



DALIT LITERATURE

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Abstract : This paper compares Dalit writings by both Dalit and Non-Dalit authors, focusing on how they depict caste oppression, identity, and resistance. Dalit literature, rooted in the experiences of untouchability, allows writers like B.R. Ambedkar, Omprakash Valmiki, and Bama to assert their dignity and humanity.

In contrast, non-Dalit authors such as Mulk Raj Anand and Arundhati Roy, while empathetic, may inadvertently reinforce stereotypes through their outsider perspectives. This study examines different narrative styles and themes in their works. While recognizing the value of non-Dalit contributions to caste awareness, the paper emphasizes that Dalit voices are vital for authentically conveying the complexities of caste oppression and the fight for social justice.

IndexTerms - Marginalized, Subaltern Studies, Untouchable, Discrimination, groundbreaking

Literary Review

The works of non-Dalit authors Mulk Raj Anand and Mahasweta Devi, focusing on how they depict caste oppression and the lives of marginalized communities.

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) is a groundbreaking piece in Indian literature that highlights the harsh realities faced by Dalits through the story of Bakha, a young sweeper boy. As an outsider to the Dalit experience, Anand writes from a humanist perspective, emphasizing empathy and dignity. However, his approach sometimes oversimplifies the complexities of caste.

In contrast, Mahasweta Devi's writings, especially *Rudali* and *Chotti Munda and His Arrow*, explore the intersections of caste, gender, and class. Although she is also a non-Dalit writer, Devi's work is characterized by a more radical, activist viewpoint. She draws on her deep connections with tribal and marginalized communities, which allows her to address their struggles more directly.

This review closely examines how both authors tackle issues of agency, representation, and oppression, and how their positions as outsiders influence their portrayals of Dalit and subaltern experiences. It highlights

the strengths and limitations of non-Dalit authors in representing caste issues, while recognizing their important role in amplifying marginalized voices.

Introduction

The term "Dalit" refers to people who are considered oppressed, broken, downtrodden, or untouchable. It highlights that this discrimination is not something they choose for themselves, but is something imposed on them by others, especially the higher castes, throughout history.

Dalit literature is a powerful way to understand the experiences of marginalized communities facing caste-based discrimination in India. While Dalit authors share firsthand and nuanced accounts of their oppression and resistance, non-Dalit writers like Mulk Raj Anand and Mahasweta Devi also engage with these important themes in their works. This paper examines how non-Dalit authors portray Dalit and marginalized communities, focusing specifically on Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) and Devi's *Rudali* (1981). The ideas created by Dalit writers reflect their awareness of social issues, shaped by their real-life experiences. Their literature aims to create a way for Dalits to communicate with each other and spread awareness of their beliefs and struggles. The Dalit Sahitya Movement is an integral part of the broader struggle for Dalit rights and social justice. It emerged as a literary and cultural expression to voice the struggles, discrimination, and oppression faced by Dalits in Indian society. Through poetry, prose, and other forms of writing, Dalit writers challenge the existing social hierarchies, confront caste-based violence, and demand equality, while highlighting the resilience and dignity of Dalit communities.

Both writers explore themes of caste, oppression, and agency, but their outsider perspectives and different writing styles lead to distinct portrayals of the Dalit experience. This research paper compares these two texts to assess how effectively non-Dalit authors represent Dalit issues and to explore the strengths and limitations of their portrayals. Through this analysis, the paper aims to shed light on the role of non-Dalit voices in the discussion of caste and social justice.

The representation of marginalized communities by non-Dalit authors can be explored through Dalit writing is mainly influenced by African American literature, the Harlem Renaissance, the Dalit Panthers movement, and struggles for individual identity. It draws from Marxist ideas about social and class struggles, the fight against untouchability, the pursuit of education, and the philosophies of figures like Buddha, Charvaka, Jyotirao Phule, Lord Shahu, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, and the subaltern perspective on identity several important ideas, including Subaltern Studies, Postcolonial Theory, and Dalit Feminism.

Subaltern Studies, influenced by scholars like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, examines the challenges outsiders face in representing oppressed groups, emphasizing the issue of "speaking for" the subaltern instead of allowing them to "speak for themselves." This concept is crucial for understanding how writers like Anand and Devi, despite their empathy for Dalit struggles, write from an external, non-Dalit perspective, potentially limiting the authenticity of their portrayal.

Dalit Feminism adds another important layer to this discussion, especially in Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali*. This perspective highlights the unique challenges that Dalit women face, which differ from those of upper-caste women and Dalit men. It questions how their lives are depicted in literature.

Postcolonial Theory, discussed by thinkers like Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, examines the relationships between colonizers and the colonized. This framework can also be applied to caste-based social hierarchies in India.

Together, these ideas will help analyze how non-Dalit writers like Anand and Devi approach the complex task of representing caste oppression and marginalized communities.

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*: A Humanist Approach to Caste Oppression

Key Themes in *Untouchable*

1. **Victimhood and Passive Resistance:** In Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, Bakha represents victimhood and passive resistance. As an untouchable, he faces harsh discrimination and humiliation, highlighting the pain of the caste system. Despite this, he shows quiet resistance through small acts, like wanting an education and searching for a toilet not meant for upper-caste people. These actions reflect his desire for dignity and a better life, illustrating how he navigates his difficult situation while subtly challenging unfair social norms.

