Dalit Assertion
and
its Space in Literature

Dalit Assertion
and
its Space in Literature

Edited by
Santosh Kumar Sonker

Yash Publishers & Distributors
Delhi-110032

Dalit Assertion and its Space in Literature
ISBN : 978-93-84633-67-7
Edition : 2018

Price : ₹ 795/-

Publised by : Yash Publishers & Distributors
1/10753, Shubhash Park,
Naveen Shahdara, Delhi-32

Sales Office : 4806/24, Ist Floor,
Bharatram Road, Ansari Road,
Daryaganj, New Delhi-110002

Contact : +919599483885,86,87,88

E-mail : yashpublicationdelhi@gmail.com

Website : www.yashpublications.com

Typeset & Printed in India at:-

Nagri Printers, Delhi

Dedicated

To

Prof. T. V. Kattimani
Vice-Chancellor
Indira Gandhi National Tribal University,
Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh,
India

Preface

'Dalit Assertion and its Space in Literature' is a collection of research/critical papers presented at an international seminar organized by Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak and edited by Dr. Santosh Kumar Sonker. It contains 24 articles by scholars who have written extensively about Dalit Literature from India and abroad. These papers discuss significant aspects of Dalit literature that has carved a niche for itself in modern Indian literature.

Most important issues in Dalit literature have been discussed in the papers included in this book. The first article titled "Theorizing Dalit Literature" by Alessandra Consolaro touches upon two seminal issues of Dalit literature. The first issue is whether or not a non-Dalit writer should write about Dalits, whether he/she can connect himself with the Dalit experiences; if he/she writes, whether his/her writing can be authentic document of the Dalits. The author of the paper writes a preliminary note on her positioning as an academician dealing with the Dalit issues. "Being a non-Dalit, I remain wary of the extent to which I am able to claim authority and feel entitled to partake in, and write about Dalit issues." This statement of Alessandra needs to be discussed at length. Both Dalit and non-Dalit writers/critics have asked this question many a time. The answer(s) to this question is/are both in negative and positive.

"Having closely and intimately associated myself with Dalit movements and Dalit Literature in my own right, being born in a religion which gave a decent status to Dalits for the first time in Indian history, I have ardently thought, argued and written extensively on and about Dalit issues and Dalit literature." The answer to the question—can the writings/opinions of a non-Dalit about a Dalit experience be atheistic?—is certainly "yes" provided

the writer/the critic has an emotional, intellectual, psychological, sociological, anthropological, intuitional, ethical and spiritual affiliations with the subtleties of Dalit experiences and problems. If we state categorically that a non-Dalit can't write about Dalit, then human experiences, human issues and concerns become segregated so much so that the scope of literature becomes so narrow that it would not have a universal appeal and it would become colourless, unconcerned and unconnected with a majority of people in the land in which it is written. Using the same logic one could argue that men can't write about women, the white can't write about the Black, the rich can't about the poor, healthy can't write about the sick and so on. So, whether a non-Dalit can/can't write about Dait is not a point. How well the author connects himself/herself with the issues/problems/experiences of Dalits with which he/she is neither emotionally nor psychologically nor socially connected and how well he/she expresses all of it are the points to be considered and it is on these points that a work of art needs to be analysed, valued and observed.

Santosh Kumar Sonker's paper "Can Dalits Get Rid of Caste Hatred" states that Dalits' all attempts to get rid of caste atrocities prove futile. Having two autobiographies- Bama's *Karukku* and Rev Fr. William Premdas Chaudhary's *An Unwanted Priest: The Autobiography of a Dalit Catholic Priest* at its core the paper reveals that even religious conversion of Dalits do not bring relief to them. They are treated as polluted Dalits and denied equal opportunities even after their conversion as Christians. Unveiling the hypocrisy of Christianity in India the paper alerts Dalits not to adopt conversion and suggests to develop their own religion.

Heinz Werner Wessler's article "The Margins and the Mainstream: Space of Adivasi and Dalit Identity in Hindi Literature" describes Dalit and Adivasi literatures as an important aspects of Hindi Literature. Highlighting the question of sympathy and empathy in the Dalit and Adivasi discourse the paper analyses the depiction of Dalits and Adivasis by Dalit and non-Dalit writers. Peeping into the *Nirgun Bhakti* tradition, it argues that the new perspective of history and the rediscovery of *nirgun bhakti* as a source for the reconstruction of Dalit experience in particular has lead to a

fundamental challenge to the conventional narratives of Hindi Literary history following the model of Râmchandra Úukla from the late colonial epoch. It also touches upon the new construction of History of religion in the Northern India which is often termed "Early Modernity".

