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## Voices of Resistance: Bhima Bhoi, Dalit Consciousness, and the Poetics of Caste Struggle

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### ABSTRACT

Saint Bhima Bhoi, a spiritual luminary, poet and a voice for the marginal, who lived in Subarnapur, Odisha, India in the 19th century. His writings and spiritual depths create a revolution across many states. He fought against the brutal Brahminical domination, social injustice, inequality and caste prejudice. His philosophy was based on Mahima Dharma. His great poetic work like *Stutichintamani* were strong critique of the dominant societal system that had traditionally oppressed the marginalised. His signature lines which are inscribed in the wall of UNO, "**Mo jivana pachhe narke padithau, jagata uddhaara heu,**" exemplifies his selfless humanism, as his commitments towards the collective upliftment of this world and this great thought aligns with the concepts of justice and equality which are fundamental in modern Dalit literature. This research focuses on Bhima Bhoi's life as a marginalised poet and compares his work and ideology to that of modern Dalit poets like Omprakash Valmiki, Sharan Kumar Limbale, Bama etc. whose literature also exposes and fights caste-based prejudice. This study also tries to look at Bhoi's poetry in connection with Ambedkarite Buddhism and how it relates to his spiritual revolt, using religious thoughts to fight caste discrimination and help society grow.

**Introduction: Bhima Bhoi and the search for justice**

Bhima Bhoi's quest for justice and equality are the core themes in Indian literature, drowning out the voices of Dalits, Adivasis, and other less well-known groups. Over time, Dalit writing, especially Indian Writing in English (IWE), has become a strong counter-narrative that shows how serious caste-based oppression is and stands up for the rights of the oppressed. Bhima Bhoi's poetry from the nineteenth century is a strong and important way to protest against the structures in society that pushed people to the edges and oppressed them. Bhoi's writing criticises the caste system and imagines a new India where everyone is treated fairly, with justice, and freedom.

Bhoi grew up in a poor community in Odisha. Mahima Dharma, a spiritual movement that condemned idol worship, priestly authority, and the caste system, had a huge effect on him. His writing, especially the strong lines

**"Praaninka Aarata Dukkha Apramita**

**Dekhu dekhu kibaa sahu**

**Mo jeevana pachhe narke padithaau,**

**Jagata uddhaara heu,"**

("Endless are the agonies and sorrows of the living. Who can bear to see it?

Condemn my life to hell, but let the world be uplifted.)

(Stuti Chintamani, Verse 27/7)

shows a deep commitment to the redemption of all people, which is similar to the humanistic themes found in modern Dalit literature.

Bhima Bhoi's poetry is an early example of the modern Dalit literary movement, which includes writers like Omprakash V almiki, Bama, and Sharan Kumar Limbale. Bhoi's poetry, like V. Almiki's Joothan, Bama's Karukku, and Limbale's The Outcaste, turns personal pain into a criticism of the caste system. Even though Bhoi wrote his poems hundreds of years ago, they are an early example of how to fight against the social order that still oppresses Dalits today. Bhoi's poems not only criticise caste-based injustices, but they also call for spiritual and social freedom. They connect the struggles of Dalit writers in the past and present.



This research looks at the connection between Bhima Bhoi's spiritual defiance and the Dalit consciousness that is explored in modern Dalit literature. Bhoi's rejection of caste, his insistence on equality before the divine, and his acceptance of a non-hierarchical spirituality are all things that are very similar to Ambedkarite Buddhism and Dalit liberation movements. Like Ambedkar, who wanted to end caste, Bhima Bhoi's call for a caste-free world through both spiritual and social activism is still an inspiration for the fight for justice and dignity in India.

### **Bhima Bhoi and Dalit Consciousness: A voice from the margins**

A Voice from the Outside During Bhima Bhoi's time, caste determined almost everything in life, including who could go to school, participate in religious activities, and move up in society. Even so, he used poetry as a way to fight back against the deeply ingrained caste system and social inequality. He often questions the spiritual validity of caste in his poems, like this strong line:

**"Jati khojile mukti nahin;**

**Mukti khojile jati nahin."**

(If you hold on to your caste, you can't be free;

if you look for freedom, your caste goes away.)

(Mahima Dharma and Bhima Bhoi, p. 16)

This idea is similar to B.R. Ambedkar's call for the end of caste, which makes the point that true freedom means tearing down the systems that keep people apart. Bhima Bhoi's idea of freedom went beyond just saving himself; he saw a world where caste had no place.

