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EMERGENCE OF DALIT AND DALIT LITERATURE IN INDIA

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Abstract

This research paper attempts to study the emergence of the term dalit and its various interpretations. Though the opinion of prominent figures like Gandhi, Ambedkar, Phule, EV Ramaswami, Dalit Panthers Movement, Marxist, and others are analyzed, the contemporary writers have not been included in this paper. Further I analyse the term 'dalit literature' and its various implications. I argue that the representation of dalit literature celebrates the dalit condition as an unparalleled one and a permanent entity. It ignores the differences within the dalit communities; rather they concentrate on building on similarities. Through these similarities they create a dalit identity and culture that defines '*Dalitness'* which is not only national but international in its inspiration. To this end dalit writers find and celebrate the similarities of dalit literature with Black literature inspired by the Panthers Movements in USA. Thus transformation of the 'dalit' identity" represents a new type of political assertion that confronts, counters and redesigns older forms of struggles, against both class and caste exploitation.

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Emergence of the term 'dalit'

His article 'Untouchable: what's in a name?' Charsley S discusses the politics of the term untouchability[1]. Every term used for describing the ex-untouchables comes from particular political discourses and ideological overtones[2]. The terms, 'untouchable', 'harijan', Scheduled Caste and dalits all reveal a political position of the name giver. So it is very important to study why ex-untouchables call themselves as dalits[3]. This chapter focuses on the different political and ideological lineages of the term 'dalit'. Such a discussion is particularly important because the Dalit Panthers Movement and neo-dalits create a separate dalit identity and literature to express them and demand their rightful place in the social and political arena.

Like the term 'dalit', which is of Hebrew origin, the them, 'caste' is not an Indian but is derived from the Portuguese term 'caste' meaning pure bread[4]. There are various terms which approximate to it in Indian languages. There is the widely used concept of *varna* which refers to a notional all India four fold division of society on the basis of the types of work performed by

[1] Charsley,S. (1996), "Untouchable: What is in a Name*?". Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 2(1), pp. 1-24.

[2] *Ibid., p. 24.* Charley points out that each and every term viz. Untouchable, harijan, dalit etc was discussed widely because all these terms produce interest of certain politics.

[3] Moon, Vasant. (2001). *Growing Up Untouchability in India: A dalit Autobiography.* New Delhi: Vistar Publication, p.×

[4] Pratheepan Pampirikunnu. (2007) *Dalit Padanam: Swathwam, Samskaram, Sahityam.* Thiruvanathapuram: State Institute of Languages, p.13.

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people in the society. Similarly the term *jati* refers to endogamous groups which are usually more or less localized or at least have a regional base.

The term 'untouchable' is one of the several terms used to refer to castes at the bottom of the caste hierarchy and originated in the 20th century[5]. It also refers to people who were considered to be impure and polluted by upper caste hindus. The hereditary 'untouchability' of certain section of the 'Hindu' society, as seen in the caste system of India, is a unique phenomenon in the world. These untouchables have been also identified as *avarnas, atisudras, antyajas, panchama, parial* and *namasudra*. The stigma of untouchability[6] has been attached to them because they are seen to be doing 'polluting' labours such as scavenging, tanning and sweeping.

"Untouchability' was practiced by upper caste hindus through the varna or caste system which was established in ancient India According to Rig Veda, the oldest of the four Vedas, the distinction of the four varna dates back to the origin of the human race. That is to say, at the time of creation, the brahmin was born from the mouth of *purush* (the primeval man), the kshatriya from the arms, the vaishya from his thighs and the sudra from his feet. However, the four varnas were actually established during the middle of the later Vedic era (1000-600 BC) which marked the formation of aryan agrarian society. It was during this time that the above myth was created and inserted in to the Rig Veda, the most important scripture of brahmanism in order legitimize the four varna systems[7].

The brahmin, who made up the highest ranked varna monopolized the position of priest and teacher of the Vedas. The kshatriya took charge of politics and the military, the vaishya formed the commoner ranks of cultivators, herders and merchants, and the sudras were relegated to the position of servants. The top three varnas were the regular members of the aryan society. They were called 'the twice born' and were allowed to participated in the religious worship presided over by brahmin. In contrast, the sudra were segregated from 'the twice born'. Below the sudra, a class of inferior people existed, in which the *chandalans*[8], or untouchables were placed.

Here social discriminations appeared in a stratified form[9]. They were not permitted to have any property, and if at all he possessed some property, his master or the brahmin could seize without any difficulty so they were put in a condition of perpetual poverty and subjugation. They were not given the right of learning and their attempt to learn or hear religious scriptures were punished by pouring hot melted led in their ears and cutting of their tongues. For all practical purposes the sudra were treated as slaves and were segregated from the society.