"Aesthetics of Dalit and Tribal Literature: A Counter Cultural Discourse" written by M. Dasan examines the politics and poetics of Dalit and Adivasi writings and explains similarities and differences between Dalit/Tribal and Indian/Sanskrit aesthetics. The paper negates argument that all literature can be evaluated with the same values and standards and argues for the need of different aesthetics for measuring Dalit and Tribal writings. Though Dalits and Tribals are divided in groups in terms of religion, they contribute to the emergence of new identities.

Centering focus on some novels such as Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, Kamala Markandeya's *The Coffer Dams*, Manohar Malgonkar's *The Princess* and Mulk Raj Anand's *The Untouchable*, Rajshekhar Mulimani and Vijay F Nagannwar's paper "Image of Dalits and Tribals in Indian English Fiction: A Study" discusses the representation of Tribals and Dalits in the Indian English novels. The paper highlights that the Tribals have been depicted innocent, loyal and deceived while Dalits as polluted and tortured but both do not get positive treatment in the hands of the novelists as both of them have been described as a special group different from the normal social groups.

Mamta Gupta in her paper "Identity Crisis in Derek Walcott's *A Far Cry from Africa*" has discussed Walcott's insensibility to the pain of Africans. Though he suffers an identity crisis because of mix parentage, black and white, but he shows his inclination towards the white to enjoy power which the poor blacks lack. His hybrid identity leads him to a critical situation where he has to choose between the black and the white and it also gives him benefit of understanding the human situation prevailed during Mau Mau rebellion.

Amod Kumar Rai in his "*Angaliyat*: A Saga of Triumph" has described the story of oppression and exclusion but it uniquely transforms the vanquished into the victor pushing the periphery to

the core. Grounded in Ambedkar's ideology, it depicts the long lasting conflict between the mainstream and the marginalized. A set of characters from Varnkar community such as Valji, Teeha, Methi, Kanku, Bhavankaka, Goka are embodiment of virtues like love, sacrifice, justice, truth, loyalty, intimacy and above all of Ambedkar's ideology while the other set of characters Meghi Patel, Ramlo, Ranmal, Dehlavala, Manji, Nanji, Phoolji Patel etc are embodiment of vices viz – envy, greed, lust, betrayal, loath, perfidy deceit, lechery etc. The novel portrays victory of human virtues over vices and it ends with success of Goka who donates seven thousand rupees for the inscription of Teehabhai Gopalbhai Parmar on the marble plaque in the front yard of the school.

Revolving around the life of Velutha and Ammu in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Satya Prakash Prasad's chapter, "Stratagem of Caste and Patriarchy in the *God of Small Things*" explains the repercussion of a Dalit's transgression of social system. Velutha, a Dalit boy and Amu, a Brahmin girl, opt hypergamus marriage which is a crime as per the social law laid down by the *Manusmriti*. Velutha is tortured to death and Ammu is excommunicated and does not get place in her family. Bearing insult and torture she meets a tragic end. Ironically enough, even after her death she does not get respect as her dead body is refused to be cremated by the church and lastly is buried in a deserted crematorium.

Anand Kattimani in his paper "Dalit Autobiographies: A Study of the Conflict between Spece and Education" presents a comprehensive study of social stratification, the limited space given to Dalits to dwell and also the limited scope given to them to get educated. The author highlights untouchability being still practiced in various parts of India and he laments over the clear division between Dalit and non-Dalit settlements. Dalit settlements are constructed on the outskirts of the village and are devoid of all basic facilities such as water, medical and drainage system. It is still very difficult for Dalits to receive good education and it is only through getting a right kind of education that Dalits can get rid of the stigma of caste attached to them over centuries. Non-Dalits do not allow Dalits to get education on the one hand and Dalit themselves

do not allow their children to receive education because of their deep seated faiths in various myths created by non-Dalit on the other. The author is very emphatic in his analysis of Dalit issues and he says that the cities are better places for Dalits to live as they can get comparatively better space, can enjoy freedom and respect, and can assert their identity.

