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Sahitya Akademi



India International Centre

Invite you to

meet the author

Daya Pawar





At Frankfurt, 1984

He does not seeth with anger, nor does he indulge in life's bitterness. He is neither markedly militant nor aggressive or provocative as most of the dalit poetry goes today. Yet, Daya Pawar is considered by many as the most effective articulator of the woes and agonies of a dalit generation which had witnessed momentous events, changing their own lives and the life of the country. No, he is not the middle-of-the-road fence-sitter. His perceptions, mild-mannered observations and comments arising out of the historic clash of the 'two worlds' as he puts it, through his poetry and prose, leave a powerful impact on both the worlds—dalit and non-dalits. When viewed in that perspective, his poetry becomes as fierce and penetrating as his prose. Sri Pawar today is referred to as the

spokesperson of the *avant-garde* wave of the dalit literature that rocked the Marathi literary scene and later in the country in early seventies.

Pawar came to the limelight in 1967 when his poetry, till then seemingly romantic and innocent, began revealing its unexpected dimensions. It was the time when the first-generation young dalit literates started ventilating their agony through their poetry. Pawar introspected on the plight of the 'untouchables' of his generation. The poems written during this period had been collected and published under the title *Kondwada*. This won Sri Pawar admirers cutting across the caste and class barriers.

It was then that a profound dimension was discovered in Daya's poetry. Often he began with a deceptively individual experience and then suddenly broke the sentiment parameters to lend a startlingly social and historic perspective to that feeling which even dazzled the most seasoned middle-class cynics. That felicity, he feels came to him from his rural experiences especially from the folk traditions. The imagery of water, which so frequently occurs in his

poems has a strikingly new dimension. Water or lack of it symbolises the dalit misery, especially that of a dalit 'untouchable' woman. One of his Marathi songs 'Paani Kuthwar Alay Ga Baai' has acquired a legendary status with singers. Daya culls an uncanny blend which has a powerful appeal on traditional as well as modern sensitive minds. When Daya came to read the Indian classics in his school days he could only hear the agonised cries of Shambuka, Karna, Eklavya, Seeta and Draupadi—all low caste and oppressed characters including women.

But more than his poetry, it was his auto-

biography *Balute*, originally written in Marathi and later on translated into a number of Indian and European languages which brought to him an international reputation. *Balute*, a trend-setting work was instantly acclaimed as a literary success not merely because of its sensational description of dalit life in a Bombay slum, but because of its immense value as a social document full of profound social and cultural insight, a facet which marks Daya's later poems.

Born in 1935 in a remote village in the outcaste locality of Maharwada in Ahmednagar district in Maharashtra, Daya went



Receiving *Padmashri* from Sri R. Venkataraman, then President of India, 1990



With his wife Hira

through all the trials and tribulations meted out by any sensitive dalit boy seeking education in those days. He was born during the time when Dr B.R. Ambedkar was undergoing a tumultuous inner conflict and was about to declare his intention that 'I will not die a Hindu'. Ambedkar's movement had a profound impact on Daya's sensibilities. His creative work does not fit into any straight-jacket though, either conventionally Ambedkarite or Marxist. And when his *Balute* caused a general storm, especially among the newly emerging middle class dalits, Daya turned to Buddha and his 'Dhammapada', which he freely rendered into lucid Marathi verse. That gave him a much needed solace when a cruel storm raged around.

The first job that Daya took up as Labora-

tory Assistant in a veterinary college in Bombay had in a way, changed his thinking. He attended morning classes in a sophisticated Bombay college and then would rush to the veterinary college for his work. His duty was to deal with animal carcasses, to vivisect the corpses, fill their veins with alcohol for preservation and sort out the dung in test tubes for chemical analysis. "That was the kind of work which, though in some other form, my forefathers had been doing for generations", says Sri Pawar. In fact, no *savarna* youth would deign to touch this job. And he discovered to his horror that most "such jobs in the modern metropolis of Bombay—in laboratories, in factories and so on—were offered only to the 'untouchables'." He felt that his caste would not leave

him even if he was trying to read Kalidasa's *Meghdoot* in the college. *Meghdoot* would never evoke a romantic mood in his heart.

To Daya, Marx and Buddha are like two equal beacons of light. He cannot view the Buddha in a conventional light. Ambedkar's rational Buddha, who equ-

ates sorrow with exploitation and poverty, appears to him more humane and far profounder a teacher than one who speaks of *karma*, soul and life after death. Perhaps, this innate streak of Ambedkar's rationalism has made his poetry and writings more penetrating and effective.

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A CHRONOLOGY

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| <p>1935 Birth</p> <p>1956 Joined as a Clerk cum Laboratory Assistant in a veterinary college, Bombay</p> <p>1967 First Dalit poem published in <i>Asmitadarsh</i></p> <p>1968 Took active part in Dalit literature movement</p> <p>1969 First article on Dalit literature published in <i>Pratisthan</i></p> <p>1972 First short story 'Vitaal' published in <i>Sadhana</i></p> <p>1972 Attended World Buddhist Conference in Ceylon (Sri Lanka)</p> <p>1975 Maharashtra Government Award for <i>Kondwada</i></p> | <p>1979 Maharashtra Government Award for <i>Balute</i></p> <p>1982 Ford Foundation Fellowship. Visited USA</p> <p>1984 Visited World Book Fair at Frankfurt and read a paper on Dalit literature</p> <p>1988-94 Member of Text Book Committee, 'Bal Bharati'</p> <p>1987-94 Member of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Source Material Publication Committee, Maharashtra State</p> <p>1990 Received <i>Padmashri</i></p> <p>1993 Chairman of Drama Pre-scrutiny Board, Maharashtra State</p> |
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With his wife and children