

DISCOURSE OF DISSENT: LANGUAGING RESISTANCE AND CONSCIOUSNESS IN SUBALTERN LITERATURES – DALIT AND BLACK

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Abstract: *The paper highlights the pivotal role of language in Afro-American and Dalit movements, emphasizing identity affirmation and resistance to dominant aesthetic structures. It examines language's dynamic role in shaping subaltern experiences and fuelling revolutionary movements. While there is some analysis of the significance of literary trends and intellectual current in these parallel movements, a few scholarly inquiries integrate the linguistic and stylistic aspects comprehensively. The study addresses this critical gap by comparing and contrasting the selected study of these two movements to see their convergences and divergences. We employ the theoretical framework of Subaltern Studies and Distributed Language (DL) to understand socio-political motifs of pre- and post-production of a particular kind of language. The selected poems are closely read and analysed through Critical Discourse Analysis, with close reading as a key technique. It allows for an exploration of the intricate relationship between the linguistic structure, use of lexical items, emotive use of language, connotational significations, and compositional semantics. While selected Black literature poems experimented with internal morpho-syntax and everyday language, Dalit literature bluntly presented harsh facts using multilingualism, a unique Indian linguistic trait, and everyday vocabulary.*

Keywords: *Black and Dalit literatures, subaltern literature, distributed language, languaging, multilingualism*

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Introduction

In the complex construct of the Afro-American and Dalit movements, language emerges as a powerful tool to assert identity and challenge the established norms of the syntax of aesthetics (Limbale, 2010; Singh, 2012; Das, 2017; Ashok & Srinivas, 2016; Hall, 2011; Gates, 2016; and Taylor, 2016). The typical sight of aestheticism, a subjective sensory perception, is grounded in the cultural framework of the experience. An object thus is aesthetically pleasing when it meets the criteria of a standardized value of society/culture, which is subjected to (un)familiarity. In Bakhtin's discourse, such an example of the aesthetic contour is termed monologic; it is an effort of privileged discourse to isolate the object of aesthetics, be it language, art, music, clothes, and so on (Bakhtin, 1981). A subaltern aesthetic, as spirited in poststructuralism, is not a single entity with a defined and rigid syntax. It picks multitudes, multidimensionality, pluralism, pragmatism, individualism and everydayness. The Subaltern aesthetic, particularly in question, is characterised by arts for life's sake in opposition to the idea of art for art's sake. The underlying significance of such treatment of arts can be observed in both Dalit and Black literature. In Limbale's (2010) work *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*, the translator (Mukherjee) notes that Dalit literary and critical writings disrupt the theorization of Indian politics, society, culture, and literature. Limbale contends that Indian literary theory often dismisses Dalit literature as non-literary works, displaying a hostile stance. Indian literary tradition is characterized by the Sanskrit word *rasa*¹, translated as essence, taste, or flavour by the Britannica dictionary. This reflects the underlying philosophy of art in the Industrial era, i.e., art for art's sake. Both Indian and Western literary transitions and American ones can be viewed broadly from the same perspective. Apart from the philosophical, ontological, and cultural distinctions that have been observed in both kinds of literature (Canon vs Subaltern), the use of language becomes an important and interesting domain of differences. Following the standard and prevalent structure of the production of art, language is supposed to be creative, unique, standard and sophisticated.

On the other hand, subaltern literature is characterized by the use of simple and plain language. Most of the early Dalit literature has witnessed the local language that the author used to speak in their locale, at their homes, and with their friends. Kumari & Kapoor (2021) call it the language of everydayness. Following Bakhtin's philosophical project (Bakhtin, 1981), the idea of polyglossia defies the idea of monism, i.e., the isolated existence of standard language. Dalit writings not only bring plurality into the discourse of literature but undermine

1. "An Indian aesthetic theory in which human emotions are extracted to a set of eight or nine flavors arising due to the proper representation of a dramatic situation and its psychophysical expression of appropriate moods. *Rasa*, relished as a universal feeling, is thus autonomous, transcending individuality." (Bhushan et al., 2015, p. 102)

the idea of single, standard, and pure language. They also dismantle the idea of a distinction between spoken and written language – supposedly a literary and non-literary distinction. It can be overtly observed in the work of a Dalit writer, Namdev Dhasal. He is notable for his work *Golpitha* (Dhasal, 2011). He employs the language spoken in his surroundings, incorporating dialects, sociolects, and idiolects. He does not hesitate to blend multiple languages, including his dialect, Marathi, Hindi, and Sanskrit.