Shyam Babu and Samy Victor Marandy in their paper "Dalit Women's Assertion: A Critique of Dominant Narrative in Bama's *Sangati*" has reflected upon the issue of Dalit women's exploitation and their resistance. The novel *Sangati* discusses questions related to Dalit women such as how Dalit women suffer because of dire poverty, and caste malaise? How they are doubly victim of their own husband at homes and the upper caste men at workplaces? However, they do not accept defeat and survive as they are. The female characters in the novel *Sangati* such as Marriama, Mukkumma etc. are no longer submissive; they boldly resist and assert their individuality through hard work, collective action and in most of the cases through ostentatious display of their body. Very wisely they exploit their body as a safe space to escape cruelty of patriarchy and power at home and outside as well.

M. R. Banjare and Charu C. Mitra in their paper "The Struggle of Stragglers in Dadasaheb More's *Gabal*" have shed light on the psyche of a dispossessed community, whose physical needs and profession are at odds due to the cultural misnomers. They analyze its implications from the perspectives of postcolonialism . More is one of the most prominent figures of Dalit Literary Movement in Maharashtra. His *Gabal* describes the struggle and suffering of the lower caste Pingal Joshi community, a nomadic tribe, which resorts to tell lies to make money by blackmailing of the superstitious and ignorant people of the village. In this self-narrative Dadasaheb sketches the sad and hellish life of the community and suffering, traditions and beliefs, rites and rituals, blind faith, illiteracy and ignorance of women of Pingal Joshi (Kudmude Joshi or Duggi Joshi) caste.

Mantesh Hurali in his paper "Voice of Protest in Devanoora Mahadeva's *Odalala*" presents the struggles of Sakavva, a Dalit woman in the context of the history of Kannada Dalit Literature.

Sakavva is strong enough to fight against the system which enjoys power at the cost of labours. When her son Sannayya asks her to divide the property, she refuses to do so on the ground that it is she who has earned it and so she has an absolute right over it. Economic independence gives her strength to head the family, assert her identity and also protest patriarchal domination.

Kaushal Panwar in her paper "Female Emancipation: Dharmashastra and B. R. Ambedkar (A Comparative Study)" analyses the contribution of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar as a thinker and a social reformer to the emancipation of women in Hindu society. She explains the relevance of his ideas in the contemporary feminist discourse on gender equality in Indian social conditions revealing his main argument that gender relations are artificially constructed under Hindu social order, which not only moulds the attitude of Hindus towards their women but also conditions women to confirm to a stereotyped feminine behavior. She also highlights the women's problems at the grassroots level and increasing awareness about gender inequality inherent in the Hindu social order, characterized by caste and patriarchy.

Delving deep into three sections- Water, Shelter, and Travel of *Bhimayana*, a graphic novel, which narrates the incident in the life of Dr. Ambedkar, Vishakha Kardam in her paper, "Ambedkar in Popular Images: A Study of *Bhimayana*" focuses on the autobiographical notes of Dr. Ambedkar starting from the "Waiting for Visa". She also reveals the importance of visual arts, newspaper cuttings, and symbols used in the novel to highlight the caste practices.

S. B. Biradar in his paper "Exploring the Issues of Caste, Gender and Identity in Bama's *Karukku*" has explored that Bama's *Karukku* presents how Bama is discriminated because of her low caste, and gender. She finds discrimination in the Convent after being nun. She realizes that non-Dalit Chritians do not want to accept them as equal to them. As per the suggestion of her brother she gets education as a brilliant student and earns job of a teacher but she renounces it when she feels biased attitude prevalent even in Christianity in India. After leaving job she decides to work for the upliftment of Dalits and in the process

she records her life in *Karukku*.

Marina Rimscha, in her chapter has tried to underscore the positive aspect of the autobiography, *Murdahiya*. Generally the authors draw attention to the pathetic description of pain and misery but Marina has thrown light on the art Tulsiram has exploited in writing *Murdahiya*. Commonly Dalit autobiographies force the readers to get disturbed and to cry but it has some additional power to make them laugh.

Vijay Jondhley in his paper, "The Narration of Identity, Misery and New Hope in the Autobiography of Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan*: A Dalit Life" talks about the writer's misery of life, his assertion of identity and proposition of new hope for other Dalits. *Joothan* charts out Omprakash Valmiki's journey of life from a poor Chhuhara Dalit boy who is slapped for scraps of leftovers till an established officer who offers good food to the person who humiliated him at a point of time. It also reveals his courage to announce his caste at the odd face of caste hierarchal structure which most of Dalits do not dare to. He does not accept defeat against the odd situations rather he struggles against it.

