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## Discipline Specific Elective (DSE) WORLD LITERATURES Syllabus

1. Omprakash Valmiki, Joothan
2. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*
3. (i) Gabriel García Márquez, "Balthazar's Marvellous Afternoon"  
(ii) Octavio Paz, "The Blue Bouquet"
4. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "Essay from Decolonizing the Mind"
5. (i) Pablo Neruda, "Fable of the Mermaids and the Drunks"



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## Joothan by Omprakash Valmiki,

### Who is Dalit?

The term 'Dalit' forcefully expresses their oppressed status. It comes from the Sanskrit root dal, which means to crack open, split, crush, grind, and so forth, and it has generally been used as a verb to describe the process of processing food grains and lentils.

Jotirao Phooley and B. R. Ambedkar, two towering figures in Dalit history, were the first to appropriate the word, as a noun and an adjective, in the early decades of the twentieth century to describe the extreme oppression of untouchables.



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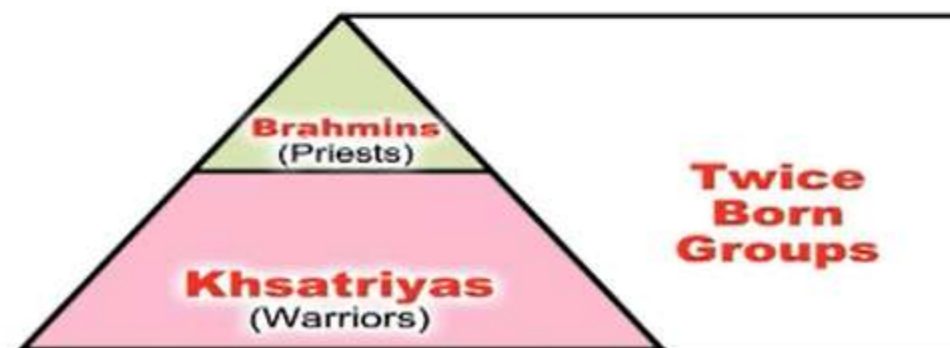
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- **Dalit** meaning "broken/scattered", is a name for people belonging to the lowest stratum castes in India, previously characterised as "untouchable".<sup>[1]</sup> Dalits were excluded from the four-fold varna system of Hinduism and were seen as forming a fifth varna, also known by the name of *Panchama*.





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the four-fold varna system of Hinduism and were seen as forming a fifth varna also known by the name of Dashtama.





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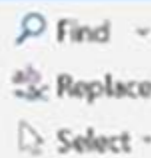
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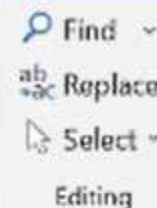


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The chaturvarna, the system of society that categorizes all castes according to four major divisions, which were arranged hierarchically in a descending order of “purity.” (The word varna literally means color, which refers to gradations within the hierarchy.) At the top of this power structure were the Brahmins, who were performers of rituals and keepers of sacred texts (the Vedas, the Smritis, and the Puranas), and the Kshatriyas, who, as rulers and warriors, patronized the Brahmins and commissioned the rituals, including the yagna, or fire ritual of animal sacrifices and gifts to Brahmins. Although the Brahmins and Kshatriyas were constantly feuding for control of power, these two varnas considered



themselves superior to the Vaisyas—the cultivators and traders—and the Sudras, the servants and performers of menial tasks. The Brahmins, in alliance with the king or state, denied the Sudras the ritual of upanayana, the sacred thread ceremony, which gave the three varnas above them the status of dwija, or twice born. Hindus must undergo this ritual, which symbolizes a second birth, before they may study the Vedas. Because the Sudras had no right to participate in this ritual, they were born only once, from the womb of a woman.

