

[doi: 10.15584/sar.2017.14.2](https://doi.org/10.15584/sar.2017.14.2)

Shruti DAS

Berhampur University
drshrutidas@gmail.com

DALIT AESTHETICS: SITUATING SHARANKUMAR LIMBALE'S POETICS

Abstract: In the traditional stratified Indian society Dalit is a class nomenclature now assigned to a group of oppressed, downtrodden people in India. These people have been treated as social outcasts, and their voice has been silenced for centuries. Dalit writing in its formative years has been largely about articulating protest, patriarchy and the demand for space for the Dalit in social, cultural, and political spheres. Over the years activist thinkers like Ambedkar have tried to evolve an ideology supporting the Dalit cause. This has given rise to a body of literature which has engaged itself with this ideology. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations* is Sharankumar Limbale's magnum opus and his contribution to the literature on Dalit aesthetics. It conveys a poetics that is subversive and resists canonical logic. The canvas offered is experiential in nature, and the language used engages one, being poetic, counter hegemonic and counter brahmanical. Limbale questions the mainstream aestheticians' doctrines of the age-old concepts of *satyam*, *shivam* and *sundaram* and problematizes the concept of beauty, pleasure and propriety. This brings to mind the problem of meaning and interrelationality exhibited in experiential literature. This article proposes to make the postcolonial reading of *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* positing Indian Society as the repressive monologic power. It seeks to situate Limbale's poetics in the dynamics of cultural discourse of subalternity.

Key words: Dalit, aesthetics, Limbale, repression, resistance

Indian society is traditionally stratified into castes depending upon the various duties the members of certain communities traditionally perform. While priests, rulers/warriors land owners and farmers have traditionally formed the upper class, there have also been a section of people assigned to serve these upper caste people known as Shudras. The Shudras have over centuries had their place on the fringes of society serving the upper castes and suffering ostracization and untouchability. Dalit, a modern term for untouchables in India, is a class

nomenclature now assigned to a group of oppressed, downtrodden people in India. These people have been treated as social outcasts, and their voice has been silenced for centuries. James Massey explains the term Dalit as the burst, the split, the broken or torn asunder, the trodden down, the scattered, the crushed and the destroyed (1997:18). Therefore it describes peoples who have been afflicted, marginalised and tortured. Literally, they were slaves of the upper caste people. Sharan Kumar Limbale is a Marathi writer and an icon of Dalit literature in India today. He has written up to forty books including his autobiography, *Akkarmashi (The Outcaste)* and a book theorizing Dalit writings, *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations*, which has contributed immensely to the body of Dalit literature. In his writings, Limbale has given meta-realistic accounts of his life as a Dalit inside the Mahar community (traditionally human scavengers) of Maharashtra. His depiction becomes universal as it reflects the life and struggles of all Dalits in general across the Indian sub-continent. In an interview Limbale says

I have and never will write for entertainment. I am a writer of people. How can I forget problems of my people? ... Dalit literature is not the literature of imagination. It is a literature of atrocities inflicted on Dalits by high caste Hindus. Dalit writers must work continuously with their focus on social transformation. (Ghosh and Rani 2014:9)

Dalit writing in its formative years was largely about articulating protest, self-respect, angst, identity, dignity, critiquing religion, politics, patriarchy, Dalit patriarchy and the demand for space for Dalits in social, cultural, and political spheres. Over the years, activist thinkers like B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) and Jotiba Phule (1826-1890) have tried to evolve an ideology supporting the Dalit cause. Eva-Maria Hardtman, who has documented and analyzed the Dalit movement in India, says that beginning in the 1990s the network of the Dalit movement has spread across the globe finding diasporic as well as non-Indian sympathizers who focus on racism, discrimination, Human Rights and related issues (2012:xiii). She further says that

the Dalit movement is part of, and belongs within, something wider. The meanings produced in the Dalit networks occur within a broader global field, structured by power relations in the vein of Fraser (1992), Alvarez (2000), and Randeria (2007) among others (Hardtman 2012:2).

