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**Unpacking the Complexities of Daya Pawar's *Baluta*: A Critical Exploration of
Discrimination and Social Injustice**

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Abstract

Baluta is a poignant and powerful memoir written by Daya Pawar, a Dalit writer from Maharashtra, India. Originally published in Marathi in 1978, the book has since been translated into several languages and has gained worldwide recognition for its honest portrayal of the harsh realities of caste oppression in India. The book explores the Dalit experience in Mumbai, India, and exposes the systemic oppression faced by the Dalit community in the city. The study examines the themes of caste, identity, poverty, discrimination, and resistance through a close reading of the text. The paper argues that Pawar's memoir is a significant contribution to the Dalit literary movement and a powerful critique of the Indian caste system. The study also explores the challenges of translating and interpreting Dalit literature for a wider audience. This critical exploration provides insights into the complex socio-cultural realities of Dalit life in India and highlights the importance of amplifying Dalit voices in literature and academia.

Key Words: Caste, Discrimination, Violence, Socio-Cultural Reality.

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Daya Pawar (1935-1996) was a prominent Marathi writer, poet, and activist. His works revolve around the issues of caste, class, and oppression, with a focus on the lived experiences of Dalits (formerly known as ‘untouchables’) in India. His writings are known for their unflinching portrayal of the brutal reality of caste-based discrimination and violence.

Pawar’s most famous work is the autobiographical novel *Baluta* (1978), which describes his own experiences of growing up as a Dalit in a village in Maharashtra. The book is a searing indictment of the caste system and the dehumanizing effects it has on Dalits. Pawar’s prose is stark and powerful, capturing the desperation and despair of those living at the bottom rung of society. Through his writing, Pawar exposes the hypocrisy of those who claim to be champions of social justice but remain complicit in perpetuating caste-based discrimination.

In addition to *Baluta*, Pawar’s other notable works include the poetry collection *Saglech Kahi Kalam* (*All That I Want to Say*, 1982) and the novel *Gavankar* (*The Village Mechanic*, 1988). Both works explore the theme of caste-based oppression and the struggle for social justice. Pawar’s poetry is marked by its directness and simplicity, while his novels are known for their realism and attention to detail.

One of the strengths of Pawar’s writing is his ability to capture the nuances of Dalit life, including the internal divisions and conflicts that exist within Dalit communities. He is not afraid to critique his own community when necessary, and his writing is characterized by a deep sense of self-reflection and introspection.

However, some critics have argued that Pawar’s writing is overly pessimistic and lacks a sense of hope for the future. While his work does not shy away from the harsh realities of caste-based discrimination and violence, it can at times feel overwhelming in its bleakness. Additionally, some have criticized his portrayal of upper-caste individuals as one-dimensional villains, arguing that this oversimplifies the complex dynamics of caste-based oppression. By and large, Daya Pawar’s writing remains an important contribution to Indian literature and the fight against caste-based discrimination. His unflinching portrayal of the brutal realities faced by Dalits in India continues to resonate with readers and serve as a call to action for social justice.

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Baluta is an autobiographical novel written by Daya Pawar, a renowned Marathi writer, that narrates the story of his life as a member of the Mahar community, a Dalit community considered untouchable under the caste system in India.

The book describes the dehumanizing and oppressive experience of being born in a lower caste in India. It portrays the horrors of the caste system in India, highlighting the deeply ingrained discrimination and oppression that the Dalit community faces in every aspect of life. Daya Pawar's experiences, as narrated in the book, are gut-wrenching and vividly capture the brutality and violence that the Dalits have to endure at the hands of the upper castes. The book was first published in Marathi in 1978 and later translated into English in 1995. The term *Baluta* means a debt or loan that can never be paid off. It is used to describe the oppressive conditions in which the Dalits lived, where they were forced to live in poverty and servitude to the upper castes, with no way of ever breaking free from their debt.

The book is structured as a series of loosely connected vignettes that chronicle the author's life from his early childhood to his adulthood. Throughout the book, Pawar portrays the various forms of discrimination and oppression faced by Dalits in different aspects of their lives, including education, employment, housing, and marriage.

