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Ambedkarite Consciousness and the Dalit Aesthetic: Reading Bama's *Karukku*, *Sangati* and *Vanmam* with Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, "Amma" and Short Stories

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how the political philosophy of B. R. Ambedkar shapes the form and purpose of Dalit literature through a comparative reading of two foundational writers from different linguistic regions of India: the Tamil writer Bama and the Hindi writer Omprakash Valmiki. Bama's autobiography *Karukku* (1992) and her novels *Sangati* (1994) and *Vanmam* (2002) are read alongside Valmiki's autobiography *Joothan* (1997), his short story "Amma" and selected stories such as "Salaam", "Shavyatra" and "Pachees Chauka Dedh Sau". The study argues that these texts translate Ambedkar's central ideas into narrative practice: caste as graded inequality, the annihilation of caste through education, agitation and organisation, the rejection of scriptural authority, the critique of patriarchy as a pillar of caste, and the moral ideal of liberty, equality and fraternity. It further argues that Ambedkarite thought supplies the foundation of a Dalit aesthetic, theorised by Sharankumar Limbale and by Valmiki himself, which replaces the Brahmanical criteria of beauty and pleasure with the criteria of truth, pain, resistance and social commitment. Using a qualitative, interpretive and comparative method grounded in close reading, the article shows how testimony, collective narration, Dalit dialect and the refusal of consolation become aesthetic choices with political meaning. The analysis attends to the intersection of caste and gender, and to the conflicts among Dalit sub-castes that Ambedkar anticipated. The study concludes that Bama and Valmiki, despite their regional, religious and linguistic differences, share an Ambedkarite vision in which writing becomes an act of self-respect and a means of social reconstruction.

Keywords: Ambedkarite theory; Dalit aesthetics; Bama; Omprakash Valmiki; *Karukku*; *Sangati*; *Vanmam*; *Joothan*; caste and gender; graded inequality; testimonio; self-respect; Dalit consciousness

1. Introduction

Dalit literature is the most significant literary movement to emerge from post-independence India, and its intellectual source is the life and thought of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956). Ambedkar was a jurist, economist, social reformer and the principal architect of the Indian Constitution. He was also the first modern thinker to treat caste not as a religious curiosity or a harmless social custom but as a structure of domination that organised labour, sexuality, knowledge and the sacred. His writings, from "Castes in India" (1916) to *Annihilation of Caste* (1936), *Who Were the Shudras?* (1946), *The Untouchables* (1948) and *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (1957), gave the formerly untouchable communities a vocabulary of rights, dignity and self-assertion. When writers from these communities began to narrate their own lives, they wrote in the light of that vocabulary.

The word "Dalit", meaning broken, crushed or ground down, was adopted in Maharashtra in the 1970s by the Dalit Panthers, who explicitly placed themselves in the Ambedkarite tradition. From Marathi the movement spread to Gujarati, Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, Hindi, Punjabi and other languages. Eleanor Zelliot traces this trajectory from the Mahar movement led by Ambedkar to the literary assertion of the 1970s, and Arjun Dangle's anthology *Poisoned Bread* (1992) made the Marathi corpus available in English. By the 1990s, Dalit writing had become a pan-Indian phenomenon, sustained by the centenary of Ambedkar's birth in 1991, by the politics of reservation and by a growing body of autobiographies that scholars such as Sharmila Rege have read as testimonios.

Two writers stand out in this national expansion. Bama (Faustina Mary Fatima Rani, born 1958) is a Tamil Dalit Christian from the Paraiyar community whose autobiography *Karukku* (1992) is widely regarded as the first Dalit autobiography in Tamil and the first by a Dalit woman to reach a wide readership in English translation. Her novels *Sangati* (1994) and *Vanmam* (2002) extend her enquiry from the self to the community and from caste to the intersections of caste, gender and intra-Dalit conflict. Omprakash Valmiki (1950–2013) was a Hindi poet, short-story writer and critic from the Chuhra (Balmiki) community of western Uttar Pradesh. His autobiography *Joothan* (1997) is the most widely read Hindi Dalit autobiography, and his short stories, collected in *Salaam* (2000), *Ghuspaithiye* (2004) and later volumes, are among the most incisive representations of caste in Hindi fiction. His critical book *Dalit Sahitya ka Saundaryashastra* (2001) is a major statement of Dalit aesthetics in Hindi.