She takes a theoretical stand that *emphasizes that the social fields where the movement activists produce meaning, from the local to the global contexts are structured by different power relations* (2). In the same vein, Limbale is of the opinion that *Dalit literature simultaneously makes the Dalits as well as the upper castes conscious of the gulf that exists even in a democratic nation like ours* (Ghosh and Rani 2014:8). He says, *Another important function of Dalit literature has been to highlight the contributions of icons like Ambedkar and*

Phule who have inspired the Dalits to be united in their struggle against discrimination and exploitation (8-9) giving rise to a body of literature which has engaged itself with a socio-political ideology that has both shaped and changed social relations. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations* (2010) (*Towards an Aesthetic* henceforth) is Sharankumar Limbale's magnum opus and his contribution to the literature on Dalit aesthetics. It conveys a poetics that is subversive and resists canonical logic. The canvas offered is experiential in nature and the language used engages one, being poetic, counter-hegemonic and counter-brahmanical.

The flow of meanings produced by the Dalit activists is deduced from everyday experience, which has historically been constrained by caste hegemony. In Indian civil society they have always been silent or muted. Explaining the Dalit movement in India Hardtmann (2012:2) says that,

exclusion over the years of Dalit activists from the public sphere led to the formation of an alternative counterpublic from the 1920s onwards. Although their flow of meaning has increasingly trickled out to the Indian public during the twentieth century, and to a great extent during the recent past, its reach in the public sphere is still to only a very limited degree.

Dalit writings have formed a body of literature which is timidly trying to nudge its way from the margins into mainstream Indian literature in this century. It comprises the ugliness of Dalit habits and habitation in the fringes of society. The narratives are quite different in expression from the mainstream narrative, thereby necessitating a different theoretical approach. Sharan Limbale questions the mainstream aestheticians' doctrines of the age-old concepts of *satyam*, *shivam* and *sundaram* and problematises the traditional concept of beauty, pleasure and propriety. This brings to mind the problem of meaning and interrelationality exhibited in experiential literature. This article proposes to situate Dalit poetics vis-à-vis traditional theory of literature making a postcolonial reading of *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* and exploring the socio-political processes evolving therein.

The Dalit of India, overridden by the caste system and brahmanic hegemony, reflect the social consciousness of revolt uttered by oppressed people of the community. Radical social dimensions can be promoted or repressed, and the dialogic or monologic constituent of language can be held responsible for this. In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* Bakhtin and Voloshinov speak of the domination of the ruling class that tries to extinguish any socially radical voice and interestingly strives to turn it inwards in order to mould the utterance of revolt into the voice of the mainstream (1986:23). Therefore, if the dialogic aspect of language foregrounds class, ideological and other conflicts, divisions and hierarchies within society, then society, manifested in state power and those elements of society which serve state power, will frequently try to silence it or

patronize it. And the language of revolt questions the repression and authority of state power that is the monologic language. Bakhtin chooses and examines carnivalesque characters seen in medieval and Renaissance times in his book on Rabelais (Bakhtin 1984), to show how the monologic language of power looked at the collective body of people who stood against the official ideology and discourse of religious and state power. In this book, he examines the manner in which the ancient tradition of *carnival* portrayed the non-hegemonic dimensions of society and people as profane. Their language was profane, and they were imagined as a stereotype of people having huge bodies, bloated stomachs, orifices, debauchery, drunkenness and promiscuity. These carnivalesque images bring to mind *Poetics* of Aristotle, wherein Aristotle distinguishes between tragedy and comedy. Tragedy, he says is *the imitation of noble actions and actions of good men* (in Butcher 1951:11) and comedy, *an imitation of characters of a lower type, not, however, in the full sense of the word bad, the Ludicrous being merely a subdivision of the word ugly. It consists in some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive* (13). Like Bakhtin, Aristotle too projected hegemonic dimensions of society in tragedy and the monologic language of his *Poetics* looked at the non-hegemonic dimensions of society and people as profane and their pain and actions as ludicrous. A similar pattern is visible in Indian Aesthetics. The Brahminical hegemony perceived the Dalit and their writings as profane and ugly.

