

## MARGINALIZATION IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: ANALYSING CASTE IN DAYA PAWAR'S *BALUTA*

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### Abstract:

*Caste-based discrimination is a serious problem in Indian society. Educational institutions like schools and hostels, which are supposed to be the harbinger of progress and equality, reinforce social hierarchies. Daya Pawar's autobiography Baluta reveals the oppression, humiliation, and psychological struggles that Dalits face, particularly in educational institutions, workplaces, and social interactions. This paper explores the themes of caste-based discrimination, exclusion and alienation of Dalit students in schools and hostels as depicted in Baluta. Through his personal experiences, Pawar vividly portrays caste discrimination and social exclusion within academic spaces. This paper highlights how caste operates as a structural barrier to education. This study aims to deepen our understanding of how education, instead of being an equalizer, often reinforces existing inequalities.*

**Key words:** Marginalization, Caste, Dalit, school, Hostel, Untouchability, Oppression, Discrimination, Dalit Identity, Dalit Literature, Daya Pawar, Baluta,

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### Introduction:

Historically, caste has played a significant role in determining access to knowledge and social mobility in India. This is evident from the mythological figures of Ramayana's Shambuka and Mahabharata's Ekalavya. Though there are constitutional safeguards, caste-based marginalization persists in schools, hostels, and universities, which affects the educational experiences and aspirations of Dalit students. The instance of Rohith Vemula, a Dalit Ph.D. scholar who committed suicide in 2016 due to caste-based discrimination a stark reminder of the caste based discrimination in higher education. The roots of the caste system are deeply entrenched in Indian society, which continues to shape experiences within academia, affecting access, treatment, and outcomes for students from marginalized backgrounds.

Daya Pawar's *Baluta* is one of the earliest autobiographies in Dalit literature, which was first published in 1978 in the Marathi language. Jerry Pinto translated it into English in 2015, making it accessible to a wider audience. *Baluta* provides a powerful and deeply personal account of caste discrimination, poverty, and social exclusion faced by Dalits in Indian society. Pawar's experiences serve as a critical lens to examine the challenges faced by Dalits in schools, colleges and hostels. This paper will analyse how *Baluta* portrays caste-based marginalization in education, shedding light on the intersection of caste and academia.

To understand the deep-rooted impact of caste discrimination in educational spaces, it is essential to examine how Pawar's lived experiences reflect broader systemic issues. Schools, which are meant to be spaces of learning and growth, often become sites of exclusion and humiliation for Dalit students. The following analysis will delve into how caste-based discrimination manifests in schools, shaping the academic and social experiences of the protagonist

### **Caste Discrimination in Schools:**

Pawar describes how the *Mahars'* school was situated in *Sunder Gully*, an area plagued by filth, garbage, and stagnant water. Its name ironically contradicts beauty. The unsanitary and undesirable location of the school underscores the discrimination faced by Dalits, as even their access to education was confined to marginalised spaces (Pawar 145).

In schools, Dalit children were made to sit separately from the Maratha students. They were denied drinking water at school. Only the Dalit students were asked to plaster the school with cow dung. (Pawar 44). Pawar exposes the hypocrisy of the Brahmin teacher who appears impartial at school but enforces caste barriers at his home. This reveals how caste discrimination was situationally enforced.

The primary function of any language is communication. But even the linguistic preferences became the site of caste discrimination as one dialect of the same language is cherished as the standard language, denying any prestige to the other dialects. Pawar remembers how Dalit students were discriminated against just because of their language in the Taluka School. Their speech was mocked as '*Mahardya*' dialect, which illustrates another layer of marginalisation (Pawar 46).

While caste discrimination in schools creates barriers to education at an early stage, the challenges do not end there. Even after gaining access to higher education, Dalit students continue to face exclusion and bias in institutional spaces such as hostels. These residential spaces, which should ideally foster inclusivity and a sense of belonging, often become sites of segregation and discrimination. Through the life experiences of Pawar, the following discussion will examine how caste-based prejudices persist in hostels, which affect the daily lives, mental well-being, and academic journeys of Dalit students.

Pawar also experienced the humiliation of being judged based on his caste and appearance. When he auditioned for the role of Ashoka in a school play, he was rejected on the grounds of his skin colour. The teacher told him, "For Ashoka the King, we need someone fair. You're too black" (Pawar, 171). This rejection was more than just about appearance; it was a manifestation of the ingrained belief that darker-skinned individuals, particularly those from lower castes, were unfit to represent greatness.

### **Caste Discrimination in Hostels:**

When Pawar first secures admission to the hostel, he views it as a place of new opportunities. He feels relieved that food and lodging would no longer be a burden. He describes this sense of comfort as having free meals as an ideal situation for him. (Pawar 117).

