

Angaliyat: A Story of Dalit Redemption

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Abstract: The purpose of the study is to evaluate the Dalit situation, concerns, and awareness in post-independence India. It highlights how renowned novelist Joseph Macwan juxtaposes Dalit and Elite, anguish and delight, fear and courage, defeat and triumph, just and unjust existing in two small villages located in Gujarat. Because of its realistic description and the author's first-hand experience, *Angaliyat* has occupied an eminent place in the arena of Gujarati literature. Elite sovereignty aided by traditional taboos, beliefs and power has eroded the socio-cultural-economic fabric and jeopardized the lives of the poor untouchable. The novel resonates that no matter how so ever physically persecuted the Dalit are, their spirit remains indomitable.

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As a result of Gandhiji's efforts, the Dalit society, which had been subjugated, shattered, and afflicted for thousands of years, began to raise its head, but the latter three decades of the twentieth century saw a transformation, a rebellion, and a type of indestructible awareness in it. Connotatively, the term 'Dalit' refers to a social movement rather than a literary; however, it is undeniable that when a section of society that has long been a victim of injustice, resists discrimination and demands its rights, the Dalit spirit is shaped and echoed in forms of literature which is known as 'Dalit literature'. The term 'Dalit' originated from the word 'dal,' meaning "subdue," "strew," "split," "oppressed," and "broken." Dalit men and women become not only victims of inhumane torture and a slew of other horrors, but also silent witnesses to elites' physical assaults, rapes, and other humiliations on women in their society. Furthermore, social ills such as economic inequity, exploitation, untouchability, partiality, despotism, heinousness, and malice have pulled their life into a quagmire. In India, the caste system, defined as *varna vyavastha*, is linked to Hindu lawbook *Manusmriti* and accordingly four 'varnas' 'Brahmin', 'Kshtriya', 'Vaishya' and 'Shudra' were reinforced in the lives of people by the coalition of kings and upholders of religion in the name of tradition, superstition, religious beliefs, dread of punishment, and the Law of Karma. It contributed to the harsh treatment of persons from lower castes, because caste is determined by one's birth and cannot be changed. Fear, starvation, poverty and corruption characterise the atmosphere in the post-independence era, as do disparities and discriminations between Christian, Chamar, Bhangi, 'Vaniya', 'Brahman,' and 'Harijan'. In the name of creed and scruples, communism and integrity, the upper and lower classes have stayed unchanged. Despite the fact that the government has passed numerous laws, socioeconomic disparity still exists.

Dalit literature emerged in post-independence India as a result of the decentralisation of power prompted by post-modernism, post-colonialism, and the quest for identity, and thirst for equality of the marginalised community, which had begun in the world a few centuries ago and was also recorded in the works of eminent writers around the world. The backward Dalit community's sorrow, suffering, frustration, loneliness, and other tyrannies in the caste-class ridden Hindu society are self-evidently expressed in literature by Dalit penmen. It speaks out against the upper class's long history of social, economic, political, and cultural exploitation of India's untouchables. Thus, Dalit literature refers to writing that is dedicated to the resuscitation of Dalit society, the environment, Dalit content, Dalit issues, Dalit characters, and the cause of Dalit consciousness', development and foundation. It runs counter to literature written with Brahminical spectacles on. "The only authentic Dalit literature," according to renowned Marathi writer Baburau Bagul, "is writing that establishes human beings in a place other than God, religion, and country, liberates and celebrates human beings by fighting caste and race is the true Dalit literature." (Bagul 282) Dalit literature treats the human as a centre, Sharankumar Limbale writes. There is no 'I' pain, only the pain of a population that has been overlooked as a whole. Dalit writers write out of social responsibility. Their writing expresses the emotion and commitment of an activist. That society may change and understand its problems - their writing articulates this impatience with intensity. They regard their literature to be a movement " (Limbale 33)