We see similar linguistic exercises in Afro-American writings. There is a deliberate use of what has been termed as vernacular or Black English, particularly in politically motivated writings. The poets or writers who were part of the movement (Black power) redefined the syntax of aesthetics, such as Baraka's poem, 'black art'. Black literature might lack multilingualism in the strict sense; however, it brings plurality in the language at all linguistic levels: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and writing conventions. Black poets literary production, however, is marked by the emotive use of language. It is noticed in many writers' poetry, but Amiri Baraka is notable for exercising the emotive aspect of the language. His writing has also been seen as his frustration towards the established aesthetic structure rooted in the Industrial Revolution. He criticises the fundamental principle of European-American aesthetic sensibility – 'art for art's sake'. He believes that if a literary work does not serve the socio-political purpose of the community, it has no use (Baraka, 2003). Similar characteristics can be observed in Dalit literature during the Dalit literary movement in the 1960s and onwards. Dalit is a political term that entered India's politics around the 1930s. It is assumed that the word is taken from Sanskrit/Hindi/Marathi and means 'downtrodden or crushed' (Omviet, 2012). In general discourse, this refers to the untouchable castes in India. Language was central to both revolutions, not just as a tool for a new aesthetic but as a way to visualize and manifest a new world and reality. It served as a source for renewed Dalit and Black consciousness, featuring unfiltered stories and treating art as both identity and progress. The Black and Dalit literature conveyed pain, anger, and revolt. Evaluating Dalit and Black Poetry based on Brahmanical and white poetic aesthetics would be unjust, given their distinct language, style, and experiences.

This paper delves into the significance of language within these transformative social currents, where both written and spoken words shape literature, a new aesthetic and become the catalyst for identity affirmation and resistance. By delving into the linguistic landscape of Afro-American and Dalit literature, the study seeks to position language as a way of emancipation. By exploring poetic expression and tones, we try to understand how the act of languaging, as both a liberating force and a contested ground, navigates the realms of identity, unity, and the redefinition of the syntax of aesthetics. This study aspires to achieve two objectives. Firstly, it attempts to see the act of languaging (in opposition to the

role of language) in shaping the subaltern's collective consciousness. Secondly, it examines the relationship between linguistic elements within Afro-American and Dalit literature and their worldview to see how it challenges, resists, and redefines the prevailing domain of the syntax and semantics of aesthetics.

Theoretical Framework

The current paper approaches the use of language in Black and Dalit literature through the lens of subaltern, which emerges in the post-colonial theories. Spivak (1985), in her Subaltern theory, focuses on the voices and experiences of marginalized and oppressed groups. She argues that these subaltern groups, typically excluded from mainstream discourses, must be understood and represented on their terms. She also argues against the external interpretation of the subaltern's internal narratives. For her, it is a risk of reinforcing existing power structures even in attempts to give voice to the marginalized. The theory targets not only socio-political and economic marginalization but also linguistic and cultural ones.

To complement the salient values of subaltern theory, we use the Distributed Language (DL) framework to explain the unique and rambunctious use of language. This framework is grounded in the theory of languaging (Becker, 1988) and distributed cognition (Hutchins, 1995). Thibault (2017, p. 76) states that Languaging is “the praxis in and through which language events are achieved and recognised”. Languaging is coordination – a way to cognize the world. Distributed language, simply put, is a theory that views language as a dynamic process and practice rather than a static product (Gurney & Demuro, 2022, p. 1). This theory suggests that language is dynamic first and symbolic second. Cowley (2009), a key contributor to this theory, states that “language is, at once, social, individual, and constitutive of the feeling of thinking” (*ibid.*, p. 1). It serves as a means of coordination between bodies, including language itself. According to Love (2007), language is not a code like Morse; it does not merely decode messages. Instead, it embodies and reinterprets – language is the message itself, not just the code. Unlike codes, language is integral to the “feeling of thinking” (Harnad, 2005). As speakers, writers, listeners, and readers, we interact emotionally with language and accomplish tasks through it. Leonardi (2013) suggests that while we cognize the world, symbols also work through us. They become part of who we are. This is possible because they constrain biodynamics as we speak, listen, think and create texts. The theory also echoes Deleuze and Guattari's idea of “assemblage²”; It views language as

2. “For Deleuze and Guattari, assemblages are more like machines, defined solely by their external relations of composition, mixture, and aggregation. In other words, an assemblage is a multiplicity, neither a part nor a whole. If the elements of an assemblage are defined only by their external relations, then it is possible that they can be added, subtracted, and recombined with one another ad infinitum without ever creating or destroying an organic unity. This is what Deleuze and Guattari paradoxically call a “fragmentary whole” (Nail, 2017, p. 23).

a dynamic interplay of semiotic elements, emphasizing its interrelationships both within and outside itself. This idea highlights language's co-dependency and convergence, making distributed language an effective hermeneutic tool for understanding language as a way of being (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

In line with Deleuze's philosophy (1994), languaging can be seen as a process of becoming. The creation of texts, particularly multilingual ones like Dhasal's and Baraka's writings, naturally brings events into existence through language, embodying a process of "eventing" the world. Therefore, the choice of lexical items, syntax, prosodic elements, and writing style is a way of transforming the world into events. This natural exercise of languaging – representing the worldview through semiotic processes and various (non)linguistic resources while rejecting the idea of language as a single, unified system – becomes a political act when grounded in Bakhtin's concepts of polyglossia and heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981). In Bakhtin's opinion, the idea of polyglossia attacks the validity of singularity, one kind of language and discourse. It places one language (for our context) in a dialogical relationship with the other, consequently challenging both the formal and functional existence of the one without the other. It asserts the tension-filled space where languages contest and achieve meaning. The multilingual, multidialectal, sociolectal and idiolectal characteristics of texts, thus, indicate a dynamic and multifaceted interaction between the author, text and the reader. Language, thus, for this paper, "is dynamical, embedded, embodied, distributed and situated." (Cowley, 2009, p. 2).

