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**The Thematic Aspects of Dalit Marathi Short Story with  
Special Reference to Yogiraj Waghmare, Keshav  
Meshram, Sharankumar Limbale, and Amitab**

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**Abstract:**

*Dalit short story is an offshoot of Marathi short story, especially, after independence. As a result of awakening in lower classes of their miserable plight they began to express themselves in literature of the many writers labelled as Dalit writers, four are considered in this paper: Yogiraj Waghmare, Keshav Meshram, Sharankumar Limbale, Amitabh.*

*Thematically considered, the stories of the writers studied here project the theme of trials and tribulations in the lives of the untouchables. Yogiraj Waghmare's short story collection 'Udrek', published in 1978, presents various shades of miserable life lived by the downtrodden people. The stories like 'Maza Baap', 'Mahar Master', 'Paraganda' present the inexorable fate of the Dalits and their slavery. Keshav Meshram's 'Patraval' (1981) reveal the upper class suppression of the downtrodden. 'Basmati', 'Rakti', 'Chataka', 'Utaara', 'Utamaaj' are some of the stories from this collection which deal with socio-familial issues of the dalit life. They also show that the caste system is proof against all attacks. Sharankumar Limbale's short story collection, 'Harijan' shows the all pervasiveness of untouchability. The stories like 'Harijan', 'Naag' present the bleak and inhuman degradation of human beings suffering the curse of untouchability. Amitab, another dalit writer, presents the dalit life through his short story collection 'Pad' (1980). His stories like 'Pad', 'Bhikaryale Okarya' present the degrading effect of struggle for food. This struggle turns man into a beast. 'Harijan Master' expresses the fact of prevalence of caste system into the present time.*

**Key Words:** caste system, downtrodden, upper caste, exploitation, untouchability, pains.

**Introduction:**

This paper deals with Marathi *Dalit* Short Story during 1975 – 1990. This period was dominated by Dalit Short story writers like Waman Hoval, Arjun Dangle, Yogiraj Waghmare, Keshav Meshram, Dada Gore, Ganesh Dhandage, Sharankumar Limbale, Amitabh (Waman Vithba Nagarale), Daya Pawar, Shankarao Suradkar, Bhimrao Shirwale, Arun Kamble, Bhaskar Chandanshive, Madhav Kondvilkar and Yogendra Meshram. Their collections of short stories received wide popularity in Maharashtra. Of all these story writers, the stories of only four of them – Yogiraj Waghmare, Keshav Meshram, Sharankumar Limbale, and Amitabh – will be discussed in this paper. Their stories are representative stories of *dalit* literature. They deal with the lives of *dalits* in Maharashtra. Their stories present realistic accounts of the lives of *dalits*. They published their collection of Short Stories respectively ‘*Udrek*’ (1978), ‘*Patrawal*’ (1981), ‘*Harijan*’ (1988), and ‘*Pad*’ (1980). These collections of short stories received wide popularity in Maharashtra.

Yogiraj Waghmare’s ‘*Udrek*’ was published in 1978. The stories from this collection portray the all pervasive picture of *dalits* who have tortured by the caste system. This collection of stories makes reader restless by presenting caste problems in rural area. Democracy is far away from villages. Village Patil is village headman and *dalits* have to work in his fields. Yogiraj Waghmare’s stories relate the stories of oppressors, upper caste people and oppressed, *dalits* or lower caste people.

The stories ‘*Maza Baap*’, ‘*Sainikachi Bayako*’, ‘*Jaganuk*’, ‘*Pil*’, ‘*Paraganda*’, and ‘*Udrek*’ present strange picture of poverty, slavery, helplessness of *mahar* community which makes reader restless. ‘*Maza Baap*’, ‘*Mahar Master*’, and ‘*Paraganda*’ give message that upper caste people consider converted *Nav-Bauddha* as *Mahar* and they expect that *dalits* should be their slaves. The upper caste mentality is very conservative that it does not like *Mahar* people to adopt *Bauddhism*. However, those who become *Bauddha* protest strongly against this mentality. This protest, pride and negation appear in ‘*Mahar Master*’, ‘*Paraganda*’, and ‘*Udrek*’. ‘*Band*’ and ‘*Mahar Master*’ show that Indian education system also encourages caste system. The stories ‘*Jatra*’ and ‘*Udrek*’ give message that *dalits* should throw away shackles of conventions which create caste system and live with dignity and self-respect.

Keshav Meshram published his ‘*Patrawal*’ in 1981. This collection of stories presents domestic and social reality of *dalits*. This presentation reveals the narrow mentality of upper caste people and cultural limitations of understanding humanity. The caste system, the four classes of Aryan Society, is still in existence in independence period and it strongly holds untouchability between upper caste and lower caste people. ‘*Patrawal*’ effectively suggests that the thoughts of Fule and Ambedkar would not be appreciated and accepted in this society and *dalits* would not be accommodated in mainstream.

