



Search for Identity and Struggle for Social Freedom in DayaPawar's 'Baluta'

Dr. Bipasha Ghoshal

Associate Professor and Head, Department of English,
Research Supervisor, Dhanwate National College, Nagpur, Maharashtra

&

Mr. Milind S. Shende

Assistant Professor in English
G. S. College of Commerce, Wardha

Abstract:

Struggle is a part of life for achieving a lofty goal as well as getting well-placed in our life in general. But when we think of struggle concerning the oppressed social sections of the society fighting for their social rights, it becomes more significant and historically important. The Dalit's who were denied human rights for centuries in our country in the name of social and religious order had to undertake a long fight for their social rights. The educated generation of Dalits after 1960 have become conscious of this struggle to reflect it in their literature. With respect to this, the name of DayaPawar is at the top of the authors. DayaPawar who is considered as the first autobiographer from the Dalit community has produced his autobiography entitled, 'Baluta.' 'Baluta' is not just an autobiography unfolding the incidences of the author's life, but also an important document from historical as well as literary point of view as it reveals the deeply rooted caste consciousness amongst the so-called upper caste Indians and the struggle of the Dalits even today after Independence at every stage and step of life. The present research papers aims at unfolding the struggle of this oppressed section and their efforts to establish their individual as well as social identity as reflected in DayaPawar's 'Baluta.' It also throws light on the life, struggle and split psychology of the author in the journey of his life.

Key words:

Social struggle, search for identity, social freedom, Dalit literature, Dalit autobiographies etc.

Introduction:

The Dalits in India are fighting since many years for their social freedom within the caste-based Indian society. A giant chunk of society which has been placed at the feet of the social order has been exploited on the ground of caste and is being denied social furthermore as human rights. The division of Indian society into four classes or varnas i. e. Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra has created a big schism among various social sections. Dalits, being the fifth class after the Shudras, were denied all the rights which are needed for a dignified and respective life. A protracted struggle since the time of Lord



Buddha to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar for freedom of the Shudras and subsequently the untouchables or the Dalits bore some fruits, and that they got freedom to some extent under the protective umbrella of law since the implementation of the Constitution of India. The struggle, harsh life, humiliations, compromises, search for identity, etc. has moulded the individual and social lifetime of the people of this section of society. The social movements started under the leadership of Mahatma Fule and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar provided some solace to the oppressed and raised the voice of the voiceless on the horizon of Indian social life. The movement led by Dr. Ambedkar brought the question of caste exploitation before the entire world. This helped to draw in the eye of the complete world and address the matter within the country. The sphere of literature also took notice of this, and also the youths coming from this, and other exploited sections of Indian society poured out their feelings and experiences through their books. The autobiographies became a poignant weapon to talk up against the atrocities and register the opposition to the inhuman system of caste. Daya Pawar, one of the foremost prominent authors from the first-generation writers of Dalit community, penned down his horrific experiences in his autobiographical work, 'Baluta.' His journey from an illiterate Dagdu to educated Daya Pawar is amazing as regards to his efforts to ascertain his identity within the caste-ridden Indian society altogether in all walks of life.

Definitions of 'Dalit' 'Dalit Literature' and Autobiographies:

The dawn of the 1960s shook the very foundation of traditional Marathi literary world. The new emergence of literature produced by the writers from the ex-untouchable communities exhibited pain, caste-based discrimination, rejection, humiliation struggle for social rights through their literary creations. The autobiographies like, 'Baluta' (1978) by Daya Pawar, 'Athawaninche Pakshi' by P. E. Sonkambe (1979), Mukkam Post Devache Gothane by Madhav Kandvilkar (1979), Upara by Laxman Gaikwad (1980), Taral-Antaral by Shankarrao Kharat (1981) etc. very honestly brought the question of caste discrimination on the horizon of literature and acquainted the people with their shocking, horrific, and unique experiences. To grasp the origin and development of Dalit literature, it's necessary to appear at and analyse the terms, 'Dalit' and 'Dalit literature' as defined by various scholars.

