

DAYA PAWAR'S *BALUTA*: A CHALLENGE TO HUMANITY

Dr. Shagufta Anjum

(Assistant Professor)

Women's College A.M.U. Aligarh

India has long been proud of its culture of tolerance and peaceful co-existence but the social, cultural and literary contestation can be seen everywhere from the last couple of decades. Here cast hierarchies still exist after seventy years of independence. It proves that only constitutional provisions are not enough to transform the mindset of the higher caste people. Such suffocated environment challenges our world view of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. Dalits everywhere in India have been the victims of caste oppression for centuries. They are forced to live in subhuman conditions and to endure economic exploitation, political powerlessness and cultural subjugation. They have been exploited in the name of religion and society. This social Injustice and inequality plunge them into ignorance and left them trapped and suffocating to live in such a hostile environment of compromises and alienation. For coming out of this social structure they need a loud and clear voice to proclaim their right. Dalit literature gives voice to the counter narratives of the people living on the margins of the society. It situates personal and collective sufferings within a larger discourse of human rights. Daya Pawar's present autobiography *Baluta* selected for analysis is a shocking account of social, cultural and political discrimination perpetuated on dalits. Challenging humanity it makes a clarion call for change in the socio-political structure to give a dalit a distinct identity.

Key words: Contestation, world view, cultural subjugation, alienation, counter narrative..

In 1960s Dalits took up their pen and filled it with boiling blood to pour out the cry of pain and anguish. This literature found its voice first in 1960 and 70 to end this age-old system and to assert their identity, pride and equal rights dismantling the caste system which was responsible for their untouchable status. Thus efforts were made to rebuild the society based on the principle of human dignity, equality and respect. Their true mettle allows them to come out from their prescribed margin defined by high caste people. Dalit comes from Sanskrit root 'dal' which means ground-down, crushed and broken to pieces. Mahatma Buddha and Phule made the pavement for such marginalized people. In 1928 Ambedkar Sahab used Dalit word in his journal; 'Bahiskrit Bharat' (outcaste India) .It provides useful

insights on the question of Dalit identity, their experiences and speculation (anubhav and anumana) to find their expression in the present world.

Literature has the power to perform the function of revolution and to change the monolithic social structure against atrocity. In 1993 Dalit Sahitya transformed into 'Ambedkari Sahitya' to explore dalit chaos, predicaments and their psyche. It awakened the new social strata and expanded the horizon of Indian literature. It is a rebellious literature against exploitation and mangling humanity that challenges Hindu philosophy and ideology based on inequality and four-fold social arrangement, Brahman, chatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Although Indian constitution is based on equality, liberty and fraternity but after independence in India, no thread of equality can be seen on the fabric of the nation. Dr. Ambedkar gave the muted one the voice and a jump from their oppressed status to equality. On 14 October 1956, he announced his conversion to Buddhism a different religion. "Today I am reborn. I have no faith in the philosophy of incarnation: and it is wrong and mischievous to say that Buddha was an incarnation of Vishnu. I am no more a devotee of any Hindu god and goddess. I will not perform Shraddha. I will strictly follow the eight fold path (Aastangik Marga) of Buddha. Buddhism is a true religion and I will lead a life guided by three principles of knowledge, right path and compassion." (Bakshi, 20-21)

Being impressed by Dr. Ambedkar's ideology Daya Pawar had written *Baluta* the first Marathi autobiography in 1978. It touches many issues that are still present in India after 40 years of its writing. It represents the muzzling voices, suppressing their inner pain. In fact, it is ironic in present modern world that how even after many decades their sentiments are being strangulated. Readers are exposed to a life of deprivation squalor, cruel discrimination and pernicious caste system. Daya Pawar poured down his inner freight loaded with anger and grief. He had written about his experience in school where he was forced to sit away from the upper caste students and had to knock their doors for leftovers. All this was not enough but he was ridiculed for his name Danduthat means, 'stone'. It was also governed by a certain order as Brahmin's name will signify learnedness, Vidhyasagar, for Chatriya, Balram for Vaishya Lakshmikanth and for shudra Maatang that declares caste system.

In his autobiography Daya Pawar heeded Baba Ambedkar's threefold exhortation to Dalits: educate, unite, and agitate is the only way to come out the trap of Hinduism.

