



DALIT SHORT STORIES AS REACTIONARY NARRATIVES AND RESISTANCE AGAINST CASTE BASED EXCLUSION

Dilip Daga Ahire¹

*Research Scholar, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar
MS, India*

Dr. Shyam Kulkarni²

*Research Guide, Department of English, Vivekanand Arts, Sardar Dalipsingh, Commerce & Science
College, Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, MS, India*

Abstract

Dalit Literature is the literature of the oppressed group of India that is lower in the caste hierarchy. Dalit short stories are the narratives that portray the caste-based humiliation directed towards the Dalits. These narratives highlight the exclusion of Dalits from social, economic spheres along with the academic sphere. The leading characters are from the marginalized communities and they resist against the discriminatory practices perpetuated by the caste system. Therefore, these short stories are called as reactionary narratives as the characters in these short stories are not mere victims of the caste system, but they react against the discrimination. The present research paper examines Marathi Dalit short stories as reactionary narratives and against caste-based discrimination.

Keywords

Dalit Short Story, Exclusion, Resistance, Reactionary Narratives, etc.

Full Article

Dalits, a bunch of people, is lowest in the graded hierarchy of the Caste System. They have been excluded from all the spheres of social, economic, political, and cultural life. Dalits are never been the centre of anything because of the politics around the caste. Dalits have been excluded from religious notions as holy scriptures of Hindus do not allow them to hear and read it. These scriptures propound graded hierarchy and lead to the caste-based discrimination. Indoctrination of Caste system and notions of purity and pollution disallow Dalits from participating in religious gatherings and activities.

Religion has influenced India socially. The social status of a person is identified by the caste one takes birth in. Religious exclusion of Dalits leads towards the exclusion of Dalits from social fronts. Dalits face exclusion in education and academia, settlements and housing structures, clothing, and language. The leadership of Dalits is always looked down upon. Having no access to a good social network, resources and opportunities, Dalits have been pushed to peripheries of the society. Lower status in religious and social spheres results in the degradation of other factors of Dalit people's life. The language of Dalits is considered taboo while the language of the upper caste becomes the standard form of language. The exclusion of Dalits affects the psychological behaviour of Dalits and weakens their physical ability too. Dalits are deliberately excluded from religious and social notions to preserve the higher status of the upper castes.



The unequal distribution of natural resources among various castes, the unequal power relations and the dominating nature of the upper caste throw the Dalits and other marginalized at periphery. The marginalized section does not get agency to voice their pain and opportunity of the upward mobility. This leads to their exclusion in various spheres.

Exclusion is an instance of leaving something or someone out. It is a deliberate act of omission. Social exclusion disallows people from participating in economic, social, and political life. This passive participation in policymaking, decision making, empowerment and education leads to the ultimate oppression of the marginalized. Therefore, social exclusion is neither a personal choice nor a natural selection to survive for Dalits. While analysing social patterns in society, we look back to the histories. The study of origin and development of the exclusion of subaltern people shows that the system had been created for the benefit of the few. Social exclusion of one group is a political act to maintain the economic and social power of the few. Dalits are put at the periphery systematically throughout the history of Hindu society.

Marathi Dalit Short Stories can be seen as new approach in Dalit literature. Marathi Dalit short stories take inspiration from the real-life incident from the life of the writer or people around him. The lines of fiction and non-fiction get merged in the Dalit short stories as these stories talk about the real-life incidents through the different characters. Marathi Dalit short stories are therefore mixture of both fiction and non-fiction. Therefore, even though these stories are fictitious but they are autobiographical as they take inspiration from the real-life incidents. This mixture of fiction and non-fiction in the Marathi Dalit short stories is the new approach employed by the Dalit writers.