Harish Mangalam, a noted Gujarati Dalit writer, in his paper "Gujarati Dalit Literature and Commitment" has described the meaning of "Commitment" in Dalit literature and asserted that "Commitment" is a crux of Dalit writing which he terms as Ambedkarite writing. Dividing Dalit writers among "Wavering Writers," "Fallen Writers" and "Committed Writers" he places more importance on the writers of third category and even prefers not to mention names of the first two. According to him, the committed writers are those who follow ideology of Dr. Ambedkar and Phule and those who compromise between the Caste Hindu ideology and Dr. Ambedkar's for the sake of individual benefits, he puts them in the category of Wavering Writers and Fallen Writers as per the degree of their displacement from Dr. Ambedkar's ideology. Committed writers can only bring social change and carry forward the struggle of Dr. Ambedkar and Phule.

Manohar Mouli Biswas has created a niche in the realm of Bengali Dalit writings. He has authored my books. His autobiography *Surviving in my World: Growing up Dalit in*

Bengal, and his collection of poems, *The Wheel will Turn*, have been translated into English. Biswas in his paper "A History of Four Dalit Women in Reminiscence: Eighteenth Century Four Marginal Caste Women of Bengal" throws light on the four Dalit women namely Rani Siromani, Sulochana, Rami Dhopani and Rani Rasmoni who hail from lower strata of the Society and belong to the eighteenth century. Peeping into the history, he has tried to underline how they voiced political consciousness against East India Company rule, how they struggled to get education despite the ban on giving education to the women of lower segments of society. The caste Hindus feared that women, if educated, would rebel against hierarchy and fight for equality. It also describes their contribution to the growth of literature.

P. Sivkami's "Dalit Litearature: A Glance" expresses her view about Dalit literature. As a writer of novels such as *The Grip of Change* and *The Taming of Women* she authentically argues that Dr. Ambedkar is a force for Dalit writers and mass but at the same time she feels sorry for the bad fate of Dalits in India because the technology and the globalization seem to be helpless for the improvement of their economical lot and have become the handmaid of the upper caste people. A few educated Dalits who hold some good positions in administration and academics are unable to favour their community due to the lack of resources and pressure of constraints. Touching upon the Tamil Dalit literature, she observes that the new identities of Dalits in India are emerging in Dalit literature, which sensitizes the readers. She also opines that to be a Dalit to write Dalit literature is not necessary but the critical and logical point of view in the writer is mandatory.

Balbir Madhopuri is a Punjabi Dalit writer. His autobiography *Changiya Rukh* which has been translated into English as *Against the Night*, has been admired by the critics as one of the most authentic Dalit autobiography. The chapter "My Dalit Experience – My Literature" included in this anthology discusses his social background, the impulses that made him to write literature, his conflict with upper caste communists and the contexts that forced him to write his autobiography and the reactions of upper caste to

his autobiography. The first section "My Social Background and Childhood" highlights the practice of caste discrimination and caste hatred in Sikh Religion. He gives a clear picture of caste based discrimination of his fellow men who were considered low. In the second section "Reason for my Writing Literature" he describes an incident that when he was travelling in a bus along with other eight boys to write his intermediate examination. One of them put his feet over the feet of a beautiful girl sitting next to him and teased her and the girl reacted to it very bitterly in a loud voice. It left a deep impression on his mind and he wrote a long poem about it. He published a few chapters of his autobiography and on getting a good response from the readers he felt encouraged to complete the book *Changiya Rukh*.

Manu Baligar is a famous Kannada writer. In his paper "Dalit Literature in India" he argues that the origin of the term "Dalit" is very recent with its origin in 1960 but the seed of Dalit Literature can be traced back in the 12th Century and they are clearly seen in the *Vachanas* of the saint poet Basaveshwara. He argues that Dalit Literature has taken inspiration from the African Literature and it has its roots in the principles of Dr. Ambedkar. He observes that Dalit literature is mainly written by Dalit about Dalit but it can be treated as an exclusive phenomenon and so, writings of other Caste Hindus dealing with Dalit life and Dalit experiences also need to be included in the ambit of Dalit writings.