The only crime the untouchable did is they were born as 'lower caste'. For centuries they have been facing economic, social and religious discriminations. They should differentiate themselves from caste hindus by living in hamlets, digging separate walls, wearing certain

[5] Sharma,Ursula. (1999). *Caste,* Buckingham: Open University Press, p.45.
[6] Their touch, and shadows and even their voices are believed to pollute caste Hindus. Untouchability has been considered as 'congenital stigma' (inborn stigma) which cannot be eliminated by some rites or deeds.
[7] Kotani, H. (ed.) (1997), *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed*, New Delhi: Manohar, p. 3.
[8] The outsiders of the caste system were known as *avarnas*, because according to *Manu dharma* they did not have any *varna* not included in the order prescribed by Manu dharma.
[9] Kotani, H. (ed.) (1997), *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed*, New Delhi: Manohar, p. 3.

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ornaments to convey dignity or status and moving around without an upper cloth or blouse. They were not allowed to study sacred books of caste hindu and worshipping in temples. Their touch and even their shadows were considered as defiling so they were not allowed to drop water from tanks and wells. They were forbidden to build houses of bricks to use. Their women were obliged not to cover their breasts. The caste hindus punished them severely if they violated these norms. These people belonging to the bottom of the varna system, namely the sudras, avarnas or *panchamas* were segregated and not considered as part of the main village settlement. Hence they came to be known as untouchables.

These 'untouchable' castes were systematically listed in the 1931 census of India and this untouchable castes in India were officially defined us depressed class in 1932.[10] The term Scheduled Caste comes from the provision of the Government of India Act 1935 which contained an official Schedule or list of castes in need of special government attention and protection[11]. Since the time of census, they were named as Scheduled Caste or depressed castes[12]. With the increased sensibility the leaders of Indian national freedom struggles for a variety of reasons replaced the term by a new term *harijan* coined by Gandhi[13].

Perspectives and Ideologies of Lower Caste Naming

Through the passage of time and history several ideologues, political leaders and institutions have used different terms to denote the conditions of the lower castes. The name comes with a particular political logic and position and has contributed to the transformation of lower caste identities into dalits over a long period of time. Some of these positions are discussed in this section.

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Hindu Texts on Sudra and Other Lower Castes

The suffering of dalits started almost 3500 years ago when the people of the 'first nation' who settled in India from time immemorial were invaded and defeated by the first colonizers, the aryans[14]. They enslaved dalits not only by suppressing them physically, but also psychologically, culturally and in terms of and religion. The aryans created the myth of four orders to justify their rule and oppress lower castes.[15] Here I examine the various textual references which advocate the inhuman treatment of the lower castes. For example, the Purusasuktha hymn explains,

> 'The brahmin (priestly castes) was born from his mouth, both his arms were Rajanya (Kshatriya, warriors), His thighs became the Vaishya (traders), from his feet the *Sudra* (serving class) were produced, all those human beings who did not fit into these four fold structure were outcastes-outcaste the purview of the divine body.'[16]

[10] Kamblez, N.D. (1982), *The Scheduled Caste*, New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, p. 30.
[11] *Ibid., p. 3*1.
[12] *Ibid.,* p. 32.
[13] The idea of harijan coined by Gandhi is discussed later part of the chapter.
[14] Joshi, Barbara R. (1986). *Untouchable: Voices of the Dalit Liberation Movements,* London: Minority Rights Group, p. 45.
[15] Kotani, H. (ed.) (1997). *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed*, New Delhi: Manohar, p.3.
[16] Massey, James. (1997), *Down Trodden: The Struggle of India's Dalits for Identity, Solidarity and Liberation,* Geneva: Risk Book Series of WCC Publication, p. 12.

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Similarly in the Rig-Veda, which was written around 1000 BC, the Chandogya Upanishad compares a chandala, an outcast to a dog or a swine in the following way:

> 'according to those who are pleasant conduct here, the prospect is, indeed, that they will enter a pleasant womb, either the womb of a brahmin or the womb of a kshatriya or the womb of a vaishya. But those who are of stinking conduct here, the prospect, is indeed, that they will enter a stinking womb either the womb of a dog, or the womb of swine or the womb of a chandala (10:7). [17]

Epics, such as the Mahabharata and Ramayana from the period 600 BC- 500 BC, also advocate and legitimize the varna system. For instance in Ramayana, there is a story about Rama who kills Shurpanaka, a sudra woman who fall in love with him. In Mahabharata, there is a story of Eklavya, a sudra who was killed, because he tries to learn the use of weapons.[18] Similarly the Bhagavad Gita established the belief in the four castes by insisting these were created by the lord Krishna himself. It advices members of each cast to follow the duties prescribed by script faithfully and says that by doing this they would be on the path to salvation.

Manuscript, ordinance of Manu written in the 7th century BC, even removed the human identity of lower castes. Manuscript accepts only the twice born castes- brahmin, kshatriya and vaisya and the once born sudra.[19] There is no fifth caste.[20] The rest of them were known as avarnas. According to Manu, the most despised group were chandala (Offspring of a *Sudra* man and a Brahmin woman) and sapaka (offspring of a chandala male and a pukkasa female), the fate was a cruel one. Thus Manu writes,

> 'The dwelling of chandala and sapaka should be outside of the village, this should be depriving of dishes, and their property consists of dogs and asses. Their cloths should be the garments of the dead, and their ornaments should be broken dishes and they must constantly wander about[21].