Dalit short stories depict resistance to exclusion and factors that underlies exclusion through reactionary narratives. These narratives fight against the caste-based discrimination. Dalit writers challenge the narratives from the mainstream literature and put forth their narratives. The narratives of the mainstream literature are about the beauty and truth but Dalits don't relate with these experiences. In Dalit literature, Dalit writers write their stories that are based on their own experiences. There is a constant play of action and reaction. Dalits answer to their exclusion by resisting. Dalit short stories show that producing literature is a reaction. It is a form of resistance. There are moments that give birth to resistance. These moments are showcased in Dalit Short stories. Therefore, Dalit short stories are reactionary narratives, as the research topic suggests.

The short story *Son-in-Law of the Government* by Sharankumar Limbale is an example of the narrative that talks about the everyday challenges Dalits face at the government offices. Sharankumar Limbale portrays these everyday struggles in his short stories. It is the short story that also comments on the reactionary attitude among Dalits. The short story is written in first person narration. The story begins with the narrator talking about the new clerk in the office. As Kamble and Kulkarni are the surnames of their respective castes. It was difficult for the narrator to discern the caste of the new clerk.

There was a tradition of Laxmi Puja on every Thursday at the office, The narrator did not like the idea and resisted against it as it was a government office and no one's public property. But no one was considerate about that. The following incident explains how the narrator reacted to this particular incident. He says,

Every Thursday there would be a Lakshmi puja in our office. I didn't like that. I raised an objection to the puja. They were all high caste. Everyone stood in opposition to me. I did not pay my contribution for the puja. The next day I brought a photograph of Dr. Ambedkar to office and wanted to put it up. Everyone opposed me. Deshpande said, Ambedkar is not a national leader. You can't put up his photograph:



**Literary Cognizance: An International Refereed / Peer Reviewed
e - Journal of English Language, Literature & Criticism
Vol. – VI, Issue-1, June 2025**

'You do a puja to Lakshmi. You've put up the picture of Lakshmi. Was she a national leader?' I said in desperation. I was trembling with rage.
Joshua said, 'Hey, Lakshmi is a goddess.
I don't believe in gods.'
Who's asking you to? Don't believe in them.'
But I won't allow this Lakshmi puja of yours to go on in the office. You sit here doing puja while you are on duty. Why?
Do your puja at home!

The practice of performing LaxmiPooja in the government office was violative towards the freedom of conscience. The narrator reacts to the practice of performing Laxmipooja by bringing photograph of Dr. BabasahebAmbedkar to the office and expressing his need to install the photo. The two actions by the people coming from two different communities are contrary to each other. The LaxmiPooja, a Hindu tradition and photograph of Dr. BabasahebAmbedkar who rejected the traditions of Hinduism including worshipping gods. The reaction of the narrator comes from the influence of Dr. BabasahebAmbedkar. His political and philosophical engagement have shaped and given a new way of life to Dalits.

The above example critically talks about the cultural conflict between the brahmins and Dalits. Dalits are establishing their own culture by resisting against the cultural norms based on caste-based discrimination. Dr. BabasahebAmbedkar's ideas help Dalits to resist against the caste-based incidents and live life with human dignity. As the Hindu traditions are based on the notions of purity and pollution, Dalits can't relate themselves with the cultural symbols of Hindus and therefore they will have to look for the symbols that better suit lives by establishing new culture.

The above incident talks about the picture of Dalit movement after the death of Dr. BabasahebAmbedkar. The everyday lives of Dalits are filled with reactionary narratives, where they fight for reclaiming their identity and fighting against the discrimination. SharankumarLimbahe have created a space in his short stories where the characters are conscious about the caste-based exclusion they face in socio-economic and cultural spheres. This consciousness results in the reactions from the Dalit.

Therefore, in short story *Son-in-Law of the Government* the narrator takes a stand against the imposition of religious practices influenced by the notions of caste, particularly the Laxmipuja performed by the upper castes performed in a secular place. The narrator's decision to bring in a photograph of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and install it in the same office the next day is a political and cultural counter-gesture. It's not merely about representation; it's a deliberate assertion of Dalit identity and rejection of imposed cultural norms.