Roop Narayan Sonkar's paper "My Literature, My 'Self'" reveals his ideas embedded in his writings. He is a renowned Hindi Dalit writer with novels like *Dank*, *Suardan*, *Gutter Ka Adami*, a collection of short stories *Poisonous Roots,* an autobiography, *Nagphani* and a play, *Ek Deputy Collector*. His novel *Suardan*, a reply to Munshi Premchand's novel *Godan*, beautifully challenges the glorification of cow in Hindu religion and the practice of caste based profession in India. One of the protagonists Râmchandra Trivedi prefers the profession of piggery paying no heed to the orthodox Satyanarayan Tripathi and enjoys all the luxuries of life. *Gutter ka Adami* advocates for the economic development of the Dalits and soft treatment of *dibyangs* and animals like snakes. The hero of the novel makes numerous

efforts to eradicate poverty of Dalits; he even sacrifices his love with the upper caste girl who tries to force him to give up his relationship with his poor relatives. His autobiography reveals the account of the writer's misery and inspires the Dalits not to surrender before the tyrants who inflict atrocities upon them. *Poisonous Roots* presents a true account of Dalits in the contemporary society and depicts Dalits not only as a neglected class but also as an uprising class. His play, *Ek Deputy Collector*, is an attack on the decreasing humanity and morality in the contemporary society. It reveals the pitiable condition of parents who are discarded by their sons for whom they sacrificed their whole life.

The articles collected in this anthology address these vital issues of Dalit studies and they also discuss various issues concerning Dalit literature in the context of various Indian regional literatures.

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, one of the two biggest personalities that modern India has produced (the other personality is Mahatma Gandhi) invariably figures in most articles. The all pervading influence of Ambedkar, the writings and movements of Ambedkar can be seen in almost every single argument put forth by scholars in these articles. All in all, these articles try to theorize Dalit literature and give an academic status to it in Indian mainstream literature on the one hand and they try to discuss the Dalit texts with the critical tools, yardsticks that are used to analyze the texts produced by the so called Indian mainstream writers on the other. In the process the authors stress on the need for evolving critical tools to value the Dalit texts and for which they argue for developing theories of Dalit literature.

The book is an important step in the direction of evolving separate critical tools and yardsticks to value Dalit literature in the context of Indian literature. I place on records my sincere heartfelt thanks to every single author whose article is included in this anthology and more so, to Dr. Santosh Kumar Sonker for taking pains to collect articles, arrange them in some order and I write an extensive introduction for the same.

The edited book, I am quite sure, will be of immense help to scholars who are interested in the study of Dalit literature. I also as

an academician, would state that the study of modern Indian literature would be incomplete if Dalit literature is not given its share/space that it richly deserves.

Prof. Basavaraj P. Donur
Professor of English
Controller of Examinations
Indira Gandhi National Tribal University,
Amarkantak-848487 (M.P.)

Acknowledgement

A great work in the universe is not possible without the life force. If the prevailing circumstances in the contemporary society disturb me, the committed struggle of intellectuals, activists and officers like Prof. T. V. Kattimani, strengthen my determination to voice for the deprived section of the society subjected to brutality, and stigmatization caused by the hypocrisy of false caste supremacy and the power politics. The present anthology is indebted to the inspiration, guidance and blessings of Prof. T. V. Kattimani, Vice-Chancellor, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh. My decision to organize an International Seminar on "Emerging New Identities in Dalit and Tribal Literature and Society" from 02nd to 04th September, 2016 would have been a hard-nut to crack and would not have seen its daylight without his motivation, guidance and expected support.

When I think of expressing regards to Prof. Gunjan Shushil, my mother-teacher, who taught me the art of life and profession which always energize me to complete even the toughest task, words realize their triviality. I am successful because of her blessings. If there is a goddess in the modern world, she is the one for me. She nurtured me as a mother and shaped me as a teacher. I cannot dare to communicate thanks to her but love to her.

Prof. Basavaraj P. Donur has been source of inspiration for me due to his hard work, commitment and dedication to the assigned work as Controller of Examination, IGNTU, Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh. I express gratitude from the core of my heart first for his encouragement and thereafter for writing "Preface" of the anthology.

