

## Lalit Aesthetics and Dalit Aesthetics: A Comparative Study

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**Abstract.** Indian Aesthetics has been under the spell of the poetics of Sanskrit or the aesthetic theory of European literature. It has proved itself a big failure to wear a pan Indian aesthetic perspective. The conventional literary output, in other words, the mainstream literature could not bring forth the truth of society in its entirety. Foggy verbalism kept ruling the roost in mainstream literature. With the change of circumstances, almost everything in every sphere of life has undergone a lot of changes. But what still remains unchanged is really the mentality of Lalit (Caste Hindu) writers as well as the sensibility of Indian literary theory. The old and worn-out ethics and aesthetics of literature is still in vogue. It comes to happen despite the fact that Dalit literature has now taken a long stride, with literary outputs galore in diverse Indian languages including Indian English. De facto, both jewellery and pottery can't be manufactured using the same tools. Similarly, Lalit literature and Dalit literature can't be assessed and interpreted applying the already established aesthetical aspects. One need not forget that beauty lies not in objects but in the eyes of the beholder. Aesthetics of literature, Lalit or Dalit or both, depends on the Rasa theory. Dalit critics lay much stress for the inclusion of the two other rasas, such as 'Revolt' and 'Cry', with the conventional nine rasas that are supposed not to be fit for the assessment of Dalit literature or Dalit art of work. The paper in question makes a humble attempt to explore the comparisons and contrasts between the aesthetic concept of Lalit literature and that of Dalit literature in the light of two books: G N Devy's *Indian Literary Criticism* (2009) and Sharankumar's *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature* (2010). Needless to say that the mainstream literature focuses particularly on the art for art's sake theory whereas the marginal literature sheds light on the art for life's sake theory in general and on the art for Dalit's life sake theory in particular.

**Keywords :** Lalit Aesthetics; Dalit Aesthetics; Foggy verbalism; Revolt rasa; Cry rasa.

'An artist is not in the world to crucify humanity but to wash its feet'.

(Charles Morgan)

'Art is the happening of truth.' (Martin Heidegger)

Aesthetics is in itself the most complicated and controversial subject. It is supposed to have been the ornamentation of an artwork. Aesthetics is said to have taken its birth along with the production of a creative work. Every work of art is of course a creative attempt. The artwork meant for a social purpose must gain universal appeal. Realism is the bedrock of aesthetic science. Aesthetics is primarily an artistic concept of the Western as well as Sanskrit literature. Aesthetics based on

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Lalit literature does not comply with the concept of Dalit aesthetics. Suffering, cry, resistance and revolt are the chief ingredients of Dalit aesthetics. Premchand is of opinion that literature is a criticism of life. Here, life refers to a united whole. To Charles Morgan, "Nearly all our failures spring from division of mind; nearly all successes from singleness and concentration". (Hudson,59) The aesthetics of Indian literature is under the forced compulsion of the western as well as Sanskrit aesthetic theory. Beauty, fancy, imagery and symbols are considered to be among the relevantly major factors for the interpretation of aesthetics but reality is that social realism must be a specific ingredient for aesthetic merits of an artwork.

### **Art for Art's Sake versus Art for Life's Sake**

There are chiefly two theoretical ways to assess an artwork. 'Art for Art's sake' and 'Art for Life's sake'. Most of the classics, oriental as well as occidental, were written keeping in view the art for art's sake theory while the literature other than classics adopted the Art for Life's sake theory. The early writings value the form more than the content. They were meant for superficial entertainment. They were not for common masses but for the particular classes. Then it was not thought that literature could represent the entire social spectrum. There are roughly two types of major aesthetic theories to assess Indian literature in its totality. They are Lalit Aesthetics and Dalit Aesthetics. The word 'Lalit' has been used to define with justification the mainstream aesthetics in the wake of mainstream literature. Even most of the Marxist literature portrays the social life emphasizing more on the outward view than on the inward image. The whole gamut of non-Dalit literature presents social truth on the basis of the mirror image. And we know that a mirror offers the surface or superficial truth of life. It is the reason why Dalit literature comes forward with the bitter and biting truth of life that the mirror eludes or ignores. It can be easily imagined that if a sufferer writes about his own life, his feeling will be obviously more original than its origin. Here along with Dalit literature its own aesthetics takes its birth to value its justified truth.

