

# DALIT AESTHETICS VERSUS MAINSTREAM INDIAN AESTHETICS: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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**Abstract:** Indian English writing started in the 19th century in India. Indian aesthetics got popularity among all regional literatures, although its traditional source can be found in Sanskrit literature. Indian poetics have emerged broadly into eight schools—*Rasa, Alamkara, Riti, Guna/Dosa, Vakrokti, Svabhavokti, Aucitya and Dhvani*, corresponding roughly to the western theory of *Pleasure, Rhetoric/Figures of speech, theory of Form, Merit/Demerit Oblique poetry, Statement poetry, Propriety and Suggestion*. In this context, the paper argues that Dalit aesthetics did not have any close correspondence with other aesthetics. Non-Dalit writers have been writing Dalit literature from 1930's onwards in India. Jyothi Rao Phule and Ambedkar gave inspiration to Dalit writers in Maharashtra. Dalit literature got popularity among all regional literatures from the mid 20th century onwards in India. Marathi writers write Dalit literature first in Marathi language and soon after, it spread into other regional literatures. Sharan Kumar Limbale is a pioneering writer on Dalit aesthetics in Marathi literature. Dalit aesthetics as manifest in Dalit literature is not researched so far to the extent it deserves. Dalit aesthetics is a new concept, recently emerging through the joint efforts of Dalit writers, critics and intellectuals on Dalit literature. Dalit aesthetics is a new approach to understand and write Dalit writings in India. Dalit aesthetics are usually compared with an Afro-American writers' ideology of black aesthetics. This research paper is going to analyze comparatively Dalit aesthetics and mainstream Indian aesthetics in English.

**IntexTerms:** Dalit literature, Mainstream, Aesthetics and Indian English literature

**Introduction:** Indian writers started Indian English literature in India from the 19th century onwards with the inspiration of western English novels. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894) wrote *Rajmohan's Wife* and published it in 1864; it is the first Indian novel written in English (Wikipedia: 2018). He gave inspiration to other Indian writers like Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004), R. K. Narayan (1906-2001) and Raja Rao (1908–2006) etc. Indian authors have written daisporic Indian English literature from foreign countries.

In modern times, because of the legacy of Jyothi Rao Phule and Ambedkar, Dalit literature has been written by Dalit writers as a new literary movement in Maharashtra. Dalit means a member of the lowest caste, oppressed or broken given to the word in general dictionary meaning. It had been used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of 'depressed classes', a term the British used for what is now called the Scheduled Castes (S.C.). In the 1970s the 'Dalit Panthers' revived the term and expanded its reference to include scheduled tribes, poor peasants, women and all those being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion. Therefore, Dalit is not a caste. It is a symbol of protest and revolution. The Primary objective of Dalit literature is the liberation of Dalits. Dalit struggle against casteism has a long history. For example, in Kannada, it goes back to the first Vachana poet of the 11th century, Chennaiah, the cobbler. The 12th-century Dalit saint Kalavve challenged the upper castes in the following words:

Those who eat goats, fowl and tiny fish:  
Such, they call caste people.  
Those who eat the Sacred Cow  
That showers frothing milk for Shiva:  
Such, they call outcastes (Kishore 1).

Dalit writers are writing in regional literatures about Dalits with the inspiration of Marathi Dalit writers in India. Marathi Dalit writers followed the path of Ambedkar and African writers. Dalits do not have much education background at the beginning in their life. They do not know literary protest or

movement with literature in the beginning. Now, they got a good English education with Christian missionary schools and able to write their literature in English.

Dalit writers have written Dalit literature in regional literatures from mid 20th century onwards in India. The regional literatures have been translated into English by various Indian and foreign translators. There are many adaptable texts in Dalit literature in some regional literatures, which can be translated into English in India. There is more scope to read them for a number of foreigners in the world, if Dalit literatures is translated into English.

Sharan Kumar Limbale comments that the traditional values of Satyam, Shivam and Sundaram, are not applicable in the context of Dalit aesthetics as they are fabrications used to exploit common people. Aesthetic trinity only benefits the upper caste and has been formulated to suppress the lower ones. Dalit aesthetics does not deliver aesthetics based on pleasure giving beauty. When it comes to Dalit literature the idea of beauty needs to be re-examined and re-analyzed. Commonly the idea of beauty is associated with spiritualism, but Dalit aesthetics are derived out of a sense of artistic reality.

Dalit aesthetics are built upon three major components—the artist, the artistic creation and the reader. The artistic creation binds the artist and the reader. When it comes to Dalit aesthetics, one cannot rely on pleasure giving beauty and taste. Dalit aesthetics tends more towards materialist rather than spiritualist. Dalit writers have been raising Dalit consciousness among the readers with Dalit aesthetic elements. The idea of beauty in Dalit literature can be evaluated with the intensity of consciousness among the writers.

At present there is considerable work going on about Dalit aesthetics. Sharan Kumar Limbale wrote *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies, and Considerations* in Marathi, in 1994. Alope Mukherjee translated it into English in 2004. Milind Eknath Awad wrote one Ph.D. thesis on this field title called *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalits*. He did his Ph.D. from JNU in 2009. The thesis not published so far. There are many articles published on Dalit aesthetics in recent times in various national and international journals. For example:- *Dalit Aesthetic Theory*, research article by Ret. Prof. S. R. Jalote from Dept. of English at BHU in Varanasi.

