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Caste, Power and Political Satire: Reading Sanjay Chitranshi's *Dalits, Dynasty & She*

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Abstract-- Sanjay Chitranshi's *Dalits, Dynasty & She* (2016) is a political satire that brings together some of the most persistent tensions of contemporary Indian society: caste, political power, dynastic politics, corruption, social inequality, populism, political mobilisation and the aspirations of historically marginalised communities. Set primarily against the socio-political landscape of Uttar Pradesh, the novel imagines a political world in which a Dalit woman, Shanti Devi, occupies the highest political office in the state, creating expectations of social transformation among Dalits. At the same time, an established dynastic political formation confronts allegations of corruption, an anti-corruption movement gathers momentum, and a section of marginalised communities turns towards Maoism. The novel thus places several competing political and social currents within a single fictional framework.

This paper examines *Dalits, Dynasty & She* as a work of political satire rather than treating it simply as a conventional political novel or an uncomplicated example of Dalit literature. It investigates the novel's representation of caste consciousness, political representation, the relationship between social identity and political power, the symbolic significance of Shanti Devi, and the character of Rama Chandra. Particular attention is paid to the novel's use of irony, caricature, humour, political spectacle and semi-fictionalisation. The paper argues that Chitranshi's central concern is not merely the transfer of political power from one social group to another but the larger question of whether structural inequalities can be transformed merely through access to political office. The novel consequently exposes the distance between symbolic representation and substantive social change.

Keywords-- Sanjay Chitranshi, *Dalits, Dynasty & She*, Dalit literature, caste, political satire, political representation, corruption, Shanti Devi, Rama Chandra, Indian English fiction

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian English fiction has increasingly engaged with social realities that complicate the familiar narratives of nation, development and democracy. Among these concerns, caste occupies a particularly significant position. Although the Indian Constitution established equality before the law and formally abolished untouchability, caste continues to influence social relations, access to resources, political mobilisation and individual identity. Contemporary Indian literature frequently returns to this contradiction between constitutional equality and lived inequality.

Dalit literature has emerged as an important literary and intellectual formation within this context. Pramod K. Nayar describes Dalit literature as an expression of Dalit consciousness concerning identity, human rights, dignity and community, connected to broader struggles for social justice. (OUP Academic) K. Satyanarayana similarly places Ambedkar and Ambedkarite thought at the centre of the development of modern Dalit literary history. (OUP Academic) The literary representation of caste therefore cannot be separated from questions of dignity, agency, social hierarchy and political power.

Sanjay Chitranshi's *Dalits, Dynasty & She* enters this field from a somewhat different direction. Published in 2016, the novel is explicitly described as a political satire. Its fictional world brings together a Dalit woman leader who has reached the highest political office in a populous Indian state, a powerful dynastic political party confronted by corruption allegations, an anti-corruption movement and a Maoist insurgency emerging from dissatisfaction with the existing social and political order. (Google Books)

The novel is particularly interesting because it does not present political power as an uncomplicated solution to caste oppression. Instead, it asks what happens when a community historically excluded from power gains access to the machinery of government. Does political representation automatically produce social justice? Can the symbolic presence of a Dalit woman at the summit of political authority transform the everyday lives of Dalits? Or can political institutions absorb and reproduce the very inequalities that they appear to challenge?

These questions form the central intellectual tension of Chitranshi's novel.

II. DALIT LITERATURE AND THE QUESTION OF REPRESENTATION

Before analysing the novel, it is necessary to distinguish between **Dalit literature** and **literature about Dalits**. The two categories can overlap, but they are not identical.

The term "Dalit" carries a history of resistance and self-identification. Routledge's *Encyclopedia of Modernism* notes that the word literally signifies being "crushed" or "oppressed" and that Dalit literature developed as an important literary expression of communities subjected to caste-based exclusion.

(Routledge Rem) Modern Dalit literary movements have challenged representations produced exclusively from outside marginalised communities and have foregrounded experience, dignity, memory and resistance.

Oxford scholarship similarly stresses the significance of Ambedkarite thought in the emergence of modern Dalit literary consciousness. (OUP Academic) Dalit writing therefore often involves not merely the depiction of suffering but a demand for agency: the right to narrate oneself, one's history and one's community.

Dalits, Dynasty & She, however, is written by Sanjay Chitranshi, whose stated approach is that of a novelist and social observer engaging with India's socio-political conditions. The publisher describes the novel as a political satire and notes that Chitranshi regards it as a satire on India's socio-political system as well as a tribute to the resilience and tolerance of the Indian state. (Google Books)

The novel is therefore better approached as a **political-fictional representation of caste and Dalit politics** than automatically classified as an instance of autobiographical or experiential Dalit literature.