Etymologically, the term, 'Dalit' derives from the word, 'Dal' in Sanskrit, which implies to crack, split, be broken or torn asunder, trodden down, scattered, crushed, destroyed¹. Eleanor Zelliott writes, "Dalit implies people who are broken, grounded down by those above them in a deliberate and active way"². This definition implies the hierarchical attitude of the so-called upper caste that was at the upper level within the ladder of caste. The term has been defined in additional inclusive manner by the Dalit Panthers. It says, "Dalits are those who are the members of Schedule Castes, Neo Buddhists, the working people, the landless and the poor peasants, women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion"³ The Panther has associated the term with the exploitation of the people no matter their religious backgrounds. Gangadhar Pantawane says, "Dalit believes in humanism. He rejects the existence of God, rebirth, soul, sacred books that



teach discrimination, fate and heaven because these have made him a slave.”⁴Pantawane has broken the cord of person’s belief in supernatural powers like God and has linked him with scientific aptitude and attitude while defining the term. SharatchandraMuktibodh in his essay entitled, ‘What is Dalit Literature’ writes, “Dalit literature is the literature produced by Dalit consciousness. The character of Dalit consciousness is clearly not subjective. It’s true that pains and pleasures are lived and experienced by the individuals alone, but the sufferings of the Dalits are common and are due to common reasons.” All the above definitions vary from each other, but are woven into one common thread that Dalit could be a term that’s related to the pain, servitude, struggle, humanism and consciousness of the oppressed ones regardless of their gender, caste, religion and culture in Indian society. It’d not be wrong if it’s said that the literature produced by such an individual is termed ‘Dalit literature.’

Search for Self-Identity and Dilemma of Split Identity:

DayaPawar published his autobiography ‘Baluta’ on 24th December 1978. It is considered as the first complete autobiography by a Dalit author. The autobiography begins with harsh and severe reality of Dagdu, Dagad, Dhonda or Dyaam’s (various names of DayaPawar in his childhood) life in deplorable conditions amongst the Mahar people. The childhood name of DayaPawar was of no worth of any prestige. In the very beginning of the autobiography, he tells us about his memory of his mother about his name. He says, “When I was a child, Aai (mother) would say, ‘Child, I had ten or fifteen other children whom I stuffed into the earth. My babies just kept dying. I asked for a boon and when you were born someone advised me, “Just name him something likeDagad or Donda (Stone). He’ll live.”⁵ The Mahars, amongst whom DayaPawar was born or the caste, to which he belonged i.e. Mahar, was considered as an untouchable caste. It was thought that even the touch of the person from this particular caste would be enough to pollute the upper caste Hindu. By the time, DayaPawar wrote his autobiography, the system of untouchability was repelled by the Law of the Country; but the discriminatory system still prevailed and ‘untouchability’ was being practiced with different patterns and social distance was being maintained by the upper caste Hindus with the Dalit communities. The degradation of the Dalits was since the very beginning or birth of the person and continued till the end. This created a psychological pressure on the person from this section of society. Speaking on this issue, Pawar further writes, “Just as Krishna ripped Jarasandha’s body into two and tossed them apart, my life has split my psyche into two”⁶. This horrific experience is not exclusive and limited to DayaPawar only; the entire Dalit society had undergone this torturous treatment at the hands of upper caste Hindus.

The people of Dalit communities had to take the menial or socially less prestigious works for which they were given cereal and fodder called ‘Baluta’. This caused to push them into poverty and make them dependent on the upper caste people. This dependency also added to their exploitation socially, physically as well as financially. The untouchability at physical level was more disturbing and humiliating. Describing such an incident, Pawar writes, “We got bhel and jilebis to eat. The villagers sat in groups, according to caste, under



the trees of the marketplace. The Mahar community sat near the Mari-Aai temple. This too was dictated by custom.”⁷. This behavior and the institution of untouchability and caste left permanent scars on the psyche of DayaPawar unto his last breath.

The author’s life like many of other Dalits’ got a new lifeline and turn after the conversion of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar from Hinduism to Buddhism. It left a tremendous impact and galvanized the entire social life of India in general and Dalits in particular. DayaPawar’s pursuing education and becoming a sophisticated person has another facet. His search for identity made him active in politics and social movements for equality. But his distance from his people after being educated created into him a feeling of alienation. Commenting on psychological feud of the characters Prof. BalkrishnaKavthekar writes, “In it, the characters of many painful, poor and devastated people is illustrated. Through ‘Dada’, ‘Aai’, ‘Tatya’, ‘Sadashiv’, ‘JavjiBua’, ‘Hari’ etc. Pawar makes ‘Baluta’ impressive and to be read carefully. His depiction of broadness, loveliness and psychological burden of the characters appeal the readers to think over the worst condition of the society in which they survive”.⁸

