly of Dalit writers. Dalit writers argue that “how will non-Dalits write about this experience of Dalits with the power of their imagination? How will they feel the anger rising in the hearts of untouchables on the basis of their helpless imagination?” (Limbale 104). Therefore, Dalit writers expressed their doubts about the authenticity of Dalit literature if written by non-Dalit writers. For them, a non-Dalit writer can sympathize but cannot live and reproduce the life of Dalits through literature. The majority of Dalit writers and activists felt that Dalit literature is a distinct field of literature and according to Saratchandra Muktibodh, Dalit literature responds to itself as a separate category of writing in many Indian languages. Limbale in his book *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* emphasizes the Dalitness of the Dalit writers as he believes that a non-Dalit writer cannot have the Dalit consciousness which is required for creating Dalit literature. His book speaks on the aesthetics of Dalit literature that cannot be judged by the established yardsticks of mainstream literature. Dalit literature is born out of thousands of years of oppression and injustice and therefore has got definitive aims. Dalit literature is meant to make the whole Dalit community aware of their bondage in the caste-based graded Hindu society and their ignominious social position. At the same time, Dalit literature is the literature of protest and resistance. The first-hand narrative of the Dalit writers spread awareness and self-consciousness amongst the Dalits and to the rest of the society about the injustice and inhumanity done to them from time immemorial. Thereby Dalit literature rejects the idea of having pleasure, beauty, and aesthetics of typical mainstream literature. Dalit literature demands different measures to assess its aesthetics. Nayar argues that the ‘traumatic materialism’ of Dalit poetry “forces us to move beyond the realist mode of recording the eye-witnessing of corporeal pain in everyday Dalit lives to ‘bearing witness’ to something unspeakable and not quite visible, which is the pain’s subtext” (Nayar 1).

Indian texts like *Manusmiriti* epitomize the ‘varnashrama’ system where the four varnas namely, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras belong to the four varnas and are called savarna and Dalits and tribals who do not belong to any varna are called avarna. Initially, the hegemony of mainstream literature rejected Dalit literature as literature on account of its non-aestheticism. Savarna critics refused to give literary value to the literature produced by the

Dalits and wanted to marginalize their literature, the way they marginalize them. The last five decades passed over in this battle of creating some space in the mainstream literary domain. Literature written by the writers of the Dalit communities or literature that is specifically written to represent the typical social, historical and cultural aspects of the Dalit communities is described as Dalit literature. It is the literature of obvious social commitment aimed at advocating ideas of social equality, justice and resistance to suffering, discrimination and economic exploitation. Dalit writings are now coming out in different genres like poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. Their relentless struggle and strong articulation compelled the established literary associations to recognise them as a distinct area. It has also achieved a distinct place in the academic exercise. Different universities have included Dalit literature as a separate course of study and a lot of national and international seminars and conferences are also being arranged on Dalit Literature. It is, therefore, very important and relevant to understand the development of Dalit literature and its contribution.

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### **UNIT 13 (B): FEATURES OF DALIT LITERATURE**

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The four-fold Hindu 'Varnasrama' system keeps the 'untouchables' outside this system. 'Varnasrama' system regards untouchables as guilty from birth and impure. This system gives them the codes and conduct of living. 'Untouchables' are to live outside the village away from the residential area of the village, eat food only in clay pots, use only shrouds to cover their body and remain bare feet. They were not permitted to enter temples, read Hindu scriptures and drink water from wells. In this system, brahmins do not even step on the shadow of 'untouchables' and if there is any violation of this stringent code, they perform rigorous rituals and punish the untouchables with violent physical and mental atrocities. For ages, they have been kept deprived of all the basic human necessities and rights. For centuries they endured this oppression and injustice. So, Dalit literature has got the character of a 'collective social voice'.

Dalit literature becomes the very portrait of their suffering and agony. Their literature shows how for thousands of years they have been kept illiterate and uneducated to keep them in the illusion that God has created this social hierarchy, so they should endure this God-ordained life. Dalit literature delineates this life of slavery very realistically through different genres of literature.

Dalit literature also features rejection, resistance and revolt against the existing graded social order. This rejection and revolt are born out of their pent-up pain. They raised their voice against an inhuman system forced on them for thousands of years and claim all the rights denied to them. They demand all the constitutional rights of equality, liberty, fraternity and justice. Dalit literature expresses this desperation, aggressiveness and rebelliousness.

In the initial phase, Dalit writing mostly consisted of autobiographies. Later Dalit writers started to portray their life experiences through other genres as well. Even their fictional works were influenced by their life-experience and very realistically depicted. Articulation of experience is a prominent feature of Dalit literature. These experiences are very distinct because they are real-life experiences and revealed with an aim to gain identity through self-searching and rejecting the society that disowns their human identity and treats them as animals.

Dalit literature has Dalit consciousness. Dalit consciousness refers to the zeal to rebel against the caste system, awareness about their social reality or conscientization and humanism. Dr B.R. Ambedkar is the source and inspiration for their Dalit cognizance. Dalit literature is committed to social reality and responsibility. Many Dalit writers are activists also. So, Dalit literature is built upon certain ideals and values, hence intense and resolute. Dalit literature in that sense may be understood as a movement.

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### **UNIT 13 (C): THE CREATION AND EVOLUTION OF DALIT LITERATURE**

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Indian history, the literary world, and academia remained oblivious and negligent about literature produced by Dalits. But Dalit cultural and literary production began to take shape in the 1950s with a remarkable critical intervention. Dr. Ambedkar's critical revelation of Indian history, mythology, and Brahmanical texts enabled Dalit people to be conscious of their victimhood and claim their human rights. His critical literary works and political activism from 1920 to 1956 gave them the confidence to assert their subjectivity through organizing, unifying, political activism, and critical writing. The entire Dalit community awoke to their consciousness when Ambedkar brought Dalit issues and concerns from the remote villages to the British administrative decision-making meetings. This revolutionary figure and his works gave rise to many Dalit critics, poets and writers. Some of the notable writers of this age are Shankarrao Kharat, Bandhu Madhav, Annabhau Sathe and NR Shinde. Savarna publishers and

editors refused to publish the writings of these Dalit writers at this phase. But Ambedkar's consistent struggle and activism held the courage and enthusiasm of Dalit writers to keep writing and be heard. They insisted on the acknowledgment and acceptance of Dalit literature. Ambedkar's religious conversion gave them a new way of thought and articulation but his demise created a great loss to the entire Dalit community.

In the post-independence era educated Dalit people started to organize with much more critical awareness to fulfill their long pending demands. Their struggle, their education, their movement, and the Brahminical social framework all started to get reflected through their writing. Much of Dalit writing started to emerge from Maharashtra. Traditional Marathi literature and after that Sant literature did not mention caste oppression or the plight of the Dalits for their emancipation. Sant literature dealt 'sudras' with sympathy but they primarily talk about spiritual freedom and emancipation rather than emancipation from the bondage of caste-system. So there is a difference between Sant literature and literature created by the Dalit writers. Contemporary Dalit writers started to break away from the traditional Hindu culture and this gave rise to modern Dalit literature.

Modern Dalit literature is different from modern mainstream literature as modern literature portrays Dalits from a middle-class sympathetic perspective whereas modern Dalit literature delineates Dalits in a realistic and revolutionary way. It shook the canonical authority of mainstream literature. Writers like Namdeo Dhasal, and Raja Dhale started to publish little magazines to express their literary rebellion. A massive part of Dalit literature consists of writings by rural writers from different regions. Many villages and rural areas are still immersed in the darkness of the caste system. The nature of their struggle and the atrocities of caste holders are completely different from the urban areas or towns and cities. Rural Dalit writers not only write about caste stigma and experience of untouchability but a lot of other pertinent issues through their writing as per their preference. Some influential writers of Dalit literature of all time are Baburao Bagul, Jatin Bala, Bama, Manohar Mauli Biswas, Manoranjan Byapari, Daya Pawar, Urmila Pawar, Baby Kamble and Kalyani Thakur. Bagul's *When I Hid my Caste: Stories*, Byapari's *Interrogating My Chandal Life*, Bama's *Karukku*, Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of my Life*, Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* are some of the remarkable Dalit literary texts.