Bama and Valmiki are separated by language, region, religion and literary tradition. Bama writes in a Tamil Catholic context, in a regional culture already shaped by the anti-caste Self-Respect Movement of E. V. Ramasamy (Periyar). Valmiki writes from the Hindi heartland, from a community engaged in the most stigmatised forms of labour, scavenging and the disposal of carcasses, in a literary field long dominated by upper-caste writers. Yet both writers locate the origin of their critical consciousness in an encounter with Ambedkarite ideas, both narrate the classroom as a site of humiliation and of possibility, and both reject the received standards of literary beauty in favour of a writing of truth and protest.

This article reads these texts together in order to answer three questions. First, how do specific Ambedkarite concepts, such as graded inequality, the link between endogamy and the control of women, the critique of scriptural authority and the injunction to "educate, agitate, organise", appear in the narrative structure and thematic concerns of Bama and Valmiki? Second, how do the two writers differ in their uses of Ambedkar, given their different religious and regional locations? Third, in what sense can their writing be said to constitute a Dalit aesthetic, and how is that aesthetic itself Ambedkarite? The article argues that Ambedkar's thought is not merely a background influence on these texts but the principle that organises their themes, their narrative forms and their idea of what literature is for.

2. Analysis

2.1 The Ambedkarite Framework

Four strands of Ambedkar's thought provide the framework for this reading. The first is his account of caste as a system of graded inequality. In *Annihilation of Caste* he insists that caste is not simply a division of labour but a division of labourers, a hierarchy that assigns occupation by birth and forbids movement between stations. Because every caste stands above some groups and below others, each acquires an interest in the hierarchy and the oppressed are prevented from forming a common front. For Ambedkar, this is why caste has survived so long: it distributes contempt downward in ever finer degrees, so that even those near the bottom find someone to despise.

The second strand is the relation between caste and the control of women. In "Castes in India" (1916), Ambedkar argued that caste is produced by the superimposition of endogamy on exogamy, and that practices such as sati, enforced widowhood and child marriage arose to police women's sexuality so that endogamous boundaries could be maintained. Caste is therefore inseparable from patriarchy; to annihilate one requires confronting the other. This insight anticipates the work of later feminist scholars, notably Uma Chakravarti and Sharmila Rege, and the argument of Gopal Guru that Dalit women "talk differently" because they face patriarchy both from outside and from within their own communities.

The third strand is Ambedkar's critique of religious and scriptural authority. He held that caste could not be abolished as long as the shastras that sanctioned it commanded reverence, and that reform required a rejection of their authority. His own search for a religion compatible with equality led him to Buddhism, which he embraced with hundreds of thousands of followers at Nagpur in 1956. Importantly, he also recognised that conversion alone did not end caste, since caste distinctions survived among Indian Muslims, Sikhs and Christians.

The fourth strand is his programme of emancipation, summed up in the slogan "educate, agitate, organise" and grounded in the triad of liberty, equality and fraternity. Education, for Ambedkar, was the means by which the oppressed would recognise their oppression; agitation was the refusal to accept it; organisation was the collective form that would make change durable. In his final speech to the Constituent Assembly in November 1949, he warned that political democracy would not last unless it rested on social democracy, a way of life that recognised these three principles together. Each of the texts examined below can be read as a working-out of one or more of these strands.

2.2 Karukku: Education, Faith and the Discovery of Caste

Karukku takes its title from the palmyra leaf, whose serrated edges cut the skin of the children who gather it. In her preface Bama links this image to the biblical description of the word of God as a two-edged sword, and the doubleness is central to the book. The leaf stands for the wounds of caste and also for the sharpness of a consciousness that can cut back. The narrative is not organised chronologically but thematically, moving between work, play, school, faith and the convent. Pramod K. Nayar reads it as a testimonio, a narrative in which an individual life becomes evidence for the experience of a community.

The decisive moment of awakening is an episode from Bama's childhood in which she sees an elderly man of her community carrying a packet of food for an upper-caste landlord by its string, so that his hands would not touch it. She finds the scene comic until her elder brother explains that it is a sign of untouchability. His advice is explicitly Ambedkarite in spirit: because the community is denied honour and dignity, its children must study hard and excel, since learning is the one route by which they can compel respect. Bama follows this advice, and the book records both her success in school and the humiliations that accompany it, including a scene in which she is accused of wrongdoing and reminded by a teacher that she has revealed her caste.

