

VOICE AS RESISTANCE: DALIT ASSERTION IN YASHICA DUTT'S *COMING OUT AS DALIT*

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Abstract

This paper examines *Coming Out as Dalit* by Yashica Dutt as a powerful narrative of resistance that foregrounds Dalit identity, voice, and self-assertion. The memoir reveals the psychological and social burden of caste concealment in contemporary India, particularly within urban and elite spaces where caste is often presumed absent yet subtly enforced. Through the act of “coming out,” Dutt disrupts dominant narratives of caste invisibility and asserts a counter-discourse rooted in lived experience. Drawing on frameworks such as Dalit studies, testimonio, and subaltern theory, this paper argues that voice functions as a crucial site of resistance against caste-based marginalisation. The study highlights how personal narrative becomes a collective political act, transforming silence into articulation and invisibility into visibility. Ultimately, Dutt’s life writing reclaims agency and contributes to a broader discourse of Dalit assertion in modern Indian literature.

Keywords: Dalit identity, self-assertion, caste, voice, resistance, life writing, testimonio

Introduction

Caste continues to operate as a deeply entrenched system of social hierarchy in India, shaping identities, opportunities, and lived experiences. While constitutional reforms and modernisation have attempted to dismantle caste-based discrimination, its presence persists in subtle and systemic forms, especially within urban and privileged spaces. In such contexts, caste often becomes an unspoken yet powerful determinant of social mobility and belonging.

Coming Out as Dalit by Yashica Dutt emerges as a significant contemporary text that challenges this silence. The memoir narrates Dutt’s journey from concealing her Dalit identity to publicly asserting it, thereby exposing the complexities of caste in modern India. Her narrative exemplifies how voice operates as resistance transforming personal testimony into political intervention. This paper explores how Dutt’s life writing functions as a form of Dalit assertion, emphasising the role of voice in dismantling caste-based invisibility and reclaiming identity.

Dalit Life Writing and the Politics of Voice

Dalit literature has historically served as a medium of resistance against caste oppression, offering a platform for marginalised voices to articulate their lived realities. Unlike mainstream narratives that often erase or sanitise caste experiences, Dalit autobiographies foreground suffering, resilience, and resistance. The concept of “voice” is central to Dalit life writing. Voice is not merely an act of expression but a political act that challenges structures of power. In this context, Dutt’s memoir aligns with the tradition of Dalit autobiographical narratives while also expanding it into contemporary urban and digital spaces. Her narrative can also be read through the lens of testimonio, a form of life writing that transforms individual experience into collective representation. By sharing her story, Dutt speaks not only for herself but for a larger community that has been historically silenced.

Silence, Passing, and the Burden of Concealment

One of the central themes in *Coming Out as Dalit* is the experience of “passing,” where individuals conceal their caste identity to avoid discrimination. Dutt’s early life is marked by this strategic silence, shaped by fear, shame, and societal pressure. This concealment reflects the internalisation of caste stigma, where the oppressed are compelled to erase aspects of their identity to

gain acceptance. The memoir vividly portrays the psychological toll of such erasure, including anxiety, alienation, and a fragmented sense of self. The act of silence, therefore, is not passive but imposed a survival strategy within a discriminatory social structure. However, this silence also perpetuates caste invisibility, allowing dominant narratives to deny the existence of caste-based oppression.

Coming Out as Dalit: Voice as Resistance

The turning point in Dutt's narrative is her decision to "come out" as Dalit. This act is both personal and political, marking a shift from concealment to assertion. By publicly acknowledging her identity, Dutt disrupts the norm of silence and challenges the stigma associated with caste. Voice, in this context, becomes a tool of resistance. "Caste is one of the major causes for inhumanity, violence which impoverished Dalit people in the society"(167). It enables Dutt to reclaim her identity and assert her place within society. More importantly, it transforms her narrative into a counter-discourse that questions dominant assumptions about caste and merit. Her use of digital platforms further amplifies this resistance, demonstrating how contemporary forms of communication can facilitate Dalit assertion. The memoir thus bridges traditional forms of life writing with modern modes of activism.

Memory, Identity, and Collective Assertion

Dutt's narrative is deeply rooted in memory, particularly familial and generational experiences of caste discrimination. These memories serve as a foundation for her understanding of identity and resistance. By recounting her family's struggles, Dutt situates her personal narrative within a broader historical and social context. This connection between individual and collective experience reinforces the political significance of her story. The memoir also challenges the notion of caste as a relic of the past, highlighting its continued relevance in contemporary India. Through her voice, Dutt not only asserts her identity but also contributes to a collective movement of Dalit empowerment.

Conclusion

Coming Out as Dalit stands as a powerful testament to the role of voice in resisting caste oppression. Yashica Dutt transforms her personal journey into a political act of assertion, challenging the silence and invisibility imposed by caste structures. This paper has argued that voice functions as a crucial site of resistance in Dalit life writing. Through her narrative, Dutt reclaims agency, disrupts dominant discourses, and contributes to the ongoing struggle for equality and recognition. Her memoir exemplifies how speaking out can transform both individual identity and collective consciousness. Ultimately, *Coming Out as Dalit* is not just a story of personal revelation but a call for social change an assertion of voice that resonates beyond the individual and into the realm of collective resistance.

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