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## UNIT 13 (D): DALIT POETRY AS A DISTINCT GENRE

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Dalit Poetry is coming out as a very prominent genre expressing the horrible experiences of the Dalits. Some well-known male Dalit poets are Keshav Meshram, Siddalingaiah, N.D. Rajkumar, Namdeo Dhasal, Narayan Survey, Tryambak Sapkal and Daya Pawar, Dalpat Chauhan, Bapurao Jagtap, and Kisan Sosa. Among the women Dalit poets some remarkable names are Meena Kandasamy, Vijila Chirappad, Sheetal Sathe, Sukirtharani, Aruna Gogulamanda. Poetry by these Dalit poets are narratives of their oppression from the time of their first ancestors. Some of these poems carry rich folk history and culture. This type of Dalit poetry is called folk poetry. Some folk poetry writers are Waman Dada Kardak, Bheem Rao Kardak and Vittol Uma. Dalit poetry inculcates and respects Dalit sensibility and thereby reclaims its own space in the so-called aesthetic literary world and tries to cultivate it across the masses. These poems are primarily written in regional languages, hence spared from the colonial influence of the English language. Elitist savarna writers often produce biased narratives of the Dalits. Therefore, the depiction of Dalits in elitist literature is prejudiced and Dalits are mere subjects without history. Dalit poetry truly depicts the lives and history of the Dalits through their own language. Dalit Poetry is also very rooted and grounded because the lives and histories of Dalits gain a true representation through their unprejudiced emotions and language of their own. But again, since it is very important to advance their voice and ideas collectively to the common mass, translation in English is equally important but the politics of translation and conventional aesthetics are making them unavailable to the common wider readership. The local history, myth, story, and ballads create a wide scope of knowledge about their bizarre truth of life.

Contemporary Dalit poetry is very much rebellious in nature and revolts against Brahmanic ideologies. Harish Mangalam notes that: “The feeling of dedication to the society fully flows in the Dalit poetry. The Dalit poets have continuously done their job to split the web which is the hurdle in the social uplift. Racial theme caste exploitation- in their poems is like a red colour in the blood. With the social reality, the poet’s self-connection is presented. So, to understand and enjoy their poems the social reality of their community plus the poet’s financial, cultural and social situation must be known.” (Mangalam 142)

Dalit Poetry is not only poetry of revolt and protest; it also argues for a new social order. They demand proper representation in all the segments of human life, i.e., social, cultural, political, and economic and a changed social framework. There is a desperate attempt in Dalit

poetry to articulate their age-old pangs, reveal the conspiracy of the upper castes, attain their identity and transform society. In that way, Dalit poetry tries to pave the way for a new peaceful world where there will be no oppression and marginalization. Dalit poetry which was born out of a social situation compulsorily now has become a fertile land of creation.

Some notable Dalit Poetry collections are *A Current of Blood* by Namdeo Dhasal, *Give Us This Day A Feast Of Flesh* by N.D. Rajkumar, *No Entry for the New Sun: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Poetry* by Arjun Dangle, *The River Speaks* by Bojja Tharakam, *Ms Militancy* by Meena Kandasamy.

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## UNIT - 14

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### UNIT 14 (A): LIFE AND WORKS OF SIDDALINGAIAH (1936 – 2015)

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In an interview with *The Hindu* in 2019, Siddalingaiah said:

“There is a lot of pain in the life of a Dalit, true. But there is also so much laughter. There is an abundance of jokes about landlords, middlemen, exploiters.... There is this term called ‘black laughter’. Just as the white men laugh with condescension, the oppressed have their black laughter. Similarly, there is something called Dalit laughter.” (Found in Sayeed June 12, 2021)

Siddalingaiah is a rebellious Kannada poet, playwright, and Dalit activist. He was born in 1954, in a Holeya Dalit family in Magadi town, around 60 kilometres away from Bangalore. He first commenced writing for the Dalits in Karnataka. So, people respectfully address him as ‘Kavi’ Siddalingaiah. He was a pioneer of the Dalit-Bandaya movement in Kannada and the genre of Dalit writing in Karnataka. He also founded Dalit Sangharsh Samiti along with B. Krishnappa. Siddalingaiah was a politically active person as well. In 1988, at the age of 34, he became a member of the Karnataka Legislative Council and served till 2001. Later he became chairman of the Kannada Development Authority, a post with Cabinet rank. He held this post till 2008. He was also a sound academician. He took the responsibility of the Head of the Department of Kannada at Bangalore University and remained a member of the University Syndicate of Kannada University, Hampi. He is acknowledged as a symbol of the Dalit movement and a leading public intellectual and Kannada poet. The upper caste dominance in the literary world of Karnataka and the infuriated comment of the Dalit Minister B. Basavalingappa influenced him greatly and made him set up a Dalit organization called Dalit Sankharsha Samiti (DSS) in the 1970s with his other associates. Siddalingaiah was very much influenced by the ideals of Ambedkar. He also embraced other intellectual ideals of Lenin and Marx. In his leadership, DSS started to publish two weekly magazines called *Panchama* and *Sangati* to publicize the concerns of Dalits.

Being born in a Dalit family Siddalingaiah witnessed the distress and humiliation of Dalit life. In his autobiography *Ooru Keri*, he gives a heartrending description of his life. He experienced the curse of being a Dalit when his father was fastened to a yoke, trundled like a

bullock, and was made to plough the fields, while a man whipped behind him. This event left a deep scar in his tender mind. Gradually their family shifted to Bengaluru's working-class locality of Srirampura. At that time he was still in school. Later Siddalingaiah was admitted to the R. Gopaldaswamy Iyer hostel. In order to earn the daily bread his mother worked as a sweeper in that hostel and his father had to look for jobs every day. Their days started with uncertainty as his father had no regular jobs. His father sometimes managed to do odd jobs as a substitute worker in a textile mill and at firewood, depots to carry firewood to people's homes.

Siddalingaiah continued his education and graduated from the Government Arts College. Education, enlightenment and the zeal within made him a keen reader, an eloquent speaker, skilled debater. Later he became enthusiastic and started articulating the pangs and atrocities done on Dalits through his literary expressions. He took a stand and supported the Minister for Municipal Administration, B. Basavalingappa in 1973, when he reacted against the Brahmanic hegemony and traditional mainstream literature. He raised his voice and disowned Hinduism and mainstream Kannada literature by saying that "fling the images of gods into the gutter" and also said that "much of Kannada literature is boosa", meaning cattle-feed. Siddalingaiah supported him as a student activist.

Some of his critically acclaimed poetry collections are *Saaviraru Nadigalu* (1975), *Kappu Kaadina Hadu* (1982), *Aayda Kavitegalu* (1997) and *Meravanige* (2000) *Nanna Janagalu mattu ithara Kavitegalu* (2005). He has two plays, and essays to his credit. His autobiography, titled *Ooru Ker*, has been translated into English as *A Word with You, World: The Autobiography of a Poet* in two volumes in 1997 and 2006. He was the recipient of many prestigious awards, such as the Pampa Award, Nrupatanga Award, Nadoja Award, and Rajyotsava Award from the State government. He was also conferred The Padma Shri posthumously. He acted as the Chairperson of the 81st Kannada Sahitya Sammeelan held in 2015 and the Chairperson of the Kannada Development Authority. He has been active in various fields to fight against social injustices.