The most original contribution of *Karukku* to Ambedkarite thought lies in its treatment of Christianity. Bama joins a religious order hoping to serve the poor, but finds caste reproduced inside the Church: in the treatment of Dalit nuns, in the institutions that serve wealthier communities, and in the indifference of religious authorities to Dalit suffering. Her departure from the convent after seven years confirms Ambedkar's observation that conversion does not by itself abolish caste. Yet Bama does not abandon faith. Like the Dalit theologians of the 1980s and 1990s, she reinterprets Christ as a liberator who sides with the oppressed. This mirrors Ambedkar's own method, in which religion is judged by whether it supports liberty, equality and fraternity, and is rejected or reconstructed when it does not.

2.3 Sangati: Caste, Gender and the Collective Voice

If *Karukku* narrates the formation of an individual Dalit consciousness, *Sangati* turns that consciousness toward the women of the Paraiyar community. The title means "events" or "news", and the novel is composed of loosely connected episodes in which the narrator, guided by the memories of her grandmother Vellaiyamma, recounts the lives of women in her village. There is no single protagonist. The narrative voice is collective, and the form itself enacts a claim that Dalit women's experience is shared and must be told in common.

The novel gives concrete shape to Ambedkar's argument that caste and patriarchy reinforce each other. The women of *Sangati* are exploited as labourers by upper-caste landlords, who pay them less than men for the same work. They are sexually threatened in the fields. And they are beaten, controlled and silenced by the men of their own community, who return from humiliation outside the home to exercise power within it. In one episode a young woman, Mariamma, is harassed by an upper-caste landowner but is herself blamed and fined by the village assembly, while her father beats her for bringing shame on the family. The episode exposes the triple oppression of caste, class and gender, and it illustrates Gopal Guru's point that Dalit women must contend with "internal" as well as "external" patriarchy.

Sangati is not, however, a narrative of passive suffering. Its women sing, quarrel, tell stories, perform laments and, in some episodes, answer male violence with verbal abuse and open defiance. The narrator moves from fear to an assertion that women must become strong, educated and economically independent if they are to live with dignity. This conclusion is recognisably Ambedkarite. Ambedkar repeatedly told women in his audiences to educate their children, to reject degrading customs and to claim the rights the Constitution later guaranteed. *Sangati* translates that address into fiction, making the Dalit woman both the subject of the narrative and the agent of its hope.

The novel is also an important document of Bama's linguistic politics. She writes in the spoken Tamil of her community rather than the formal literary register, and Lakshmi Holmström's translation preserves something of this through untranslated words and colloquial rhythms. The choice is aesthetic and political at once: it refuses the authority of a literary standard shaped by upper-caste usage and asserts the dignity of a speech long dismissed as crude.

2.4 Vanmam: Graded Inequality and the Politics of Division

Vanmam (translated as *Vendetta*) is the text in which Bama engages most directly with Ambedkar's theory of graded inequality. Set in the village of Kandampatti, the novel narrates the escalating conflict between two Dalit communities, the Pallars and the Parayars, who live as neighbours and work the same land for upper-caste Naicker landlords. The Parayars are largely Christian and the Pallars largely Hindu, so that caste difference is compounded by religious difference. What begins as a quarrel grows into a cycle of murder, police action and retaliation.

The novel shows how the dominant caste benefits from this division. The landlords and local politicians encourage the hostility between the two groups, supply weapons and arrange protection, while both Dalit communities lose lives, property and years of labour. This is precisely the mechanism Ambedkar described: graded inequality gives each oppressed group someone to look down on, and that small privilege prevents the oppressed from uniting against those who exploit them all. Bama's achievement is to make this abstract argument visible through the details of village life: the disputes over water and land, the pride invested in festivals and processions, the rumours that turn neighbours into enemies.

The ending of *Vanmam* offers a cautious hope. Educated young people from both communities come to recognise that their conflict serves only the landlords, and they begin to cooperate, notably in local electoral politics. The novel thus returns to Ambedkar's programme: education leads to awareness, and awareness to organisation across the divisions that caste has created. *Vanmam* is less lyrical than *Karukku* and less polyphonic than *Sangati*, but it is the most explicitly political of Bama's works, and it reminds readers that the Dalit movement must confront internal hierarchy as well as external domination.