Bakhtin's vision of society exhibits a conflict between monologic and dialogic forces. The monologic forces are authoritarian and argue for what it takes to be logical, whilst dialogic forces, which Julia Kristeva calls 'poetic language', constantly struggles to express the non-logical. Kristeva believes that notions of unquestionable authority and singularity such as God, Law, Definition, etc., always work on the side of monologic power. She describes 'poetic language' as the language of resistance. It is polyphonic and anti-totalitarian and foregrounds the inability of any logical system based on 'zero-one sequence' like truth-falsehood, nothingness-notation and other such binaries. She holds that the only way to escape the linguistic, psychic, and social "prohibition" is through "poetic discourse" (Kristeva 1980. 69-89). Bakhtin and Medvedev in the context of the revolution in the post-Stalinist Russia threw light on language as a meaningful utterance in their socio-historical context. Bakhtin/Medvedev write:

Not only the meaning of the utterance but also the very fact of its performance is of historical and social significance, as, in general, is the fact of its realization in the here and now, in given circumstances, at a certain historical moment, under the conditions of the given social situation. The presence of the utterance is historically and socially significant (Bakhtin/Medvedev 1978:120).

The voice of the Dalit against the monologic authoritarian hegemony in postcolonial India bears meaning, given their historical and social status. Evolving meaning in the narratives of Dalit literature calls for a close look at the process of articulation that resists interpretation and logic which is the basic tenet of Dalit aesthetics. Limbale in his book *Towards an Aesthetic* has raised questions and his voice against hegemonic dominance in a literary arena where the subaltern Dalit voice has been subjected to ignominy for centuries. Limbale mostly talks about the Dalit aesthetics as seen in the literature in the State of Maharashtra in India. Before Limbale, Jotiba Phule provided the logic of history of Dalit ideology much like Hegel in Europe, says Gail Omvedt in *Dalit Visions* (2010:23). Omvedt quotes G.P.Deshpande, an eminent scholar, who argues that Phule's thought proved that socio-political struggles of the Indian people could attract universal attention:

Phule also talked about knowledge and power much before Foucault did. In fact, Foucault's post-modernist analysis comes at a time when Europe has literally seen the 'end of history' whereas Phule's efforts were to change the world/society with the weapon of knowledge (Omvedt 2010:23).

Limbale's theory, like Phule's, is a kind of historical materialism where economic exploitation and cultural dominance are interwoven. His poetics discuss at length the cultural indignity and social subalternity of the Dalits under the repression of state power that tends to silence or patronize the utterance of revolt which would foreground another kind of language and performance inside the society. The ongoing argument in this essay positions Limbale's *Towards an Aesthetic* in a similar context.

Traditional literature and literary theory have been monologic and silent about the Dalit or the oppressed class. Western and Indian traditional literary aesthetics both tend towards the study of beauty and form with the intention of generating pleasure. *Rasa* and *dhvani* are two key concepts of Indian aesthetics addressing the nature of aesthetic experience and the meaning of poetic words respectively. J.N.Mohanty in his book, *Classical Indian Philosophy* (2000), discusses the concept of post-vedic aesthetics in India at length. Poet-vedic aesthetics, he says, rely heavily on the theory of *Brahman*, positing that since *Brahman* is the essence of all metaphysical entities, the locus of beauty lies in the object and not in the mind. Thus, all living beings gravitate towards that locus or centre of beauty for fulfillment or ecstasy. In this quest for fulfillment nothing appears ugly or bad, since all things shine with beauty and sublimity. This element of beauty vibrates in the states of *rasa* (*krodha, bhava, rati*), all of which express beauty and sublimity whether they give pain or pleasure. Aristotle uses states of anger, joy, fear or sorrow for catharsis. *Rasa* uses them to achieve a state of *sachchidananda* (a composite of permanence, consciousness and joy). The poetic discourse of this philosophy promotes a monologic view positing the

