

Daya Pawar's *Baluta*: A Discourse of Dalit Marginalization

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Abstract:

Baluta is a realistic and thrilling discourse about how the Dalit community faces multiple forms of marginalization. Daya Pawar's *Baluta* is credited as the first Dalit autobiography in Marathi language. Traditionally, Dalits have been denied representation in Indian history and literature. The upper caste ruling classes have scripted their history by depriving them of the right to get an education. The history of the Dalits is one of brutality, hardship, marginalization, exploitation, and compromise. They are forced into ignorance by social injustice and inequality, and they are forced to live in a hostile atmosphere of estrangement and compromise that is oppressive. An eye-opening portrayal of the social, cultural, and political prejudice against Dalits can be found in Daya Pawar's current autobiography, *Baluta*, which has been chosen for analysis.

Keywords: Dalit autobiography, marginalize, injustice, inequality

The present-focused autobiography 'Baluta' is the first Dalit autobiography written by Daya Pawar, published on December 25, 1978, and later translated by Jerry Pinto in English and published in 2015. Daya Pawar discourses not only about personal and family members but also about his community in general. The translator, Jerry Pinto, writes in the 'Translator's Introduction' at the end, which encourages the reader to read the text to the end:

“There are ghost stories in Baluta, and childhood games; there are romances and rumours; there are songs and sayings, there are corpses to be photographed and the tale of how to use a dusting-rag to romance your new bride. And cast of characters that are colourful as my city: there are counterfeiters and hijras, sex workers and distillers, gamblers and con women, political leaders and opportunists, dancers and exorcists. You'd like this would get unbelievable and exotic; if it does, it is my translation that is to be blamed. In the original, it is told in a matter-of-fact manner that takes

in the wandering Raiwand and the aghori who would lick up his own vomit and makes of both the stuff of life itself.

This is one of the finest autobiographies I have ever read, and I count it an honour that I was given the opportunity to translate it.” (Pawar, 2015, p.xvi)

Daya Pawar belongs to the Mahar community in Maharashtra. They were socially marginalized. The caste system forced Mahars to live on the edge of the village, which is known as ‘Maharwada’. The upper-caste people, Maratha and Bhramin, kept their distance from them. They were untouchables and treated as bonded labor. In the village, they were appointed for special tasks without wages. Their specific work was designed by the upper-caste community. like dragged away the carcasses of dead animal, chopped firewood, to run in front of the horse of any important person who came into the village, tend to their animals, feed and water them and give them medicine, proclamation announcing funerals from village to village, played music day and night at festivals and welcomed new bridegrooms at the village. On behalf of these all work they demand their share of the produce of the land (village harvest). That is called Baluta and it was their birth right. When they demanded their share of harvest the upper caste farmers rudely behave with them. Pawar writes:

“As a child, I would always go with my mother to claim our share....Each Mahar would carry a coarse blanket. The farmers grumbled as they handed over the grain: ‘Low-born scum, you do not work. Motherfuckers, always first in line to get your share. Do you think this is your father’s grain’.....Finally, the Mahars would spread their blankets on the grain and the Marathas would give them whatever was beneath. This came with a stream of abuse. The Mahars would ignore them completely as they tied up their bundles.” (Pawar, 2015, p.66)

The issue of starvation and survival also takes center stage in the book, along with the cruel insults and despicable actions of the unjust upper caste members who make a living hell out of the lives of the Dalits. The word "Baluta," which is Marathi for "leftover food," is a perfect representation of the humiliation that a Dalit feels when they have to pay for their predetermined village portion in exchange for carrying out socially. Perhaps due to the sorrow and guilt associated with facing the self he speaks about in his autobiography, Pawar has described his narrative as a secret that must not be shared. Rather than

promoting the autobiographical as a genuine form of self-representation, Pawar explores the link between secrecy and reveal.

Baluta and dead animals flesh was the basic resources of Mahar community. Daya writes that death of cattle brought great excitement to the Maharwada and if the animal accidentally fall from the cliff and died they excited more because such animal's flesh would be fresh. He writes:

“When the vultures and kite began to circle, like aeroplanes, the Mahars would locate the fallen animal. They would rush to get there before the birds picked the carcass clean.” (Pawar, 2015, p.73) As this message Maharwada secured people runs “Taking whatever was to hand, pots, pans, dishes, ghamelas.... Until te last strip of skin had been cleared, no one took a break...The women would pull each other's hair, and abuse each other's mothers.” (Pawar, 2015, p.76)