We have used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for close reading and grounding the texts in our theoretical frameworks. CDA developed during the mid-20th century in response to the structure-oriented (denotational) analysis of language. Fairclough (1989; 2013) have grounded CDA in the theoretical framework of critical social theory. It draws from various disciplines, including linguistics, sociology, and political science. As a method, it critically analyses the use of language concerning power structure, social ideologies, group representation, intertextuality, social context, and agency and resistance.

A New Aesthetic: Discourse on Language in Black and Dalit Literature (Poetry)

In the literary expression, the convergence of Black and Dalit voices unveils a narrative that transcends conventional aesthetic and linguistic boundaries and challenges established norms. As we navigate the labyrinth of verses written by Black and Dalit poets, we recognize characteristics that distinguish their unique presentation of discourses. Along with exploring thematic elements, our attention is on the significance of language in shaping narratives, creating spaces for resistance, and fostering a sense of identity. Through this exploration, we seek to understand the intricacies of Black and Dalit poetry and engage in

a broader conversation on the power and potential that language subsumes as a liberating and empowering reflection of cultural resurgence.

Lee (1971) provided the following aesthetic categories as an effort to reflect the uniqueness of African American experiences.

1. polyrhythmic, uneven, short, and explosive lines;
2. intensity; depth, yet simplicity; spirituality, yet flexibility;
3. irony; humour; signifying;
4. sarcasm- a new comedy;
5. direction; positive movement; teaching; nation-building;
6. subject matter – concrete; reflects a collective and personal lifestyle; and
7. music; the unique use of vowels and consonants with the developed rap demands that the poetry be real and read out aloud.

Lee observed the poems written by Black poets who first identified themselves as black and then as poets. These characteristics are important both from a new aesthetic perspective and the emergence of black consciousness. Cooke (1986) argues that the history of African American literature passes essentially through four stages. He termed the first stage ‘imitation’, where African American authors imitated the styles and themes of white American and European literature. The second stage was a stage of assimilation. The writers of this stage often aimed to show that African Americans could integrate into white society and contribute to it meaningfully. The third stage, he argued, is identified with experiments with dialect and a way of narrating and poetizing, which involves a self-conscious insistence on verbal and linguistic differences. However, the last stage, which he argues is yet to be reached, indicates the freedom to expropriate all models. How can we do theory and criticism in white man’s language? It reflects the fact that we language our discourse or discourse our language. The worldly experience is embedded, consumed and experienced through one’s own language. According to Bakhtin (1981, p. 294),

... As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language for the individual consciousness lies on the borderline between oneself and the other... The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes one’s “own” only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language... but rather, it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions; it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own.

The identified categories (Lee, 1971), thus, are not stylistic but rather attributes that are characteristic of a unique cultural world. Morrison posits that language variations embody distinctions between multiple identities, defining individuals according to their unique standards in contrast to presumed expectations. She echoes Wittgenstein in contending that language puts constraints on or shapes human knowledge and thought. Her view on the interconnectedness of language, culture and self is reflected in the sentence, “Oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence”. She further adds, “Sexist language, racist language, theistic language – all are typical of the policing languages of mastery, and cannot, do not permit new knowledge or encourage the mutual exchange of ideas” (Morrison, 2008, p. 201).

In Dalit poetry, we encounter similar characteristics mentioned by Lee (1971). Dalit poetry is characterized by expressions like revolutionary, radical, narrativization, short, emotive, anger, frustration, disgust, criticism, etc. Ashok and Srinivas (2016, p. 144) observed some of the characteristic features of Dalit literature. We have presented some of the characteristics they mentioned briefly here.

1. A literature of protest against all kinds of exploitation: caste, class, race or occupation.
2. It rejects both Indian and Western theoretical conceptions like Freud’s psychoanalysis, Barthes’s structuralism, and Derrida’s deconstruction together with the Indian theories of *Rasa* and *Dhwani*³.
3. It rejects the straightforward narrative of Indian mythologies. They found relevance in Buddhism.
4. Personal narrative, experience and authenticity are the characteristics of Dalit literature. Their language, as well as images, comes from their experiences.
5. Dalit literature imbibes “Dalit consciousness”, a consciousness of their slavery and their experience of exclusion, subjugation and oppression.
6. Emotive use of language that reflects shame, anger, and indomitable hope.
7. The Dalit writers found inspiration from the Black movement in America.