hegemony of the *Brahman* as the essence of all metaphysical entities. It does not take into consideration, rather, negates the existence of any other form which may oppose its doctrine in a rejection of polyphony and the dialogic forces. Limbale differs from this monologic view of poetic discourse. He brings in the importance of the participation of the reader in any evaluation or discerning review of literature. Considering that literature is for enjoyment, he suggests that this enjoyment is directly proportionate to the mindset and preference of the reader which can be found in the proximity of the literature to the reader's life and culture. *The reader has certain pre-determined assumptions that precede reading.[...] The reader examines whether these assumptions are challenged or confirmed by the text. The reader's mindset is informed by class and caste* (118). This contests the logic of traditional social discourse heralding what Kristeva calls a non-logical *poetic discourse*. In this context, it is pertinent to look at the views of some literary theorists of Maharashtra from where Limbale hails and is informed in regional and cultural aesthetics.

R.B.Patankar, a noted scholar, points out that, *Aesthetics is a much respected, almost awe-inspiring subject in Maharashtra today* (2010:389). He further says that people from various subcultures, here, believe that aesthetic theory can be developed without being *deeply steeped in any artistic tradition and in all the important material on the subject* and that *“what one needs is nothing except original talent* (391). Patankar's opinion depicts the ideology of the dominant class in Maharashtra. His opinion is representative of the utterance of authority and the state power in a historical and social moment. A theoretician of repute, Bhalchandra Nemade in his article, “The Marathi Novel 1950-75”, throws light on the spectrum of development of Marathi novel. He divides the spectrum into two basic trends, one the unrealistic and the other, the realistic trend. The unrealistic trend is the *pratikriti*-oriented Mochangad trend, consisting of the historical, the mythological, the biographical and the fantasy novels; and the *riti*-oriented Muktamala trend which represented the sexual novel. The realistic part of the spectrum is the regional trend consisting of regional themes; and the *kriti*-oriented Yamunaparyatan trend consisting of sub-community, sub-culture based; problem-based; and new morality based themes in the novel. The latest trend *kriti is an instance of the obvious realistic attitude on the increase through the new novel* (2010:215). Analyzing the trends in literature in the post-1960 period, he says that a new cycle of Marathi novel began around that time.

Though the reviewers-professors-publishers-editors with their punditic taste tried hard to push the old cycle forward during the decade, a new cycle of the kirti-oriented trend with its various branches started emerging. The novelists belonging to the later prevented the punditic criticism. They accepted realism, selected novel subject matter, and, avoiding the unrealistic individualism, bridged the gulf between the individual and society. They brought techniques of finding out significance in social life and activity. They invented new aesthetic ideas (Patankar 2010:216).

The realism of the new novelistic trend gave the subaltern voices space. The punditic literature had never taken cognizance of Dalit writing in Maharashtra, as they professed monologism, but later, a dialogic and polyphonic force rose to question authority and singularity such as God, Law, social systems, caste, etc. This polyphonic force arose with a subaltern consciousness to inform itself and the practitioners of monologism of the slavery, the pain and suffering that were a part of their reality for centuries in Maharashtra and the whole of the Indian subcontinent.

Dalit literature is a body of writing by the Dalit steeped in Dalit consciousness that rejects beauty and pleasure in favour of social values, conditions and life-affirming realism. They reject traditional aesthetics for a new aesthetic, depicting constant struggles of the Dalit in order to express the counter-logic of hegemonic aesthetics. The concept of beauty propounded in aesthetics thus far has been challenged by both Ambedkar and Limbale, who suspect the literary value inscribed in beauty, truth and God. Like Western aesthetics, Indian aesthetics lays importance on *satyam*, *shivam* and *sundaram*, the concepts of truth, holiness and beauty, respectively. The Dalit puts to question the existing collective system or the *langue* of upper caste Hindus, contesting and positing the reality of *satyam*, *shivam* and *sundaram* faced by them for an illogically long time. Limbale in his book *Towards an Aesthetic* states that *the art that contradicts tradition obstructs the process of enjoyment by casting a shadow on conscious and unconscious prejudices and assumptions held by the reader* (2010:118). He further draws into focus that, *Dalit literature cannot be fully appraised without knowledge of the Dalit writers' experience, their anger, rejection and rebellion vis-à-vis traditional values, as well as the social context* (118). In the same section, he emphasizes that Dalit writers prioritize problems of society over aesthetic gratification. In fact their *effort is to transport the aesthete-readers to their own level of experience* (118). He further analyses the Dalit's historical and social situation and questions the validity of traditional aesthetics of the upper caste. He says:

Untruth: . . . Is it truth that Brahman [upper caste] was born from Brahma's [God] mouth and the Shudra [Dalit] from his feet? Is it truth that one is born a Shudra because of sins committed in a previous life?

Since there is no truth in any of this, satyam should really be asatyam [untruth].

Unholy: Hindu scriptures have deemed the touch, shadow and speech of the Dalit person as defiling. Food, water and people become impure from the touch of the untouchable. Not only human beings, even God becomes polluted. Separate settlements, riverbanks and cremation grounds have been arranged for untouchables. ... Even today Dalits are tortured by being called Dalit. Injustice and ill treatment are inflicted on Dalit women....

Unbeauty: Dalits should live outside the village; they should take inauspicious names; they should not accumulate property; they should possess only donkeys or dogs, and they should wear clothes meant to dress corpses. They should not learn Sanskrit or read the Vedas, lest by doing so, they become aware of their oppression. ... (if) they did not live

mutely according to prescription, provision for serious punishment was made for any breach of injunctions (Limbale 2010:20-21). [parentheses mine]

Truth, God and beauty so dear to the appreciation of literature are put under a scanner by a major section of society that has been oppressed for centuries. The *poetic language* of resistance is evident in the above cited lines from Limbale. There is no truth, holiness or beauty in discrimination and undermining of human values. The state of *sachchidananda*, a composite of permanence, consciousness and joy, as proposed by the *rasa* theory is a mockery in view of the social oppression suffered by a section of the same society. The only way to escape the linguistic, social and psychological oppression is through *poetic language*. Limbale firmly believes that *Satyam, shivam, sundaram ... are fabrications used to divide and exploit ordinary people. In fact, the aesthetic concept of 'satyam, shivam, sundaram' is the selfish mechanism of upper caste Hindu society* (21).

In his opinion, *it is necessary to replace this conception of aesthetics with one that is material and social* (21). The Western critical tradition looked at mimesis from the Aristotelian perspective, where the subject of mimesis was considered in two ways as principle and practice. As a principle, mimesis is a kind of human urge that creates drama and is endowed with aesthetic values. As a practice, mimesis is a way of handling theatrical devices to reflect the principle. For the subaltern or Dalit aestheticians, mimesis is pure imitation and exposition both in principle and practice. In principle, this mimesis spoke about the need for writing not to attain any catharsis but to attain raised consciousness in society about the need for struggle against oppression and discrimination. And in practice, it depicted the experiential reality of the Dalit suffering. Modern Marathi literature portrayed Dalits from a middle-class perspective that showed sympathy and compassion for Dalits, but there were *no images of Dalits with self-pride [...]* *Instead of delineating Dalits realistically, the new writers gave sensational descriptions of artificial sexuality, sensuality and crime* (27). Hence, Dalit writers from the slums and rural areas hold that,

... if 'the experience of untouchability' or 'the stigma of caste system' is set aside, the lives of all the oppressed people are alike. However, to deny the visible presence of caste system and say that all rural life is identical is to deny reality. It is not possible to close one's eyes to the experience of the untouchable because it is the experience of thousands of people over thousands of years. Dalit literature is born from the womb of this untouchability. This is its uniqueness (Limbale 2010:29).