The *chandala* and *sapakas* are supposed to be the forefathers of contemporary dalits. For centuries the status of dalit had been in the nadir of the society. In response two protest movements, Jainism and Buddhism, led by Mahavira (580-468 BC) and Buddha (563-483 BC), attempted to reform and oppose the varna system[22]. But they were both suppressed by the strong religious and political authority[23]. This showed that the varna system had the backing of the ruling savarna castes who used the system and its legitimating texts to increase their exploitative hold over the lower castes.

Jotiba Phule

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[17] Massey, James. (1997), *Down Trodden: The Struggle of India's Dalits for Identity, Solidarity and Liberation,* Geneva: Risk Book Series of WCC Publication, p. 13.
[18] *Ibid*,. p. 16.
[19] Kotani, H. (ed.) (1997), *Caste System, Untouchability and the Depressed*, New Delhi: Manohar, p. 3.
[20] The remaining part of the society was known *avarna* which literally means colourless. They are outsiders of the society.
[21] Manu 10:51f, cited in Massey, James. (1997), *Down Trodden: The Struggle of India's Dalits for Identity, Solidarity and Liberation,* Geneva: Risk Book Series of WCC Publication, p. 12.
[22] Massey, James. (1997), *Down Trodden: The Struggle of India's Dalits for Identity, Solidarity and Liberation,* Geneva: Risk Book Series of WCC Publication, p. 21.
[23] Menon, A. Sreedhara. (1978), *Cultural Heritage and Kerala: An Introduction*, Cochin: East- West Publication Pvt. Ltd.

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Before Jotiba Phule, bhakti[24] saints advocated equality for all and spread the idea that God is one for every caste. But it is Jotiba Phule who popularized the idea of equality in social and religious life. He formed Satya Shodhak Samaj in 1873 which was the first organization fighting for the rights and upliftment of 'untouchables'. He dreamt of an egalitarian society where religion had no role. The Samaj, under Phule, focused on two aspects: education for 'untouchables' and resistance to the brahmanical ideology. As Phule saw it, imperialism was linked with Brahmanism and therefore it was important to root out Brahmanism to fight with imperialism[25]. Bali, not Rama, was Phule's role model in the Ramayana.

In many ways dharma and caste are the centre of Phule's thought. His opposition to Brahmanism did not relate only to the varna system. It covered almost all aspects within the hindu system. Phule rarely used the term Hindu or Hinduism. Instead he refers to the Brahmanism.[26] In this view Hinduism as we know it originates in the Shruthi's (the Vedas) and the Smriti's. He was convinced that these books were a part of the brahmanical attempt at creating text which would rationalize and perpetuate their dominance. Phule was not interested in tinkering with this or that aspect of the brahmanical structure to make of a little more human. He argues for a complete rejection and destruction of the system.

Jotiba Phule sought to create dichotomous conceptions of the hindu social structure which was composed of two correlative and diametrically opposed classes, whose characteristics were defined with reference to their opposition to each other. In this way Phule spoke of class and not caste societies without using the term 'class'. For them he uses their varna name, brahman and *sudradisudra*[27]. But this dichotomous structure, at one level recognized and accepted the position of high Brahmanism, although in a negative sense. It was used to explain the polarity within the social structures of society, a method akin to that used by the Marxists in their analysis of capitalism by emphasizing the by polarity of modern society between the bourgeoisie and proletariat[28]. Thus Phule demythologized the *avatar* theory, linking it to a metaphorical interpretation of aryan conquest[29], but he did this by providing his arguments an economic basis. In this way Phule's thought shows an influence of both caste and class factors, thereby leaving a potent legacy.

E. V. Ramaswami Naicker (Periyar)

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[24] The Bhakti movement, which arose in south India around the 8th century, AD, personalized the relationship between god and the devotee beyond the hierarchy of castes and without the esoteric knowledge and the ritualistic intercession of Brahman priests. It, after all, gave everyone an avenue to approach god personally, whatever his or her rank in the caste hierarchy, its goal was not to dismiss the caste system. (Nirula. (2009), *Dalits: a Bruised Dignity: The Pure and Impure*, New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporations, P. 21)

[25] But it is a paradox that some of the writers in Kerala are propagating the importance of adopting imperialistic life style to save dalits and adivasis. They are saying globalization and imperialism are the two positive thing to adopt the oppressed groups. For instance Tomy J compares the resemblance of dalit and western life style to make a good relation with them. See, Tomy, J. (2003). "Agolavathkarana Kalath Dalit Samskaram Vayikkendathu" (How to Read Dalit Culture in Globalization Period) in Arun, A. (2004) (ed.) *Behind the Shadows*, Sulthan Batheri: CUC Center for PG Studies in Social Work. pp.89-90.

[26] Deshpande, G.P. (ed.) (2002), *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule*, New Delhi: Left Word Books. p. 15.

[27] *Ibid.,* p. 6.

[28] *Ibid.,* p. 6.

[29] Omvedt, Gail. (2008), *Seeking Begumpura: The Social Vision of Anti-caste Intellectuals*, New Delhi: Navayana Publishing. p. 182.