This distinction makes the novel particularly useful for literary study. It raises a question of representation: how does a non-autobiographical political novel imagine Dalit identity, political aspiration and caste consciousness?

III. THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE OF THE NOVEL

The fictional world of *Dalits, Dynasty & She* is deliberately crowded with competing political forces. The novel includes a Dalit-led political formation, an established dynastic party, an anti-corruption movement and a Maoist current. The publisher's synopsis explicitly identifies these as interconnected forces within the novel. (Leadstart Corp)

The political landscape is therefore not binary.

There is no simple division between oppressed and oppressor, good politics and bad politics, or marginalised citizens and an entirely corrupt establishment. Instead, power appears as a shifting network of alliances, ambitions and competing interests.

This complexity is essential to Chitranshi's satirical method.

Political satire traditionally operates by exposing contradictions between political ideals and political realities. Scholarship on political satire emphasises its capacity to question existing political and social orders by juxtaposing an imperfect present with ideas of what society claims it ought to be. (OUP Academic) Chitranshi adopts precisely such a strategy.

The political world of the novel repeatedly presents ideals—justice, empowerment, equality, anti-corruption and social transformation—against practices shaped by ambition, manipulation and the pursuit of power.

Thus, the novel's political satire does not depend exclusively upon mocking individual politicians. Its deeper target is the **systemic contradiction between democratic rhetoric and political practice**.

Shanti Devi: Gender, Caste And Political Power

One of the most significant dimensions of the novel is the figure of **Shanti Devi**, the Dalit woman leader who occupies the highest political position in the state.

Her identity combines three politically significant categories:

1. Dalit identity,
2. female identity, and
3. political authority.

Her rise therefore possesses enormous symbolic significance.

For Dalits, her victory can be read as evidence that a community historically excluded from political power can enter the highest levels of democratic government. For women, her position challenges the conventional association of political authority with male leadership. Her presence thus carries both caste and gender implications.

However, Chitranshi does not allow this symbolic achievement to remain unquestioned. The central issue becomes whether **representation equals emancipation**.

The novel asks an uncomfortable question: if a person belonging to a historically marginalised community occupies a position of extraordinary authority, what happens to the marginalised people who placed their hopes in that representation?

The importance of Shanti Devi consequently lies not only in who she is but in what her political position represents.

She becomes a test case for democratic representation.

Her political success creates expectations that extend far beyond her individual career. Her supporters see her rise as a possible turning point in the history of caste relations. Yet the narrative simultaneously exposes the danger of assuming that the identity of a political leader automatically guarantees the transformation of the political system.

The novel thus separates **identity politics from institutional transformation**.

A leader may belong to an oppressed community and still operate within structures shaped by older political practices. This tension is one of the novel's most productive themes.

Rama Chandra and the Politics of Dalit Identity

Rama Chandra provides another important perspective on caste and political aspiration. Through him, the novel moves beyond the abstract idea of “Dalit empowerment” and explores how caste affects individual choices and self-perception.

One published review observes that the novel presents political developments partly through Rama Chandra’s perspective and highlights his experience as a Dalit navigating a society that continues to impose caste-based distinctions. (*I And Me With I*)

This is significant because caste in the novel is not merely a political category. It becomes an element of identity.

The problem of caste is particularly powerful when it enters everyday life. A person may possess education, intelligence, ambition or professional qualifications, yet caste can continue to determine how that individual is perceived.

The theme connects the novel with a broader concern in Dalit literary studies: the concealment and negotiation of caste identity.

Recent scholarship on Dalit literature has examined precisely this phenomenon. *Concealing Caste*, edited by Kusuma Satyanarayana and Joel Lee, explores narratives in which individuals born into communities stigmatised as “untouchable” attempt to be perceived as belonging to higher-status communities. The editors describe caste concealment as a revealing site for understanding the contradictions of caste hierarchy. (*OUP Academic*)

Rama Chandra’s experience can consequently be read within a larger literary question: **What happens to the self when social identity is imposed from outside?**

Caste becomes not merely a social label but a psychological and political burden.

The Village and the State Capital: Two Spaces of Power

The novel’s spatial organisation is also significant.

The fictional village of Danapur and the political capital, Lucknow, represent two different but interconnected dimensions of Indian democracy. Danapur embodies everyday social relations, caste identities and grassroots political consciousness, whereas Lucknow represents institutional political power.