## DALIT LITERATURE

Dalit literature is the literature of the Dalits, by the Dalits and for the Dalits. Dalit(oppressed or broken) is not a new word. Apparently it was



## ***30 Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature***

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### **3.4 WHO IS DALIT?**

To start with, there will have to be a definite explanation of the word 'Dalit' in Dalit literature. Harijans and neo-Buddhists are not the only Dalits, the term describes all the untouchable communities living outside the boundary of the village, as well as Adivasis, landless farm-labourers, workers, the suffering masses, and nomadic and criminal tribes. In explaining the word, it will not do to refer only to the untouchable castes. People who are lagging behind economically will also need to be included.

### **3.5 WHAT IS DALIT LITERATURE?**



### 3.5 WHAT IS DALIT LITERATURE?

Dalit literature is precisely that literature which artistically portrays the sorrows, tribulations, slavery, degradation, ridicule and poverty endured by Dalits. This literature is but a lofty image of grief.

Every human being must find liberty, honour, security, and freedom from intimidation by the powerful elements of society. These values are now being articulated in a particular kind of literature—its name being Dalit literature. Recognizing the centrality of the human being, this literature is thoroughly saturated with humanity's joys and sorrows. It regards human beings as supreme, and leads them towards total revolution.

#### 3.5.1 Suffering in Dalit Literature

### 3.5.1 Suffering in Dalit Literature

The Hindu religious order has considered the Dalits' shadow, touch and speech to be impure. It has regarded them untouchable and guilty from birth. Dalits should not accumulate property or wear gold ornaments, they should live outside the village and own only donkeys and dogs. Furthermore, they should partake of food only in clay utensils, use only shrouds for clothing, and take inauspicious and crude names. Hindu scriptures are replete with numerous such commands.

For thousands of years, Dalits have been kept deprived of power, property and position. It was propounded that 'god created this hierarchy', so that Dalits may not rebel against this

## Dalit Literature: Form and Purpose 31

social order. Thousands of generations of Dalits have continued to endure this injustice.

Dalit society came to understand its slavery following the thoughts of Babasaheb Ambedkar. This mute society found its hero in Babasaheb, and its anguish voice through him. This anguish of Dalits is the progenitor of Dalit literature. It is not the pain of any one person, nor is it of just one day—it is the anguish of many thousands of people, experienced over thousands of years. Therefore, it is expressed collectively. The anguish of Dalit literature is not that of an individual but of the entire outcast society. This is the reason why it has assumed a social character.

### 3.5.2 Rejection and Revolt in Dalit Literature

### 3.5.2 Rejection and Revolt in Dalit Literature

✓ 'Rejection' and 'revolt' in Dalit literature have been birthed from the womb of Dalits' pain. They are directed against an inhuman system that was imposed on them. Just as the anguish expressed in Dalit literature is in the nature of a collective social voice, similarly, the rejection and revolt are social and collective.

✓ This rejection is aimed at the unequal order which has exploited Dalits. Its form is double-edged—rejecting the unequal order, and demanding equality, liberty, fraternity and justice. To use a legal concept, the rejection in Dalit literature constitutes a 'just remedy'.

Revolt is the stage that follows anguish and rejection. 'I am human, I must receive all the rights of a human being'—such is the consciousness that gives birth to this revolt. Born from unrestrained anguish, this explosive rejection and piercing revolt

is like a flood, with its aggressive character and an insolent, rebellious attitude.

### 3.5.3 Experience in Dalit Literature

✓ The experiences articulated in Dalit literature have not yet been expressed in any other literature. They are the experiences of a particular community. Experiences conveyed in Dalit literature have several characteristics. They constitute an engagement in



## 32 *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*

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self-search to achieve self-respect; and the rejection of traditions and a religion that are opposed to such self-respect. They mark a rebellion against overbearing religion and tradition, as well as hypocrisy masquerading under seductive names such as freedom or democracy. They express the pain of human beings who are not treated as human. They demonstrate respect for the Buddhist value of treating humans as human. And they nurture the feeling of unending gratitude towards Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar and Mahatma Phule.

