

# Lapis Lazuli

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### Editorial

**Dalit Literature** is one of the rapidly evolving fields of study in academia as well as social discourse. The term ‘Dalit’ was introduced officially in 1958 in the first conference of the Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangha in Bombay. “Dalit” means crushed, ground or broken to pieces. In India, caste is an important aspect of everyday lived reality. Although India achieved political Independence long back, there have been various sections of the society, importantly the Dalits who had no independence from the gruesome casteist dominion that pervaded all spheres of their lives, be it education, employment opportunities, bare sustenance, religion, marriage and so on. As a consequence they remained in a state of denial of basic amenities and were deprived of even the most basic human rights. The rise and evolution of Dalit literature has therefore also aided in a systematic reconstruction of social memories.

The revolutionary voice of Dalit literature was heard for first time in Marathi language with the advent of the Dalit Panther movement and soon, it percolated to other languages like Hindi, Tamil, Gujarati, Telugu, Kannada and so on. The writers primarily used poetry and autobiography to share their personal experiences of Dalithood and the treatment they received from the caste Hindus of the predominantly Savarna society. Dalit writers gradually started experimenting with various genres of literature such as poetry, fiction and drama for the expression of their pain, as is also evident from the phrase “narratives of pain” associated with such literature. Some famous Dalit writers including Arjun Dangle, Sharan Kumar Limbale, Namdeo Dhasal, Om Prakash Valmiki, Mohandas Naimishray, Kanwal Bharti, Hira Bansode, Urmila Pawar, Baby Kamble, Bama, P. Sivakami, to name a few, toiled hard to carve out an

alternative space for Dalit Literature within the rigid frameworks of mainstream literary traditions.

The problematic of translation, publication and dissemination of Dalit Literature, as well as the need for enlightened/trained/suitably empathetic reviewers and critics of such literature are critical questions that are finally beginning to be addressed in academia. Recognition is hard to come by for Dalit writers, and since they write mostly in their native languages, it is essential that they are provided a platform for wider outreach across the country and indeed the world, in order to establish the voice and identity long denied to them through the ravages of caste-system.

With new and emerging areas of interest within the ambit of Dalit Literature (DL), we invited scholarly papers on varied exciting themes and sub-themes such as, DL- its historic evolution, the current trends and practices, DL in the context of globalization and third world literature, the Identity debate, Dalit life, society and culture, Dalit politics, the gender debate, Caste and sub-caste: a critical debate in DL, Dalit Ideology- the impact of Marx, Phule, Ambedkar, the Subaltern and DL, the Afro-American struggle and DL, slave narratives in DL, Dalithood and the question of religion, Dalit women's writing, Dalit Historiography, Dalit literary theory, Dalit aesthetics, Dalit idiom—a new language, DL and English language, portrayal of Dalits in mainstream literature of yore and contemporary expressions, DL and the politics of translation, the abolition of untouchability and its current manifestations, questions of pollution, Portrayal of and engagement with Dalithood in cinema and media.

We were delighted to note that we received a tremendous response to the CFP and it was difficult to choose from the wide array, and here we are happy to present the best of those, with a positive hope of many subsequent special issues on Dalit Literature. While many papers are focused on Dalit writings from the eastern India, a significant number deal with women Dalit writers, indicating a much needed balancing and re-orientation of the movement of Dalit studies.

In "Translating Bangla Dalit Poetry: Negotiating the Politics of Language", Brati Biswas succinctly discusses the issues and concerns faced by a translator while attempting to translate Dalit literature from one language to another, while keeping the socio-politico-linguistic nuances intact. Biswas shares her own enriching experience as a translator, attempting to translate a poem written in Bangla into English and Hindi.

In "The Sacred Thread and the Death Rope: Politics of Representation of Dalit Lives and Dalit Deaths in Colonial India with Reference to Sarat Chandra Chatterjee's *Abhagi's Heaven!* and Munshi Premchand's *The Deliverance*", Poushali Chakraborty focuses on the possibility of theoretical exploitation of the subaltern lived experience by upper-caste writers during colonial period as well as an early insurgence of Dalit feminism.

Sayantika Chakraborty in "Understanding Dalit Women: A Reading of Baburao Bagul's 'Mother'", uses Bagul's short story to discuss how Dalit women also experience violence, beginning at their own homes, and family norms are another means of oppression and committing violence against these women; concluding that though their voices are deliberately silenced, their emancipation would occur once they are able to break the familial shackles and revolt against the very society they are a part of.

Through a sustained critical reading of Meena Kandasamy's poetry, Kanupriya Dhingra in "Come, Unriddle Me'- Reality of The Dalit Feminine Self in Meena Kandasamy's *Ms. Militancy*" argues that Kandasamy's poetry seeks an analysis of gender relations as they are inflected by multiple and overlapping patriarchies of caste communities that produce varying registers of vulnerability for the Dalit women.

Kalyani Dixit, in "Reflection of A Subaltern's Lacerated Identity and Sentiments: Sharan Kumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi (The Outcaste) and Other Works*", discusses how the unidentified subalterns in the process of searching their own identity create a crop of a distinct Dalit literature and how Limbale's capability to express his anger and frustration with and stark vision makes him sturdy voice of the voiceless Dalit multitude.

Saikat Guha, in "HinduPsyche and the Persistence of Caste: Reading Ajay Navaria's *New Custom*", seeks to highlight the shallowness and inhumanity of the caste system and its psychologically violent form which prevails today, through a detailed analysis of Ajay Navaria's story, *New Custom*.