Sharan Kumar Limbale is a seminal figure in India’s Dalit literature and movement. In his book, *Towards the Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Consideration*, he argues that Dalit literature has paved a

3. Consult Das (2017, p. 30) for understanding *Rasa* and *Dhwani* as the theory of aesthetics in the Indian context.

different path compared to both Indian and Western aesthetic sensibility. He further says that “beauty-related experiences are object-specific, person-specific, and situation-specific” (Limbale, 2010, cited in Das, 2017, p. 27). He is against the general concept of beauty and aesthetics and argues that they can only exist in a conflict of dialogism and cannot be prescriptive. Limbale (2010, p. 105) comments on what constitutes Dalit literature and writes, “Dalit writers believe that Dalit literature is a movement. They see their literature as a vehicle for their pain, sorrow, questions, and problems. But when readers read the works of Dalit writers exclusively as ‘literature,’ the common ground between the writer and the reader is disturbed”. Dalit literary texts are examined as a societal expression of pain, agony, and anger, where their authenticity is revealed through rawness and a sense of “artlessness” (Limbale, 2010, p. 108). The aesthetics of art must be looked at from the objective of an art. Dalit literature must be analysed from a “sociological perspective focused on social values [rather] than on beauty” (Thiara, 2016, p. 257). Brueck (2014) is of the view that Dalit literature is marked by realism. The best way to reflect or represent reality is the language in which reality is lived and experienced. Therefore, Dalit writings take on a political dimension as they embody the unadorned, everyday essence of spoken language, positioned in contrast to levels characterized by refinement, standardization, classical norms, and purity. Arockiamary and Mary (2016, p. 139) say that “... In its own right, Dalit writing takes upon itself the language of the real world, thereby attempting to deconstruct the linguistic parameters long-held by the so-called mainstream literature ...”.

The language of the real world is best understood through the interaction between individuals, language, and events. It is essential to consider the language through which a specific emotion is felt, as this determines which form of language can most effectively convey that emotion. Also, Dalit and Black literatures are considered emotional due to their rich life experiences and protests, significantly influencing their linguistic expression. Majid (2012) notices that emotion interacts “with language at many levels of structure, from the sound patterns of language to its lexicon and grammar, and beyond to how it appears in conversation and discourse” (cited in Riegel et al., 2016, p.1636). Holmström (2012), in her translation of a Dalit writer Bama’s novel *Karukku*, writes in her introduction,

Bama is doing something completely new in using the demotic and the colloquial routinely, as her medium for narration and even argument, not simply for reported speech. She uses a Dalit style of language which overturns the decorum and aesthetics of received upper-class, upper-caste Tamil. She breaks the rules of written grammar and spelling throughout, elides words and joins them differently, demanding new and different patterns of reading (Holmström, 2012, p. XI).

Linguicism and Black Consciousness in Baraka's Black Art and Sonia's 'right on' and 'blk rhetoric'

Baraka's radical poems are highly socio-political and demand immediate action from the community's members. They also try to liberate blacks from their prejudices. According to Neal (1968, p. 29),

The Black Arts Movement is radically opposed to any concept of the artists that alienates him from his community. Black Art is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept. As such, it envisions an art that speaks directly to the needs and aspirations of Black America. To perform this task, the Black Arts Movement proposes a radical ordering of the Western cultural aesthetic. It proposes a separate symbolism, mythology, critique and iconology. The Black Arts and Black Power concept both relate broadly to the Afro-American's desire for self-determination and nationhood. Both concepts are nationalistic. One is politics; the other with the art of politics.

One of the important characteristics of Black Art is what was regarded as the use of unusual, direct, provocative, and obscene language. A language that characterizes everyday use. A language deemed unsuitable for artistic expression. By examining the conventions of linguistic elements such as lexical items, morphology, syntax, capitalization, and punctuation in the English language, the poems crafted by Black poets emerge as radical. This marks the inception of a novel or alternative aesthetic known as the Black aesthetic. Linguistically, this aesthetic can be defined by semantic play (as articulated by Gates (1987) in "Signifyin(g) Monkey"), exploration of phonological possibilities, inventive morphological constructs, freedom in syntax, and unconventional yet intentional stylistic choices in capitalization, punctuation, and vocabulary. Observe the following stanzas taken from Baraka's Black Art (1979). The poem is long; thus, we have taken only a few stanzas. The dots (.....) indicate that we have left something in between.

Poems are bullshit unless they are
teeth or trees or lemons piled
On a step.
Fuck poems
and they are useful, wd they shoot
come at you, love what you are,
breathe like wrestlers, or shudder
strangely after pissing.

The opening line itself challenges the traditional concept of a poem, a conventional European-American literary aesthetic. It confronts the idea of

“art for art’s sake”. The use of words such as bullshit, teeth, fuck, piss, and lemon highlights the “feeling of thinking”, reflecting the poet’s affective stance on artistic expression. He aims to use language in a way that is performative. He wants a poem that has teeth; it can mean that it can bite or chew; in other words, it must have some capability to do damage. He wants a poem about trees, possibly trying to connect with nature in a true African sense. He wants a poem like a lemon, which causes some disturbing emotions. It should not be sweet and pleasurable. His use of obscene and disturbing words like fuck, shoot and piss in the above stanza is indicative of the discursive nature of a discourse. It also talks about Black consciousness and asks them to be proud of who they are, not silently but overtly. Apart from a morphological protest, one can notice the use of capitals with functional words, which is against the standard form of English.