Dalit writers assert that their literature conveys the life that they have lived, experienced and seen. Since the experience contained in Dalit literature is articulated out of a desire for freedom, its character is collective rather than individual. It is this experience that has inspired Dalit writers to write. The

they have lived, experienced and seen. Since the experience contained in Dalit literature is articulated out of a desire for freedom, its character is collective rather than individual. It is this experience that has inspired Dalit writers to write. The connection of experience with the lives of Dalits cannot be ignored. Experience, here, is the product prepared from a chemical process, with pain and revolt as the ingredients. Dalit consciousness plays a prominent role in this.

#### 3.5.4 Dalit Consciousness

The Dalit consciousness in Dalit literature is the revolutionary mentality connected with struggle. It is a belief in rebellion against the caste system, recognizing the human being as its focus. Ambedkarite thought is the inspiration for this consciousness. Dalit consciousness makes slaves conscious of

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### 3.5.4 Dalit Consciousness

The Dalit consciousness in Dalit literature is the revolutionary mentality connected with struggle. It is a belief in rebellion against the caste system, recognizing the human being as its focus. Ambedkarite thought is the inspiration for this consciousness. Dalit consciousness makes slaves conscious of their slavery. Dalit consciousness is an important seed for Dalit literature, it is separate and distinct from the consciousness of other writers. Dalit literature is demarcated as unique because of this consciousness.

### 3.5.5 Commitment in Dalit Literature



this consciousness.

### 3.5.5 Commitment in Dalit Literature

Dalit writers make their personal experiences the basis of their writing. Always prominent in their writing is the idea that certain notions have to be revolted against, some values have to be rejected, and some areas of life have to be strengthened and

built upon. Because Dalit writers write from a predetermined certitude, their writing is purposive.

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. Dalit writers are activist-artists who write while engaged in movements. They regard their literature to be a movement. Their commitment is to the Dalit and the exploited classes.

But Dalit writers' voicings can be negatively influenced by their commitment. It is necessary for them to know the boundary between the activist and the artist. The writer's creation is a part of social life. Transformational writers cannot shirk social responsibility. Even so, it is important for them to ensure that this responsibility does not have a harmful effect on their creation.

### 3.5.6 The Language of Dalit Literature

The view of life conveyed in Dalit literature is different from the world of experience expressed hitherto. A new world, a new society and a new human being have been revealed in literature, for the first time. The reality of Dalit literature is distinct, and so is the language of this reality. It is the uncouth-impolite language of Dalits. It is the spoken language of Dalits. This language does not recognize cultivated gestures and grammar. It is said that language changes after every twenty miles, but this arithmetic turns out to be wrong with respect to Dalits. In the same village, differences are evident between the language of the village and the language of the untouchable quarters.

For their writing, Dalit writers have used the language of the quarters rather than the standard language. Standard language

village and the language of the untouchable quarters.

✓ For their writing, Dalit writers have used the language of the quarters rather than the standard language. Standard language has a class. Dalit writers have rejected the class of this standard language. Cultured people in society consider standard language to be the proper language for writing. Dalit writers have rejected this validation of standard language by the cultured classes, because it is arrogant. To Dalit writers, the language of the basti seems more familiar than standard language. In fact, standard

*Mahabharata*, which support the caste system, cannot be honoured by us': this is the perspective of Dalit writers.

Dalit writers have used those images and symbols in their literature that are appropriate for relating experiences. Use of distinct images and symbols is seen especially in Dalit poetry. However, Dalit writers cannot forget that Hindu religious literature has nourished the unequal caste system. Therefore, they have decided not to use religious symbols in their writing. Dalit critics have encouraged Dalit writers to construct new myths instead of using the existing symbols and metaphors of Hindu sacred literature. When the Dalit writers did employ religious symbols, it was to deconstruct them, infusing them with new meaning and purpose.

3.6 CHARGES AGAINST DALIT LITERATURE

### ✓ 3.6 CHARGES AGAINST DALIT LITERATURE

Because of the form, purpose and role of Dalit literature, many accusations have been made against it. It has been charged that Dalit literature is propagandist, univocal and negative; that it does not represent the individual person; and, that excessive resentment is heard in Dalit literature.