Bhima Bhoi was different from many of his contemporaries who followed the most common religious practices. He suggested a spiritual order that did not recognise caste differences. He believed in Alekha Brahma, a divine force that has no form and no hierarchy. In this belief, everyone is equal in the eyes of the divine. This belief went against Brahminical Hinduism, which put people into groups based on how pure their rituals were. Bhima Bhoi made it clear that caste has no power in the divine world and that everyone is equally important.

### **Lived experience and the Poetry of Suffering**



In Dalit literature, personal pain is often used to show how unfair the system is. Bhima Bhoi's poetry not only talks about his own pain, but it also talks about the pain that all living things go through. In his poem,

**"Kaahin mu luchibi kemante banchibi palaibi keun pathe,**

**Jagata Kasana kete mu sahibi vipatti padiba jete,"**

(Where can I hide? How can I live? How can I get away?)

How much should I put up with the problems of the world that come my way?

(Stutuchintamani, Verse 25/1)

Bhima Bhoi struggles with the heavy burden of the world's sadness, wondering where one can go to escape it and how much longer one can stand it. His words show not only his own pain but also a deep understanding of the pain that people all over the world are going through. In another verse he expressed it as-

**"Praninka kasana bheduachhi mana, Jivanaku mora badhe"**

"I suffer every pang as the sorrows and sufferings of all beings pierce my heart."

(Stuti Chintamani, Verse 26/20)

He talks on how the sorrow and suffering of others profoundly impacts him, which is something that all people can relate to.

These collective sense of sorrows of Bhoi are parallels with Omprakash Valmiki's Joothan. In this autobiographical text of Valmiki, he highlighted individual challenges with untouchability as well as the broader injustices encountered by Dalits. Both Bhoi and Valmiki utilize their personal experiences and agonies as compelling evidence to argue against social injustice. They not only talk about their pain, but they also use it to fight the systems that keep inequality going.

Their poetry and autobiographies transform into appeals for justice and social change when they engage in this manner. Their discourse transforms the personal into a means of resistance, inquiry, and ultimately dismantling the structures of caste-based oppression.

**Spiritual Resistance: Mahima Dharma and Ambedkarite Parallels**



Bhoi's spiritual thoughts surpassed traditional religion; they were the ways for him to fight the system that had kept caste disparities for a long period of time. His deep connections with Mahima Dharma compelled him to renounce idol worship, brahmanical priestly authority, and the brutal caste hierarchies common in mainstream religion. He instead adopted Alekha Brahma, the holy essence, who is formless and non-hierarchical. This idea of spirituality is very different from the dominant brahminical view of a caste-oriented celestial system, where a person's worth was typically predicated on their social rank.

Bhoi's poems showed a place where the divine went above caste limits. He said that people could not be free as long as caste was an important part of their lives. Bhoi's rejection of caste went beyond just ideas; it was a spiritual act of resistance.

His poetry were a forceful, physical protest against the religious and societal systems that kept caste-based inequity persisting. He wasn't simply talking about saving himself; he was talking about a spiritual emancipation for everyone that would only arrive when caste differences were gone.. He said,

**"In the thirty-six royal lineages,**

**the caste of boatmen cannot be named."**

**It is smart to think of water as the only caste inside.**

**"I only hope for one person and one caste in the universe.**

**The creator made everyone from the same earth"**

(Stutichintsmani, 70.12,13).

In this way, Bhima Bhoi's work can be seen as an early form of spiritual activism, similar to the later Ambedkarite Buddhist movement. Both wanted to take away the religious and spiritual reasons for caste. Like Ambedkar, Bhima Bhoi didn't just criticise caste from a philosophical point of view; he used spirituality as a way to bring about social change. His teachings didn't just ask for a new way to practise religion; they also called for a complete change in how people thought about God and people. His focus on divine equality wasn't just about his own faith; it was about imagining a world where the systems that enforced caste no longer had any power.

## **Conclusion**



In conclusion, we need to rethink what it means to be Indian. Bhima Bhoi's poetry imagines Indianness as a place of justice, equality, and resistance to caste oppression. His spiritual defiance against hierarchies is similar to what modern Dalit literature says, which shows how powerful the voices of people who are left out can be.

This chapter shows how Bhima Bhoi's legacy lives on in modern critiques of caste, like the works of Bama, Valmiki, Limbale, and Arundhati Roy, by putting him in the context of Dalit Studies and Indian Writing in English. His call for freedom, "**Mo jivana pachhe narke padithau,**" is still a source of inspiration in India's ongoing fight for justice, dignity, and equality.

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