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The idea of Dravida nationalism was propagated by E. V. Ramaswami Naicker. He formed Dravida Kazhagam in 1942 with the help of Annadurai. The movement was anti-Brahmin but not focusing on eradicating caste[30]. According to him Hinduism was not a religion, but a system created through conspiracy of the brahmins[31]. Through such an analysis the Self Respect movement used the essence of a new egalitarian Tamil Dravidian identity to build a movement for resisting the hegemony of the persistent brahamanical order. It also used the Tamil linguistic identity as a powerful tool[32]for organizing people in Tamil Nadu to participate electoral politics.

E. V. Ramaswami began adopting Gandhi's principle enthusiastically on joining the Congress[33]. In 1925 he launched self respect movement in Erode amidst a social atmosphere charged by intense social discriminations and exploitation. The movement developed a theory of rights, power and justice and a definition of community which brought forth new subjects of history, rational committed to reciprocity equal yet desirous of fraternity and above all free bound only the idea of self respect[34].The goal of the movement was to build a casteless society which was free from the oppression of brahmanical hinduism. Rationalism and atheism were the key words in the struggle to usher in an anti-brahamanical and anti-hindu egalitarian social order. Thus the movement gave the slogan: god must be abolished, religion must be abolished, the Congress must be abolished and British rule must be abolished[35]. This could only be done by the rejection of religion and not conversion to another religion. He reasoned that by conversion people simply replace one faith and prophet by another, and since all religions were opposed to reforms the solution lies not in a change of religion, in its rejection. This could only be done by a vision for an ideal socialist society, which was summarized in the term *samadharma*.[36]

Harijans and Gandhian Philosophy

Gandhi used the term *harijans* or children of god for communities that were considered 'untouchables'. He wrote many articles on harijans in his news papers '*Harijan'* and '*Young India*'.[37] Through these articles he showed his sympathy towards harijans and he presented the vision of an ideal hindu society where no untouchability would exist[38]. He wrote in *Young India*,

[30] Ragu, J. (2007). "Hindu Colonialisavum Dalitvavum" in Thomas, Boby (ed.), *Dalit Pathakal* (*Dalit Ways)*, Kottayam: DC Books, p. 67.

[31] Pratheepan Pampirikunnu,Dr (2007) *Dalit Study: Identity, Culture , Literature,* Thiruvanathapuram :State Institute of Language, p. 30.

[32] Mohan, J. (2001), *History Of Dalit Struggle For Freedom: Dravidian Parties And Dalit Uprise In Tamil Nadu,* Pondicheri: Dharma Institute of Social Science, p. 131.

[33]Chatterjee, Debi. (2004), *Up Against Caste: Comparative Study of Ambedkar and Periyar*, New Delhi: Prem Rawat publications, p. 31.

[34]Chatterjee, Debi. (2004), *Up Against Caste: Comparative Study of Ambedkar and Periyar*, New Delhi: Prem Rawat publications, p. 12.

[35] Chatterjee, Debi. (2004*), Up Against Caste: Comparative Study of Ambedkar and Periyar*, New Delhi: Prem Rawat publications, p. 33.

[36] *Ibid,*. p. 136.

[37] Some of the articles were 'Caste Must Go'; 'All are Equal in the Eyes of God'; None High, None Low'; The Bleeding Wound'; My Soul's Agony'; My Varnashrma Dharma'; The Removal of Untouchability' and others.

[38] Mohan, J. (2001), *History of Dalit Struggle For Freedom: Dravidian Parties and Dalit Upraise In Tamil Nadu,* Pondicheri: Dharma Institute of Social Science, p. 87.

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"Swaraj is unattainable without the removal of the sin of untouchability as it is without Hindu-Muslim unity"[39].

As Gandhi saw it 'varna' was a misunderstood concept. It emanated from the law of nature or god, and it was up to discretion of human beings to accept or reject this law. According to him, since varna is an order of society describing a social structure, it does not interfere much with a persons individuality or personal freedom.[40] Thus the reform of hindu society need not be predicated upon the eradication of caste. Thus he wrote: 'inter drinking, inter dining, and inter marrying are not essential for the promotion of the spirit of democracy'[41]. Later Gandhi changed his opinion and said, 'if I had my way I would persuade all caste Hindu girls coming under my influence to select harijan husbands'[42].

Gandhi believed in caste hierarchy, but rejected untouchability, which according to him, was a sinful practice. According to Gandhi untouchability was not the product of the caste system, but of the distinction of high and low that had crept into hinduism and was corroding it. The rejection of untouchability was thus a condemnation of the divisions of people according to "high" and "lowness". Thus the abolition of untouchability would lead to the purification of the caste system will itself[43].