The ideologies of Dr. Ambedkar and Shri Jyotirao Phule impacted Marathi Dalit literature, which serves as a framework for Dalit literature in all other languages. Gujarati literature in the post-independence era was affected by various Dalit activities and consciousness, and as a result, the first generation of Dalit writers had a dual obligation: to share their experiences and to spread knowledge. The majority of Dalit authors' works tend to portray their frustrations, indignation, and animosity toward the upper castes, along with their yearning for societal reform. Jayanti Gadit says in a high and sarcastic tone, " It is logical that as a Dalit, if he or his relatives had been victims of the aristocracy's exploitation in some way, some animosity towards the aristocracy will be nurtured in them. Another layer of Dalit human sense will not open up to them if they keep their creative eyes closed all the time." (Pandya 52) The fruits of the struggles waged by Ambedkar were to be tested by the post-independence generation. There was a challenge of evading, exposing thousands year old histories of suppression, of prevalent mortification and fostering untold, unforeseen, unproven esteem, rewarding humanity revealed through their prominent cultural values – and Joseph Macwan triumphed in the ordeal. Achyut Yagnik aptly says: "... *Angaliyat* is not a documentary novel about Dalit social life in it all its dimensions. The real challenge for Macwan was not to develop a storyline which exposed the structure of domination prevalent in central Gujarat. For an excellent storyteller like him, to tell the story of oppression and exclusion intimately experienced by him

since childhood would have been an easy task to accomplish. The real challenge before him was to turn the periphery to the core, to transform the vanquished into the victor." (Yagnik 27)

Joseph Macwan's creative temperament and outward personality are influenced by his firsthand, authentic life experiences, which serve as a source of outrage against exploitation, casteism, untouchability, ignorance, social inequity, curiosity, superstition, narrow-mindedness, deception and injustice suffered by Dalit community. Joseph Macwan, a Sahitya Academy award winner and a realist par excellence say, "I had been a part of, a piece of their suppressed life, had also seen them never quitting their outlook. Those predicaments force me to make them alive on paper. Such is my contribution...I don't have any ideology or philosophy...it's just me getting revealed in my creation." (Macwan 5)

Rita Kothari writes in the first preface to the English translation of *Angaliyat* (The Step Child);

"A ray of hope, a beacon for the nascent body of writhing, the community of writers, readers and critics had looked forward to Josephbhai giving direction and bringing in freshness to Dalit writing in Gujarati, in a way that only he could have. However, some of his contemporaries believe that Josephbhai did not go beyond the personal universe to justify his claim that he was the representative voice of Gujarati Dalit writing. The matter remains contestable. Meanwhile, Josephbhai carried the burden of representation and became a symbol of both Dalit aspirations and disappointments." (Rita Kothari 9)

With a heavy heart, the author pays homage to the genuine, flesh-and-blood people in society, acknowledging their inexplicable tragedies, calamities, and hardships. Joseph Macwan, who survived such ordeals and portrayed them without bitterness, is not only a documentary solidity but the fragrance of a creative. When it comes to emotions, the writer has never been in a state of emotional anguish or shed tears.

The publication of Joseph Macwan's Dalit novel *Angaliyat* (Step Child) paved the ground for further exploration of Dalit concerns in Indian fiction. While reading *Angaliyat* we feel as if entering into a foreign realm, the door which was still locked.

"For the first time, the author has vividly described the life struggle of an untouchable caste," Dhaval Mehta said of *Angaliyat*, the decade's most epic masterpiece. This critically acclaimed novel develops into a "narrative of human beings seeking their identity," (Pandya30) expressing characteristics such as creativity, tenacity, patience, dedication, and empathy. This remarkable story is a realistic novel with very little fantasy.