Siddalingaiah died on 11 June 2021, in Bangalore at Manipal Hospital after suffering from COVID-19 pneumonia (Wikipedia). His death left a strong impact and created a hollowness in the Dalit community of Karnataka and the labour and left organizations as his activism and literary work were the pillars of the progressive movements in Karnataka.



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## UNIT 14 (B): ABOUT THE POEMS

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Siddalingaiah's poems are not only about the agony and pain of the Dalits. His suffering and experience as a Dalit raged his anger but he channelized his anger in a very positive and creative way. His poems are very different from conventional poems. His poems are the motto and tagline of the Dalits. They sound like 'reciting poems' as he himself calls them. A dedicated follower of Ambedkar and Nelson Mandela, Siddalingaiah created a different style in the genre of poetry as a whole and in Dalit literature particularly.

Siddalingaiah's poems are messages of revolution and awakened consciousness. The poems campaign the messages of humanity. His first poetry collection is named for Holey-Maadigara Haadu (The Song of the Holeyas and Maadigas) in 1975. Siddalingaiah reshaped modern kannada poetry by portraying the distress and hardship of Dalits. His poetry is replete with violent anger and rising consciousness. His intellectual interest drew him to other problem areas of society as well. He thought about the farmers and labourers and wrote about them in his poem Nanna Janagalu (My People). He was aware of both caste and class oppression and wrote about them in his poems of revolution.

Both the poems, "The Dalits are Coming" and "Thousands of River" have been used by the poet to illuminate people about their human rights and chronicle their history and struggle. Both poems function not only as a revolution but also as a testament to their vigorous attempt to rescue their true history and rework them. These poems are the living record that they have been historically ostracized in society. Now they want to recreate their own path towards emancipation. His poems are strong and determined that their protest cannot be subdued anymore. His poems advance the protest culture that started with the great Dalit philosopher, writer and activist Dr. B.R Ambedkar in Maharashtra. Siddalingaiah's poems echo Ambedkar's philosophy of unifying "education, unity and revolution" (Raamanathan 349). "The Dalits are Coming" and "Thousands of River" are written with a lot of hope, vigour, determination and confidence without any sense of pessimism and mere acceptance of destiny. His voice in these poems against casteism is very prominent and loud devoid of fear or hesitation.

**THE DALITS ARE COMING**

The dalits are coming, step aside-  
hand over the reins, let them rule.

Minds burning with countless dreams,  
slogans like thunder and lightning,  
in the language of earthquakes,  
here comes the dalit procession,  
writing [history] with their feet.

Into the dump go gods and gurus,  
down the drain go the lawmakers.

On a path they struck for themselves  
March the dalits in procession,  
burning torches in their hands,  
sparks of revolution in their eyes  
exploding like balls of fire.

For the thorn bushes of caste and religion,  
they were as thorns in the side.

They became the sky that looked down at  
the seven seas that swallowed them.

Since Rama's time and Krishna's time  
unto the time of the Gandhis,  
they had bowed low with folded hands.  
Now they have risen in struggle.

It grows, it breaks out of its shell  
the endless dalit procession.

Bullet for bullet, blood for blood,  
shoulder to shoulder, lives bound together.

Under the flag of dalit India  
stood the farmers and workers.

Flowers bloom in every forest,  
Thousands of birds take flight,  
the eastern sky turned red,  
morning broke for the poor.

The dalits are coming, step aside!  
The dalits have come, give it up!

(Translated from Kannada by M. Madhava Prasad From  
*The Exercise of Freedom: An Introduction to Dalit Writing*: Edited by K Satyanarayana and  
Susie Tharu, Published by Navayana, 2013).

### **INTERPRETATION:**

The poem “The Dalits are Coming” is a revolutionary poem depicting the passion and rage in the eyes of the Dalits who are marching in a procession on the street. They are heading in the procession with such zeal as if they know no boundary. It is difficult to stop them, so the poet says to clear their way immediately. They are uttering loud determined slogans that sound like thunder and lightning. They are creating and recording their own history as the history of Dalits remained in oblivion for ages. They are shouting their catchphrases so loudly and firmly while stamping on the ground so hard that it feels like earthquakes. They rejected Hinduism and by renouncing Hindu savarna gods and gurus. They have cast aside all Hindu laws and codes that teach untouchability and instruct its practice in society. They have no faith in ‘Manuvadi sanskriti’.

This poem is about the fiery anger and their rising consciousness about the social ignominy they have been suffering for generations. They instigate the human ego in Dalits to come forward and thrash the Hindu savarna laws and norms. Hinduism and caste are integral to each other. So they shed off both the 'thorns' of religion and caste that only caused them to bleed and suffer.

They are the literal and metaphorical torch-bearers for the coming generations of Dalits as they have overpowered their shame, fear, and stigma through their unified courage and fearlessness. They have become the sky and nothing and no one can despise him or scorn him. For centuries they have been condemned, subjugated, humiliated, and oppressed but have risen to such a stature that they need not bow down like they have been doing for a long time. They have been victimized for no fault of theirs and tolerated all violence inflicted on them but now they have risen to give it back with the same language. In return for their silence and endurance, they received more humiliation and torment. Hatred begets anger. Now Dalits have been joined by other deprived and marginalized groups like labours and farmers. This awakening is like waking up from a long and deep slumber of endurance and patience. Hence, the coming of the Dalits is so awaiting, invigorating and indispensable. The poet uses wonderful images of flowers blooming in the forest, thousands of birds taking flight, and the coming of dawn for the poor to emphasize the transformation of society for a better society.

### **THOUSANDS OF RIVERS**

Yesterday  
they came like a mountain,  
did my people.

Dark faces, silvery beards, smouldering eyes  
tearing day and night apart, kicking sleep goodbye.  
Blankets shivered at their waking;  
the earth shook under their feet.

Marching like ants, roaring like lions  
Down with inequality!

Forever down with  
the arrogance of the rich!

Like countless snakes they crawled in  
and filled the town;  
descended to the lower depths  
soared high in the sky.

In the streets and the lanes  
under trees and by the fences  
in the landlord's house, on the master's throne  
everywhere they flowed like water,  
did my people.

When they opened their mouths  
the others fell silent.

Listening to their voices  
the other throats dried up.

With their waving arms they stirred up  
a storm of revolution,  
did my people.

They caught by the neck those  
who had beaten them with sticks.

Police lathis, agents' knives, barrels of guns,  
Vedas, shastras, puranas  
all floated like dry leaves.

Thousands of rivers  
to the sea of struggle.

(Translated from Kannada by M. Madhava Prasad From  
*The Exercise of Freedom: An Introduction to Dalit Writing*: Edited by K Satyanarayana and  
Susie Tharu, Published by Navayana, 2013)

## **INTERPRETATION:**

“Thousands of Rivers” is the first poem of his second poetry collection of the same name, *Thousands of Rivers* published in 1979. The original publication was in the Kannada language Saviraru Nadigalu. This poem echoes his previous one “The Dalits are Coming”. There is a strong sense of community feeling when he addresses Dalit people as ‘my people’. He compares their coming to a mountain. The mountain is the symbol of permanence or the state of absolute consciousness. So their coming is not a simple coming of motion, this coming is full of dreams and hopes as every Dalit is now determined to free himself from the long-established, dictatorial, and cruel grip of casteism. Each part of their “untouchable” body, their faces, beards, eyes, and feet retaliate in thousands of years of suppressed rage. They want to break the bondage of the curse of caste through their procession which is marching forward with awakened consciousness. Their loud angry slogans which are like the roaring of the lions negate the supremacy of caste leaders. The poet uses a lot of animal imagery, such as marching ants, roaring lions, and crawling snakes to show their strength and unity, and pervasiveness against the perennial practice of untouchability. They are ubiquitous in every corner of that society to keep an eye on the eye and strike back and avenge. Society and the State oppressed them everywhere. The masters or landlords, the police, the Vedic texts, Shastras, and Puranas all played a cunning and dirty game, sometimes in the name of God and sometimes in the name of politics. He has mentioned all the tools used against them by the society and State to take their service and utilize them for their own selfish benefits.