As is well known, Gandhi replaced the term untouchable with 'harijan', to illustrate his sense of compassion and empathy for these deprived castes. Some scholars, however, believe that this term was itself an arrangement for a protective discrimination[44], which provided for a social legitimacy to the discriminatory practices of upper castes without changing the social status of the lower castes. The mainstreaming of this idea into the political ideology and practice of the Congress gave a powerful leverage to anti-caste movements and was forcefully opposed by Ambedkar within and outside the constituent assembly. [45]

Ambedkar on Dalits

Balasaheb Ambedkar was a visionary reformer of modern India. He used the term dalit for "ex-untouchable" castes.[46] Belonging to a lower caste Mahar family, Ambedkar, used his life experience to confront the discrimination faced by 'untouchable' castes. Unlike Gandhi, Ambedkar wore western clothes of dress[47] and this symbolized his reservations about the

[39] *Young India*, 08.12.1920.
[40] Banarjee, D.N. (2006), *Crusade Against Untouchability: Gandhian Movement for Uplift of Harijans in India*, New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, p. 41.
[41] *Young India,* 7.07.1946.
[42] *Young India,* 23.04.1925
[43] Banarjee, D.N. (2006), *Crusade Against Untouchability: Gandhian Movement for Uplift of Harijans in India*, New Delhi: Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, p. 11.
[44] Mohan, J. (2001), *History of Dalit Struggle For Freedom: Dravidian Parties And Dalit Upraise In Tamil Nadu,* Pondicheri: Dharma Institute of Social Science, p. 87.
[45] Shah, Ghanshyam.(ed.) (2001), 'Introduction' *Dalit Identity and Politics*, New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 21.
[46] Gaijan, M.B. and Prasad, Amar Nath. (2007), *Dalit Literature: A Critical Exploration*, New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, p. 278.
[47] Pratheepan Pampirikunnu. (2007) *Dalit Padanam: Swathwam, Samskaram, Sahityam,* Thiruvanathapuram: State Institute of Languages, p. 32.

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traditional Indian society. He believed untouchablity was of social, not racial origin and therefore subject to change.

Ambedkar led many struggles against Untouchability. In 1920s he participated in 'sanskritization[48]' process and in 1930s he forced to open Hindu temples to dalits. In this period he also suggested some norms for the reformation of hindu society. For example he said that all castes should have a standard appearance so that they can not be identified as lower castes by their appearance. He also suggested that priesthood should not be based on heredity but priests should be appointed through the conduct of a state held examination. But having failed in these measures rejected Hinduism he said that the caste system had been legitimized through the shastras[49]. It had religious sanction and that there was no sphere of life which was not regulated by this principle of graded inequality. He argued that there could be no solution to the problems of the dalits within the Hindu society. He therefore converted to Buddhism as he believed that dalits were the descendants of the original ancient Buddhists. [50]

Unlike Gandhi who fought for untouchable's equal status in the varna system, Ambedkar raised his voice for equal social, political, and economic opportunity to the dalits. He realized that education, not sympathy of upper caste hindus, would bring about changes in life of lower castes. Thus he redefined the rights of dalits according to the western idea of democracy, fraternity and liberty. Unlike Gandhi, Ambedkar said that legal rights and political power, and not a change of heart, would help to improve the social, economic and political status of dalits[51]. It is for this reason that Ambedkar was instrumental in arguing for constitutional rights and affirmative action, which he believed would form the basis of a social revolution.

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Marxists on Dalits

Unlike Gandhi and Ambedkar, Marxist scholars interpreted the problem of dalit within the Marxist class theory of exploitation and economic inequalities[52]. They traced the primary cause of caste based inequalities to the unequal distribution of property. According to Marxist framework, the root cause of legal, political, social and religious discrimination lies in the economic structure of the society on which these superstructures are erected. The economic structure of the society is considered to be the foundation of all the institutions. Thus D. D Kosambi explained 'caste is class on a primitive level of production'.[53] Thus according to

[48] The term Sanskritization was used by M.N Srinivas while analyzing the process of change in the traditional social structure in India. He states that Sanskritization in the process by which a low Hindu caste or tribal or other group changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high and frequently twice born caste. Generally such changes are followed by a claim to a higher position in the caste hierarchy then that of caste traditionally considered to the claimant caste by the local community. (Kshirasagat, RK. (1994), *Dalit Movement in India and its Leaders* (1857- 1956), New Delhi: MD Publication Pvt. Ltd)

[49] *Shah, Ghanshyam. (ed.) (2001),* Dalit Identity and Politics*, New Delhi: Sage, p. 18.*

[50]Shah, Ghanshyam. (2001), "Dalit Movements and the Search for Identity" in Shah, Ghanshyam. (ed.), *Dalit identity and politics*, New Delhi: Sage Publications. p. 211.

[51] Mohan, J. (2001), *History Of Dalit Struggle For Freedom: Dravidian Parties And Dalit Upraise In Tamil Nadu,* Pondicherry: Dharma Institute of Social Science, p. 135.

[52] *Thorat, SK & Desh Pande, R.S. "Caste System and Economic Inequalities; Economic Theory and Evidence" in Shah, Ghanshyam (ed.)* Dalit Identity and Politics*, New Delhi: Sage, 2001, p. 48.*

[53] Kosambi, DD. (2008). "The Culture and Civilization of Ancient India in Historical Outline". Cited in Chatterjee, Debi. (2004), *Up against Caste: Comparative Study of Ambedkar and Periyar*, New Delhi: Rawat Publication, p. 187.