We want live words of the hip world live
fresh & coursing blood.
we want “poems that kill.”
Assassin poems, Poems that shoot
guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys
And take their weapons leaving them dead
With tongues pulled out and sent to Ireland. Knockoff
Poems for dope selling wops or slick half-white
Politicians Airplane poems, rrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
Rrrrrrrrrrrrrrr... tuhtuthtuthtuthtuthtuth.....
....rrrrrrrrrrrrrr... Setting fire and death to whities ass.
.....
We want a black poem. And a
Black world
Let the world be a black poem.

The aggression in these stanzas reflects the spirit of the people associated with the movement (Otaiwi & Hassan, 2020). Baraka wants words to be a weapon; he wants the poem to kill, shoot guns, assassin and wrestle. Many people, including black intellectuals, have critiqued the intention or possible interpretation of the poems that appear to be violent. However, it indicates what DL proposes of “feeling of thinking⁴” (Cowley, 2009; Harnad, 2005). The poem deconstructs language, highlighting its dynamics and the discursivity involved in its construction and expression. When Baraka expresses a desire for a poem that

4. What we hear influences feeling and thinking. It (language and, thus, emotion) emerges as we coordinate with other living beings.

can “kill”, there is an underlying sense of frustration, anger, and helplessness conveyed through the interplay of language with extralinguistic elements such as socio-political contexts, spatiotemporal settings, and the socio-psychological position of the individual. The poet articulates his frustration regarding the inaction of the black community, the brutal actions of whites against blacks, and prejudices faced by blacks and critiques the ethics, morality, aesthetics, and the social, legal, and cultural systems upheld by whites. When he says, “poems that wrestle cops into alleys.... And take their weapons leaving them dead....” it is a call of distress, a helplessness against police brutality. It implies black morality. It shows the dilemma of Black people/revolutionaries. Their moral principles prevent them from engaging in violence, taking lives, killing, or wrestling. As a result, Baraka envisions a poem – an abstract, inanimate entity – that inherently cannot perform such actions. However, the poem becomes an agent that carries out these actions, which only a conscious being could accomplish. This semantic anomaly makes the poem distinctive and quickly popular. It is an example of the use of active language. By “active”, we mean it has the “feeling of thinking” or action, in the spirit of Austin’s (1962) illocutionary act. It brings the central point of the theory of DL, i.e., “realizing values”.

A direct reference to how we do things with language is the representation of vocal sounds that Baraka produces in the poem, such as, “rrrrrrrrrrrr R..... tuhtuhtuhtuhtuh....rrrrrrrrrrr.... It can be analysed as an onomatopoeic expression, a direct, unclouded association between the sound and the feeling. He wants the poem to be “Setting fire and death to whites ass”. Moreover, this emotion is not entirely racial but political. As he also mentions half-white politicians, Niggers and Jews. In line with Subaltern theory, the expression serves as a plea to draw attention to the Black situation in America. Black voices have gone unheard, been misrepresented, and viewed through the perspectives of European Americans.

As far as the poem’s aesthetic is concerned, it sets its poetic syntax and sensibility. The semantic or interpretational load that each word, phrase or sentence has is remarkable. Its complexity and simplicity are important poetic characteristics that are unique to Baraka’s style. The use of onomatopoeic sounds, profane language (or it can be said that this is their everyday language), and the innovative use of capital letters and spelling systems mark an alternative aesthetic in literature. Its aesthetics is in its objective, its reachability, its being common, its soul, its value, and its directness.

Sonia Sanchez ‘right on: white america’

The alternative aesthetic from the perspective of forms of language can be explicitly noticed in Sonia Sanchez’s poem ‘right on: white america,’ published in 1970. Unlike Baraka’s black art, where he used capitalization very differently,

just.
 u & me
 blk/ and un/armed.
 this country might have
 been a pio
 neer land once.
 and it still is.
 check out
 the falling
 gun/ shells on our blk/ tomorrows.

An interesting observation is the use of slanted lines that are conventionally used to indicate the ‘or’ proposition in the English language. However, Sonia’s usage deviates from the standard usage and employs a new semantics. The use first simply interjects the conventional interpretation and demands a complicated reading of words and phrases. For example, “blk/ and un/armed” brings multiple interpretations with reference to the movement (such as police brutality and black rebellion), such as the proposition “black and armed”, “black and unarmed”, “black or armed”, and so on. Even the conjunction “and” does not straightforwardly bring out the idea of addition but of a conjunction and disjunction. Syntactically, it appears to make the structure of the poem look very different, and connotatively, we can interpret it as a black aesthetic that has the dual function of distorting the existing syntactic-semantic of the English language and creating a new Signification altogether (Gates, 1987). The use of space on the page is also structured in a way that accounts for the fluidity. Her engagement with the language at the morphological level is also fluid and intentional, viewed as linguistic violence by the language purists. Words such as “tomorrows”, “blk”, “allamerican”, “u”, and so on would definitely disturb white Americans, as she puts it in her poem’s title.