In his autobiography, *The Outcaste* (2003), Limbale does not sensationalize poverty and untouchability, he gives a clear picture of the lives lived by the Mahar community: they feed on the flesh of dead animals; dust the fungus off bread before eating the food obtained from begging; it is even sanctioned that hunger may be appeased with banana peels thrown away by people on the

streets; the barber refuses to cut their hair as they are untouchables; their women are raped and exploited but cannot aspire for any respectability and suffer many more such gory experiences throughout their lives. Rejection and revolt become social and collective so far as Dalits are concerned. They demand to be recognized as human and to receive all the rights of living as human beings. Thus the meaning of beauty and pleasure becomes relational and contextual. It depends upon processes of association and combination within the system of a specific dialogic 'poetic language'. Dalit aesthetics bears meaning in context as we look at Bakhtin's theory of language, which he said, *stems from the word's existence within specific social sites, specific social registers and specific moments of utterance and reception* (Allen 2000:11). The diction or language in Dalit literature is distinct, purposeful and based upon the social register of Dalit experience.

It is the uncouth-impolite language of Dalits. ... This language does not recognize cultivated gestures and grammar. ... For their writing, Dalit writers have used the language of the quarters rather than the standard language. . . . Cultured people in society consider standard language to be proper language for writing. Dalit writers have rejected this validation of standard language by the cultured classes, because it is arrogant (and) does not include all the words of the Dalit dialects. Besides, the ability to voice one's experience in one's mother tongue gives a greater sharpness to one's expression (Limbale 2010:33-34).

The language used in Dalit literature is polyphonic and stands in opposition to the diction prescribed in both Indian and Western hegemonic Aesthetics. The discourse of the Dalits is anti-authoritarian and escapes from an imposed linguistic and psychological 'prohibition'. It is a language that becomes meaningful in the socio-historical context of oppression and revolt. It is essentially experiential, born from absolute, unrestrained anguish, *explosive rejection and piercing revolt* (Limbale 2010:31). The images and symbols used in the literature are appropriate, communicating to them and their readers their dynamics in society and a history of torture of untouchability and hunger. Images of indignity and hunger dominate most of Dalit literature. In *The Outcaste*, Limbale writes, *hunger is a powerful thing* (2013:50). He describes an incident when out of hunger he had stolen bhakaris (a kind of rolled out dry bread) from some Waddars, untouchable stone crushers, who were crushing stones with their hammers near a bungalow. Without any sense of guilt or shame in the language he writes, *I just picked up their bhakaris tied in a cloth, and ran home. When I untied the bundle there were a few bhakaris of milo jowar and five or six fried mice on top.* (50) Neither stealing nor eating inhuman food like fried mice brings in any guilt or shame because the writer justifies that,

Hunger is bigger than man. Hunger is more vast than the seven circles of hell. Man is only as big as a bhakari, and only as big as his hunger. Hunger is more powerful than

man. A single stomach is like the whole earth. Hunger seems no bigger than your open palm, but it can swallow the whole world and let out a belch (Limbale 2013:50).

Eating mice, hunger and belching are words that the authoritarian language of the dominant class shies away from using, but it is commonplace in the diction of the Dalits as they live the reality of these experiences. In another incident Limbale describes hunger and how he and his siblings deal with it. It is a market day and his sisters Vani, Nagi and Nirmi went running around begging and eating whatever they could get or steal.

On one occasion a fruit vendor hit Vani with his chappal in the crowded market. Vani wriggled and cried on the street. She had stolen just a banana but the fruit vendor was wild with anger. Perhaps that fruit vendor had a daughter like Vani? Yet he was ruthless. People gathered at the scene. My eyes flowed like a leaki

By evening the market dispersed. Vani had collected the banana skins which people had discarded after eating the fruit. She sat by the street and ate the skins. I hit Vani. I snatched the skins and threw them away to stop her from eating them.

Suddenly, though, I changed my mind. I collected the banana skins and wiped them with my shirt as they were soiled. Then I went to the river, sat in a corner and started eating them. ... When I reached home my mother was sitting on a torn rag-quilt... (she) hissed at me, ' Let her eat worms and live. Why do you make it a matter of prestige?' (Limbale 2013:21-22).