### **Mirror Image and Ultrasound Image**

Literature is commonly said to be a mirror to the society. It may be true with the Marxist point of view that seemed unable to bring out the hidden bitterest truth of the marginal society. Marxist literature failed to portray the whole truth of society. This is the reason why Dalit literature came into being to interpret the left truth hidden to the mainstream society. Where the mirror presents the outward image, the ultrasound takes out the inside truth of the depressed community. Thus Dalit literature is very close to the ultrasound image of society. In other words literature must represent the pan-realism, not pseudo-realism, of society. And from a pretty long time, Lalit literature has been doing injustice to the oppressed society, providing to it a little room in it. The deliberate negligence of Dalit life by the Lalit class writers caused the Dalit writers to give vent to their own suffering by their

own, filling the dark gap left to be bridged by their counterparts. It can be said that Dalit literary output is a treasure of hidden truth the truth of the pitch dark India.

### **Nine Rasas versus Two Rasas ('Revolt' and 'Cry')**

Lalit aesthetics i.e. Mainstream aesthetics reckons as many as nine rasas. Out of them two were added to the list far later - Shantarasa (Equipose rasa) and Bhaktirasa (Devotion rasa). The former was included in early 11<sup>th</sup> century while the latter in early 16<sup>th</sup> century. Now the question is why not some more rasas relevant to the contemporary resistance literature be included. Dalit critics do not emphasize the separate existence of aesthetics of Dalit literature but feel the essentiality of the inclusion of two rasas, 'Revolt' rasa and 'Cry' rasa, in the already established conventional aesthetic theory. With incorporating these two rasas the aesthetic concepts of Indian literature will put on the pan Indian democratic outlook, giving it a universal dimension. But the Lalit or Savarna critics do not understand any such need for the inclusion of any more rasas. When they underestimate Dalit writing by Dalit authors, then how and why they allow it to have its own aesthetic concept. R. B. Patankar remarks, "Sanskrit poetics does not tell us how to discuss the moral problems presented in a contemporary novel..." He takes it for granted, "To ask us to use theories like that of rasa will be a form of cultural tyranny." (Devy, 393)

### **Imagination and Realism**

"Art is not like mathematics or philosophy. It is a subjective, sensual, and highly personal activity in which facts and ideas are the servants of fancy and feeling; and artist's first aim is not truth but delight." remarks Lord David Cecil. And delight or pleasure giving art has no meaning in absence of realism. In his literary essay, Charles Morgan holds his view, "If the word has no meaning for you, art can have no meaning, creation no meaning, and imagination no range." (Hudson, 69) Imagination rests on inference or supposition. So it has least connection with reality. Imagination made for delight is far from socio-humanistic realism. Social realism has spontaneity and more impressive and more effective. Daya Pawar observes, "critics don't even seem to realize that we live in a different cultural island. They pay no attention to the distinction between a literature written from imagination and one that is based on lived ideas." (Limbale, 112) In the words of Omprakash Valmiki, "Literature rested on the foundation of imagination and idealism can be relevant at all." (Valmiki, 9)

### **Language**

#### **a. Foggy and Factual**

Even on the level of language, the literature, even Dalit literature by Lalit writers and the literature by Dalit writers differ from each other. The former suppresses the intensity of resistance while the latter intensifies the power of

resistance that is supposed to be the soul of Dalit literature. The language of most of Dalit literatures is obviously not factual but foggy. Foggy verbalism leads to no conclusion. On the contrary it creates confusion. The entry of Dalit writers into the domain of Dalit literature has spoil-played the game. They think that the already approved artistic or aesthetic yardsticks are enough to judge the merits of literature. As Dalit literature does not suit the conventional aesthetic standards, the Savarna critics presume that Dalit writing is a new discourse that need not require to have an individual status of literature in the form of Dalit literature.