The stories 'Basmati', 'Rakti', 'Chataka', 'Utaara' and 'Utamaaj' meaningfully present misery and troubles of *dalit* families. 'Basmati' makes strangely restless while suggesting that nobody can escape from the clutches of caste system. 'Chataka' ironically tells that scrap is more valuable than the *dalits*. 'Utaara' and 'Utamaaj' simultaneously show progress of established and regress of displaced people. Education system encourages not equality but inequality because this education system is devised by upper caste people who favour caste system. This is expressed in 'Modata', 'Harmot', and 'Beduk' in a suggestive manner. 'Modata' shows violent struggle between *dalits* who have strong desire for education and upper caste system which deny them education. 'Harmot' and 'Beduk' expose the faulty education system in which upper castes have opportunity to develop but at the same time it hinders the progress of *dalits*. *Dalits* are not aware of the fact that there is a system around them which works against them and puts obstacles in their progress. This system generates hatred about education in *dalits*. 'Basamati' and 'Utamaaj' show that *dalits* are marching towards progress in spite of hard barriers put around them. Again 'Utamaaj' suggests that education does not build self-respect and pride in *dalits* but it confuses them. They are imprisoned in their confused identity and lead their life in a state of doubt and delusion. 'Nasabandi' suggests that the government officers use the weapon of bribe and caste system to hide corruption and immorality in education system.

'Beduk' shows that caste system considers *dalits* and beasts at the same level. Moreover, the story explains that in spite of democracy, the roots of inequality and untouchability are not eradicated. *Dalit* who is trapped in caste system, yields to circumstances. But this oppressed *dalit* becomes more selfish and cruel beast while exploiting another *dalit* lower to him. This is shown in 'Patrawal'. The fact that humanity of man appears at surface level but his beast like nature hides in darkness is communicated in 'Patrawal'. 'Harmot' and 'Bandgul' highlight the need of introspection for *dalits* and their leaders. *Dalit* leaders rob *dalits* and live on their money instead of working for their betterment. The eradication of caste system and untouchability in free India was expected but instead upper caste people used this democracy to exploit *dalits* and keep them *dalits*. In this way, the selfish nature of upper caste people is depicted in 'Chataka'. 'Rakti' shows how leaders go to *dalits* for votes and give promises to solve their problems. Actually, political system compels *dalits* to live in tenements. 'Zadap' exposes the meaninglessness of *dalit* life. Many years after independence, the problems of backward classes have not been solved by the leaders. This regrettable situation does not affect or move upper caste people. 'Gomkala' shows that how it is impossible to form a cultured man in a society which is trapped in four squares of ignorance, poverty, dirtiness and disease. 'Patrawal' and 'Beduk' express in a suggestive manner that *dalits* are not still aware of the fact that their slavery and helplessness endanger their very existence.

'Nasbandi' highlights the fact that caste system is implemented by using woman, her womanhood and her caste. 'Gomkala' and 'Basamaati' deal with the problem of a *dalit* woman. She does not respect her husband. She rejects very concepts of chastity and loyalty and throws away tradition. But at the same time she believes her womanliness in

motherhood. So she longs for a child. She rejects chastity and sacrifices her character for becoming a mother. In this way, she becomes traditional.

Sharankumar Limbale presents the reality of rural and urban *dalits* through the stories of his collection '*Harijan*'. The observation of caste system is at both places, in rural villages and cities. The difference is that in rural villages caste system is observed openly while in cities it is observed discreetly. The rural folks appear through the realistic portrayal of conventions. This collection of stories shows the progress and regress of *dalit* people. The hypocrisy of city people is exposed by suggesting their hidden desire for caste system and false secularism.

'*Harijan*' and '*Naag*' explain that caste system does not allow man to live like man rather it degrades him to animal level. Sometimes, *Dalit* crosses his limitations and achieves considerable progress as well. Sometimes he revolts against the forces which push him down to inhumanity. '*Dhadaka*' and '*Chatta*' show that caste system has evolved traditions which make them fight among themselves and give away life. '*Dhadka*' shows knowledgeable protest against uselessness and foolishness of traditions. '*C.R.*' shows how promotions are given to upper castes and lower caste are deprived of the same. '*C.R.*' and '*Sambodhi*' show the forces which check the progress of *dalits* and suppress their intellect. '*Naag*', '*Yeskaraachi Bhakar*' and '*Suryachya Vahana*' suggest that the caste system encourages *dalits* to fight against each other and die for the sake of upper castes. '*Lok*' shows how caste system and superstitions compel *dalits* to fight and destroy each other. Like nations, castes have boundaries also. The boundaries of nations are protected by fighting soldiers but the boundaries of caste have not been protected by any system. This problem is raised in '*Jevha Mazi Jaat Kalaali*' and '*Sima*'. '*Mi Malakaacha Pavana Hay*' shows how man makes another man an object and the provision is made by the system that object should not cross the boundary. In spite of this provision, man tries to revolt against the system. '*Jevha Mazi Jaat Kalaali*' and '*Sambodhi*' show picture of literary field. The literature of *dalits*, its inspirations, and values are not properly understood but the literature of *dalits* is criticized as obscene.