2. **The Outsider's Perspective:** In Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, the outsider's perspective is shown through Bakha's experiences as an untouchable. Anand, a non-Dalit author, tells Bakha's story with empathy, allowing readers to see the harsh realities of caste discrimination. However, this distance can limit the depth of Bakha's feelings and thoughts, sometimes oversimplifying the complexities of Dalit life. While the outsider's perspective raises important issues, it may not fully capture the richness of the untouchable experience.

Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali*:

In *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand, the focus is on a Dalit man and the discrimination he faces because of his caste. In contrast, *Rudali* highlights the double oppression faced by Dalit women, who are marginalized both because of their caste and their gender. This makes their struggle even more intense. Mahasweta Devi's story provides a deeper look into the lives of Dalit women, showing that while their resistance might be quiet and subtle, it remains strong and significant in the fight against oppression.

Key themes in *Rudali*

1. **The Theme of agency amidst oppression:** It highlights how Dalit women, despite enduring severe caste, gender, and class discrimination, navigate ways to resist and assert control over their lives. Though constrained by societal structures, characters like Sanichari find small yet significant avenues to exercise

their autonomy and dignity. For example, as a rudali, she challenges her oppressive circumstances by making decisions that reflect her personal strength, resilience, and desire for respect, demonstrating that even in the harshest conditions, marginalized individuals can assert their agency.

2. Intersectionality of caste and gender: The theme of **Intersectionality of Caste and Gender** in Rudali shows how Dalit women face double oppression both because of their caste and their gender. This makes their struggles more complex than those of Dalit men, as they are marginalized in multiple ways. The story highlights how both caste and gender shape their lives and challenges.

3. The theme of Subversion of Rituals: Rudali illustrates how Dalit women challenge oppressive traditions. While they are obligated to perform rituals like mourning the dead, they subtly subvert these practices to assert their dignity and resist their marginalized social status. Through these rituals, they find a space to quietly rebel against the systems that oppress them, using what is meant to suppress them as a means of resistance.

Analysis:

Both Untouchable and Rudali deal with caste oppression, but they tell the story in different ways because of the authors' backgrounds and goals. Mulk Raj Anand's Untouchable reflects his humanist views and the colonial context, focusing on the moral wrongness of caste discrimination, but it doesn't deeply explore the agency of Dalits. In contrast, Mahasweta Devi's Rudali offers a more radical view, highlighting the strength and resistance of Dalit women, showing how they challenge and survive within oppressive systems.

1. Language and Accessibility: Mulk Raj Anand uses straightforward, accessible language to reach a wide audience, effectively conveying the struggles of the Dalits. In contrast, Mahasweta Devi's Rudali employs a more complex, regionally influenced style, reflecting the specific cultural and social realities of Dalit women. This distinction in language helps highlight the unique experiences and voices of the marginalized in each narrative.

2. Portrayal of Dalit Power: Untouchable focuses on moral outrage against caste oppression but does not delve deeply into Dalit agency. In contrast, Rudali emphasizes the strength and resistance of Dalit women, portraying their ability to challenge and resist oppressive systems despite their marginalized status. While Anand highlights the injustice, Devi showcases the resilience and autonomy of Dalit women in the face of adversity.

3. Gendered Experience of Caste: Untouchable primarily focuses on the caste-based oppression faced by Dalit men, highlighting their struggles with social discrimination. On the other hand, Rudali portrays the dual burden of caste and gender discrimination faced by Dalit women, emphasizing how they endure both societal and patriarchal oppression. This distinction brings out the unique and intersecting challenges experienced by Dalit women.

Conclusion: Strengths and Limitations of Non-Dalit Representation

Mulk Raj Anand and Mahasweta Devi, despite being non-Dalit writers, have made significant contributions to the discourse on caste oppression in Indian literature. Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* was groundbreaking for its time, as it brought attention to the lives of Dalits, but it is limited in its portrayal of Dalits as passive subjects of caste violence. The novel focuses more on the inner turmoil of the protagonist, Bakha, but does not fully explore the broader social and political contexts of caste oppression. In contrast, Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali* offers a more complex and nuanced portrayal of Dalit women, showcasing their agency even within deeply oppressive systems. The protagonist, Sanichari, embodies resistance and survival, offering a more active role for Dalit characters, particularly women, in confronting their marginalized position in society.

A comparative analysis of these two works reveals the strengths and limitations of non-Dalit writers in representing Dalit experiences. While their outsider perspectives can provide empathetic portrayals, they also run the risk of reinforcing certain stereotypes or oversimplifying the complexities of caste oppression. Mulk Raj Anand's depiction, for instance, tends to portray Dalits as helpless victims, which may inadvertently reduce the scope of their agency. Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali*, on the other hand, offers more depth and complexity, yet still remains a non-Dalit writer's interpretation of Dalit life. Ultimately, the voices of Dalit writers themselves are crucial in providing an authentic and comprehensive understanding of the Dalit experience, as they can speak directly to the lived realities of caste-based discrimination and oppression.

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