### **b. Artificial and Spontaneous**

William Wordsworth, the forerunner of the Romanticism in English literature, establishes the spontaneity of feelings in literature. When he states that poetry is a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings collected in tranquility, he attaches little importance to fancy and conjecture. On the basis of this definition of poetry, any literary genre can be properly analyzed and interpreted. Dalit literature finds itself very close to this very definition of poetry that remains not confined to poetry itself. Where imagination encourages forced language, realism boosts up forceful language. Forcible use of imagery, and symbols, weird hetero-genus comparison and contrast and conceit create monotony, leading to artificiality of feelings. That is why most of Dalit literature books are read only for the academic enhancement not for intellectual harmony in the real sense. Most of the literary texts set to various classes from primary to university level are meant for marks, grades and certificates alone. They do not represent the whole social realism. On the contrary, Dalit literature is the product of spontaneous but powerful feelings of centuries old suffering. Spontaneous language is more appealing as well as more relevant. It is also true that the idea is difficult only in its extreme simplicity. But spontaneous simplicity has its own peerless aesthetic attributes. Even in Dalit literature, spontaneity of imagery, symbols and various figures of speech can be seen if it is gone through well. To our sheer pride Dalit literature has enriched Indian literature with its new phraseology and diction that have enhanced its dimensional value.

### **Literature of Speculation and Self-experience**

Kashinath Singh, a Hindi litterateur, observes that for writing on the horse one need not be a horse. This comment has been flashed in a reply to a Dalit writer's establishment that Dalit literature can be written only by Dalit writers because only sufferers know the intensity of suffering and agony. It is true that anybody can sympathetically write about a horse but when the horse writes about his own life, the description of his agony will be more realistic, more original. In one case language is based on observation whereas in another case language is based on direct self-experience. Observation transcends appearance, taking the flight of imagination. In absence of total truth, the writing gets failed to have

humanitarian approach. Charles Morgan opines, "It is said that the writer who does not directly concern himself with contemporary affairs and who thinks of men and women as individuals, not as units in a mass, does nothing to increase the happiness or lessen the misery of mankind, or if he does anything, he acts only as a drug." (Hudson, 75) How the suffering of Bakha in *Untouchable* and that of the protagonist of *The Outcaste* can be equalized? In *Untouchable* the form—the stream of consciousness—is more important than the content whereas *The Outcaste* attaches more importance to its content than the form. Art and life are interconnected. Art is valuable only when it values life as a whole. R. B Patankar, a Marathi critic, in his literary essay "Aesthetics: Some Important Problems" writes, "Everything that has taken place in India since ancient times obviously does not belong to our today." (Devy, 392)

**‘Beauty is truth; and truth, beauty’ (John Keats)**

This single Keats’s poetic quote seems to be influenced by Indian philosophically imbued aesthetic theory based on ‘Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram (Truth, Heaven, Beauty). If beauty lies in truth, and truth in beauty, then the portrayal of social realism that Dalit literature upholds with the hope of social justice deserves aesthetic appraisal. Both these terms—truth and beauty—coexist, are interrelated and interdependent. In this sense too, the literature that analyzes and interprets the truth of social life in its entirety must be beautiful. And Dalit literature that results from the ignorance and negligence of the justified concerns of the have - nots and slumdogs, the perennial sufferers is the living record of pungent truth of the frontier life. Chinua Achebe avers, ‘Stench is my aesthetic.’ Stench is also the byproduct of the depressed and the suppressed class struggling for life on the margin. For the perception of beauty, one needs the keen sense of observation.

**From Sympathy to Resistance**

Both Marxist literature and Ambedkarite literature have taken upon themselves the interpretation of the depressed life. The former partially deals with Dalit’s agony with sympathetic viewpoint whereas the latter intensively portrays the life condition of the people on the periphery, nourishing the power of resistance for drastic changes in their existing condition. Sympathetic literature compelled Dalit writers to write resistance literature, highlighting the hidden awesome truth of Dalit community.