Daya tells about another marginalizing discourse: The Thursday market held great significance for the Mahars, as they would gather under the marketplace trees in groupings based on caste and enjoy delicious bhel and jilebis. Everyone could often reach his location with closed eyes. “The restaurant had different cups for different castes; there were Mahar cups and Chambhar cup, Mang cups and so on. Our cups were very often without handles and ant-infested. We had to rinse them ourselves before ordering tea. We sat separately; either on the verandah or on a bench behind the restaurant. (Pawar, 2015, p.43)

Daya recounts his school memories they were not allowed to sit with Maratha children. The Mahar children had to sit outside, on the steps. Maratha children faced the teacher and Mahar children sat at right angles to them, facing in a different direction. The discrimination on the basis of cast was extreme. Daya writes: “If we were thirsty, there was no water for us at school; we had to go back to the Maharwada to drink. The Chambharwada was close by but they too would not give us water.” (Pawar, 2015, p. 45)

The fact that Daya enrolled in school was extraordinary because thousands other Dalit children were not given the same opportunities in school at the time because of their parents' ignorance, poverty, and lack of enthusiasm. Daya was driven to pursue an education and find purpose in his life despite the severe societal conditions he faced. His conviction was that education had the ability to change people's lives. In the story told by Baluta, Daya's mother is advised not to send him to school by his close relatives. The argument put out was that forcing Daya to work would enable his mother, who is a widow, to sustain the expenditures of the family rather than sending him to school.

Daya Pawar writes:

“Sakhu, what’s the point of sending the lad to school? Are we Brahmins? Baniyya? Let him loaf around and eat scraps. Or take the animals to gaze. You’ll get some money that way.” (Pawar, 2015, p. 61)

Here he recollects Babasaheb Ambedkar’s words: “What dreams do the women of Maharwada have for their children? That their sons should become peons or sepoy? A Brahmin mother’s ambitions are different: My son should become a District Collector, she says, Why do Mahar women not harbor such longings?” (Pawar, 2015, p. 61)

After getting a good education, Daya got the job of clerk-cum-laboratory assistant at the Parel Veterinary College. He observed that this job was irrespective of the level of his education. Society has not changed the mentality of the Mahar community; though they are well educated, they have to perform their traditionally demeaning job. Daya writes:

“On the first day I understood how I got the job. No upper-caste person would have taken it. From the various districts of Maharashtra, samples of the shit of sick animals would arrive at the laboratory. Every morning, I was supposed to open these parcels, make a note of them in the register, transfer the contents into glass jars using a glass rod, change the water in them every hour, remove the sediment and when the water ran clear, transfer the remains into a glass phial. After lunch, the doctors would examine the specimens under the microscope. They would write down their diagnoses and I would have to send off the reports.” (Pawar, 2015, p. 234)

Given the type of dirt involved in the work, Daya finds that he is qualified for it. The upper classes, he finds out, believe that handling animal feces is improper. Lower castes are seen to be the only ones fit for this dirty task. He narrates:

“The other department, Anatom, was where animals were dissected. The carcasses were hung on hooks, the skin stripped off. My job was to prevent them from decomposing by injecting their blood vessels with alcohol. My subordinate, a class IV employee, was also a Mahar, from the Konkan. He was better than the qualified vets at stripping an animal. After all, it was his traditional occupation.” (Pawar, 2015, p. 234)

Later, he condemned his destiny and felt remorse for his birth and said: “Damn it, after all this education, here I am doing the work that my forefathers did.” (Pawar, 2015, p. 235)

Conclusion:

The narrative of Baluta is told by the author Dagdu Pawar to Daya Pawar, who is literate. Both are the author's personalities. An untouchable's experiences fighting for a peaceful existence are conveyed in the autobiography. The book's strengths lie in its portrayal of the culture surrounding the protagonist, which is both evident and straightforward. It was a critical triumph in both Marathi and English translations, inspiring Marathi society, but its candid portrayal of Dalits caused serious anti-Dalit backlash. A new genre of Marathi literature was established by this book. After Baluta, a large number of autobiographical works discussing difficult circumstances and unpleasant reality were written. Daya Pawar's use of language, which is not only rebellious but also incredibly reflective and analytical, is what makes him special. Baluta uses the humiliation of having to beg for leftover food as a model symbol for the Dalit people, either in his home village or for himself. Baluta, interpreted more widely as the Dalit's portion or lot in life, historicalizes the image of the marginalized Dalit by placing him in the midst of financial hardship. Because of the guilt and pain that come with facing oneself, the narrator of Baluta challenges the purported veracity of the autobiographical work by keeping his narrative a secret.

References:

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