He told, "Have faith in yourself. With justice on our side I do not see how we can lose our battle. For ours is a battle not for wealth or for power. It is a battle for freedom. It is a battle for reclamation of human personality." (Ambedkar 1942)

Daya Pawar always maintained distance from Dalit Panthers due to their violent ways. He was a kind and soft-spoken intellectual. He used to say if Dalit Panthers are in favour of morcha he will not join them but would walk on foot path alongside. Daya Pawar's daughter Pradnya says, "likhnajeena aursangharshkarna, yeh sab ekdosrekephalu the. Yeh jo jee rahethe, apnehaqkeliye lad rahethe, kabhiraste par utar ate the, kabhi pen uthalete the." (The Indian Express 2 August 2015 written by Dipti Nagpaul D' Souza New Delhi)

Every day news papers report the discrimination and injustice against Dalits but this daily routine of reading has killed our sensitivity and sensibilities. On the other hand writing about their atrocities Dalits used it as a defense mechanism. According to Freud, it is an unconscious and creative effort of ego, which is used to protect themselves from feelings of anxiety and guilt. It arises because they feel threatened or because of their superego which becomes too demanding. It operates at an unconscious level and helps ward off unpleasant feelings and makes them feel better. Repression, denial, projection, displacement, regression and sublimation are all the approaches of defense mechanism. Writing is sublimation. Through which Daya expressed his inner self. He says about the poem, 'In Prison' that it mirrors his life.

“Mysorrow: an iceberg,
 Its tip alone breaking the waterline.
 My memories: drops of acid
 That leaves me shivering in pain.
 On my shoulders, the crucifix of life
 On my forehead, the placard of my fate-
 You who have washed the guilt off your hands,
 You who have exfoliated your past,
 How do you manage with these new-hewn faces?”

In the mist of casteism, privilege class was not able to recognize the talent and various skills of Daya's father as he knows to play flute and beat the drum. He was expert in sowing the seeds and can catch the snake by its tail, slamming its head he can break its back.

Daya Pawar was one of the admirers of Baba Ambedkar who was a visionary and a philosopher of life. He always restricted Dalits from womanizing and alcohol because he knew that all these addictions will force them to get involve in other evils as theft, robbery, and gambling too due to which society will never give them equal right but will throw them out of the village or city as a curse on it. But among dalits these were considered a sign of masculinity and men look at that man with great admiration.

Daya's own father who was a womanizer had his own philosophy of life, 'naked, I came, naked I shall return.' (Pawar 28)

They were not only socially marginalized but also geographically. They live out of the village and high-class people did not tolerate to share the same air so their front of the houses was on the back of high caste people. Caste system forced Mahars to live on the edge of the village which is known as 'Maharwada' the area designated in every village for Mahars so that they can stay away from the main village and villagers to maintain hierarchy and purity. They were untouchables and treated by upper caste villagers as bonded labour. There were certain assigned tasks as dragged away from the carcasses of the dead animals, chopping firewood, playing music day and night at festivals and welcome bride groom at the

village border and they have to run in front of the horse of any important person and take care of their animals too. They had to make proclamations of the funeral announcement from village to village and in return for it they received baluta- their share in the village harvest.” Mahars would spread their blankets on the grain and the Marathas would give them whatever was beneath. This came with a stream of abuse. The Mahars would ignore them completely as they tied up their bundles.” (Pawar P. 66)

Not only Maratha farmers were cruel who used to grab the entire crop using bad words like, ‘ to hell with your mother and father’. As an act of kindness, they give us a couple of measures. Adivasis were also the same or imitating Marathas they would give them water from a great distance and Bakhri and chatni too avoiding physical contact. Even the barber refused to cut the hair of Mahars and Chambhars and feel happy to shave buffaloes. The cities were free from all such contaminations of casteism. To get freedom from this entire environment he decided to get an education, although he has to suffer a lot due to the attachment for his mother and sister. Whenever in feasts sweetmeats was served he thought about his mother and sister that he is eating here sometimes dare to hide a laddoo in his glass for his sister but had not done because of a thief being called but to eradicate this evil he was willing to sever the umbilical cord.

Brahmanic cruel and cunning behavior is also noted here. An old widow pays the tax but forgot to get the receipt. Next day when she asked for receipt, that inhuman Brahman refuses but accuse her of stealing the money. She swears at the feet of Goddess no one believed on her but sent her to jail for three months. To be born in dalit family was her only crime.