Sonia’s other poem, titled “blk/ rhetoric”, is more radical in terms of the syntax of poetry or, for that matter, language. Like the one described above, she does not use capital letters. Her use of the period is a protest. She uses a question mark, even if there is no question word (a characteristic of suprasegmental features (intonation)). She uses small brackets to write running thoughts. Her writing plays with the convention of using linguistic and non-linguistic elements such as the use of brackets, periods, commas, question marks, capitalization, shorthand, omission in spelling, word boundary, and sentence boundary. In the poem below, how she manifests her world in words on paper reflects her orientation and interaction with the world. The use of spaces to reflect the silence or pause, eliminating word boundaries to indicate how a dialect is spoken, creating new word boundaries to reflect the natural pauses, and so on.

who's gonna give our young
 blk / people new heroes
 (instead of catch / phrase)
 (instead of cad / ill / acs)
 (instead of pimps)
 (instead of wites / whores)
 (instead of drugs)
 (instead of new dances)
 (instead of chit / ter / lings)
 (instead of a 35c bottle of ripple)\
 (instead of quick / fucks in the hall / way
 Of wite / america's mind)
 like. this. is an S O S
 me. calling.....
 calling.....
 some / one
 pleasereplysoon.

Content and form blend creatively and effectively in all these poems. Sonia's poem, published in 1969, responds to Baraka's SOS, calling Black people to unite. She agrees with Baraka that there is a common enemy. However, she reflects upon the internal struggle and asks, "Who will be a role model and guide the black community?". It is a rhetorical question. Black poetry not only speaks out against white oppression but also seeks true revolution by addressing internal conflicts, particularly those highlighted by Black feminists. As a subaltern literature, two possible hypotheses emerge: (a) creation of new semantics by working through the language (structures); it not only generates possibly a new code (Black English) but also registers linguistic violence (an act of resistance), and (b) effort to build an identity which is rooted in the vernacular cultural and linguistic practices; echoing black consciousness and aesthetic.

Dalit Poetry: Languaging Personal Narrative, Anger, Protest and Criticism

There is a debate about who is a Dalit and what is Dalit literature. Who can write for the marginalized? Some argue that only a Dalit can write about and for Dalits, as they have experienced a life of discrimination. The debate started with Mulk Raj Anand's (1935) work "Untouchable", as the author is from a higher caste. Swaroopa Rani (1998) believes that a Dalit writing by the higher caste can only be considered sympathetic literature. On the question of who

is a Dalit, she posits that people who have been subjected to untouchability and denied social, economic, political and cultural rights are called Dalits. She opines that Dalit writing based on Dalit consciousness will reflect Dalit people's painful experiences (Rani, 1998, p. 21). A distributed language perspective supports such a stand as language cannot be devoid of subjectivity. Language is a phenomenon; a language that does not have a terminology of caste and caste-related insults cannot convey the emotion experienced (see also Kothari, 2013). Dalit Poetry reflects the essence of Dalit consciousness, a socio-political term given by Jotirao Govindrao Phule (Ghose, 2003). The Dalit movement in Maharashtra, initiated by Ambedkar, gained momentum with contributions from writers like Namdev Dhasal and Baburao Bhagal (Teltumbde, 2016). Inspired by the struggles of the Black community and the Black Panther Party in America, the Dalits established the Dalit Panther Party in 1972, sharing a common trajectory of oppression (Teltumbde, 2016). Both Dalits and Afro-Americans faced challenges – Dalits with the caste system and Afro-Americans with enduring racial issues, leading to their marginalization.

Dalit aesthetics starts with acknowledging and discarding two prevalent perspectives of literary aesthetics. Firstly, the Sanskritized syntax and semantics of poetry, and secondly, the European restrictive understanding of literature as a written or printed object. It recognizes the non-Sanskritized culture of literature in pre-colonial India. Poetry in India has always implied performance, music, retellings, and improvisation and transmission through oral traditions. Limbale (2010) argues that *Rasa* (beauty and aesthetic as prevalent in Sanskrit literature) can be rewritten as a new *Rasa* depicting the taste of pain, anger, rejection, rebellion, problems, struggles, injustices, and ill-treatment contained in Dalit literature. Dalit poetry is characterised as a political act and not merely an art, as Namdeo Dhasal describes it. Born in 1949, Namdeo Dhasal is a prominent Dalit poet from Maharashtra, a western state in India, and a founding member of the Dalit Panther (a socio-political entity). His poetry is known for its raw, intense, and tactile expressions. Dhasal's verses draw inspiration from his personal experiences and observations of his birthplace, the impoverished and gritty "Golpitha", marked by issues such as poverty, prostitution, and illness.