The movement between these spaces allows Chitranshi to establish a contrast between:

social reality and political spectacle
village experience and state power
ordinary citizens and political elites
caste hierarchy and democratic equality

The movement from the village towards political power might initially appear to represent social mobility. Yet the novel repeatedly demonstrates that geographical or political movement does not necessarily eliminate social hierarchy.

The capital may contain the institutions of democracy, but the village continues to carry the weight of inherited social structures.

This contrast is crucial to understanding the novel’s political imagination.

IV. CASTE AND THE POLITICS OF EMPOWERMENT

*The idea of **empowerment** lies at the centre of the novel.*

The political rise of Shanti Devi generates hope among Dalits because political power is understood as a means of correcting historical exclusion. Yet Chitranshi complicates this expectation.

The question is not whether political representation matters—it clearly does—but whether representation alone can dismantle structural inequality.

This distinction between **symbolic empowerment** and **material empowerment** is fundamental.

Symbolic empowerment occurs when a historically excluded community sees one of its members occupying a position of authority.

Material empowerment requires changes in everyday conditions: dignity, security, education, economic opportunity, social acceptance and freedom from discrimination.

The novel’s satire emerges from the gap between the two.

A political victory may generate celebrations, speeches and slogans. Yet the social realities that produced caste inequality may remain intact.

Thus, the novel implicitly asks:

Can a change in the occupants of power produce a transformation in the structures of power?

This question gives the novel a significance beyond its immediate political setting.

The “Dynasty” and the Continuity of Political Power

The second major term in the title, “**Dynasty**,” introduces another dimension of political authority.

If “Dalits” represents historically marginalised communities and “She” represents the individual female political leader, “Dynasty” represents inherited political power.

The contrast is deliberate.

A dynastic political formation derives its strength from continuity: political influence, family networks, established institutions and accumulated power.



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The rise of a Dalit woman appears, therefore, to disrupt the established pattern.

But Chitranshi does not present the political contest merely as a conflict between old and new. Instead, he shows how different forms of political power can reproduce similar patterns of manipulation.

This is one of the novel's central ironies.

A system may change its political actors without necessarily changing its political culture.

The novel therefore invites readers to distinguish between: change of rulers

and

change in the structure of power.

That distinction gives the title its deeper significance.

Corruption and the Failure of Political Idealism

Corruption is another major concern in the novel.

The established political party faces allegations of large-scale corruption, while an anti-corruption movement emerges as an alternative political force. ([Google Books](#))

Yet the novel refuses to make anti-corruption politics entirely straightforward.

The movement itself becomes vulnerable to political appropriation and competing ambitions. This reflects a broader satirical principle: political movements that begin as expressions of public anger can themselves become sites of power struggles.

The novel consequently examines the **institutionalisation of protest.**

Once a movement gains visibility, questions arise:

- Who controls it?
- Whose interests does it represent?
- Who speaks for the marginalised?
- Can protest remain independent after entering mainstream politics?
- What happens when moral rhetoric becomes political capital?

Chitranshi's satire works through precisely these contradictions.

The anti-corruption movement is not simply celebrated or condemned; rather, it becomes another component of the political machinery that the novel scrutinises.

V. MAOISM AND THE POLITICS OF FRUSTRATION

The novel also introduces Maoist politics as an expression of dissatisfaction among sections of Dalits and tribal communities with the existing social and political order.

The publisher's description specifically identifies a section of marginalised communities turning towards Maoism in response to the status quo and feudal structures. ([Google Books](#))

Its inclusion broadens the novel's political spectrum.

Democratic politics appears at one end of the spectrum, while revolutionary violence appears at another. Between them lie electoral politics, protest movements and institutional negotiation.

The novel therefore asks what happens when democratic institutions fail to satisfy expectations of justice.

The presence of Maoism should not be read merely as a plot device. It demonstrates the consequences of political alienation.

When communities perceive that established institutions cannot adequately address inequality, alternative forms of resistance become imaginable.

The novel thus links caste oppression with political frustration without reducing either to a single cause.

Satire as a Narrative Strategy

The most distinctive formal feature of *Dalits, Dynasty & She* is its use of satire.

Chitranshi uses humour, irony, exaggeration, political caricature and recognisable political situations to expose contradictions in public life. A contemporary review describes the novel as a semi-fictional portrayal of Indian politics, particularly its caste tensions, political scheming, greed and corruption. ([Ken Langer](#))

The semi-fictional quality is important.