2.5 Joothan: Humiliation, Knowledge and the Ambedkarite Self

Valmiki opens *Joothan* by declaring, in Arun Prabha Mukherjee's translation, that "Dalit life is excruciatingly painful, charred by experiences" and that these experiences have found no place in literature. The autobiography is an attempt to supply that absence. Its title names the leftover food that his community collected from upper-caste weddings and feasts, and the image condenses an entire social order: the Chuhras of Barla, in Muzaffarnagar district, live on what the Tyagis discard, and the scraps are received as a favour rather than as payment for labour.

The book's central drama is the struggle for education, and its scenes of schooling are among the most frequently discussed in Dalit literature. As a boy Valmiki is made by his headmaster to sweep the school grounds for days instead of attending class, until his father finds him and confronts the headmaster in fury. The father's insistence that his son will study, and that study will raise the standing of the whole community, echoes Ambedkar's conviction that education is the first condition of freedom. Later, when a teacher narrates the epic story of Drona feeding his son Ashwatthama flour mixed in water because he could not afford milk, the young Valmiki asks why no epic ever records the hunger of his own people, who survived on far less. He is beaten for the question. The episode stages Ambedkar's critique of scriptural and epic authority: the classroom transmits a sacred tradition in which the suffering of the untouchable is unspeakable, and the Dalit student who speaks it is punished.

The mother is the other heroic figure of the book. At the wedding of a Tyagi family, after her years of labour for them, she asks for food for her children and is insulted by the host. She overturns the basket of leftovers and walks away. Valmiki presents this as a founding act of refusal, the

moment when the acceptance of *joothan* is broken. The scene is a model of what Gopal Guru calls the politics of humiliation and of the self-respect that answers it.

The turning point of Valmiki's intellectual life comes when, as a trainee in an ordnance factory in Maharashtra, he encounters Ambedkar's writings and the Marathi Dalit movement. Sarah Beth and Raj Kumar have both noted that this reading gives Valmiki a language in which his scattered experiences become a pattern and his silence becomes speech. From this point the autobiography is not only a record of suffering but an Ambedkarite analysis of it. Valmiki's decision to retain the surname "Valmiki", despite advice to drop a name that marked his caste, is the final expression of this consciousness. Rather than escape stigma by concealment, he turns the stigmatised name into a declaration of identity, in keeping with Ambedkar's insistence that the oppressed must assert themselves rather than seek acceptance by imitation.

2.6 "Amma" and the Short Stories

Valmiki's short stories, published in *Salaam* (2000), *Ghuspaithiye* (2004) and *Chhatri* (2013), and partly translated by Naresh K. Jain as *Amma and Other Stories* (2008), extend the concerns of *Joothan* into fiction. "Amma" tells of a Dalit woman whose life is spent in sanitation labour and whose overriding resolve is that her children will not inherit the broom. The story directly dramatises Ambedkar's argument that caste is a division of labourers who are bound to hereditary occupations. Amma's struggle is not for herself but for a break in that inheritance, and she pursues it through her children's schooling. Like the mother in *Joothan*, she combines endurance with an unbending sense of her own dignity, and the story refuses to present her as a mere victim.

"Salaam" examines a custom in which a Dalit bridegroom must go from door to door among upper-caste households to offer a ritual salutation and receive gifts. The groom refuses, and the refusal provokes the anger of the village. A parallel strand follows his upper-caste friend, who is treated as untouchable merely because he is part of the wedding party and so experiences, briefly, what his friend has known all his life. The story is a study of how deference is ritualised and of how its refusal becomes political action.

"Shavyatra" ("Funeral Procession") turns to the hierarchy among Dalits themselves, the same theme that Bama explores in *Vanmam*. A family belonging to a community considered lower even by other Dalits is ostracised by its neighbours, and when a child dies the family is denied access to the cremation ground. The story is perhaps the starkest illustration in Hindi fiction of Ambedkar's thesis that graded inequality turns the oppressed against one another.

"Pachees Chauka Dedh Sau" ("Twenty-Five Fours Are One Hundred and Fifty") narrates a father who has repaid a moneylender according to the moneylender's arithmetic, in which twenty-five multiplied by four makes one hundred and fifty. When his son learns multiplication at school, the deception is exposed. The story is a parable of the Ambedkarite principle that education is the means by which exploitation is first recognised. Knowledge here is not ornament but an instrument of liberation, and the son's discovery breaks the father's habitual trust in the powerful. "Ghuspaithiye" ("Intruders") carries this argument into the modern institution, showing Dalit students in a medical college who are treated as intruders because they were admitted through reservation. Taken together, Valmiki's stories map caste across the village, the family, the school and the professional institution, demonstrating that education opens the door to a world that is still organised by caste.