Subramaniam describes Dhasal's poetry as "Mumbai without her make-up, her Botox, her power yoga; the Mumbai that scathes, unruly, menacing, yet vitally alive, beneath the glitz mall and multiplex, the high rise and flyover. The Mumbai of the non-identifiable, the untameable, the non-recyclable" (2014, para. 3). Dilip Chitre, who translated Dhasal Poetry, "Namdeo Dhasal: Poet of the Underworld" into English, explores the fascinating archaeology of Dhasal's idiom, its many tones and registers, and its polyglottal fusion of Bambaia Hindi (a local dialect – mixture of Hindi, Urdu, English and Marathi) with the Mahar dialect that is Dhasal's family inheritance. Dhasal introduces his readers to his world through his own language. He acknowledges the use of profane

and abusive expressions in his poetry. He writes about his surroundings as *do number ki duniya* (a duplicate/evil world). He further writes, “This is where my poems come from.... I am showing it to you. I’ll show it to anyone who wants to know what life is like here. I grew up here. I have a bond with these people. They are my people – these lumpen; I am one of them. My poetry is about life here” (Dhasal, 2011, p. 162).

While examining the poems of Dhasal, Ketkar (2016) observes that Dhasal distorted and mocked Sanskrit words to introduce ambiguity, challenging not only the exclusivity of contemporary Marathi poetry but also the elitism associated with modernist language. We can observe this in one of the poems in the collection of Dhasal’s poetry, *Gandu Bagicha* (Gandu Garden), published in 1986. The term *Gandu* is used as an abusive word in Hindi and Marathi language. The park has been the subject of disgust. As described by Ketkar, it is a park where the Hijra (transgender) community gathers to carry out rituals such as nirvana or the castration of men to make them eunuchs (Majumdar, 2009, cited in Ketkar, 2016). He further describes, “the park was also a place where Hijras and gay men engaged in sexual activity”. Ketkar translates *Gandu Bagicha* as “Arsefucker’s park”.

Here, we present the translated version of “Gandu Bagicha” by Ketkar (2016).

It is no longer the garden we know
Mere dost
Jara bhunke de mera fata hua sa hriday...
 ... The worm of *karmanyewadhikaraste*
 has started nibbling at the silence
 the crippled cockroach of *karma yoga*
 Needlessly keeps digging up the soil
 it has already torn
 The condom of delusion
 To tatters.

The English translation of some phrases presented here was originally in the Marathi dialect. Hindi and Sanskrit phrases, sentences, and words have not been translated in the given stanzas above. A non-literary language is a tactical approach to such poetry. As noticed, Dhasal’s poems in Marathi are marked by the local dialect of Marathi. Even when using Hindi words, he preferred non-standard words. The use of everyday language like *mere dost* (my friend), *mera fata hua sa hriday* (my torn heart) indicates his rootedness and his effort to make art accessible. Phrases such as *fata hua hriday*, where the verb phrase *fata hua* (*torn*) is colloquial and *hriday* (heart) as a standard word are used together in a single phrase. In Bakhtin’s terms, this marks an effort to dialogize

the standard discourse of language. It becomes political when written and read with a specific purpose, as is the case here. A close examination of the words and phrases highlights the rigid separation between Dalits and non-Dalits, as well as the cry and hope for amalgamation. However, multilingualism as a way of communication is common in India, which houses more than 1300 languages. Most Indians are multilingual and exercise multilingualism every day. Kumar (2023) observes the discursive linguistic practice of the Magahi speech community and argues that languaging is a way of becoming in cross-gendered discourse. However, the becoming is in constant flux, a process of semiotic indexation.

Another such example is “the worm of *karmanyewadhikaraste*”. The Sanskrit word is taken from a verse of Gita, a holy book of Hindus. Dhasal, by writing the first word of the verse, indicates the meaning of the entire verse, which is: “*Karmanye vadhikaraste Ma Phaleshu Kadachana, Ma Karma Phala Hetur Bhur Ma Te Sango Stv Akarmani,*”. This verse is popularly translated in general discourse as “you are entitled to work without expecting rewards. Emphasise the work itself, stay active, and don’t dwell on the outcomes”. In Dalit politics, this verse is highlighted for its interpretation as a philosophy promoting caste as a closed category, urging Dalits to engage in their work without anticipating any reward in the form of social and political upliftment. Using the word (*karmanyewadhikaraste*) evokes the whole theological underpinning of Hindu scriptures, with the word “worm”, which is connotationally used to denote disgust, implying a deliberate attempt to attack the idea of purity and the philosophy of Varnas. How Dalit poems are written and received opens a whole dialogue of how everydayness, characteristic of Dhasal’s poetry, is a subject of aversion in the canonical world. The linguistic contestation in the above stanza reflects the socio-political reality. The multilingual poem using Sanskrit words with a locally polluted Bombay Hindi itself is an insult to Brahmanical aptitude. It is also an effort to bring art to a common populace’s level, a language lacking hierarchy. He also makes his stand clear and critical to the extent that he is not afraid of being impolite and offensive. In the next line, when he says