When I recall the process of conceptualizing seminar, Prof. Khemsingh Daheriya's support cannot be forgotten. He was always with me at every step. I would like to express my special regard to

him. Dr. Jai Prakash Kardam's valuable suggestions and contributions stop me to proceed without expressing my gratitude to him. It is because of him, two resource persons from foreign countries - Prof. Heinz Werner Wessler from Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden, and Dr. Alessandra Consolaro, University of Torino, Italy, and one participant, Ms. Marina Rimscha, University of Bonn, Germany, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel could make their presence in the Seminar giving it an International status. Whenever I had any problem I contacted him even at mid night. Mr. Harish Mangalm, Gujarati Dalit writer also have claim over my gratitude for his suggestions and support. I am also grateful to Roop Narayan Sonkar, great Hindi Dalit writer, for his encouragement with inspiring words. The seminar was blessed with the ideas of great Dalit writers such as Dr. Jai Prakash Kardam, Manohar Mouli Biswas, P. Sivakami, Roop Narayan Sonkar, tribal writers like Laxaman Gaikwad, Vaharu Sonwane, Jacinta Kerketta and non-Dalit writer, Manu Baligar. Scholars and academician such as Prof. Vijay F. Nagannawar, Chairman, Dept of English, Rani Channamma University, Belagavi, Karnataka, Prof. M. L. Jadhav, Kolhapur University, Kolhapur, Prof. Sanjoy Saxena, University of Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, Dr. Satya Prakash Prasad, Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi and Dr. Vinod Kumar Singh, Delhi University made the Seminar successful with their deliberations. Prof. Vijay Nagannawar was always as a brother right from the idea of Seminar entered my mind. Whenever I faced some problem, I contacted him for solution. The memories of Neha Bhabhi's love who was not a participant of the Seminar but came to share burden of me and my wife, Anjani, fetch tears from my eyes and brings smile on my face. She celebrated her "Teej" at my home only. Dr. Satya Prakash Prasad and Dr. Vinod Kumar Singh though were present as resource persons but more as friends to share my tiredness during the seminar. I was delighted to find them in Amarkantak after my student days in University of Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh. I would like to thank Prof. Krishna Singh, Dean Faculty of Humanities and Philology, Prof. Abhilash, Head, Dept of English and FL, for their support. Dr. Deepa Moni Boruah, Assistant Professor, Dept of English and FL for dividing papers into technical

sessions and taking responsibility of the master of the ceremony in inaugural and valedictory sessions, Dr. R. S. Rao, Associate Professor of Dept of Computronics, for cultural performances in the evenings, Dr. Nagendra Kuamr Singh, Assistant Professor, Dept of Journalism and Mass Communication, for stage decoration, Dr. Vinod Sen, Assistant Professor of Economics, for food arrangement, Dr. Praveen Kumar, Assistant Professor of Hindi, for transportation, Mr. Rajesh Kumar, Assistant Professor of Physics, Dr. Mohan Chadhar, Assistant Professor of AIHC, Dr. Charles Vergese, Assistant Professor of Sociology for taking care of accommodation for participants are worthy of special thanks. Yogesh Tiwari, research scholar, the Dept of Hindi, Priyanka Mishra, and Sonu Singh, research scholars, Department of English and FL, Priya Yadav, research scholar of the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Richa Namdev, Pratiksha Srivastava, Pratima Gupta, Kirti Pandey, Mohit Úukla, Jitendra Yadav, Neha Singh, Anchal Singh Chandel, Surabhi Chouksey MA (English) Students, Tripti Markam, Shikha Pandey, Sakshi Soni, Choomlata, Pooja Kumari, Ranjana, Ashish Vaishnav, Tushar Pandey B A (Hons) First Semester students deserve mention here for their praiseworthy assistance without which seminar could have not been materialized. Every appreciation and thanks seem trivial before the loneliness which my wife suffered before Ayan came to this world. My presence was meaningless for her because I was completely engaged in giving shape to the Seminar. I convey lots of love to her because without her tolerance of my busy life, the seminar could not have seen its maturity and sucess. I would like to extend my gratitude to ICSSR, New Delhi for giving me partial financial support.

Most of the papers published in this anthology were originally presented in the seminar. Later I requested the contributors to develop them in full-length papers with requisite modifications so that they can be brought out in the form of book. Some of the papers have been contributed for the publication only. They were not presented in the Seminar.