There has been a very rigid demarcating line between the class literature and the mass literature. This demarcation is prominent in the Marxist literature too. In his essay ‘What is art?’ Rabindranath Tagore postulates, "The idea of ‘Art for Art’s sake’ has its origin in this region of the superfluous." (141) Tagore’s point of view concerning the beauty of simplicity sums up the philosophical ideas and

ideals of Dalit aesthetics that is more realistic, more truthful and more effective than those of Lalit aesthetics :

Because we have faith in this universal soul, we in the east know that Truth, Power, Beauty lie in simplicity, - where it is transparent, where things do not obstruct the inner vision. (146)

We must have the realization of a positive truth, which is more real and apparently abstract. Here is a translation of an Indian poem written by a woman poet of medieval India. Its subject is Life.

I salute the Life which is like a sprouting seed,  
With its one arm upraised in the air, and the other down in the soil;  
The Life which is one in its outer form and its inner sap;  
The Life that ever appears, yet ever eludes.  
The Life that comes I salute, and the Life that goes;  
I salute the Life that is revealed and that is hidden;  
I salute the Life in suspense, standing still like a mountain,  
And the Life of the surging sea of fire;  
The Life that is tender like a lotus, and hard like a thunderbolt;  
The Life full of joy and the Life weary with its pains;  
The Life eternally moving, rocking the world into stillness,  
The Life deep and silent, breaking out into roaring waves. (Devy, 141)

In this poem the essence of Aesthetic theory can be observed. Literature includes the whole life conditions. Lalit literature, if written following 'art for life's sake' theory, gives vent to 'the life revealed' and 'the life full of joy' whereas Dalit literature manifests 'the life hidden' and 'the life weary with pains'. When I. A. Richards says literature is a criticism of life, he includes life not in fragments but in the form of an undivided whole. Premchand's literary output endorses this truth to a great extent. When mainstream literature failed to interpret Dalit's pain and suffering with social justification, the marginal literature defines the suffering of the worst sufferers in a well justified way. The arrogance of the so called mainstream literature has lessened its utility in practical life. It is the reason why it has been confined to the particular class.

Aesthetic concept results from circumstances. There was a time when aesthetic theory was based on the abstract ideas and the forms of an artwork. Martin Heidegger opines that art is an interpretation of truth. Hiding truth results from foggy verbalism. Over-make-up eludes the actual beauty of simplicity. A work of art is not meant for art's sake alone. It must serve humanitarian approach of the artist. To be honest, craft can't be an end in itself. Craft without end is valueless. 'An artist is not in the world to crucify humanity but to wash its feet.' If pleasure is the basis of the aesthetics of Lalit literature, pain and suffering is the basis of the

aesthetics of Dalit literature. Based on Ambedkarite ideology, the essence of Dalit literature lies hidden in the constantly committed struggle for procuring equality, fraternity and freedom. Even Vivekananda insists upon the fact that 'Freedom is heaven, slavery is hell.' And real beauty certainly lies in resistance and revolt waged for breaking the fetters of slavery.

### Why Dalit Aesthetics?

Dalit literature does not demand a quite separate aesthetic territory but persists the need of approval of its own original aesthetic parametres. In one of his critical essays 'The Fine Art of Reading', Lord David Cecil writes, "Every writer has inevitably a limited creative range." (Hudson, 185) In wake of this thoughtful remark, it can be said that no writer is beyond his/her own creative approach. As literature is the product of the creative faculty a writer is blessed with we must think that art minus life gets reduced to nothingness. Art gets value only when it relates itself to life. Life itself is said to be an art. An arrogant mind cannot envision and envisage the interrelationship between art and life. And Dalit litterateurs entwine both in their artwork. And the concept of Dalit aesthetic theory has maintained equipoise between art and life :

We shall perceive also a relationship between art and life in the modern world that is not easily recognized by those who most arrogantly call themselves modern. (76)

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