the crippled cockroach of Karma Yoga
Needlessly keeps digging up the soil

He again compares the “Karma Yoga” (essentially, it means the same thing as described above regarding the philosophy of work and reward) with a crippled cockroach. A cockroach is an insect that is the target of human disgust; in particular, it implies impurity, especially in Brahmin kitchens. The notion of purity and impurity is very central to the politics of Dalits. Dalits are regarded as impure in the Brahmanical philosophy of Hinduism. Thus, the way Dhasal attacked the establishment was courageous and, at the same time, creative. Moreover, the usage of condoms, as in “torn the condom of delusion”, defines the

new aesthetic of Dalit literature, which tries to incorporate characteristics such as being provocative, using profane language, challenging the establishment, harsh criticism, self-narrative in unhinged words, and representing the common everyday discourse in the everyday local dialects.

Challapalli Swaroopa Rani

If there is any soul that is subjected to all kinds of oppression and exploitation in this country (India), she is a Dalit woman. A Dalit woman is doubly marginalized, as she is oppressed by the caste system as well as gender and class oppression. One such woman Dalit writer from the Telugu heartland is Challapalli Swaroopa Rani. She is one of Telugu's most widely published and translated women Dalit writers. In her writing, she discusses the women-centric societies of the lower castes. She has been conferred the title of *Kaviyatri Tilaka* ("Eminent poetess"). She observes that a Dalit woman faces three kinds of oppression: caste, class and gender. Her writings address Dalit women, as she describes Dalit women as Dalit among Dalits.

When has my life been truly mine
 In the home male arrogance
 sets my cheek stinging
 while in the street caste arrogance
 splits the other cheek open

Originally, the poem was written in Telugu language and appears in her collection *Mankenapuvvu*. The translated part of the poem is taken from her work *Dalit Women's Writing in Telugu* (Rani, 1998, p. ws-22). It represents the twin evils of casteism and male chauvinism. Here, the translated version of the poem is presented. However, one can notice the emotive use of language. The way the author starts with a rhetorical question resembles Sonia's poetry. She does not use poetic language, such as metaphors and idioms. She uses language that can directly represent her experience as a woman and a Dalit. In the first three lines, there is a manifestation of patriarchy and violence, referring to patriarchy within Dalits. The next two lines represent the realities of caste. The use of words such as "cheek" and "stinging" are so vivid and raw.

The next poem, written by Challapalli Swaroopa Rani (2012) and translated by T.S. Chandra Mouli, discusses a crude social exploitative practice. A footnote is provided with the translated text "In some parts of Karnataka state, there is the practice of tender aged girl children from Dalit family becoming 'Basivis' pleasure givers to village men".

As a babe in the womb
depicted as an untouchable
stamped with a low caste, I was born.
That day itself branded a slut
amidst senseless rules
in the cesspools of superstitions
cast away, I became forbidden woman.

.....

The poem, which was originally written in Telugu, expresses the harsh social reality of Dalit families. The use of words such as “slut”, “babe”, and “forbidden woman” are challenging words for the established aesthetics. Moreover, from the perspective of a woman writer who is doubly oppressed, these words show courage, uncompromising attitude, and tenacity to speak the truth. In the distributed language framework, a subaltern communicates about their world using their own language to convey the emotion that they felt through words and action. They employ the language they think in, feel, and experience insult, abuse, and rejection.

Conclusion

The analysis of Black and Dalit literature, employing theoretical frameworks such as subaltern studies and distributed language, has provided valuable insights into the linguistic and social implications embedded in the poetry of these marginalised communities. By delving into Namdeo Dhasal’s and Swaroopa Rani’s poignant verses representing Dalit literature and Amiri Baraka’s and Sonia’s powerful poems within the context of Black literature, it becomes evident that these literary works employ a remarkable creative use of language. It must be received not only as a language of protest but also as their natural way of expression.

The poetry studied reflects a spectrum of emotions, from anger and frustration to hope and resilience, mirroring Dalits and Blacks’ multifaceted struggles and experiences. Dhasal’s choice to incorporate the local dialect and profane so-called street language, paralleled by Sonia’s and Baraka’s linguistic choices, underscores a deliberate departure from standardized language and prevalent aesthetic norms. This departure serves a dual purpose: firstly, to address the inadequacy of European/ American standards in capturing the essence of the Dalit and Black experiences, and secondly, as a form of resistance against hegemony. The Dalit and Black literature poets recognize that reclaiming and using their languages is crucial for building a common consciousness within their communities. It is a language that resonates with the lived experiences of caste and race, fostering unity and distinctiveness simultaneously. In essence,

these poets strive to construct a linguistic and social space that reflects their identity and serves as a powerful instrument in the ongoing struggles for social justice and equality. Through their poetry, they articulate a nuanced and authentic narrative, challenging existing norms and contributing to the broader discourse on representation and resistance within the realms of Dalit and Black literature. Their use of linguistic patterns, forms, and mixed texts index their experience of oppression. In doing so, these poets amplify the marginalised voices, move in new directions and redefine the Dalit and Black literary landscapes.

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