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Marxists caste ideology provides the justification for the exploitation of labour. Varnashrama dharma, forms the bedrock of the hierarchical, brahmanical ethos, has ensured the existence of a large labour force over the years. It has also made sure that such a force works for a price that is far below the real value that it should be getting for its work. Thus the varna system legitimizes the extraction of surplus value in the name of god and is just another form of class exploitation[54].

B. T Ranadive, the prominent Marxist, read the Indian history within the class structure[55]. He said that at every moment in the anti- imperial struggle in India, upper caste bourgeoisie cunningly secured their domination through a nationalist movement. Therefore the Government of India is unable to implement land reform even after independence. He concludes that people should unite not based on caste identity but in the common identity as oppressed people in order to struggle against the bourgeoisie[56]? Ranadive continues,

> 'The common consciousness generated through the economic struggle cannot be pushed forward with out such struggle (struggle against caste and communalism) and direct intervention of the movement on caste oppression'[57].

From the 1970s, certain changes did take place in terms of recognition of the caste factor in the context of class struggles. At its Salkia Plenum in 1978, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), the largest communist party in the country, acknowledged that the ruling classes took advantage of caste and communal division among the people and emphasized the need for a mass struggle against casteism and communalism[58]. In 1979, E.M. Shankaran Namboothirippadu, a frontline leader and ideologue of the party stated that

> One has to realize that the building of India in modern democratic and secular times requires an uncompromising struggle against the caste based on Hindu society and its culture……. The struggle for radical democracy and socialism cannot be separated from the struggle against caste society[59].

Thus class based movements were forced to recognize the importance of identity politics and link class struggles to the struggle for a casteless society. This influenced the transformation in the very definition of the term 'dalit'.

The Transformation of the 'Dalit'

The struggles and ideological traditions outlined above influenced the post-independence policies for affirmative action. They also led the formation of a new class of beneficiaries which emerged from amongst the dalits. In this new context the term 'dalit' was first used in the early 1970s by neo-Buddhist activists who were the followers of Ambedkar. These dalits started to aspire for ideological and political militancy which would help them to achieve their goal of a

[54] Chatterjee, Debi. (2004), *Up Against Caste: Comparative Study of Ambedkar and Periyar*, New Delhi: Prem Rawat publications, p. 187.
[55] Ranadive, B.T. (2004), "Caste, Class and Property Relations" in Shah, Ghanshyam. (ed). *Caste and Democratic Politics in India*, New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, pp. 134-161.
[56] *Ibid,. p. 150.*
[57] Chatterjee, Debi. (2004), *Up against Caste: Comparative Study of Ambedkar and Periyar*, New Delhi: Rawat Publication, p. 191.
[58] *Ibid.,* p. 191.
[59] Economic and Political Weekly, annual number 1979 p.347 cited in Chatterjee, Debi. (2004), *Up against Caste: Comparative Study of Ambedkar and Periyar*, New Delhi: Rawat Publication, pp. 191- 192.

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casteless society.[60] Thus the dalit became a term for all oppressed and exploited people in Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati and many other Indian languages.[61] It referred to those who have been broken ground down in a deliberate way by those above them. There is in the word itself an inherent denial of pollution, karma and justified hierarchy[62].

Thus daliltism is coined as a revolutionary phase in dalit transformation. Dalit is an ideological transformation of Scheduled Caste and ex-untouchables, a protest against upper caste hegemony by way of rejection of upper caste cognitive paradigm. It also involves the creation of their own cultural idiom, literature and ethnic hegemony, complete liberation from oppression in all aspects of human life. To this end, dalits aspire for revolutionary change through the creation of a militant community identity.[63] The making of such an identity and literature is thus symbolic of a political assertion of the dalits, especially in the Maharashtrian context.

This the process of the transformation of the 'dalit' from a term which was largely used for Scheduled Castes, to an umbrella term for uniting all communities facing discrimination on basis of descent and occupation was mediated by the growth of the Dalit Panthers Movement. The manifesto of the Dalit Panthers defined dalits in 1973 as "all Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes, landless labours, small farmers and nomadic tribes, who are committed to fighting injustice steaming from political power, property, religious, social status[64] . Arjun Dangle, the prominent dalit leader, defines dalit as

> 'Dalit means masses exploited and oppressed economically, socially and culturally in the name of religion and other factors. Dalit writers hope that this exploited group of people will bring about revolution to the country[65]'

Where as Sharan Kumar Limbale explains,

> 'Harijans and neo-Buddhists are not the only Dalits. The term describes all the untouchables' communities living outside of the boundary of the village, as well as adivasis, landless farm labours, the suffering masses and nomadic and criminal tribes. In explaining the word it will not do to refer only to the untouchable caste. People who are lagging behind economically will also need to be included.'[66]

Dalit Sahitya Academy in 1981 considered besides ex-untouchables all persecuted minorities and the OBCs as dalits.[67] Dalit, a term meaning downtrodden or broken down but used with pride as a self chosen name that reflects no idea of pollution and can include all who

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[60] Mohan, J. (2001), *History Of Dalit Struggle for Freedom: Dravidian Parties And Dalit Upraise in Tamil Nadu,* Pondicheri: Dharma Institute of Social Science, p. 87.