#### 3.6.1 Is Dalit literature Propagandist?

✓ Dalit literature has been criticized as being propagandist. It has been alleged that this literature lacks artistic finesse, and that

Dalit writers affect a 'pose' when they write. It has been charged further, that their writing expresses the frenzy of a movement, and does not possess neutrality and objectivity.

If Dalit literature appears to be propagandist, it is because it presents the Dalit writers' anguish and their questions. This literature has made a declaration for human values, and hence is not neutral. Dalit writers cannot sever their relationship with their pain. The questions they pose in their work are their own, and those of their society—they cannot be neutral. To the critics, their reaction may seem like a pose. However, it cannot be said that the entire corpus of Dalit literature is propagandist. Since Dalit writers see their writing as a means of human liberation, expressing emotion is integral to the literature they produce. Intense lived and felt experiences cannot be called propagandist.

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### 3.6.2 Is Dalit Literature Univocal?

Dalit literature is also frequently accused of being mired in univocality, monotony and stasis. The source of this univocality is the expression of an ideological view common to all Dalit literature. Because of this common ideological function, the character of this literature is univocal. Besides, the experiences narrated in Dalit literature are very similar. Untouchables'



## DALIT LITERATURE

Dalit literature is the literature of the Dalits, by the Dalits and for the Dalits. Dalit(oppressed or broken) is not a new word. Apparently it was used in the 1930's as a Hindi and Marathi translation of 'depressed classes' a term the British used for what are now called the scheduled castes. In 1970s the 'Dalit Panthers' revived the term and expanded its reference to include scheduled tribes, poor peasants, women and all those being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion. So Dalit is not caste. It is a symbol of change and revolution.

The term "Dalit literature" came into use in 1958, when the first conference of Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangha (Maharashtra Dalit Literature Society). Dalit literature is an important stream of Indian writing in English and other languages of India. It is literature about the oppressed classes and caste of India

A tradition of Dalit writing can be traced to eleventh century writer Cekkilar [Periyapuramam]. Modern Dalit writings are founded on the works

Cekkilar [Periyapuramam]. Modern Dalit writings are founded on the works and ideological insights of Ambedkar, the chief architect of the constitution of India. Dalit writing is in reparably tied to dalit liberation movements in various parts of India. This category of literature become a significant presents in the 1960's in Marathi literature and later in Hindi, Tamil and Malayalam as well as English poems, short stories, novels besides autobiographies from the major genres of Dalit expression. These writings formed a collective voice that questioned through articulation of their social reality the kind of writings that made them in visible or distorted their identity. Traditionally Dalits were considered to be beyond the pale of varna or caste system. They were originally considered as panchama or the fifth group beyond the fourfold division of Indian people. They were not allowed to let their shadow full upon a non- Dalit caste member and they were required the sweep the ground. Where they walked to remove the 'contamination' of their foot full. Dalit were forbidden to worship in temple or draw water from the same wells as caste Hindus and they usually lived in segregated neighborhood outside

## **IMPACT OF DR. BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR'S CONVERSION TO BUDDHISM**

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar wanted to correct the wrongs in the Hindu social order. He wanted to liberate the untouchables from the clutches of Hindu social order. He attempted to reform the Hindu social order from within; he endeavored to appeal the conscience of the so-called Hindu leaders for the same. However, his efforts were in vain. On the contrary, he had to face the wrath of the orthodox Hindus.

Thus, left with no alternative, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar decided to convert to other religion, a religion which would be truly based on the democratic principles of liberty, equality, fraternity and social justice. He believed that it was only the Buddha's Dhamma i.e. Buddhism which was the most suitable religion for his conversion.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, on 14th Oct Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar with his followers embraced Buddhism. He decided to revive Buddhism in India, the land of its origin. To him to strengthen democracy in India and to restructure the Hindu society on the democratic principles the revival and

order. He wanted to liberate the untouchables from the clutches of Hindu social order. He attempted to reform the Hindu social order from within; he endeavored to appeal the conscience of the so-called Hindu leaders for the same. However, his efforts were in vain. On the contrary, he had to face the wrath of the orthodox Hindus.

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