

# Literaria

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*Editor*

**Mehdi Hasan Chowdhury**

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## **Rebellious Aesthetic: Caste Narratives in Madan Veera's Poetry**

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**Suresh Kumar**

Dalits employ literature as a discursive apparatus to articulate their lived experiences of systemic oppression and socio-economic exploitation, engendered by the entrenched structures of caste hierarchy and the ideological construct of the purity-pollution binary. Poetry emerges as the most widely adopted literary form among Dalit writers, owing to its capacity for condensed expression and its efficacy in encapsulating affective intensities. Dalit poetry, as a distinct literary praxis, diverges markedly from non-Dalit poetic traditions in its ideological orientation, thematic gravitas, and linguistic intentionality. Rooted in the lived experiences of caste-based exclusion, Dalit poetry operates not merely as a mode of artistic expression but as an act of political reclamation. Unlike non-Dalit poetry, which often luxuriates in aesthetic detachment, universalist tropes, or the exploration of interiority unmarked by social location, Dalit verses foreground the immediacy of social injustice, the materiality of pain, and the assertion of a silenced collective identity. Their poetics are deliberately anti-hierarchical - eschewing ornate metaphors, classical allusions, and syntactic sophistication often valorized in dominant literary canons - in favour of a raw, affectively charged diction that confronts

the readers with the urgency of Dalit realities. Furthermore, while non-Dalit poetry may engage with suffering in abstract or allegorical registers, Dalit poetry resists such sublimations; it insists on naming oppressors, historicizing trauma, and reconstituting language as a site of struggle. In this sense, Dalit poetry is not only aesthetically subversive but also epistemologically radical—it challenges the very framework through which literature has been read, valued, and institutionalized. Its power, in my opinion, lies in its refusal to conform, in its relentless foregrounding of caste as an ontological and structural reality, and in its commitment to transmute personal anguish into collective resistance.

In Punjab, the tradition of writing poetry on the theme of caste spans several centuries, reflecting its deep entrenchment in the region's literary and social consciousness. Dalit literary historians and critics opine that the earliest impulses of Dalit poetry can be discerned in the sacrosanct verses of the Sikh gurus. These compositions represent some of the first literary articulations to foreground the question of caste and to unambiguously challenge the embedded social hierarchies and hegemonies. The gurus, especially Guru Nanak Dev, the first guru and the founder of the Sikh faith, wrote in the language of the masses and aimed his writings not to amuse the elites but to expunge prevalent differences and uplift the depressed sections of society. Since these features of his verses are very akin to modern Punjabi Dalit poetry, it can be argued that the tradition of writing poetry on Dalit issues with a reformist approach was initiated in the fifteenth century with the vocalization of Nanak Dev. Nanak Dev declared caste a hollow swaggering and called himself the lowest of the low. In one of the verses he says, "*Neechan andar neech jati, Neechi luun ati neech*" [I am the lowest of the low