It is the first Gujarati novel that attempted to bring social awareness and reflects the plight of the untouchable weaver community. The focus eventually shifts from the individual to the entire society, from the story of Teeho and Methi's relationship to the story of the entire weaver caste residing in a small village in Gujarat's Kheda region. It's a true story about the Patel-Thakor-Harijan-Baraiya and Weavers (Vankar) clans of Ratnapur-Shilapur and Kerdia. Characters such as Jeevan, Valji, Dano, Teeho, Kanku, Bhavan Bhagat, Methi, Master, Ramlo, Bhikhalo, Khushlo Khant, Chunthiyo Chorat, Vali, Gokal, and others represent the weaver community, whereas Meghji Patel, Manji, Nanji, Ranchod Delawalo, Dhulsang, and others represent the higher class. The untouchables are continually neglected, maltreated, verbally and physically beaten and forced to live in a wretched state in a secluded corner of society, which is quite terrifying. Many fatalistic accept it as Valji says, "To live where you were born and to be alive means to put up with life, whether it is a little or a lot, but you must compromise." (Macwan 30)

The thematic fabric is built around a conflict in the neighbouring village of Shilapur between four weaver caste men and the established interests of the upper caste. Teeharam (Teeho), a foreigner who arrived in Shilapur to sell fabric, scolds Naniya, son of Meghji Patel, who points a stone at the pot of a weaver girl Methi, completely wetting her, and she is abused as a slut despite her protests. "Their eyes roved over the woman's nipples visible through her wet blouse. Flustered under their lascivious gaze she re-adjusted her wet pallav across her chest" (Macwan 15, 16).

Teeho, unable to bear a girl's humiliation, engages in a brawl with superior lads. As the feud intensifies, Tiha's head explodes, and a helpless and blood-streaked Teeho seeks refuge with the weavers, but the frightened weavers refuse to help him, as this small but politically and economically powerful elite has overpowered the eighty-year-old weavers' community and has kept them in a constant state of turmoil. They ascertain the same as Valji, that for them life means suffering which can be only more or less.

The incident had dire repercussions. Dhulsang Thakore, the chief of Shilapur village, which has a population of Patel and Thakore, strictly forbade Valji and Tiho admission into the village. The weavers believe that 'diving into the sea and exacting vengeance on the crocodile' is unaffordable to them. (To live in Rome and Strife with Pope): But Teeho determinedly says, "To hell with water and crocodiles... people like us either become extinct or we suck up all their water itself... the British sun is still warm. Once Independence arrives, our days will be numbered" (Macwan 23).

Valji devises a secret plan to transport Methi to Ratnapur after being stopped to visit Shilapur, but unfortunately, Golo, the motor driver, spills the bins to the adversaries. Valji, who was rushing after the motor and climbing on it, was hit on the head by a big branch of a tree during the abduction and died as a result of injuries. Valji is killed by Delawala Seth's plot. However, everyone who was a part of the scheme is held accountable. Valji's death frustrated Teeho, but on the other hand, is supported by daring activists such as Master, visionary Bhavan Bhagat, and many young weavers. Kanku, Valji's window, agrees to marry Dana, her brother-in-law, after a long period of trauma. Both Methi and Teeho are miserable in their marriages to Chuthiya Chorat and Vali, respectively, and yearn for each other and dream of their union, but society forbids them from doing so. Gradually, an extreme conflict is developed between Methi and Vali .

Ranchod Delawala, is elected as a minister in the post-Swaraj period and the situation worsens for Dalits. Teeho was severely thrashed by Patels but the hospital and police remain passive, leaving helpless Teeho on the verge of death. Master and Danji, try hard but to no avail and Teeho die in the cart on the way. The whole community sinks into despair when he is buried next to his friend Valji's grave. Shocked Methi gives up food and water, after eighteen days she also bids farewell to this cruel world forever and is buried next to Teehai's grave. Thus, death united them. Towards the end, Teeha and Dana's offspring leave the village to ward off the social harassment and flee to the city to earn a living peacefully. After many years, to everyone's astonishment, Teeha's stepchild Gokul donates a large amount to build a school in the village and will have his father's name inscribed on the marble

plaque. The story ends in bliss. However, in this way, the literary meaning of 'Angaliyat' - 'the stepchild' becomes synonyms for the biased treatment of the whole weaver community, a real stepchild.