The novel's political world may be fictional, but it draws upon recognisable features of Indian political culture. This creates a deliberate ambiguity: readers can recognise the social and political realities behind the fictional names without the narrative becoming a straightforward political chronicle.

Satire provides Chitranshi with a protective distance.

Instead of presenting a political argument directly, he creates situations in which the absurdity of political behaviour becomes visible.

For example, political leaders can appear simultaneously powerful and ridiculous. Speeches promising justice may coexist with political manipulation. Leaders representing oppressed communities may reproduce conventional practices of power.

The resulting irony is central to the novel's aesthetic.

Humour and the Absurdity of Political Performance

Political life in the novel frequently becomes theatrical.

Politicians perform for voters, supporters, opponents and the media. Political gestures acquire symbolic meaning, while private ambitions operate beneath public rhetoric.

This theatricality allows Chitranshi to transform politics into a form of social drama.

The politician is simultaneously:

- an individual,
- a public performer,
- a representative,
- a strategist,
- and a political symbol.

The gap between these identities generates much of the novel's humour.

Satire thrives on precisely such gaps.

A politician may speak in the language of social justice while pursuing personal advancement. A movement may speak of moral reform while being influenced by political ambition. A leader representing a marginalised community may become part of an establishment whose structures remain unequal.

The humour therefore has a serious function: it exposes contradiction.

VI. THE POLITICS OF THE TITLE

The title *Dalits, Dynasty & She* deserves particular attention because it condenses the novel's central political relationships.

“Dalits”

The first term places caste and marginalisation at the centre of the narrative.

It signifies a historical community, a political constituency and a social identity.

“Dynasty”

The second term represents inherited political authority and established power.

It introduces the question of whether democracy can escape older forms of political inheritance.

“She”

The final term is striking because it reduces the political leader to a gendered pronoun.

Yet this apparently simple word carries enormous symbolic weight.

“She” is simultaneously:

- a woman,
- a Dalit,

- a political leader,
- a symbol of representation,
- and an individual whose political choices affect an entire community.

The title consequently establishes a triangular relationship:

Dalit identity — Dynastic power — Female leadership

The novel's political drama emerges from the interaction of these three forces.

Women and Political Representation

The gender dimension of the novel deserves greater critical attention.

Shanti Devi's political position challenges two conventional hierarchies simultaneously: caste hierarchy and gender hierarchy.

Yet the novel also asks whether a woman who reaches political power is necessarily liberated from patriarchal political structures.

Political institutions may allow women to occupy visible positions while continuing to operate according to masculine conventions of power—aggression, manipulation, patronage and political competition.

The novel therefore allows a distinction between:

women's presence in politics

and

transformation of political culture through women's participation.

This distinction is especially valuable for feminist readings of the novel.

Shanti Devi is not simply a “woman politician” added to a political narrative. Her gender becomes part of the political symbolism surrounding her.

At the same time, the novel's treatment of women is not free from the contradictions of the political world it depicts. The representation of women can itself become instrumentalised for political purposes.

Thus, the novel invites an intersectional reading in which caste and gender cannot be examined independently.

VII. INTERSECTIONALITY: CASTE, CLASS AND GENDER

Although the term “intersectionality” emerged from a different intellectual context, it provides a productive framework for understanding the novel.

The identities represented in *Dalits, Dynasty & She* do not operate independently.



Caste intersects with:

- gender,
- class,
- political power,
- education,
- economic status,
- and access to institutions.

Shanti Devi's identity as a Dalit woman politician is therefore more politically complex than either "Dalit" or "woman" alone.

Similarly, Rama Chandra's identity cannot be understood merely through his caste. His aspirations, education, relationships and political ambitions interact with his social identity.

The novel consequently demonstrates how social categories overlap rather than operate in isolation.

VIII. THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

One limitation noted by a contemporary reader is that the novel sometimes privileges political events over sustained character development, particularly in the case of Rama Chandra. (Ken Langer)

This observation is useful for a critical reading.

The novel's principal strength lies in its breadth: it brings numerous political currents into conversation. But that breadth can sometimes reduce the psychological depth of individual characters.

This is partly a consequence of the novel's satirical purpose.

Characters sometimes function symbolically.

They can represent:

- political parties,
- caste interests,
- ideological positions,
- social groups,
- or political tendencies.

Such symbolic characterisation is effective for political satire but can limit psychological complexity.

The novel is therefore often more interested in **systems than interiority**.

This is not necessarily a flaw; it is a formal choice. Nevertheless, it is an important point for a balanced academic assessment.

Realism, Fiction and Recognisable Political Figures

Another interesting feature is the novel's relationship with political reality.