'*Pad*', the collection of short stories of Amitab, was published in 1980. Even though, this country is democratic, the communal forces are dominant. These forces make it necessary for *dalits* to fight against casticism, poverty, and inequality. Both the governing system and religious system act against *dalits* for exploiting them forever. Such a type of theme has been handled in '*Pad*'.

Caste made man beast and he has to struggle against beast for livelihood. This fact of human life is presented in '*Pad*' and '*Bhikaryale Okarya*'. The castes of *dalits* can easily be understood because of their means of livelihood. This fact is shown in '*Pad*', '*Valanache Pani*' and '*Bhikaryale Okarya*'. '*Pad*', '*Valanache Pani*', '*Bhikaryale Okarya*', '*Polalelya Paulkhuna*', and '*Harijan Master*' express the fact that untouchability is not eradicated even though India is a democratic socialist country. '*Harijan Master*' shows a

remarkable struggle of *dalit* who becomes *bramhin* and *bramhins* refuse him to consider as *bramhin*. 'Janmkhun' relates the fact that how communal forces attempt to reinstate castes by declaring the eradication of castes. 'Bridge Number Ten' and 'Tada' show that caste is appearing in a new form of factionalism in *dalit* society. Factionalism in *dalit* goes down to family level in 'Tada'. The experience that *dalit* political power waves aside the responsibility of *dalits* while *dalits* sacrifice for self-respect is presented in 'Bridge Number Ten' in a meaningful manner. 'Sahashyachya Wawrat' becomes meaningful when it shows that the feeling of protest against injustice among *dalits* is for self-respect and not only for reaction. The story 'Satyakam Wald Jabali' unfolds various layers and their complications in the life of a *dalit* woman. Moreover, the story exposes that the *dalit* woman is victim of not only caste system but she is victim of male dominated society also. The woman presented in the story knows the importance of education so she refuses the conventions of caste system. However, her approach towards male dominated society is traditional and so she becomes a victim of patriarchal society.

A twofold exploitation of *dalit* woman is portrayed with affection by Keshav Mashram and Yogiraj Waghmare. On one hand, she is a victim of caste system on the other hand she is a victim of patriarchal system of society. Her double exploitation makes her pathetic. Many times she is used only for sexual gratification and this horrible picture is presented in an effective manner. In some of the stories, her unique humanity is also portrayed.

The language of *dalit* story gives the experience of *dalit* life. Standard as well as rural language is used profusely in the stories. In these stories the rural dialect is used as per requirement of the situation. Yogiraj Waghmare, Keshav Meshram and Amitab portray the picture of *varhadi* (North-East Maharashtra) *dalit* life by using *varhadi* dialect.

Dalit short story moves the last man on the social ladder of caste system to the centre of plot. Dalits became the protagonists and heroes of the stories. Dalit story is spontaneous expression of troubles and tortures experienced by dalits. There is sincerity in expression. Dalit short story gave a new dimension to Marathi literature and enriched it. Dalit story made its unique space in Marathi literature because of its effective way of presenting social reality and meaningful subject-matter.

'Dalit' is an attitude or approach towards *Dalit* literature. It is an approach towards literature and making of *Dalit* Literature. Anybody can hold this approach. The writers those who portray the picture of common exploited man and those who struggle for restoring humanity, dignity, nobility and self-respect of man are called *dalit* writers. The narrow definition of *dalit* literature that is written of *dalits* by *dalits* for *dalits* is not expected here. *Dalit* literature is struggle for human identity and pride and revolt against inhumanity and humiliation.

**Conclusion:**

The above discussion shows that the themes of *dalit* short stories are mainly pains, poverty, exploitation, injustice because of caste system, lack of education, ignorance etc. The experiences expressed through these short stories are first hand experiences. Hence they are more genuine and poignant. The life portrayed in these short stories is predominantly rural where the chances of exploitations are more as compared to urban life. The use of rural dialect gives appropriateness to the experiences.

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