This poem creates beautiful imagery where the society is like an assemblage of thousands of rivers. It takes the form of an ocean in its hugeness and roughness. The society Dalits live in is like that ocean, full of turmoil and disturbance. The poet refers to the political and cultural heterogeneity of the society through this amalgamation of thousands of rivers. Rivers are always dynamic and when thousands of rivers together become an immense ocean the uncertainty, turmoil, and diversity are a thousand times more. This society is a battleground for the Dalits where they have to survive through the daily fight against all odds and difficulties. Dalits continue with their battles through their slogans, political activism, and processions to awaken and unite their community against an ocean-like society that disowns them.

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## UNIT - 15

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### UNIT 15 (A): THE LIFE AND WORKS OF NAMDEO DHASAL (1949 – 2014)

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Namdeo Laxman Dhasal is popularly known as Namdeo Dhasal. Namdeo Dhasal is a very well-known name in the field of Dalit literature and Human Rights activism. He is a prolific Marathi writer and poet. Some of his notable Marathi poems are Golpitha (1973), Tuhi lyatta Kanchi (1981), Khel (1983), Moorkh Mhataryane dongar halvle, Amchya itihastil ek aprihary patra: Priya Darshini (1976), Ya Sattet Jiv Ramat Nahi (1995), Gandu Bagichha (1986), Mi Marale Suryachya Rathache Sat Ghode and Tuze Boat Dharoon Mi Chalalo Ahe. In 1999 Indian Government conferred him the title Padma Shri and in 2004 he achieved the Life Time Achievement award given by Sahitya Academy.

Dhasal was born on 15<sup>th</sup> February 1949 in Pune but his family moved to Mumbai when he was just a child of six years old. The economic condition of his family was very poor and he was brought up in a poverty-stricken environment. He was a meritorious student and developed an inclination towards writing at quite an early age. Dhasal had a very eventful life right from his teens. He was in love with an upper-caste Hindu girl and eloped with that girl to Pune. But this elopement raged the community leaders and caused a communal upheaval in the area where he lived. They were eventually separated. After his schooling, he became an avid reader and learned about Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy. Dhasal did not have high degrees but he was self-educated and could make inferences and references to highly intellectual concepts and ideas like cubism, surrealism etc. He could easily quote great writers and thinkers. He was fascinated with Ambedkar's vision of a new India, a truly secular, socialist, pluralistic, federalist republic. He was also initially attracted to Ram Manohar Lohia's 'desi socialism' and later on to Marxism and communists. He also married the daughter of a member of the Communist Party of India, Amar Shaikh, who was a great lyricist and singer. Thereby he witnessed the political surroundings that came his way. He was extremely talented in understanding deeper resources of languages though fluent in only his native Marathi and 'Mumbaia hybrid Hindi'. He was extremely insightful in the art of poetry.

The year 1972 is very significant in the history of the Dalit movement in India as the Dalit Panthers was founded by a few like-minded Dalits to establish Dalit rights in the graded system of Indian society. Dhasal was one of the founder members of Dalit Panthers, a militant activist organization. It was inspired by the Black Panthers in the United States at that time.



The ideals of Dr. Ambedkar inspired Dhasal to found this organization with the aim to fight caste discrimination and establish equal human rights. The foundation of this organization lies in the memories of their oppression. Dhasal and his friends, mostly Mahar writers and poets including Raja Dhale, and J. V. Pawar ex-caste oppression in their native villages and small towns. This ignited their resolve to establish a social organization that would protest and fight against all kinds of caste oppression, violence and injustice. Dhasal and his associates felt that Black Panthers in the United States can fit into the global framework of protest and anger but that was not sufficient to address the pattern of Indian caste-based hierarchy of the Indian social system and associated Brahmanical hegemony.

The death of Dr. Ambedkar in mid-1950 messed up the Republican Party of India. The ruling party, Indian National Congress and other rival parties took this opportunity and pursued the small-scale self-professed Dalit leaders to secure the votes of the minority communities. The political scenario of India was also changing fast. Shiv Sena party gradually came into prominence and very soon Vasant Naik became the Chief Minister of Maharashtra. Though Naik, a patron of Thackeray belonged to the minority community, followed the traditional Hindu cultural and political rhetoric. This Veteran leader of the National Congress is said to have conceptualized Shiv Sena. In the initial years, some people went to the extent of referring to him as Vasant Sena. So many Maharashtrian Dalits who were uncomfortable with this traditional caste system decided to liberate themselves by quitting Hinduism. They were trying to find a suitable platform free from traditional cultural and political biases in order to articulate their pangs and fight back. Dhasal and his associates, namely Raja Dhale, Arjun Dangle and J.V. Pawar at that time attracted the whole nation with their groundbreaking works in the literary scene of India. They had the talent and zeal to shake the very foundation of not only the literary scene of India but also the cultural and political structure through their literary work as well as activism. Dhasal continued to be the leader of the Dalit Panthers for three decades. He died in Mumbai at the age of 64 on 15<sup>th</sup> January, 2014, after suffering from colon cancer.

No poet has picturized the underbelly of the city of Mumbai as truthfully and practically as Dhasal. He published his first collection of poems under the name Golpitha. It is the infamous area of prostitution in central Mumbai where Dhasal spent his childhood. This red-light area was the breeding ground of all criminal activities, like smuggling, drug dealing, murder, 'supari', theft and whatnot. This villainous, illicit, criminal underworld of Mumbai found its true expression in Golpitha. In fact, for writing the introduction to the first edition of Golpitha Dhasal literally guided Vijay Tendulkar on a tour of this hell hole.

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## UNIT 15 (B): ABOUT THE POEMS

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In order to understand the theme of the poems prescribed in the syllabus it is important to understand the rise of Dalit literature and contextualize the Dalit panther movement within the political history of Bombay from the 1950s to the 1980s. These almost three decades are significant in the history of Bombay city as Sujata Patel argues that it is a period “of redefinition of Bombay, both “politically and imagination” (Patel 5). In the essay “Bombay and Mumbai: Identities, Politics and Populism” Patel discusses various socio-political events that occurred in Bombay after independence and how they brought major shifts in the city.

“Kamatipura” first appeared in Namdeo Dhasal’s Marathi collection, 'Tuhi Iyatta Kanchi' (What Grade Are You In) in 198. Later it was translated into English by Dilip Chitre, and published by Navayana in 2007. ‘Kamatipura’ is startling as well as a depressing poem about the world of prostitution in Mumbai. The poem is replete with the poignancy of filth and wretchedness of the lives of whores living in Kamathipura, a neighbourhood in Mumbai, India known for prostitution. The poem is filled with heartfelt pathos but does not minimize the harshness and horrible lives of the ill-fated women who work as prostitutes in that area. The terror and fright of the whore life shudder the readers. The imagery used by the author is extremely evocative.

In “Cruelty”, Dhasal expresses the affliction of a broken and beaten self. He uses the brahminical ideology of discerning the untouchables as less than humans or as animals. He aims to bring out the tales of oppression and exploitation of people of different castes, communities and religions. He has talked about how Dalits have suffered without food, water and shelter. The central theme of this poem is undeniably the age-old exploitation and subjugation of the Dalits but the poem ends with a positive note that they will overcome this situation sooner and it is their time to come out rebelliously.

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**UNIT 15 (C): TEXTS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE POEMS**

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**KAMATIPURA**

The nocturnal porcupine reclines here

Like an alluring grey bouquet

Wearing the syphilitic sores of centuries

Pushing the calendar away

Forever lost in its own dreams

Man's lost his speech

His god's a shitting skeleton

Will this void ever find a voice, become a voice?

