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BA English Honours | Semester VI | ENG6EJ301

# Dalit Literature: An Overview

Module 4: Dalit Fiction, Resistance Narratives, and Modern Trajectories • Comprehensive Notes

# Chapter 4: Dalit Fiction: Realism, Agency, and Emancipation

Dalit prose fiction subverts the sentimental pastoralism of mainstream Indian fiction, rejecting depictions of Dalits as passive, weeping victims awaiting upper-caste saviors. Instead, Dalit short stories and novels portray protagonists who assert their bodily agency, intellectual clarity, and revolutionary defiance.

## 4.1 Baburao Bagul: "When I Had Concealed My Caste"

Baburao Bagul's landmark Marathi short story "When I Had Concealed My Caste" (*Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti*) exposes how caste surveillance operates in modern urban workspaces. The protagonist, an educated young Dalit railway employee, attempts to conceal his Mahar caste to rent a room. When his identity is discovered, he is savagely beaten by upper-caste colleagues, illustrating that modern education and urban anonymity cannot shield the subaltern from caste violence.

## Advanced Critical Theory, Hermeneutics & Literary Praxis

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### 1. Hermeneutic Paradigms and Textual Mechanics

Critical inquiry into Module 4: Dalit Fiction, Resistance Narratives, and Modern Trajectories reveals how textual forms construct meaning through complex aesthetic strategies and structural choices:

- **Structuralism and Semiotic Deconstruction:** The organization of signs, tropes, and syntactical structures establishes narrative authority while simultaneously revealing internal fissures. Binary oppositions embedded within the discourse—such as center versus margin, tradition versus modernity, and subjective interiority versus objective reality—are systematically problematized through textual slippages and ambiguous signifiers.
- **Postcolonial and Subaltern Interventions:** Interrogating power dynamics, linguistic hegemony, and epistemic violence within the literature demonstrates how marginalized voices negotiate, resist, or appropriate dominant canonical modes. The representation of colonial encounters, diaspora, and regional identity operates not merely as a passive backdrop but as an active agent reshaping literary genres.
- **Feminist, Queer, and Intersectional Critique:** Analyzing the construction of gender roles, patriarchal surveillance, and non-normative subjectivities provides crucial insights into how bodily experience, domesticity, and public agency are mediated across divergent historical moments and cultural landscapes.
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reflects socio-economic stratification, environmental exploitation, and geopolitical borders that delineate belonging and exile.

### 2. Historiographical Context and Reception Theory

Every literary text and cultural artifact is firmly situated within specific historical material conditions. Understanding Module 4: Dalit Fiction, Resistance Narratives, and Modern Trajectories requires examining how contemporaneous social movements, intellectual revolutions, and material shifts in print and digital publishing influenced textual production. Furthermore, Hans-Robert Jauss's concept of the "horizon of expectations" demonstrates that textual reception is never static; each successive generation of readers reinterprets these works through evolving ethical, philosophical, and cultural frameworks.

### 3. Comparative Aesthetic and Thematic Matrix

The following analytical matrix summarizes key comparative dimensions across traditional interpretive paradigms and modern critical frameworks relevant to Module 4:

| Critical Dimension | Traditional / Formalist Reading | Contemporary Critical Synthesis | Pedagogic & Interpretive Significance |
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| **Narrative Architecture** | Linear progression, coherent plot teleology, and psychological realism. | Fragmentation, unreliable narration, polyphony, intertextuality, and non-linear temporalities. | Exposes the constructed nature of truth claims and socio-political narratives. |
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