The work creates fictional names and situations while drawing upon recognisable political structures and events. A review published by the Institute of Rural Management Anand describes the novel as a political satire with characters and situations that can appear recognisable to readers familiar with Indian politics. (IRMA)

This strategy produces a form of **political realism through fictionalisation**.

The reader does not need to identify every real-life counterpart to understand the novel. Instead, recognisability becomes part of the satire.

The fictional world mirrors reality sufficiently closely to encourage comparison, while remaining formally a work of fiction.

IX. THE NOVEL AS A CRITIQUE OF POLITICAL SUBSTITUTION

One of the most important ideas emerging from the novel is what may be termed **political substitution**.

Political substitution occurs when one group replaces another in occupying positions of power without fundamentally altering the structure through which power operates.

The novel repeatedly raises this possibility.

A dynastic party may be replaced by a Dalit-led party.

An established political elite may be replaced by a new elite.

An anti-corruption movement may become another political force.

Yet the basic machinery of political competition can remain intact.

The question then becomes:

Has power actually changed, or have only its occupants changed?

This question gives the novel its strongest critical dimension.

X. DEMOCRACY AND THE MARGINALISED

The novel's treatment of democracy is deliberately ambivalent.

On one hand, democracy enables a Dalit woman to reach political power. This is itself historically significant within the novel's fictional universe.

On the other hand, democratic institutions do not automatically erase social inequality.

This tension is fundamental to the novel.

Democracy can provide:

- political representation,
- electoral participation,
- institutional access,
- and the possibility of social mobility.

But democracy can also become vulnerable to:

- corruption,
- patronage,
- identity politics,
- political manipulation,
- and the concentration of power.

Chitranshi's satire operates within this tension.

His stated description of the novel as a tribute to the resilience, tolerance and acceptance of the Indian state is important here. ([Google Books](#)) The novel's criticism of political practices should therefore not be reduced to a rejection of democracy itself. Rather, its satire exposes the contradictions within democratic practice.

XI. THE END AND THE POSSIBILITY OF A NEW BEGINNING

The novel's multiple political currents converge around the possibility of a new beginning. The publisher's synopsis explicitly frames the question of whether the interaction among the different socio-political forces might help the nation enter a new phase. ([Google Books](#))

The idea of a "new beginning" is deliberately uncertain.

The novel does not offer an uncomplicated utopian solution.

Instead, it leaves readers with the larger question of whether India's political and social structures can accommodate genuine transformation.

This uncertainty is appropriate to the satirical form.

Satire rarely supplies a complete alternative political system. Its primary function is diagnostic: it reveals contradictions, hypocrisies and failures.

Chitranshi's novel consequently ends less as a political programme and more as a literary question.

XII. CONCLUSION

Sanjay Chitranshi's *Dalits, Dynasty & She* is a significant example of contemporary Indian political fiction because it brings caste, gender and political power into a single narrative framework. Its central achievement lies in refusing to treat the rise of a Dalit woman to political authority as the final answer to caste oppression. Instead, the novel turns that rise into a question: **what happens when symbolic representation encounters the entrenched structures of political power?**

Through Shanti Devi, the novel examines the symbolic power of Dalit and female representation. Through Rama Chandra, it explores the relationship between caste identity, individual aspiration and social acceptance. Through the "Dynasty," it examines inherited political authority. Through the anti-corruption movement, it questions the relationship between moral protest and political ambition. Through Maoism, it introduces the possibility of radical resistance when democratic institutions appear inadequate to sections of the marginalised population.

The novel's satirical technique allows these questions to be explored without turning the narrative into a political treatise. Humour, irony, caricature and fictionalisation expose the contradictions between political rhetoric and political practice.

At the same time, the novel should be situated carefully within the discourse of Dalit literature. Dalit literary scholarship emphasises consciousness, dignity, self-representation and resistance; Chitranshi's work, by contrast, is a political satire that represents Dalit politics and caste relations from within a broader fictional examination of Indian political life. ([OUP Academic](#)) Its value therefore lies partly in the way it opens questions about **who represents the marginalised, how representation operates, and whether political power can produce substantive social transformation.**

Ultimately, *Dalits, Dynasty & She* is less interested in declaring one political force victorious than in exposing the unstable relationship between identity and power. Its deepest irony is that political change can occur without necessarily becoming social transformation. A new face may occupy the seat of power, but the structures surrounding that seat may prove remarkably persistent.

The novel thus remains relevant as a study of the uneasy relationship between **democracy and hierarchy, representation and emancipation, political power and social justice.**



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