[61] Shah, Ghanshyam. "Dalit Movements and the Search for Identity" in Shah, Ghanshyam. (ed.) (2001), *Dalit Identity and Politics,* New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 196.

[62] *Ibid*., P. 196.

[63] *Ibid.,* p. 88.

[64] Shah, Ghanshyam. (2001), "Dalit Movements and the Search for Identity" in Shah, Ghanshyam. (ed.) *Dalit identity and politics,* New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 196

[65] *Dangle, Arjun (ed.) (1992),* Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, p. 65.*

66 *Limbale, Sharan Kumar (2004)* Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations, *New Delhi: Hyderabad: Orient Longman, p. 11.*

[67] Shah, Ghanshyam. "Dalit Movements and the Search for Identity" in Shah, Ghanshyam. (ed.) (2001), *Dalit identity and politics,* New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 210.

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identify themselves as oppressed by caste system[68]. Scheduled Caste leaders reject the term harijan and insult rather than and honor. An egalitarian social order was not possible within Hinduism whose very foundation was hierarchical with Scheduled Caste at the bottom. The reorganization of the Hindu society on the basis of *chatur* varna is impossible because the varna is like a leaky pot or like a man with a running nose. He did not have faith in the charitable sprit of the caste hindus towards the untouchables. He asserted that Scheduled Caste should get organized and get educated and struggle for self respect rather than depend on sympathy[69].

The caste feeling centered on the ideas of pollution and purity is so deeply rooted in Indian society that it cannot be just erased unless the entire system itself is changed. The dalit have suffered from multiple deprivations and have been victims of age-long oppression caste discrimination are rooted in the material condition of life and have raised barriers among workers and peasants[70]. However it is not merely class disparity but caste division which matters more to the dalit, as social status in India is determined not by economic status but to a large extend by a captive status. This distinguishes them significantly from Marxist writers who lay emphasis on class.

Dalit Panthers and Literature of the Dalits in Maharashtra

The rise of Maratha Dalit Literature in Maharashtra was the result by the growth of the Dalit Panthers Movement and Dalit Literary Movement in the 1970s. These movements were inspired by the American Movement, Black Literature Movement. As the Black got noticed in America, Dalits movements too wish to get wider space in literature. Like the American movement, the Dalit Panthers and the Dalit School of literature represent a new level of pride, militancy and sophisticated creativity. They gave up the accepted terms untouchables, Scheduled Castes, Deprived Classes, harijans, and started writing. The term dalit inspires to awaken the dalit castes educationally, socially and politically. The Dalit Panthers movement was a neo-social movement which accepted Ambedikar's philosophy to find theoretical framework for the movements. Dalit writers claim by organizing the movement they changed and formed their identity as oppressed than untouchable castes.[71]

Following the Dalit Panthers Movements which started in Marathi language in 1970s, a number of similar other movements came up in different regional languages. The dalit Panthers Movement familiarized the term dalit[72]. They redefined the term dalit and propagate a common identity to all castes and sub-castes. They included dalits, *adivasis,* neo Buddhists, poor farmers, and land less classes and women in to a single platform[73].

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[68] Mohan, J. (2001), *History Of Dalit Struggle For Freedom: Dravidian Parties And Dalit Upraise in Tamil Nadu,* Pondicheri: Dharma Institute of Social Science.

[69] Ilaiah, Kancha. (2001), "Dalitism Vs Brahmanism: The Epistamological Conflict In History" in Shah, Ghanshyam. (ed.) *Dalit identity and politics,* New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 109.

[70] *Omvedt, Gail. (1978), "Class Struggle or Caste War", September 30,* Frontier, *Vol. 2, pp. 9-11.*

[71] Dangle, Arjun. (ed.). (1992), *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman. p. 265.

[72]Murgkar. (1991), *Dalit Panthar Movement in Maharashtra: A Sociological Appraisal,* London:Sayam Books, Appendix (Dalit Panthers Movement's Manifesto.)

[73]Limbale, Sharan Kumar (2004) *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations,* New Delhi: Hyderabad: Orient Longman, p. 11.

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Dalit literature is mainly a result of the socio-cultural changes in Maharashtra accelerated after independence. A new awareness was already kindled among the downtrodden classes through the efforts of Phule and Ambedkar, though the movements have differences from Ambedkar and Phule's ideologies. The process of liberation of the depressed started in the 19th century gained momentum through the effort of Ambedkar in the 20th century and found in expression in the dalit literature. Ambedkar's ideas and movements gave a spirit of dignity and freedom amongst 'dalits' first through the agitational methods and then through the Indian constitution which he was instrumenting in framing. After Ambedkar dalits started arguing that they were denied their just constitutional rights. The younger generation started reacting against the society with hatred and hunger.