However, his sense of security is soon disrupted when he is met with hostility from the *Koli* students who already reside there. Despite being from a marginalised community themselves, they uphold the caste hierarchy, reinforcing discrimination against him. Pawar reflects on this contradiction and notes how caste pride remains strong regardless of a group's own low status in the social hierarchy (Pawar 117). His experience shows how the oppressed groups engage in exclusionary practices against others they deem inferior.

The theme of social exclusion becomes most apparent in the way Pawar is treated during meals in the hostel. A senior student, who is his roommate, immediately warns him that he is not allowed to sit with the others while eating. Instead, he must stay near the door, away from the rest (Pawar 117). The discrimination is not limited to his peers; even the hostel superintendent, who is responsible for maintaining order, does nothing to stop it. Instead, he reinforces the segregation, explicitly telling Pawar that as a *Mahar*, he risks being physically attacked if he attempts to sit with the rest of the students (Pawar 118). This highlights how those in power not only ignore oppression but actively enforce it.

Another significant aspect of Pawar's experience is the humiliation he endures daily. The other students not only ostracise him but also take pleasure in making him feel inferior. Even religious customs, which are meant to promote unity, are weaponised against him. The prayer recited before meals, *Vadni kawal gheta naam ghyaa Shri Hariche* ('Think of Shri Hari when you take your first mouthful of food'), instead of being a moment of spiritual reflection, becomes another means of reinforcing his untouchable status (Pawar 118). Rituals that should be inclusive instead serve to deepen his sense of alienation. The psychological toll of such discrimination is evident in Pawar's reflections on his own perceived helplessness. He struggles with his inability to stand up for himself. He regrets not resisting the oppression he faced. He describes his lack of self-respect as one of his deepest disappointments (Pawar 118).

Despite his struggles, Pawar briefly finds a small sense of belonging in *bhajan* singing, as his musical ability allows him to take part in group activities. He recalls being one of the lead singers at the hostel, which momentarily grants him some recognition (Pawar 119). However, even in this space, caste barriers remain. When *prasad* is distributed after the *bhajans*, he is deliberately excluded from receiving it, a stark reminder that no matter his talent, he is still considered an outsider due to his caste identity (Pawar 119).

When Pawar shifts to another hostel for Dalits, he sees it as an opportunity to escape the prejudices of his village and pursue higher education (Pawar 166). However, even before gaining admission, he encounters caste-related biases. During the application process, when he refers to himself as a '*Harijan*,' he is corrected and told to identify as '*Mahar*,' exposing the conflicting identities imposed on Dalits by different sections of society (Pawar 166-167).

Though this hostel is meant for Dalits, it is not free from discrimination. Since high-caste individuals refuse to rent spaces to Dalit students, the hostel is housed in a building owned by a Muslim landlord (Pawar 167). Inside the hostel, caste-based divisions continue to thrive. The students eat in groups segregated by caste, with different communities mocking and maintaining distance from one another (Pawar 168).

The Dalit hostel, which was established to support students from marginalized communities, ironically became a site of caste-based divisions. The *Mahar* students dominated the space, while students from other Dalit castes, such as *Mangs* and *Chambhars*, lived in fear (Pawar, 167). The mess was an emblem of these caste hierarchies, where students ate in groups divided along caste lines and ridiculed those from different backgrounds (Pawar, 168)

Further humiliation came in the form of ragging and bullying. The hostility from upper-caste students escalated when Pawar's mother started working as the hostel cook. Rumors spread that she was secretly giving him extra food, leading to resentment among his peers (Pawar, 172). The students mocked the quality of the food, saying, "What kind of gravy is this? You can see the ceiling in it" (Pawar, 173). The discrimination extended beyond direct verbal abuse and into deeply ingrained cultural practices. When his mother got her period, the students refused to eat food cooked by her, shouting "Shame, shame" as he entered the mess (Pawar, 176).

The most traumatic event Pawar recounts is the moment he finds his young sister being made to dance for the amusement of hostel boys, who sing an erotic *lavani* while watching her. The scene fills him with rage, and his frustration erupts in a rare act of defiance as he challenges his oppressors, asking why they do not subject their own mothers and sisters to the same humiliation (Pawar, 175).

### Conclusion :

Daya Pawar's *Baluta* provides a stark and unfiltered account of caste-based marginalization in educational institutions, revealing how schools and hostels, instead of being sites of empowerment, often become spaces of exclusion and humiliation for Dalit students. His narrative sheds light on both overt discrimination—such as segregation, verbal abuse, and exclusion from shared spaces—and the more insidious forms of caste-based bias that operate through institutional structures and social norms.

The analysis of *Baluta* underscores that education in India, rather than serving as an equalizer, frequently reinforces existing social hierarchies. Pawar's account also reveals the complexities of intra-Dalit hierarchies, where even within marginalized communities, caste-based prejudices remain deeply embedded. *Baluta* serves as both a testimony and a call to action, urging readers to acknowledge and challenge the persistence of caste-based discrimination in education.

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