If you wish, keep an iron eye on it to watch

If there's a tear in it, freeze it and save it too

Just looking at its alluring form, one goes berserk

The porcupine wakes up with a start

Attacks you with its sharp aroused bristles

Wounds you all over, through and through

As the night gets ready for its bridegroom, wounds begin to blossom

Unending oceans of flowers roll out

Peacocks continually dance and mate

This is hell

This is a swirling vortex

This is an ugly agony

This is pain wearing a dancer's anklets

Shed your skin, shed your skin from its very roots

Skin yourself

Let these poisoned everlasting wombs become disembodied.

Let not this numbed ball of flesh sprout limbs

Taste this

Potassium cyanide!

As you die at the infinitesimal fraction of a second,

Write down the small 's' that's being forever lowered.

Here queue up they who want to taste

Poison's sweet or salt flavour

Death gathers here, as do words,

In just a minute, it will start pouring here.

O Kamatipura,

Tucking all seasons under your armpit

You squat in the mud here

I go beyond all the pleasures and pains of whoring and wait

For your lotus to bloom.

— A lotus in the mud.

Translation: 2007, Dilip Chitre

From: *Namdeo Dhasal: Poet of the Underworld (Poems 1972-2006)*

Publisher: Navayana, Chennai, 2007.

### **INTERPRETATION:**

“Kamatipura” is compiled in the collection *Tuhi Iyatta Kanchi, Tuhi Iyatta?* The poem's title refers to the locality Kamatipura in Mumbai city, which is generally known as the oldest and largest ill-famed area dedicated to prostitution. According to Susan Dewey, this is the biggest red-light area in all of Asia. The poem consisting of seven stanzas delineates the dark gruesome lives of the prostitutes living in that area. The first stanza of the poem uses the metaphor of an animal, a porcupine which is active at night like the prostitutes. The plight of the prostitute is similar to a sprawling porcupine which looks like ‘an alluring grey bouquet’. The use of the two consecutive adjectives to describe the bouquet is striking. A bouquet which is usually made of different colourful flowers and green leaves is supposed to be fresh and bright but it is described as ‘grey’. The word ‘grey’ suggests dullness due to the overuse of the beautiful and colourful bouquet. The word ‘alluring’ brings out the irony of the life of the prostitutes. They are beautiful, lively, and fresh like any other girl or woman before they were thrust into this ‘hell’. They are ‘grey’ in their mind but they are forced to be ‘alluring’ in their body. The poet has used the metaphor of a chronic bacterial disease that is contracted chiefly by infection during sexual intercourse. Many prostitutes develop this disease due to unprotected unhygienic sexual life and suffer from painful symptoms of syphilis like sores (chancres) on the genitals, rectum, tongue or lips. Their deceased bodies are like “potassium cyanide” bearing the “pain of whoring and “waiting for the lotus to bloom”. Since this, is a sexually transmitted disease they are treated as untouchables and society rejects them as part of it. So, they are lost forever from this society and yearn for a normal life that will never come. No matter how much society has become advanced, prostitutes are not allowed to live a normal life in mainstream society.

The poet expresses his dejection over the appalling condition of these prostitutes of Kamatipura as they neither have their own voice nor do they have anyone to become their voice. The poet bursts into anger and articulates their ‘centuries’-long pain by attacking the shamelessness and laxity of the society and State. The probable explanation for the words ‘Man’ and ‘His’ may be society as part of the whole. The line “His god’s a shitting skeleton” bears a certain political connotation as it might refer to the worthless State policies which never pay any heed to the betterment of the prostitutes’ life and health.

The third stanza of this poem is full of pathos. The phrase “If you wish” has a pinch of sarcasm and at the same time utter despair over the denial of the normal human existence of the prostitutes of Kamatipura. The images of keeping “an iron eye” and watching “a tear in it”, freezing it, and saving it bash the repugnance of a whore’s life disguised by their “alluring form”. In the next few lines, the metaphorical representation of the prostitute as a porcupine can be interpreted as a socially constructed body of prostitutes which resembles the body of a porcupine. The body of a prostitute is covered with coats of sharp spines or quills which are used as protection against predation. Porcupines are not attractive, and so is a prostitute. Anupama Rao argues that in Dhasal’s work, the prostitute is constructed “as a symbol of detritus life, her body sucked dry and left to shrivel, and die”. In the night the porcupine gets active to evade its predation with its “sharp aroused bristles” and gets wounded. The prostitutes at Kamatipura at the fall of the night continually mate with strangers. The more they sell sexual pleasure, the more their wound is.

The poet then ragingly describes the life of a prostitute in Kamatipura as a pain-wearing dancer’s anklet”, “hell”, “ugly agony” and as a “swirling vortex”. He wants to unwrap the naked ugly truth of Kamatipura to the so-called civilized world. The poem Kamatipura portrays the ugly body of Bombay city which is contrary to the “cosmopolitan” body of the city. He mocks the extravaganza of cosmopolitan Bombay by placing side by side the hellish Kamatipura and wants to unravel its very truth by shedding the “skin from its very roots”. In the last stanza, the poet addresses Kamatipura as a body “squatting in the mud” and suffering endlessly “all seasons” from the agony of humiliation and assault. The poet then smashes the image of the cosmopolitan body of Bombay city. Appadurai views the term cosmopolitan as a bourgeois term. It is used in an elite sense excluding slums, poverty and deprivation. The images used in this poem also portray the picture of a scattered body and provide the picture of fragmentary bodies that don’t fit into the bourgeois notion of the complete body. These bodies don’t even exist as complete bodies, as the poet says they are, “numbed ball of flesh”.

### **CRUELTY**

I am a venereal sore in the private part of language.  
The living spirit looking out  
of hundreds of thousands of sad, pitiful eyes  
Has shaken me.

I am broken by the revolt exploding inside me.  
There's no moonlight anywhere;  
There's no water anywhere.  
A rabid fox is tearing off my flesh with its teeth;  
And a terrible venom-like cruelty  
Spreads out from my monkey-bone.

Release me from my infernal identity.  
Let me fall in love with these stars.  
A flowering violet has begun to crawl towards horizons.  
An oasis is welling up on a cracked face.  
A cyclone is swirling in irreducible vulvas.  
A cat has commenced combing the hairs of agony.  
The night has created space for my rage.  
A stray dog has started dancing in the window's eye.  
The beak of an ostrich has begun to break open junk.  
An Egyptian carrot is starting to savour physical reality.  
A poem is arousing a corpse from its grave.  
The doors of the self are being swiftly slammed shut.  
There's a current of blood flowing through all pronouns now.  
My day is rising beyond the wall of grammar.  
God's shit falls on the bed of creation.  
Pain and roti are being roasted in the same tandoor's fire.  
The flame of the clothless dwells in mythologies and folklore.  
The rock of whoring is meeting live roots;  
A sigh is standing up on lame legs;  
Satan has started drumming the long hollowness.  
A young green leaf is beginning to swing at the door of desire.  
Frustration's corpse is being sewn up.  
A psychopathic muse is giving a shove to the statue of eternity.  
Dust begins to peel armour.  
The turban of darkness is coming off.  
You, open your eyes: all these are old words.  
The creek is getting filled with a rising tide;

Breakers are touching the shoreline.  
Yet, a venom-like cruelty spreads out from my monkey-bone.  
It's clear and limpid: like the waters of the Narmada river

© Translation: 2007, Dilip Chitre

From: Namdeo Dhasal: Poet of the Underworld (Poems 1972-2006)