Social Aspects in the Autobiography:

The Dalit autobiographies are the records of pains, and struggle for human and social rights by the oppressed communities and DayaPawar’s ‘Baluta’ is no exception to this fact. The autobiographer here has fulfilled his social responsibility by portraying the plight of the exploited ones. As Jean Paul Sartre says about the social responsibility of the author, “Writing is not simply writing, it is an act, and in man’s continual fight against evil, writing must be deliberately used as a weapon. It is necessary that he understands this”. Sartre’s words are most befitting regarding the delineation of social life through their literary creations of the Dalit writers. DayaPawar has made many references to the incidents of discrimination on caste basis which compelled him to accept the bottom place in the social ladder of Indian society. DayaPawar has exposed the hypocrisy of the so called seemingly peaceful and harmonious society with rich culture by narrating the public incidents where he had to undergo open humiliation sanctioned by the society. He writes about this discrimination, “The restaurants had different cups for different castes; there were Mahar cups and Chambhar cups, Mang cups and so on. Our cups were very often without handles and ant-infested. We had to rinse them ourselves before ordering tea. We sat separately; either on the verandah or on a bench behind the restaurant.”⁹ This discriminatory pattern of behavior had social sanction and was backed by the fanatic Hindus in the name of religious notion of purity. Pawar has attacked the psychological vileness of the society by describing such incidents of his life in his autobiography. The discrimination was not limited to restaurants only, but it had infested nearly all aspects of life from marriage to film industry.

The historic conversion of Dr. BabasahebAmbedkar into Buddhism brought a revolutionary change in the lives of ex-untouchables or Dalits. It changed the life style, life pattern of the converted people at large. They stopped doing menial works. Pawar writes about such change in wearing clothes of his people-“Office going Mahar girls began wearing white saris to work. When it was discovered that these girls in white saris were the Mahars of



old and the Bouddhas of today, upper-caste girls stopped wearing white. This amused me. Notions of caste are tenacious; they cling to us, leech-like”¹⁰

The rise of Dr. Ambedkar on the social and political horizon of India, enthused a spirit of a respective life amongst the oppressed people. The political awareness among them was quite appreciable and they started bringing their problems and questions to the fore through agitation, speeches, newspapers, meetings and through political party. DayaPawar, an educated and socially and politically aware young man, started participating in the meetings of Republican Party of India, a political party formed after the demise of Dr. Ambedkar. The discussion of all these political and social movements and involvement of the writer himself in these activities shows us how the existing life and social movements had shaped his life. The autobiography ‘Baluta’ reflects the entire gamut of social, political, cultural, educational and religious life of the author himself and the entire society of his time.

Conclusion:

The autobiography ‘Baluta’ by DayaPawar is a wonderful piece of literature which transcends the limitations of caste and speaks about the agony of all the oppressed. It was the first complete autobiography in the era when in the name of aesthetics, the ‘space’ was denied to the Dalits and no substantial work with proper delineation of problems of Dalits, Adivasis or the other exploited sections of Indian society was produced by the traditional authors. DayaPawar through his ‘Baluta’, thus, awoke the generation of writers and poets of his times and attracted their attention towards the question of caste and untouchability. After the publication of ‘Baluta’, there was a wave of autobiographies by the ex-untouchables or Dalits. The writers from the marginalized sections at large and some *savarna* writers too started addressing these issues through their creative writings.



References:

1. Kumar, Raj. *Dalit Literature and Criticism*. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2019. P. 29.
2. Zelliott, Elineor. *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1992. P. 267
3. Joshi, Barbara. Ed. *Untouchable Voices of the Dalit Liberation Movement*. New Delhi: Select Book Services Syndicate, 1986. (Qtd. P. 145)
4. Ibid. p. 6.
5. Pawar, Daya. *Baluta*. New Delhi: Speaking Tiger Publishing Pvt. Ltd., 2015.
6. Ibid. p. 6.
7. Ibid. p. 42-42.
8. Kavthekar, Balkrishna. *Dalit SahityaEkAaklan*. Kolhapur:AjabPustakalay, 1981. P. 83.
9. Pawar, Daya. *Baluta*. New Delhi: Speaking Tiger Publishing Pvt. Ltd., 2015. P. 43.
10. Ibid. p. 259