BaburaoBagul's short stories depict the similar kind of narratives that extensively talk about the exclusion of Dalits on various grounds. The characters in his short stories are aware about the discrimination they face and rebel against the caste-based discrimination. These stories are rebellious where the main characters almost stand against the caste-based discrimination in general and people perpetuating discrimination in specific. His characters do not have the fear of being rebel and shattering the norms. His short story *Bohada* is testament to the resistance portrayed in his writing.

Damu, a Mahar, announces that he will perform song that too Narsinha song in the *Bohada* which is performed by the upper caste only. The whole village was in a shock. Bagul describes it as how the red statue of lord Maruti took wrathful aspect or in another lines he says how Raavana had ruled in Lanka. At the village square Damu continues,

"ifMahars cannot do the saong, then who rules here?"



After a lot of discussions at the village square, Ganpatrao demands money from Damu which is huge amount, thinking that Damu will say no perform. But he says he will arrange the money. Damu was asked to give two hundred rupees but he gave five hundred and got the opportunity to perform Narsinha in Bohada. It gave new hopes to Dalits as they were saying,

“Next year, we will dance as the five Pandavas. And then let them bring down death or destruction, it will be all the same to us”

While the Patil was saying,

“Now we should have no more bohadas.”

The above short story is an example how Damu reacts to the caste-based practices by defying them. He questions the monopoly of the upper caste over performing the characters of gods. Even after a lot of pressure from the upper caste he does not surrender. This shows the reactions of Dalits to the caste-based operation. The firmness of the main character in the story is the reflection of the socio-political scenario of the Indian society. Damu's action of not surrendering to the planning and plotting of the villagers and being firm on his decision to perform in the play is reaction to the systematic discrimination sustained with the help of religious notions and political dominance of the upper caste. Therefore, Marathi Dalit short stories are reactionary narratives in which the marginalized characters resist against the humiliation and the caste-based discrimination.

The analysis of both the short-stories given above are examples of reactionary narratives that talk against the caste-based discrimination. The characters in both the stories fight against the discrimination. They are filled with rage as they face humiliation in their daily and not given equal opportunities. They fight for the equal opportunities. As we have in the story by Sharankumar Limbale, the character comes with the alternative cultural symbols to the dominant culture and reclaim their identity. In the short story, *Bohada*, the protagonist is firm on his decision to defy the discriminatory practices of the village. The stories represent the world of Dalits where they stand strong against the hegemonic monopoly of the upper caste over the various spheres of economy and politics. The characters in the Marathi Dalit short stories resist against the caste-based exclusion. Therefore, Studying Marathi Dalit short stories as reactionary narratives against the caste-based exclusion provide with the agency to Dalit writers to put forth their struggle.

References

- Ambedkar, B. R. *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*. Vol. 1, Department of Education, Government of Maharashtra, 1979.
- ---. *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*. Vol. 2, Department of Education, Government of Maharashtra, 1979.
- Bagul, Baburao. *When I Hid My Caste*. Translated by Jerry Pinto, Speaking Tiger, 2018.
- Dangle, Arjun, editor. *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*. Orient BlackSwan, 2009.
- Limbale, Sharankumar. *The Dalit Brahmin and Other Stories*. Translated by Priya Adarkar, Orient BlackSwan, 2018.





This is an Open Access e-Journal Published Under A Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License

Article Received: 15/06/2025

Article Accepted: 25/06/2025

Published Online: 27/06/2025

To Cite the Article: Ahire, Dilip, and Kulkarni, Shyam. "Dalit Short Stories as Reactionary Narratives and Resistance against Caste Based Exclusion." *Literary Cognizance: An International Refereed/Peer Reviewed e-Journal of English Language, Literature and Criticism*, Vol.- VI, Issue-1, June, 2025, 197-201. www.literarycognizance.com