The emotion expressed in the above cited episode from *The Outcaste* is not cathartic; rather, hunger and the expression of pain and anger which is intensely felt and lived both by Limbale and his Mother, though in different contexts, is representative and integral to the literature of the Dalit. It primarily expresses desire for survival and only then human liberation or dignity. Their tragedy is collective and never individual. It is representative of a collective revolt against established hegemony and state power. Babasaheb Ambedkar's ideas and agitation gave the Dalit self-respect. His ideology became the inspiration for Dalit literature which held human dignity at the centre. Ambedkar fought against the iniquitous system of Hinduism that imposed inequality among humans on various fronts, such as, heredity, marriage restrictions, profession, dietary rules and hierarchy. Ambedkar's ideas of social justice were influenced by the French Revolution. He professed liberty, equality and fraternity in society for the untouchables, yet he was distinct as his *philosophy has roots in religion and not in political science* (Limbale 2010:47). It is here that he differed from the ideology of Marx. Marxism was concerned with the exploited, suffering common person in the process of a class struggle between the poor and the rich. Ambedkar's view of exploitation was different, given the complexity of the Indian situation, where the struggle was multidimensional taking caste, class and religion into its ambit. Ambedkar believed that "it is not true that we are poor therefore we are untouchable. The truth, he believes, is that we are untouchable therefore we are poor. Otherwise, every poor person in India would be

untouchable!” (66). He believed that untouchability and poverty in India were socio-historical phenomena rooted in today’s politics and needed to be eradicated. Malcolm X in "Racism: the Cancer that is Destroying America," (1964) published in the *Egyptian Gazette* had said:

The common goal of 22 million Afro-Americans is to respect as human beings, the God-given right to be a human being. Our common goal is to obtain the human rights that America has been denying us. We can never get civil rights in America until our human rights are first restored. We will never be recognized as citizens there until we are first recognized as humans.

The Dalit voices in India also revolt and demand equality, civil rights and respect as human beings. Their literature reflects their everyday experience in their own language expressing their heartfelt desire to subvert the doctrines laid down by the dominant class/caste. In this light Limbale quotes from a letter Engels had written to Minna Kautsky on 26 November 1885:

[A] socialist-biased novel fully achieves its purpose, in my view, if by conscientiously describing the real mutual relations, breaking down conventional illusions about them it shatters the optimism of the bourgeois world, instills doubt as to the eternal character of the existing order, although the author does not offer any definite solution (Limbale 2010:72-73).

The Dalit writers not only nurture economic consciousness, they also nurture caste consciousness in their literature which makes it radical, injurious, bitter and aggressive. Like the African-American consciousness it is motivated by the revolutionary desire for freedom from slavery and exploitation, engendered by a Brahminical context. Religion and Brahminism have dominated Hindu society for so long that Dalit literature perforce has given anxious voice to the consequences of this discrimination. To reiterate his point, Limbale cites Gwendolyn Brooks’ argument regarding the authenticity of Black Literature. She says,

Sometimes there is a quarrel. ‘Can poetry be “black”? Isn’t all poetry just POETRY?’ The fact that a poet is black means that his life, his history and the histories of his ancestors have been different from the histories of Chinese and Japanese poets, Eskimo poets, Indian Poets, Irish poets ... The poetry from black poets is black poetry. Inside it are different nuances AND outrightnesses (Limbale 2010:96).

Dalit literature is distinct, and its aesthetic value is inherent. It is representative of the collective voice of the Dalit in a common socio-historical situation. Kristeva’s *poetic language* which is the language of intertextuality, because of its embodiment of otherness, is against, beyond and resists totalitarianism and language of propriety, authority and state power, is the kind of language found in Dalit writing. It is subversive and revolutionary. It questions dominant Brahminical ideology while foregrounding the otherness of Dalits.