In "Dalit Women in Premchand's *Godan*: Victims of the Patriarchal and Brahminical Values of Indian Society", Darsha Jani explores through a close study of *Godan*, the violence perpetrated on the Dalit Women, that underlines the social codes, rules and regulations formulated on the basis of ideological viewpoint of the ruling class and caste.

Ranjana Kaul and Sunanda Gupta, through an exhaustive survey of writings by Dalit Women writers in “From the Margins to the Center: Dalit Women Writers” describe how while the Dalit women writers have been charged with abandoning their caste identity in favour of a gendered consciousness, it is their engagement with a wider reality which will move their work into a literary space which is open to broader critical enquiry and literary engagement.

In “The Case of *Bhimayana* and the Search for a New Dalit Aesthetic”, Shweta Khilnani argues that the visual narrative form of *Bhimayana* has certain elements which have the potential to subvert dominant ideologies. Her paper studies the dynamics of this visual form vis-à-vis traditional regimes of representation and discusses the former’s significance within the backdrop of Dalit aesthetics and politics.

In “The Subaltern as Subject’ in Mahasweta Devi’s *Sri Sri Ganesh Mahima* and *The Book of the Hunter: Paradigms of Living*”, Srirupa Mahalanabis takes into consideration Mahasweta Devi’s works to read into the lives of two central women characters therein, who in spite of their subaltern position, succeed in challenging their environment.

Shaista Mansoor, in “Bama’s *Karukku: Testimony of Agony and Confrontation*”, analyzes Bama’s *Karukku* as testimony of the agony and the consequent confrontation of Dalit Women with the ravages of caste system.

Farhana Naaz and Mohosin Mandal, in “Dalits in Bollywood: From Endurance to Resistance- A Historical Approach”, adopt a historical approach to trace the process of the subjugation of Dalits while at the same time, focusing on the evolution of Bollywood movies in portraying Dalit issues with the transition in Dalit society .

Hina Nandrajog translates Gurjant Kalsi Landey’s “*Saraape hoye Lok*” from Punjabi to “The Cursed Ones” in English, providing a valuable opportunity for wider audience and a larger outreach of the sensitive portrayal of Dalit experience in the story.

Vandana Pathak, through a detailed analysis of Nagnath Manjule's movie "Fandry", finds it to be an authentic document of Dalit consciousness, protest and revolt, in her paper titled "Fandry: A Moving Saga of Dalit Consciousness".

Ved Prakash, in his perceptive paper titled, "Politics of Food: Exploring the Voice and Identity of Dalits and African Americans", explores crucial questions like: However, what happens when food is denied to a certain marginalised sections of a society on the basis of caste, class and, race? What happens to the formation of a cultural identity of a certain group when food becomes an unattainable entity?

Saheli Sinha Roy attempts an evaluation of how the 'Dalit-Consciousness' or a 'Dalit-Awakening', in Bengal has achieved the deserved platform to voice the protest against centuries of exploitation and discrimination, and to register and celebrate the 'Dalit-Identity', and how self-memoirs have become the desired space to voice the protest, in her paper titled "Celebration of the 'Dalit-Consciousness' in self-memoirs: Reading With Manohar Mouli Biswas's *Surviving in My World: Growing Up Dalit in Bengal*".

Manisha Saluja, in her nuanced paper titled "Rebelling through the language of love: A study of sexual violence in the love poems of Meena Kandasamy", explores how through language, a Dalit woman can turn gendered-caste violence on its own back and break away from the narrative of victimhood to assume a vocal, rebellious, desiring self.

Moumita Sarkar, in her informative paper titled "The emergence of the progressive self in Bengali Dalit Literature", seeks to highlight the history of Dalit Literature in West Bengal as well as the engagement of Bengali Dalit authors with language, by taking into account two narratives- an autobiography, D. P. Das's *The Untouchable Story*, and the a fictionalised presentation of an autobiography, Manoranjan Bepari's *Chandal Jibon*.

Through a detailed analysis of three Dalit autobiographies, Samrat Sharma in "Shaping of the Consciousness in Childhood: A Study of Dalit Autobiographies", discusses how authors like Vasant Moon and Sheoraj Singh Bechain do not display any anger in their narration, whereas Omprakash Valmiki does not spare any crude details of his childhood: for the Dalit child

becomes an important motif as s/ he struggle to make sense of the complexities of the caste based divisions and these anxieties shape a kind of awareness of being the ‘other’.

Bijit Sinha discusses the notion that caste discrimination is not fixated on a particular stigmatized community; rather, it transcends Varna, as the hate towards the alienated community remains undeterminable throughout history, in his paper titled “Postcolonial Representation of Dalit Subalternity with reference to Bengali Dalit fiction”.

Finally, M. Sreelatha discusses Dalit women’s autobiographies in “Double Oppression of Dalit Women: A Study of the Autobiographies of Baby Kamble and Urmila Pawar” and dwells at length upon the distressing effects of the caste based social system on Dalit women.

With these well-researched papers and one translated story, we proudly present to you the Autumn 2015 issue of **Lapis Lazuli- An International Literary Journal (LLILJ)** ISSN 2249-4529, with special focus on Dalit Literature.

Happy reading!

**Dr. Brati Biswas**

**Kalyanee Rajan**