It also describes the life of Daya Pawar, a Dalit who grew up in a small village in Maharashtra, India. Pawar describes the ways in which he and his family were treated as outcasts by the upper-caste members of the village. The Dalits were forbidden from using the same wells as the upper-caste members, and they were not allowed to enter the temples or participate in any religious activities. Pawar's father worked as a bonded laborer for the upper-caste landlord, and the family lived in extreme poverty. "I heard that before coming to Mumbai, Dada worked at a Brahmin landowner's house on a yearly contract." (Pawar 37)

Pawar's experiences in the village led him to become an activist and a writer. He became involved in the Dalit movement and wrote extensively about the discrimination and exploitation that the Dalits faced. In *Baluta*, Pawar describes the caste system in India as a rigid and oppressive system that creates a deep divide between the upper-caste and lower-caste members of society. He argues that the caste system is the root cause of poverty and inequality in India.

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One of the main themes of *Baluta* is the relationship between caste and power. Pawar describes how the upper-caste members of society use their power and privilege to oppress the Dalits and maintain their dominance. He also describes the ways in which the Dalits resist this oppression by creating their own forms of community and culture.

The text also emphasizes the dehumanization of Dalits, who were often not even considered as individuals with distinct identities and personalities. They were seen as a faceless mass of people who were meant to serve the upper castes. He anguishes. “The nameless, formless wretched of the earth.” (Pawar 44)

Pawar also highlights the role of education in breaking the cycle of poverty and oppression for the Dalit community. He argues that education is the key to empowering the Dalits and giving them the tools to fight against the caste system. However, he also acknowledges the challenges that Dalit students face in accessing education due to discrimination and lack of resources.

In this autobiographical novel, Pawar portrays the caste system as a deeply ingrained and oppressive social structure that shapes every aspect of life in his village. He describes how the upper-caste people, who hold most of the land and wealth, use their power to maintain the social hierarchy and keep the Dalits in a subordinate position. The Dalits are forced to perform menial and degrading tasks, such as cleaning toilets and disposing of dead animals, which are considered impure by upper-caste Hindus.

Pawar also underlines the systemic violence that the Dalits face, including physical and sexual abuse, and how the police and judiciary system are biased against them. The author narrates his own experiences of being treated as a second-class citizen, facing discrimination in education, employment, and marriage.

Through his personal narrative, Pawar highlights the deep-rooted nature of caste prejudice and its impact on the psyche of Dalits. He writes about how the caste system perpetuates a sense of inferiority and shame among Dalits, who are made to believe that their worth is determined by their caste. He also exposes the hypocrisy of upper-caste people who claim to be ‘progressive’ but continue to perpetuate caste discrimination in their personal and professional lives.

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One of the most striking aspects of *Baluta* is its unflinching portrayal of the inhumane treatment of Dalits by upper-caste Hindus. The book exposes the pervasive caste-based discrimination that governs every aspect of social life in India. For example, the author recounts how his family was forced to live in a separate, dilapidated hut outside the village, and how Dalits were barred from entering temples and other public spaces. Pawar also explores the psychological effects of this discrimination on Dalits, as they struggle to come to terms with their low social status and internalize the dominant caste ideology. He describes how the Dalit community often turns to religion and spiritualism as a way of coping with their oppression, and how some individuals resort to alcoholism and violence.

In conclusion, *Baluta* provides a powerful critique of caste discrimination in India, and exposes the pervasive and systematic oppression faced by the Dalits. The book is a valuable contribution to the literature on caste and social justice and serves as a reminder of the urgent need for radical change in Indian society. It has highlighted the urgent need for social and political action to dismantle this oppressive system and create a more just and equitable society. The book offers a searing critique of caste-based discrimination and the social and economic inequalities that it perpetuates, and it also portrays the resilience and humanity of the Dalit community in the face of tremendous adversity. As such, it remains a vital text for anyone interested in understanding the complex social and cultural dynamics of modern India.

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