Mahar women’s shadow can also pollute Maratha’s temple. Such was the belief so they changed their way despite to change their blind faith. Fortunately, at that time a new Christen mamledar was appointed in taluka. He was in favour of justice so he decided to come to Maharwada, not in the village. Others took it as an insult. Finally, it was decided they will not trouble Mahars closing off the right of way.

Once all the Mahars decided to leave the village because of the violation of the harvesting tradition to give their share at the time of harvesting. Hearing this news of Mahars leaving the village they went and made them return with due respect. It was done selfishly because they used to believe if there will be no Mahar then any calamity might be visited upon them.

If it is a social gathering or an academic environment everywhere they have to face humiliation. At the time of village festival, there were wrestling also. But again there was a hierarchy in that match, a Mahar wrestler could not challenge to upper-class wrestler if he does and found out then beaten mercilessly. Casteism was the major part of games too. All this discrimination killed Daya’s feelings for sports. In one of the village festivals, Mahar children were invited for the feast but never allowed to serve until the higher cast had not eaten. It was a fiery barbaat in that Bajri ghugris were served. “We crush the ghugris into the barbaat while blowing-‘SssssssSssss’- to cool our mouths, but we would not stop eating. To find a piece of meat was like finding the cosmic egg and generated as much joy. We scraped up whatever was left over after the feast and brought it home.” (Pawar P. 83)

Thursday market for Mahars was a festive occasion, going there they used to eat bhel and jilebis but all the villagers used to sit in groups according to their caste under the tree. This was so customary that everyone could get his place with closed eyes. The restaurants have different cups for different castes as Mahar cups, Chambhar cups, and Mang cups. Mahar cups were without handles and ant-infested which had been washed by themselves before ordering tea and had to sit on the veranda or a bench behind the restaurant.

“They faced the teacher and we sat at a right angle to them, facing in a different direction. If we were thirsty, there was no water for us at school; we had to go back to Maharwada to drink”. (Pawar P. 45)

The role of a teacher was completely different once in a week they have to plaster the school with cow dung. There was one teacher who never discriminated Daya at school but as he entered his house becomes the different one. He never allows him to cross the threshold but had to stand on the steps. “It was as if he had his caste consciousness hanging on a peg near the door and he could slip into or out of it, at will”. (p.45)

After his father's death being inspired by Baba Ambedkar's words, his Aai decided to educate her son to make him a sahib. Baba used to say, “What dreams do the women of Maharwada have for their children? That their sons should become peons or sepoy's? A Brahmin mothers' ambitions are different: My son should become a district Collector, she says. Why do Mahar women not harbor such longings?” (Pawar P. 61)

Daya Pawar talks about the real fight for getting food or we can say for survival between vultures and Mahars. Vultures with cruel eyes and sharp beaks hated Mahars because they used to throw stones to save the dead animal but again vultures' greed forces them to come back.

Ambedkar's teaching to unite is not followed by Dalits. They have many sub groups which provide the higher class an opportunity to divide them and rule them. The division of those carcasses was so inhuman that one can feel suffocated. The division was based on gudsas (the name for the animal's bone) They used to fight for that bones and women pulled each other's hair. That division reflects their social status. Within the family male siblings were entitled to the proportions of the share. If you get larger share you are the most respectable one. Some get half of it and some only intestines. His share was only one or two paise (one hundredth or one-fiftieth of the whole).

Dead animals flesh and baluta was the only resource of their life. Baluta was like begging but Mahars did not get this as a sign of slavery but take it as their right. For getting bakhri only women used to go if there is no woman in the family then an old man carrying a stick with bells attached. Daya mentioned here that earlier it is supposed to be a flag to show their authority or project themselves as the kings of their domain. When they lose the war then enemy succeeds in his plan to split them like wood and take their symbol of might turning it into a sign of slavery. From then a Mahars always have a stick in their hand.

Maratha boys seem swollen with pride of being born in a high caste and insult him for his caste then he feels fuse of an explosive device has to sputter inside him. “I felt that it could

not be possible be my world. At every step, at every corner, I was confronted with contempt, treated with disrespect. It suffocated me.” (Pawar P. 86)

They were very rigid to follow their age-old blind culture. That is why they suffered a lot. They become against themselves. Dr. Bheemrao Ambedkar's third teaching was to agitate against injustice and evils. Women were the most vulnerable targets of caste-based violence against their community. Once a strange incident happened in Maharwada, The bride was kept with her father in law until her husband who worked in the city cannot find a house. One day she found her father in law beside her on the bed so next day she sent the message to her mother's house and the groom was called to discuss the whole matter. Finally, when it is asked from the groom about this matter he said, “When I married this woman, she was a meant to be common property between my father and me. Thus she belongs to my father as much as to me. I'm not going to hurt my father's feelings. If this is unacceptable, her family may take her back.” (Pawar P 110)

Daya's aunt Jamuna (mother's step-sister) was sold to a brothel by her husband. She was extremely beautiful that was her fault due to which he suspects on her. In the last years of her life, she lost the control over her mind and begged till death.