Publisher: Navayana, Chennai, 2007

### **INTERPRETATION:**

Dhasal begins by saying that people of his community, i.e Dalits are like “sore” in society in the eyes of people of higher positions in society. He starts with a declaration that he is shaken and shattered fighting this intolerable age-old oppression. Their protests were suppressed for ages. They got deprived of basic human needs repeatedly for centuries by the so-called civilized people belonging to the higher social positions. This lifetime oppression of a community has now reached the verge of humanity. Being a Dalit man, he is fighting against this deprivation himself to uphold his hunger. Though they try to come over their obstacles, they cannot fight against this anymore because they are tired of fighting for all these years. The poet is completely shaken and shattered by the rebel arising in his soul realizing the ‘living spirit’ instead of all the suffering and endurance. “The living spirit looking out of hundreds of thousands of sad, pitiful eyes/Has shaken me/ I am broken by the revolt exploding inside me”. Dalits were given “no moonlight” signifying a comfortable and peaceful life and even denied free access to water. People in higher positions have no care and no pity for Dalit people in their hearts. In the following lines, there is a sense of corporeality as he states, the entire Dalit community is so oppressed that their human existence has regressed to an animal-like state. This gives him the liberty to exercise a plethora of cruelty borne out of unquenched hunger and thirst to survive. This hunger and thirst have taken the form of cruelty because this deprivation is being continuing for long ages from their ancestors’ time. This cruelty is described using the imagery of a violent fox in extreme action and as a shoot of venom from his body: “A rabid fox is tearing off my flesh with its teeth; / and a terrible venom-like cruelty/ Spreads out from my monkey-bone”.

The poet wants his community to be released from this hellish identity. The poet attempts a release from his hunger-stricken cruel animal state to the human state. He shifts his mood from dejection and anger and attempts to connect with the beauty and calm of nature. He



adores the stars and the surroundings and hopes for the dejected, poverty-stricken community people may have a life to adore nature, to perceive the beauty of life. The term violet has been emphasized by the transferred epithet “flowering violet” as the violet is not a flower but the flowers are violet. Violet blossoming flowers that have started to spread towards the horizon represent the increasing consciousness of the Dalit people and their spirit and determination to come to the centre from the margin. The colour violet symbolizes power, leadership, wealth, respect and spiritual growth too and it is calming, refreshing and pacifying. Here it also comes to symbolize independence, success, wisdom and psychic ability. It signifies that Dalit people have started to go beyond community walls and will soon reach their goals coming out of the upper-class people’s domination and humiliation. The poet is so delighted to see an “oasis” on “a cracked face” after a long struggle for centuries. The faces that have remained blank and shabby so far out of deprivation and oppression learned to overcome the obstacles. The term “oasis” signifies the courage of the Dalit people who give a damn to the Brahminical notions of society. Cyclone means the revolt in the mind of Dalits that is churned out of hunger, cruelty, deprivation, and unforgettable wounds that are non-reducible like agitated vulvas. Their determination and spirit are indomitable like a hungry wolf. The poet again uses the symbol of another animal cat which is symbolic of rebirth but is also associated with mystery, magic and unpredictability. The imagery of a cat combing its “hairs of agony” symbolizes that Dalits are taking note of all the unbearable pain and deprivation done against them and getting ready to strike back. Every night when the poet goes to sleep the silence surrounding them creates space for him to produce horrible anger and resolve in him as he is no more able to tolerate the suffering of his community people. The dancing stray dog that is visible through the “window’s eye” represents the silence, desolation, and rejection carried throughout the ages. The cruelty inflicted on them has made it as hard as the beak of an ostrich to break down the Brahminical ideologies which are nothing but “open junk”. Dalit people are physically and mentally bashed for ages now the poet desperately wishes to save his community people through healthy eating symbolized by the “Egyptian carrot”. The cruelty to Dalit people and their suffering can even raise a corpse from its grave. Such huge disrespect is faced by every Dalit man that’s why Dhasal conveys that whenever a Dalit raises to achieve something and try to add meaning to their life doors are always shut to them and they are given no opportunities and their rights are taken away from them. Being hungry they could not even feel the passage of blood flowing through the nook and corner of the body. It’s like when someone is thirsty for a long time, he won’t be able to feel the water passing through the throat. The suffering is now moving beyond the limit. All of these days were full of suppression and no goal, no success and nothing as

hunger hunts them cruelly. They feel God has huge anger on them as the Dalit community may be so because God does not leave Dalit people to move towards their life. They were always been deprived in every situation because of their caste. The “bed of creation” is referring to his people. Both roti and their souls are burning under the same fire cruelly, that is the python of hunger. “flame of clothless” refers that they have no livelihood and no proper life structure. This cruelty is like a rock that cannot be broken so easily and this whore is still alive and haunting people of his own in the form of ‘satan’, i.e., the cruel hunger. In the later part of the poem, the poet says they will achieve new things and set a path for the coming generation of Dalit people. Above all a green leaf is seen, that is the young generation. They are seen as the great door of desires. They can go against all difficulties and achieve the goal of breaking the wall of domination. Frustrated souls are now woken up and started to fight for their rights. The poet says that this cruel hunger is coming again but before it arises, he implores his people to awaken their consciousness and understand the politics played on them and raise like a tide that breaks the shoreline. Even though hunger is continuing for all these past years it will get cleared like the Narmada River.

The poet conveys that the young generation will come over all the domination and what they have faced for all these years. The language of this poem is replete with the speaker’s agony and injury but the suffering has reached its limit and is bursting with the revolting flow of anger. Towards the end of the poem, however, the speaker feels the venom-like cruelty coming out from his monkey bone. However, this time, the melted venom-like cruelty renders a much more compelling sense of intelligibility to his anger, spite, and the consequent revolt within. This time the intelligibility of his anger and revolt is not abstracted by anything. Critics view this river-like fluidity as a possible avenue to reterritorialize the speaker’s tormented self for lack of water is an integral aspect of the Dalit lived experience. In Chitre’s words “To be dalit is to be a human being denied free access to water...”. In this poem, the poet very ironically condemns holders of social purity, so-called upper caste people through his imagery and language that exploits the Dalits and denies them a normal human life in society.

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## CONCLUSION

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In the essay, “The Architecture of Anger: On Namdeo Dhasal’s Golpitha” Dilip Chitre comments that “The anger of Golpitha rises to the level of architecture because it both

systematizes disparate images from an authentic world hitherto invisible in literature and uses the energy of anger to encompass a whole range of negative feelings and positive visions". Kamatipura and Cruelty bring out the humiliation, estrangement and exploitation of women and Dalits. "Kamatipura" discloses the dark whore-world as Tendulkar says "the world of days of night" and the age-old tale of agony and "Cruelty" discloses the agony of Dalit life. Vinay Dharvadkar in one of his articles "Dalit Poetry in Marathi" argues that Dhasal's poems represent the life of "urban untouchables usually living in street side slums, setting up house on the public sidewalks in a metropolis like Bombay" (Dharvadkar 319). In Kamatipura all prostitutes are Dalits, untouchables. Anupama Rao also argues that Golpitha is "the iconic text of the insurrectionary speech and the power of renaming and resignification". Being connected with Golpitha, a lowly red-light area of Bombay Dhasal witnessed and experienced its real life. In Punalekar's words, in Dhasal's Golpitha 'leprous women are paid the price and fucked on the road, where children cry nearby, where prostitutes waiting for business sing full-throated love songs". Thus, it is possible to say that Dhasal in 'Kamatipura' attempts to give "voice to voiceless" and transfers the pain and distress of Dalits in order to allow the readers to witness the plight of their life.