Through literature they seemed to share common feelings even if they write in different languages. In autobiographies and testimonies written by dalits, they try to articulate a common identity among all dalit castes and sub-castes. Of course, it had some positive reflections on the literary arena. Their writing was just against the so-called popular writers like Mulk Raj Anand, a popular dalit novelist, who imbibed a savarna psyche. For instance, Sharan Kumar Limbale talks about popular writers' and their interventions on dalits[74]. Mulk Raj Anand is criticized by Limbale for his dalit characters. According to Limbale, Mulk Raj presented such dalits as people who are helpless, faceless and who need external intervention to save them from their misery.[75] The popular writers confront questions of suppressing dalit feeling in their literature; Dalits are sidelined or become tool of their masters in these writing. Dalits are helpless society and they are searching outsiders for their Christ in the popular novels. In this sense, the writers who wrote for Dalits like Mulk Raj Anand, Thakazhi[76] and others, face serious questions from Dalit intellectuals and scholars.

Debates on dalit literature need to be seen in the context of who is a dalit as outlined in the previous discussion. According to Maharashtra Dalit writers, dalit literature is not a just literary event. It is outcome of social injustice which has been here for centuries. A group of impatient and articulate young men is at the centre of this movement. Literature has been one of their chief medium. It exposed the atrocities of high society with brutal frankness, burning anger and hatred and called for ruthless vengeance against the society and people who have created such inequality and inhuman atmosphere. Dalit literature, according to Dalit Panthers Movement is a literature of action and it propagates for total changes of the society and its main emphasis is on realistic expression of the society.[77] Anger, affliction, protest and refusal are the main features

[74]Sharan Kumar Limbale, (2004) *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations*, p. 18 .

[75] Most dalit novels are written by some non- dalit writers, in which they portrays dalit are helpless creators. Limbale, Sharan Kumar. (2004), *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations,* New Delhi: Hyderabad: Orient Longman, p. 18.

[76] Takazhi Siva Sankara Pillai is known as a 'dalit writer', ('dalit writer', was considered those who bring some dalit characters in literature, Thakazhi extensively brings dalit stories in his writings, so he is considered as a 'dalit writer') who wrote a number of novels and short stories in which dalit are coming as characters. He faced serious criticism from dalit intellectuals for his dalit characters. Most dalit characters, he portrays, are supporting their master and the existing system. For example Koran in his famous work in *Randidangazhi* expresses this idea of supporting his land master. (Pambirikkunnu, Pradeepan. (1998), "Anyatheenamaya Randidangazhi" *Sahitya Logam*, July- August p. 84))

[77] Pallath, S.J, J.J. (1993), "*Dalit Asthitwathinte Samskarika Vasham*" in Pallath,J.J Dalit Vimojanam: Samasyayum Sameekshayum, Kannur: Samskrithi Publications, p. 74.

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of this literature, but in its projection of a common identity this literature tends to loose the socio-historical context of specific experiences.[78]

In this sense dalit literature is characterized by an ahistorical representation of the dalit identity for its main aim is to legitimize a dalit movement. As Arjun Dangle ascertains,

> "Dalit literature is not simply literature. It's associated with a movement to bring about change. It represents the hope and ambition of a new society and new people"[79]

Limbale, on the other hand attempts to give a more realistic picture of dalit literature when he says,

> Dalit literature is unflinching in portraying seamier side of life, life outside the boundaries of the village, this literature seems to say, is marked by a sense of community, sharing, warmth, and physicality but often wretched. In it, sexism, ignorance, violence, internal rivalry and conflict, competition for survival, drunkenness and death all are coming. Authentic representation involves an unromanticized and unpitying reflection of in life of materiality of Dalit life in its entire dimension.[80]

Such a representation of dalit literature celebrates the dalit condition as an unparalleled one and a permanent entity. It ignores the differences within the dalit communities; rather they concentrate on building on similarities. Through these similarities they create a dalit identity and culture that defines 'Dalitness' which is not only national but international in its inspiration. To this end dalit writers find and celebrate the similarities of dalit literature with Black literature inspired by the Panthers Movements in USA.[81] Thus transformation of the 'dalit' identity" represents a new type of political assertion that confronts, counters and redesigns older forms of struggles, against both class and caste exploitation.

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[78] Punalekar, S.P. (2001), "Dalit Literature and Dalit Identity" in Shah, Ghanshyam. (ed.), *Dalit Identity and Politics,* New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 231. Punalekar quotes Tukaram Adsul, a dalit activist, who says: 'what is the end result [of dalit education]? We educated youth dalit acquire some knowledge. We passed some examinations and soon get in to some government jobs. We get enmeshed in our own small world of our family and friend. We totally forgot our own community'.

[79] Arjun Dangle (ed.) (1992), *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*, Hyderabad: Orient Longman, p. 265.

[80] Limbale, Sharan Kumar. (2004), *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations,* New Delhi: Hyderabad: Orient Longman, p. 14.

[81] The status of dalits in India and blacks in America is characterized by their relative deprivations and disabilities. The blacks were shipped from Africa into Virginia in 1619 as plantation labours and they were initially called as Negros and later they were enslaved by the whites and later they institutionalized slave trade. Negros were denied not only socio, economic, political and legal rights but even minimum civil rights. So Blacks in America fought against these inequalities and they declared black as a way of celebration. They taught to be proud of their culture and their identity as blacks. Dalit leaders took inspiration from the Black Panthers movement in America. They debated ideas from Black writers such as Franz Fanon, Malcome X and others.

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