2.7 Toward an Ambedkarite Dalit Aesthetic

The texts discussed above share a set of formal choices that together constitute a Dalit aesthetic. The most systematic theorisation of that aesthetic is Sharankumar Limbale's *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* (Marathi 1996; English 2004). Limbale argues that the classical Indian theory of *rasa*, which measures literature by the aesthetic pleasure it produces, and the ideal of truth, goodness and beauty, are unsuited to Dalit writing because they were formulated within, and serve, a caste society. In their place he proposes values derived directly from Ambedkar: equality, freedom, justice and fraternity. A Dalit text is to be judged by its capacity to awaken consciousness, to make readers recognise the inhumanity of caste and to move them toward change. Pain, rejection and revolt are, for Limbale, the characteristic emotional registers of this literature.

Valmiki's *Dalit Sahitya ka Saundaryashastra* (2001) makes a parallel argument for Hindi. Its central category is *Dalit chetna*, Dalit consciousness, which Valmiki defines through Ambedkarite thought. He contends that literature which depicts Dalits sympathetically, as some upper-caste writers including Premchand had done, is not Dalit literature unless it is informed by this consciousness and by the experience of those who have lived caste from below. Toral Gajarawala and Laura Brueck have shown how this argument reshaped the Hindi literary field, challenging the progressive realism of earlier writers and insisting that representation of the oppressed is incomplete without their own critical voice.

Bama and Valmiki realise this aesthetic in several shared ways. First, both privilege testimony over invention. Even their fiction is anchored in recognisable communities, and their autobiographies present themselves as evidence rather than as artful self-fashioning. Second, both refuse consolation. Their narratives rarely end in reconciliation or transcendence; they end in resolve, in the decision to study, to speak or to organise. Third, both reclaim language. Bama's use of Paraiyar Tamil and Valmiki's plain, unadorned Hindi reject the elevated diction associated with upper-caste literary culture. Fourth, both turn private wounds into collective knowledge, so that the "I" of the autobiography is always also a "we". Sharmila Rege's reading of Dalit women's testimonios, and K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu's anthologies of South Indian Dalit writing, situate these choices within a broader movement in which the literary is redefined as a form of social witness.

The differences between the two writers are equally instructive. Bama's Ambedkarism is mediated by Tamil Christianity and by the regional legacy of the Self-Respect Movement; her central innovation is to make gender inseparable from caste and to imagine liberation through a reinterpreted faith. Valmiki's Ambedkarism confronts the Hindu epic and the Hindi canon directly; his central innovation is to expose the mechanisms of humiliation inside the modern institutions, the school, the factory and the college, that were supposed to dissolve caste. Both, however, return to the same Ambedkarite conclusions: that caste must be named before it can be fought, that education is the beginning rather than the end of emancipation, and that unity among the oppressed is the condition of any lasting change. In this sense the Dalit aesthetic they practise is not separate from Ambedkar's politics but is its literary form.

3. Methodology of the Study

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive and comparative methodology. Its primary method is close reading of the selected texts, attending to theme, narrative structure, point of view, imagery and language. The primary corpus consists of Bama's *Karukku*, *Sangati* and *Vanmam*, and Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, "Amma" and the short stories "Salaam", "Shavyatra", "Pachees Chauka Dedh Sau" and "Ghuspaithiye". These texts were chosen because they span the two major genres of Dalit prose, autobiography and fiction, and because they represent two distinct regional and linguistic traditions, Tamil and Hindi.

The theoretical framework is drawn from the writings of B. R. Ambedkar, in particular "Castes in India", *Annihilation of Caste*, *Who Were the Shudras?*, *The Untouchables* and his speeches to the Constituent Assembly. From these writings the study derives four analytical categories: graded inequality, the nexus of caste and gender, the critique of scriptural authority, and the programme of education, agitation and organisation under the ideal of liberty, equality and fraternity. Each text is read against these categories to identify how Ambedkarite ideas are dramatised, adapted or extended.