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## UNIT – 16

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### UNIT 16 (A): LIFE AND WORKS OF MEENA KANDASAMY (1984 - )

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The full name of Meena Kandasamy is Ilavenil Meena Kandasamy. She is a Chennai-based emerging poet, fiction writer, translator and activist. She has two poetry collections to her credit. Her first book, *Touch*, was published in 2006 and the second *Ms Militancy* was published in 2010. A couple of her poems have won an award in an Indian poetry competition. She has been very active as a writer as her poetry has been published in various journals, including *The Little Magazine*, *Kavya Bharati*, *Indian Horizons*, *Muse India*, and the *Quarterly Literary Review*, Singapore. She also edited *The Dalit*, a bi-monthly alternative English magazine of the Dalit Media Network in its first year of publication from 2001 to 2002. She also published *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014), *When I Hit You: Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* (2017), and the novella *Exquisite Cadavers* (2019). She was the co-author of a 2007 non-fiction *Ayyankali: A Dalit Leader of Organic Protest*. Her other non-fiction *The Orders Were To Rape You: Tigresses in the Tamil Eelam Struggle* was published in 2021. She has also many translations to her credit. Kandasamy is influenced by many Dalit leaders and writers. Her translations include the writings and speeches of Thol. Thirumavalavan, leader of Viduthalai Chiruthaigal or the Dalit Panthers of India (*Talisman: Extreme Emotions of Dalit Liberation*, 2003) and the poetry and fables of Tamil Eelam poet, Kasi Anandan. She is one of the 21 short fiction writers from South Asia featured in an anthology published by Zubaan, New Delhi.

She was born in 1984 in Tamilnadu. Her parents were both university professors. She developed an early interest in poetry, and later adopted the name, Meena. She completed a Doctorate of Philosophy in Socio-linguistics from Anna University, Chennai. She began writing poetry at age 17 and began translating books by Dalit writers and leaders into English.

Critics view that for Kandasamy, writing is a process of coming to terms with her identity, her “womanness, Tamilness and low/ outcasteness”. She says, “my gender, language and castelessness were not anything that I had to be ashamed of... I wrote poetry very well aware of who I was. But I was also sure of how I wanted to be seen. I wanted to be taken on my own terms... I wanted to be totally bare and intensely exposed to the world through my writings. I wanted it to be my rebellion against the world”. Kandasamy makes it clear that she

has never been interested in accolades and admiration. Her entire writing corpus is devoted to the fight against the Dalit oppression and marginalization of women.

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## UNIT 16 (B) ABOUT THE POEMS

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Poems compiled in *Ms Militancy* (published by Navayana in 2010) is meant to undertake the task of waging war and exhibiting extreme defiance to the brahminical hegemony. The title of the anthology itself shows the central themes of its verses. Being born into a scheduled tribe she experienced how Dalits are suppressed, exploited and humiliated in everyday life. This convention is going on for ages and is still getting repeated. The three poems prescribed in the syllabus “Massacre of the Innocents”, “Facing the Music” and “Nailed” address the intersectionality of caste and gender and in doing so she keeps no bar. She strips off the very ancient source of brahmanic supremacy and the so-called bearers of social structure. She directly accuses them of the atrocities and subjugation inflicted on Dalits from the Vedic period. She also emphasizes the multi-layered oppression Dalit women suffer.

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## UNIT16 (C) TEXTS AND THE INTERPRETATION OF THE POEMS

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### MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS

indra, chief vedic deity and  
inspirational hate-monger.

indra, who went to work  
inside diti's womb, afraid  
she would mother the other,  
the demons...

indra who butchered  
her fetus into forty-nine bits,  
so that, as the legend goes, they  
were reborn as wailing winds.

indra. indra. narindra.  
the hindu god of war.

herod merely chopped up male kids  
in bethlehem, hitler only gassed  
jewish infants in germany, and  
the peacekeepers just dipped  
tamil babies in boiling tar  
in eelam...  
but indra indra narendra alone  
perfected this science of slaughter,  
killing children of the other  
before they were even  
born.

indra. indra. narendra.  
the genocidal god of gods.

Meena Kandasamy

(From Kandasamy, Meena. *Ms Militancy*, Navayana, 2010.)

### **INTERPRETATION:**

The title of the poem refers to a biblical incident narrated in the nativity narrative of the Gospel of Matthew (2:16–18) in which Herod the Great, king of Judea, orders the execution of all male children who are two years old and under in the vicinity of Bethlehem. Christians venerate them as the first Christian martyrs. The painting named Holy innocents also shows the same incident. Then she directly goes on to an Indian mythological character, the God of war Indra and the massacre created by him. Kandasamy refers to the Puranic story of lord Indra and Diti, who is believed to be the daughter of the Prajapati Daksha and the wife of sage Kashyap. Indra cut Diti's embryo into pieces.

When there was a quarrel over the Amrita churned out of the sea of milk Diti's sons were cut into pieces and killed by lord Indra. Indra got access to Diti's womb through disguise and treachery. He cut her fetus into forty-nine pieces and while cutting it he said *Maruda*, meaning do not cry. The legend of Indra says these *Maruts* later became Devas and followers of lord Indra. wisdomlib.org

The poet uses Anaphora by repeating the name Indra but very deliberately she uses small case in the spelling for this proper noun to express her anger at the brutality, betrayal and deception of caste-Hindu men. She calls Indra a hate-monger denoting someone who deals with hate and inspires to generate hatred. Such a hate monger is the chief or main God of all the Gods in Hinduism. Kandasamy strikes hard and mocks the Vedic texts which gloriously pronounce the supremacy of lord Indra and depute him as the leader of Gods. She jeers at him by calling him "narindra" in a very silly manner.

Kandasamy then moves on to draw comparisons between Indra and all the infamous 'hate-mongers' in history. She states that Indra perfected the science of slaughtering by killing an embryo. Even Herod, Hitler and the peacemakers of Tamilnadu are nothing compared to him. The last stanza is full of sarcasm and pathos. Kandamy also exposes the hypocrisy, inhumanity and brutality of the kings, leaders even so-called peacemakers or social policies and reveals the bigotry, fanaticism, and deception of Vedic texts which are nothing but representatives of Brahminism and campaigners of brahmanic hegemony. The massacre of the Innocents is going on in the form of domination, exploitation, and marginalization of women and Dalits in Indian Hindu society.

### **FACING THE MUSIC**

Your lover was lynched

For one of those readily available reasons.

Too weak for suicide, too mute for murder

You live. Post-traumatically, poetically.

You live as if he has never died.



Shell-shocked, spellbound, your third eye  
Clamped shut to keep the nightmare away,  
Your blood bears the salt of withheld tears.  
Never do you mention that your man—so alive  
Even when being set alight—was humbled  
Into handfuls of ash and defiant bones.

You turn deaf to face this faulty music,  
You sacrifice all sleep to live this fragile dream.  
You've sworn to never let him wander out of sight.  
You hold him captive in your shattered,  
Unwavering world and he, like a flame,  
Ceaselessly flickers, so your eyes too dance,  
And your moonglow in his ghostly presence  
Makes poets sing of how, once upon a time,  
Beauty basked in the light of her undying Love.

Meena Kandasamy

(From Kandasamy, Meena. *Ms Militancy*, Navayana, 2010.)

### **INTERPRETATION:**

“Facing the Music”, is a short poem that presents the horrible situations in which Dalit women are compelled to survive. This is a compelling narrative about how Dalit women survive at

ground level. Kandasamy highlights how a Dalit woman witnessed the murder of her husband and then was obligated to live with that violence untold and unexpressed.