Dalit literature recognizes that *beauty-related experiences are object-specific, person-specific and situation-specific* (Limbale 2010:114). Aesthetics can only exist in a conflict of dialogism and cannot be prescriptive. There cannot exist a general concept of beauty or aesthetics, and Dalit literature cannot subscribe to the idea that literature privileges pleasure derived from beauty. The *rasa* would be rewritten as a new *rasa* depicting the taste of pain, anger, rejection, rebellion, problems, struggles, injustices and ill-treatment contained in Dalit literature. Limbale argues that the hegemonic *critique of Dalit literature is mired in the issue of taste. It comprises of flattery, advice, direction and sympathetic encouragement. Dalit writers do not find this criticism genuine* (121). They have rejected traditional artistic standards of both Western and Indian aesthetics. They claim *Our path is different. Our direction is different. Therefore we should spend our energies in travelling our own path and seeking our own direction* (121). Hindu icons, imagery and value systems are replaced by Dalit deities, rural imagery and inverted value system in present-day Dalit aesthetics. The notion of beauty and truth for example, has undergone a drastic change, privileging the individual and her felt experiences rather than an abstract notion of imaginary beauty and archetypal experiences that the reader may not be able to relate to. *Dalit writers are not focused on the aesthete-reader, traditional aesthetic values, which are aesthe-reader centered, are not applicable to the evaluation of their literary productions* (118-119). Dalit literature evolves towards a revolutionary awakening of *consciousness of self-respect* (119). It is a literature of the exploited engaged in a search for freedom while trying to give expression to it. Far from being imaginary or romantic its foundation is primarily embedded in political, economic, social and moral aspects of real life. Therefore, Limbale's poetics suggests an alternative poetics promoting dialogic possibility of looking at art from the point of view of the cultural discourse of subalternity in postcolonial India.

References

- Allen, G.** 2000. *Intertextuality*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bakhtin, M.M.** 1984. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. H. Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bakhtin, M.M., Medvedev, P.N.** 1978. *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*. Trans. A.J. Wehrle. Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press.
- Bakhtin, M.M., Voloshinov, V.N.** 1986. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Trans. L. Matejka and I.R. Titunik. Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press.
- Barthes, R.** 1984. *Elements of Semiology*. Trans. A. Lavers and C. Smith. London: Jonathan Cape.
- Butcher, S.H.** 1951. *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*. Trans. and with notes. Introduction by J. Gassner. 4th ed. Mineola, NY: Dover Pub. Inc.
- Butcher, S.H. trans.** 2010. *The Poetics of Aristotle*. Las Vegas, Nevada: Lits.

- Ghosh, N.K., Rani, S.** 2014, Sept. “‘My Words are My Weapon’: Conversation with Sharan Kumar Limbale’. *Re-markings* 13.3, pp. 7–22.
- Hardtmann, E.M.** 2012. *The Dalit Movement in India: Local Practices, Global Connections*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Kristeva, J.** 1980. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Trans. T. Gora, A. Jardine and L.S. Roudiez [in:] Roudiez, L.S. (ed). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Limbale, S.** 2010. *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations*. Trans. with commentary by A. Mukherjee. Delhi: Orient Blackswan.
- Limbale, S.** 2003. *The Outcaste : Akkarmashi*. Trans. S. Bhoomkar. New Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press.
- Malcolm X.** 1964. Aug 25, “‘Racism: the Cancer that is Destroying America,” *Egyptian Gazette* <http://www.malcolmx.com/about/quotes.html> (Accessed 19.04.2014).
- Massey, J.** 1997. ‘Historical Roots’ [in:] *Indigenous People: Dalits Issues in Today’s Theological Debate*. Massey, J. (ed.). New Delhi: ISPCK.
- Mohanty, J.N.** 2000. *Classical Indian Philosophy*. New York: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers Inc.
- Nemade, B.** 2010. “The Marathi Novel 1950–1975 (1981)” [in:] *Indian Literary Criticism: Theory and Interpretation*. Devy, G.N. (ed). Noida: Orient Blackswan, pp.192–219.
- Omvedt, G.** 2010. *Dalit Visions*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan.
- Patankar, R.B.** 2010. “Aesthetics: Some Important Problems.” [in:] *Indian Literary Criticism: Theory and Interpretation*. Devy, G.N. (ed.). Noida: Orient Blackswan, pp. 389–416.