Dalit aesthetics is not traditional aesthetics in general. It has a different purpose in the literary world. That is in the words of R. G. Jadhav:

I think that from the point of view of Dalit aesthetics, the important thing is to achieve aesthetic distance by liberating oneself from extreme involvement in social awareness. It means that the Dalit writers have to realize their total sensibility towards life from the level of art (Jadhav 3-4).

I would like to discuss Dalit aesthetics, in the following points:

1. Sharan Kumar Limbale, a famous Dalit writer, and critic has opposed rasa theory and propounded separate Dalit aesthetics in his work *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies, and Considerations* (2004). He writes:

How will the taste of the pain, anger, rejection, rebellion, problems, struggles, injustices and ill-treatment contained in Dalit literature be known through slow sipping and relishing? In terms of Dalit literature, the rasa theory of aesthetic appreciation seems insufficient (Limbale 116).

2. Limbale is one of the prominent founders of Dalit aesthetics. While propagating Dalit aesthetics he has considered the mainstream critics of aesthetics. He says that Dalit literature is a movement, and a vehicle of pain, sorrow, questions, and problems. Since Dalit literature is a life-affirming literature all strands of it are tied to life. Dalit writers claim that they write for humanity. Dalit literature promotes equality, freedom, and justice, and emphasizes human being and society. Limbale has briefly summed up Dalit aesthetics:

The aesthetics of Dalit literature rests on: first, the artists' social commitment; second, the life-affirming values present in the artistic creation; and third, the ability to raise the reader's consciousness of fundamental values like equality, freedom, justice, and fraternity (Limbale 120).

3. Dalit aesthetics has drawn a similar line like that of the Indian notion of aesthetic, which is a kind of negative dialectic of Dalit aesthetics. Dalit aesthetics of Limbale show affinities with India aesthetics, but it has defined aesthetics, as objective in nature that concerns the voice of suffering and that is a condition of all truth. Dalit aesthetics has been essentially informed by such socio-political existence.

Their resistance to the force that negates life becomes the focus of one's faith, articulation, and expression. The aesthetic of resistance grounded in a redemptive activity of the protested communities. It is embodied in particular philosophical, ideological moorings (Awad 41).

4. Dalit writers got a new identity in the mainstream Indian English writing for their literature. Dalit writers' modest attempts lead to put in a new framework for Dalit literature. "The central idea of mainstream literature is the Hindu trinity of 'Satyam Shivam Sundaram', for Dalit it is the Western trinity 'liberty, equality and fraternity'. This central idea makes both the literature mutually exclusive and parallel" (Kumar 3). Dalits are struggling for freedom in society from upper caste people. The dominant mindset of people from society has to change by Dalit writers' writing.

5. "Mainstream literature largely follows the principle of 'art for art's sake' while Dalit literature is 'art for life's sake'. This principle makes the literature and its interpretation different" (Kumar 4). Dalit narrative style shows different from general narration. The mainstream literature tries to take one in different world the imaginary world forgetting this world. Dalit literature is representing the real world with Dalits everyday experience in life.

6. "The source of inspiration of mainstream literature is the Hindu mythological texts such as *the Vedas, Purana, Upanishads, Geeta, Manusmriti, Ramayana, Mahabharata etc.*" (Kumar 4). These texts are the recurrent themes in the work of mainstream literature. These are revered time and again and considered as the ultimate fountain of ultimate knowledge and truth. Contrary to this belief, Dalit writers question and challenge these very texts.

Language and metaphor used by Dalit writers are very different and sometimes shocking.

The reason of Dalit literature being harsh and unconventional; as it is born out of anger, anguish and rebellion against the system. It is the literary depiction of injustices, grief, pain, oppression and suffering. It is the articulation of the voice so long been silenced or ignored.

Mainstream literature is the serving the purpose of maintaining the hegemony of one caste on another (Kumar 4).

7. Dalit literature has a different form and purpose, it cannot include in the mainstream India literature. The mainstream Indian literary criticism and the theory cannot fit for Dalit criticism. Mainstream Indian English literature has been portrayed of Dalits representation in the ugly symbols in their literature.

Dalit literature has potential to develop independently along with mainstream literature. Indian literary critics are criticizing Dalit literature with traditional tools so far. This will have to change in the future because the Dalit aesthetic tool can fulfill the gap in between traditional and Dalit aesthetics. Dalit writers have to focus on the various types of Dalit aesthetic elements in their literature. Therefore, the other readers can understand the Dalit literature in a clear way while they are reading a Dalit text. So far, Dalit writers have written all forms of literary genres in Dalit literature. These have to bring change in the lives of Dalits and the ideology of upper caste people. Dalit writers have been struggling for sociological change among Indian communities in terms of their behavior towards Dalits.

**Conclusion:** This research paper clearly showed that Dalit art forms evolve along with Indian English works of literature. Indian aesthetics and Dalit aesthetics have compared two different theories to evaluate both literatures. Dalit aesthetics and mainstream Indian aesthetics have been studying necessarily by readers for the present understanding of Dalit literature. The Dalits write in order to convey their meaning through their texts with traditional tools earlier. Now there are some new Dalit literary tools coming up with new force. The new critical theories could help in order to understand Dalit literature. This research paper gave a clear approach to Dalit aesthetics as manifested in Dalit literature.

In future, research scholars should work in this field in order to enrich this concept in a valid theoretical framework.

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