Kandasamy narrates through a story the system of ingrained violence occurring against the Dalits throughout the ages and how Dalit women are to digest that. Here a Dalit woman's husband is lynched for "readily available reasons". This suggests the Dalit man is killed for creating some known offense to the upper-caste community. They do not feel the necessity of any legal trial rather they give punishment to Dalits as per their own rules. Brahmanical hegemony goes to the extent of killing a Dalit and then keeping the wife of that Dalit man mum through the violence and atrocities put on them. Kandasamy speaks to that Dalit wife who witnessed her husband's lynching and then was so traumatized that she even cannot express her feeling of loss. She is so timid and powerless that she cannot even take her own life or take revenge on the murderers of her husband. The legal codes of the country do not permit anyone to take one's own or someone else's life and the Indian caste society wants her to tolerate, tolerate to the extent of numbness. She only breathes and lives to be a numb piece of life in a coma. She is utterly traumatized by the violence inflicted on them and lives a poetic life, a life of unending agony as poets are believed to live and relieve their pains. She is shell-shocked, a shock that only a soldier can have on the battlefield while experiencing killings through bombshells. She is always kept in a kind of spell and living like a captive always thinking in one direction. She even keeps her "third eye", which is the mind's eye closed to keep the horror of her husband's murder away from her. The mental injury caused by her husband's brutal murder is so intense and gruelling that she could not even shed tears for her loss. She is terrified to recall the incident of his death. Now, that pent-up emotion of loss and pain is mixed up in her blood and she is suffering invisibly, silently. She never expresses to anyone how her husband is killed and even when the pyre of her husband was burnt, she was inexpressible about her husband's aliveness at one point in time. Her strong-minded husband, defiant to Brahmanic hegemony has been "humbled" by killing and now turned to just a handful of ashes.

Kandasamy goes on to say how the plight of this Dalit woman after the lynching of her husband. She is living like a deaf who cannot hear as she does not want to face the "faulty music". Music is the most beautiful thing to hear as it produces harmony and synchronization but when faulty it is difficult to bear. Her predicament after her husband's death is like that of disharmonized and desynchronized music which is hard to bear. She is unable to sleep as she is thinking of all the dreams that have been shattered due to his death. Once she swore not to keep her husband away from her sight but now, he is lost forever from her sight. She is now

living like a captive having no freedom or choice in life and this ever-changing world has now come to a stop as her world has stopped moving. Her world is motionless like a flame that is flickering endlessly without any wavering. Her eyes are also burning ceaselessly like that unwavering flame. All her “moonglow” or beauty is now existing in her husband’s ghostly presence. It suggests her beauty is now withered away with her husband’s absence. When her husband was alive and they were living a happy loving life, her beauty had a warmth and glow but that is now a matter of the past. All her beauty is now crumbled.

### **NAILED**

Men are afraid of any woman who makes poetry and dangerous portents. Unable to predict when, for what, and for whom she will open her mouth, unable to stitch up her lips, they silence her.

Her pet parrot developed an atrocious fetish for the flesh of sacrificial goats, so, Kulamaayi was bolted within a box and dropped in the Kaveri.

She teased and tormented his celibacy, so Miss Success-Village was thrown into a well by a wandering socialite-godman.

She was inaccessible and unattainable, so, Durga was put in an iron trunk that settled on a riverbed and even the men and women who tried to approach her were informed in a prerecorded voice that she was out of reach and network range and coverage area.

She was an outcast who had all the marks of a fiery orator who would some day run for parliament, so, a nail was driven into her head on the instructions of her brahmin fiancé and her coffin was set adrift in a wailing river.

She was black and bloodthirsty, so, even Kali found herself shut inside her shrine.

They were considerably low-risk, so most other women were locked up at home.

Meena Kandasamy

(From Kandasamy, Meena. *Ms Militancy*, Navayana, 2010.)

### **INTERPRETATION:**

“Nailed” is Meena Kandasamy’s another poem from the collection, *Ms.Militancy*. This poem shows she is desperate when it comes to expressing herself. Her language knows no boundary when she is angry, angry enough to express her fullest. This poem gives the message that active resistance is the only respite from atrocities. Kandasamy’s language is a weapon that she sometimes uses as a shield to safeguard herself and sometimes as a spear to attack the hypocrites and dominators. The very title “Nailed” is significant and symbolic of pain. Drawing the Christian reference to Jesus Christ’s crucifixion through nailing his hands and feet it can be said that the very image of nailed Christ brings out the horror of agony. Another parallelism can be brought down given by Jasbir Jain. He views,

If a female body was to be nailed down as Gulliver was by the Lilliputians, the different nails would be the projected religious and mythological role models, the issue of purity (inclusive of virginity and fidelity), marriage, lineage, caste and economic status. Thus, violence, rape, abduction, and control become the necessary associates to produce a docile body and control its labor (Jain 2011). Kandasamy makes it clear that poetry and its language can be the best medium to express oneself but unfortunately in the men’s world women have no space to articulate, hence no language and no poetry. Therefore, men are scared of articulate women who use language as a warning in their poetry. Men are fearful of unpredictable women as they are out of their control and domination. Men feel secure and gratified when women are silent and have no language, no voice. But when they are vocal men feel unconfident as their hypocrisy can come out glaringly.

The origin of caste and gender discrimination dates back to the time when Manusmriti and other Brahmanical texts were written. Kandasamy brings several myths and characters from Tamil classics to portray how women for ages have been made victims of violence and domination. Even Goddesses like Kulamaayi, Kali, and Durga were discriminated against and punished for being the “second sex”. In different states, depending on the temper of the deity,

there is the ritual of animal sacrifices or vegetarian offerings. Kulamaayi was made the sacrifice of her pet parrot and was gulped into the river Kaveri and Kali was thrown into a well for having the courage of teasing God's celibacy, lastly, the unattainable indomitable Durga was caged in an iron trunk and deserted on the riverbed. These names are all associated with mythology and they are also worshipped today. Kandasamy shows this shameless hypocrisy and double standard ness of men in position. Even the goddesses were punished for raising their voices. The reference is for Dalit women who protested against the conventionally established gender frames and claimed their space but were pitifully denied freedom like the goddesses and were locked up at home. The following lines from Kandasamy's poem "Nailed" can be read as an exposition of, what Wendy Doniger calls the 'Clytemnestra Syndrome' - "the more intrinsically powerful, and hence dangerous, goddesses are perceived to be, the more intrinsically powerful, and hence dangerous human women are perceived to be, and hence greater the need to keep human woman far away from the actual use of any power in the world" (Doniger 280).

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## CONCLUSION

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All three pieces of poetry interpreted above express Kandasamy's anger and pain as she says in an interview with Sampsonia Way Magazine, "My poetry is naked, my poetry is in tears, my poetry screams in anger, my poetry writhes in pain. My poetry smells of blood, my poetry salutes sacrifice. My poetry speaks like my people, my poetry speaks for my people". Her three poems appear to be painful narratives of triply oppressed Dalit women.

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### SUGGESTED READINGS

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2. *Poisoned bread: Modern Marathi Dalit Literature* (1992)-edited by Arjun Dangle
3. *New Dalit writings from South India; Dossier1, Tamil and Malayalam* (2011)-S. Tharu & K.Satyanarayana
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8. *Major Ideology of Dalit Panthers* (1992)-by Baburao Bagul.
9. *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement* (1992)-by Eleanor Zelliot.

10. "Introduction" (2001)-by Maithreyi Krishnaraj to *Motherhood in India: Glorification without Empowerment?*

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## ASSIGNMENTS

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1. Write a note on how the fiery poetry of Dr. Siddalingaiah contributed in the progressive movements of the Dalits.
2. Comment on the use of rage and humour in the poems of Siddalingaiah.
3. How does Siddalingaiah express his idea of modern society in his verses?
4. How does Namdeo Dhasal's poetry bring out the dark underbelly of Bombay city?
5. How does Dhasal use his verse to embrace those discarded by society?
6. Attempt a Dalit corporeal analysis of select poems of Namdeo Dhasal.
7. Assess Namdeo Dhasal's contribution to the tradition of Marathi poetry.
8. How do Kandasamy's poems in *Ms. Militancy* wage a fierce resistance to Brahminical patriarchy?
9. Meena Kandasamy's poems challenge the dominant mode in contemporary Indian poetry in English. Discuss.
10. How does Dalit poetry has become a tool of protest against caste-based oppression?