The study is supplemented by secondary sources in Dalit literary criticism and theory, especially the aesthetic writings of Sharankumar Limbale and Omprakash Valmiki, and the scholarship of Gopal Guru, Sharmila Rege, Eleanor Zelliot, Pramod K. Nayar, Sarah Beth, Raj Kumar, Toral Gajarawala and Laura Brueck. Insights from testimonio studies and from feminist analysis of caste inform the reading of autobiographical and women-centred narratives.

The comparative dimension follows the method of thematic juxtaposition rather than influence study. Bama and Valmiki did not write in dialogue with each other; the comparison is justified by their shared intellectual source in Ambedkar and by the parallel situations of Dalit communities in two regions. Texts are read in their published English translations, with reference to original titles and key terms where these carry meanings that translation cannot fully convey. The study follows the MLA Handbook (9th edition) for documentation.

4. Limitations of the Study

The study has several limitations. First, it relies largely on English translations. Bama's Tamil and Valmiki's Hindi carry dialectal textures, idioms and caste-specific vocabularies that translation inevitably flattens, and some of the aesthetic claims made here, especially about Bama's use of Paraiyar speech, would be strengthened by analysis of the original texts. Not all of Valmiki's short stories are available in English, and the selection discussed here is shaped by what has been translated.

Second, the corpus is selective. Bama has also written short stories and later novels, and Valmiki wrote poetry, plays and critical essays, none of which are examined in detail. The two writers also represent only two of the many regional traditions of Dalit literature, and conclusions drawn from them cannot be generalised to Marathi, Telugu, Kannada, Punjabi or Malayalam Dalit writing without further study.

Third, the Ambedkarite framework, though central, is not the only lens through which these texts can be read. Marxist, Periyarist, feminist and theological approaches would foreground different aspects, such as class formation, regional anti-caste traditions or Dalit Christian theology, which receive limited attention here.

Fourth, the study is textual rather than empirical. It does not examine the reception of these works among Dalit and non-Dalit readers, their place in school and university curricula, or the conditions of their publication and translation. Finally, the positionality of any critic writing about Dalit literature shapes interpretation, and the study acknowledges that its readings remain open to correction by Dalit critics and communities whose experience these texts represent.

5. Conclusion

This article has argued that the work of Bama and Omprakash Valmiki is best understood as a literary realisation of Ambedkar's thought. In *Karukku* and *Joothan*, the two most celebrated Dalit autobiographies in Tamil and Hindi, the discovery of caste is followed by the pursuit of education and by an awakening that is explicitly or implicitly Ambedkarite. In both books the classroom is a place of humiliation and of possibility, and in both the narrator's family, a brother in Bama's case and a father and mother in Valmiki's, embodies the refusal to accept the destiny caste assigns.

The novels and stories extend this analysis in directions Ambedkar himself charted. *Sangati* and "Amma" place Dalit women at the centre, showing that caste is reproduced through the control of women's labour and bodies and that Dalit women resist on more than one front. *Vanmam* and "Shavyatra" expose the graded inequality that sets Dalit communities against one another, confirming Ambedkar's warning that the hierarchy survives by dividing

the oppressed. "Salaam" and "Pachees Chauka Dedh Sau" dramatise the breaking of ritual deference and the liberating power of knowledge, while "Ghuspaithiye" shows how caste follows Dalits into the institutions of modern India.

The article has also argued that these thematic concerns cannot be separated from aesthetic form. The preference for testimony over ornament, the collective narrative voice, the use of community speech and the refusal of consolation are choices that follow from an Ambedkarite conception of literature as a means of social reconstruction. Limbale's and Valmiki's theories of Dalit aesthetics make this conception explicit: the value of a work lies not in the pleasure it gives but in the consciousness it awakens and in its fidelity to the values of liberty, equality, justice and fraternity.

The comparison of a Tamil Christian woman writer and a Hindi writer from a scavenging community demonstrates that Ambedkar's thought functions as a shared idiom across Dalit literatures, even where religion, region and gender produce real differences. Bama adds to Ambedkarite discourse a sustained account of Dalit womanhood and a critique of caste inside Christianity; Valmiki adds a precise anatomy of humiliation in the modern institution and a fierce reckoning with the Hindu literary canon. Together they show that Dalit literature is not a minor regional current but a national literature of conscience. Future research might extend this comparative approach to other regional traditions, to the original-language texts and to the reception of these works among new generations of Dalit readers, for whom Ambedkar's call to educate, agitate and organise remains urgent.

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