Higher caste people also treated dalit women as commodity or their property. They were abused and misused. It is seen very clearly when a Brahmin high school teacher asked Hansa's (a Mahar girl) hand for his only son. It was caused an explosion in the village then the truth revealed that his son has tuberculosis that is why no one is eager to give his daughter so he asked for a Mahar daughter. After achild was born, Deshpande died and Hansa returned to Maharwada.

Daya also accepted at the end of his autobiography that he is responsible for his wife's present condition. He was suspicious about her character so he left her to her father's house forever. Thus she had to marry a man of her father's age to live a life.

When his mother was working in his hostel kitchen, other students blamed her for theft and he did not dare to meet his mother thus an invisible wall rose between them. One day he had seen that his nine or ten-year-old sister was dancing and his hostel mate boys were singing and delighting watching her dancing. Again it made him explode. Maratha boys troubled his mother a lot they used to mix salt in the food and accused of robbery many times. Nothing could be done only they can curse themselves.

This present India is a yield of Gandhian legacy. In 1932 before independence, Dalits demanded a separate electorate like Muslims for protecting themselves from all these discriminations. But Mahatma Gandhi was the fiercest who drafted a letter to Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for India, “The untouchables are not well organized. There is very little political consciousness among them and they are so horribly treated that I want to save them against themselves. I hold that a separate electorate is harmful to Depressed Classes and for Hinduism. I therefore respectfully inform His Majesty's Government that in the event of creating a separate electorate for Depressed Classes, I must fast unto death.....” (M.K. Gandhi (letter to Samuel Hoare by M.K. Gandhi, March 1932)

Our spectrum of visualizing the things should be broader. On 2nd January 2018 , An agitation disturbed the normal life of public because this time Dalit victory over Peshwas is redefined and marked as Nationalism versus Imperialism but Dalits do not see it from this narrow lens but celebrate it their victory in contemporary time relating it to their social and political marginalization, which is not acceptable in Hindu Rashtra. Ambedkar's grandson Prakash Ambedkar told that all this was planned by some Hindutva organizations. This passion for Hindutva is responsible for bringing the state at halt. In reality, nothing was being projected against nation because in 1689, Sambha ji's body was found in a river and Govind Mahar, a Dalit resident gathered the body part for the last rites and Sambha je memorial was erected by Mahars. Poisonous politics has given the colour to this event. That is an issue of contemplation rather than a debate Nationalism versus Imperialism.(We need not any organization to guide us)

Vasant Sathe expressed his idea of equality for all which seems apt and logical from all perspectives through which the long-awaited dream of equality will be fulfilled. The objective to bring these underprivileged people on the same level as the rest, then the best solution would be possible only through cultural and educational awakening .Now our country is stood on a threshold of a stupendous transformation so change in ideology is possible through various religious, political and social heads. They should come together and declare, as was done Adi Shankaracharya, "that by birth everyone is equal manual worker. It is by education that he becomes twice born".....Let anybody who goes to school be declare a Brahmin with the right of upanayana." (Sathe, "Don't divide Indians on Caste")

References:

- Ambedkar, Dr. B.R> Speech at the 'All-India Depressed Classes Conference',1942.
- Vasant Sathe, " Don't divide Indians on Caste", Deccan Chronicle Monday, 13 April 2006.
- Ambedkar, B.R. Annihilation of Caste. New Delhi: Critical Quest, 1985.
- Manohar D. Murali ed. " Critical Essays on Dalit Literature " New Delhi Atlantic Publishers, 2013.
- Pawar Daya, Baluta,Speaking Tiger Publishing, New Delhi, 2015.(Translated by Jerry Pinto)
- Perez Rosa Maria, " Kings And Untouchables", New Delhi, Chronicle Books, 2004.
- Ambedkar, B. R. *All-India Depressed Classes Conference*. 1942.
- Pawar, Daya. *Baluta*. Speaking Tiger Publishing, 2015.