Angaliyat is a saga of the predicament of the Dalit community where in the plot of suffering and protest, loss of identity and search for individuality, evading history and writing present, fear and courage, love and dedication go hand in hand. Shri Pramod Kumar Patel notes, "The self-assurance and exuberance displayed by the story's key characters, Teeho, Walji, Kanku, Methi, and others, indicate the community's strong identity. Macwan has closely been associated with the people of this weaver's society, so he has seen them more closely in the way of life, manners, rituals, and traditions of that class. As he says about Teeha, "Here, too, the creator's intention to render Tiha a hero can be apparent... nevertheless, due to "...his hero-like attitude, the work is drawn into the immensity of the class fight." In a very natural way, strategies, manoeuvres, and rivalry merged. As a result, Teeha's heroic behaviour in the work doesn't appear artificial." (Macwan 53)

As Methi in the story depicts, Dalit women are more vulnerable. They are treated with contempt and are subjected to horrors, exploitation, injustice, inequality, horrible tortures, and societal evils like child marriage and neglect, which are fostered by both their social structure and Elites. When they can't discover a way out, they strive to eliminate their so-called existence. Low caste individuals are generally thought to have no values, but the love story of Teeha- Methi shows true love blossoming under any conditions, and Teeha's sacrifice on the altar of discrimination has a new depth, that of love. The love plot leads the reader to the plot of Dalit persecution, although it overpowers the theme of suppression at times in the work. Some scholars have also pointed out the limitations of narration or object integration. Jayant Gadit says, "The story which was made exciting by the thrilling events in the first half gets entangled in the marriage knot of Teeho-Kanku, Methi-Dana in the second half and the story of class struggle changes." (Pandya 54) Even Pramod Kumar Patel "sees some serious limitations in terms of the artistic composition of the novel". Also, My Dear Jayu calls the sequel "Shithil bandh" (loose plot) and Bharat Mehta "Naryo Filmi" (Completely dramatic). Nonetheless, the author has been extremely successful in portraying it as an artistic work and in chronological social reality. Thus, Babu Dawalpara says, "Despite the shortcomings in the concept of work, character building and language composition, the success of the author in shaping the social reality in this popular novel is remarkable." (Dawalpara 22)

A string of incidents of caste-class discrimination portrayed in the novel displays the cunning of the upper class intoxicated by power and superiority. It costs many lives and even descendants of Teeha-Dana, plagued by insecurity, helplessness and social neglect, leave the city in search of a better life, but the incident of donating 7000 rupees for a high school by Gokal and having his father Teeha's name inscribed on the marble plaque is a kind of slap on racial-jaundiced eyed Dehlavala who asked for 5000 rupees donation. Gokal's action indicates weavers' commitment to obtain education to improve their social and economic circumstances and also an assertion of their rights as well as existence by giving 2000 rupees more. Regarding this nationally acclaimed novel, My Dear Jayu says, "The life of a forgotten class born from the struggle against illusions has been depicted in a bleak light. Not only is class conflict an appealing and timeless feature of this story, but so are the deeds committed as a result of it." Mohan Parmar notes, "The documentary depiction of the society in which he was born and suffered unfathomable humiliation, this work may fall short of artistic criteria, but the author has succeeded in evoking "a world of inner pain." (Dawalpara 55) Furthermore, the use of vernacular language as a technique to delve deep into the psyche of Dalits to explore a deep sorrow and demonstrate admirable courage helps the characters to come to life. The author invigorates the language with new spirits, attitudes and meanings, and popular expression skillfully offering the world of the tormented humanities and their indecipherable pining with artistic brilliance. Individual strife, family conflict, and social class warfare are all present in 'Angaliyat.' The author has demonstrated a lovely approach to describing reality in a genuine manner, rather than a flight of fancy. In addition, by telling this genuine narrative in their language and dialect, he has introduced the reader to a new 'people'. Dalits are shown not only as humiliated, pitiful, and helpless individuals, but also as courageous, fearless, and assertive advocates for their human rights.

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