I express heartfelt thanks to all contributors to the anthology such as Dr. Alessandra Consolaro, Prof. Heinz Werner Wessler, Prof. M Dasan, Prof. Vijay F. Nagannawar, Harish Mangalam

(Gujarati Dalit Writer), P. Sivakami (Tamil Dalit writer), Roopnarayan Sonkar (Hindi Dalit writer), Manohar Mouli Biswas (Bengali Dalit Writer), Manu Baligar (Kannad Writer), Balbir Madhopur (Pujabi Dalit writer), Dr. Satya Prakash Prasad, Dr. Anand Kattimani, Dr. Amod Kumar Rai, Dr. Mamata Gupta, Dr. Shyam Babu, Dr. Charusheel C. Mishra, Dr. S B Biradar, Dr. Mantesh Hurali, Dr. Vishakah Kardam, Dr. Kaushal Panwar, Vijay Jondhley, M. R. Banjare, Samy Victor Marady, Rajshekhar S Mulimani and Marina Rimscha. It is because of their intellectual endeavour the anthology is present to take the reader on an ideological tour of a disguised reality.

Guru is the most revered in the world as per Hindu mythology because he teaches the art of accumulating knowledge and winning success. My knowledge is indebted to Prof. Madhusudan Prasad, my research supervisor. I express my reverence to him.

Blessings of my grandfather- Shri Gulab Sonker, father- Shri Rambabu Sonker, mother- Mrs. Uma Devi, uncle- Shri Rajendra Prasad, love of my better half- Mrs. Anjani, pleasure and occasional irritation given by my little angel- Ayan, being active companion till late night have acted as a catalyst for giving present shape to the anthology.

I would like to thank Mr. Jatin Sharma for cover design and Mr. Shanti Swaroop Sharma, Yash Publication, for printing the anthology.

The present anthology adheres to the 7th edition of MLA and sometimes APA as well for structure of papers.

Dr. Santosh Kumar Sonker

Contents

Writers' Words and Experiences

Theorizing Dalit Literature

Alessandra Consolaro

The strategic apparatus of Dalitness refers to the experience of distinct discriminatory practices, and to the formulation of political agendas of collective liberation. For some critics, its starting point is to be seen in the implementation of the Mandal Commission report in 1990, but in my opinion this was just the time when an old undercurrent of the process of change became visible, as Chaube (2009) has clearly shown. If we juxtapose the Indian situation with the global scene, we can identify the beginning of a process of change right after the Second World War, when the eurocentric and ethnocentric system broke down and new centers and issues emerged: it appeared no more possible to believe in a rational and univocal history, which necessarily tends to an improvement of human conditions. Even scientific and technological progress not always bring benefits to people's lives. In the Indian context, a first important point of departure for the cultural order is the year 1947, when the country was partitioned and a new socio-economic-political order arose. The newly found State promised not to "discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them" (Indian Constitution, art. 15), but in reality the political forces and the establishment were destabilizing rural India and were pushing society towards a situation that set the mainstream against the marginalized sections, in a conflict that menaced to become an unending one.

In the Sixties and Seventies, a series of crisis of representation took place at a global level, in which older relationship models and traditionally accepted social and individual bonds became no longer credible. The very boundary between the language and its object was disrupted, and a keen sense of new possibility and diversity

became widespread. Together with it, the will to experiment, to rethink and redefine art, provoked a revolutionary explosion. Those who were previously minority currents of resistance –movements of blacks in America, homosexuals, women, young people, Dalit etcetera– turned into majority trends. As for the Indian setting, resistance gradually became a powerful parallel stream: B.R. Ambedkar had reacted to the inertia of the political apparatus quitting Hindu religion and embracing Buddhism with his 380,000 followers in 1956, and other major currents can be seen in the Naxalbari movement in 1967 and in J.P. Narayan's total revolution in 1974.

Popularized by the Dalit Panther Movement of Maharashtra in the 1970s, the term 'Dalit' – which means 'broken' or 'downtrodden' – has been reclaimed as a means of self-empowerment and a mark of pride. 'Dalit' is the self-chosen name of the so-called untouchable castes that, following B.R. Ambedkar, reject the Gandhian designation 'Harijan' as uppercaste patronizing. The term implies militancy and alliance with other disenfranchised groups, including peasants, workers, and women. 'Dalits' generally includes those termed in administrative parlance as schedule castes (SCs), Schedule Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBCs); however, in day-to-day usage and political discourse, the term is so far mainly confined to SCs.[1]

Here, I am not going to formulate a theory of Dalit literature, but I would like to share with the readers some thoughts, in order to discuss how theorizing Dalit literature is being brought about. Simply said, I am going to raise questions but not necessarily give an answer to them. I hope this will help "systematize Dalit literature according to general principles."[2] Indian Dalits and women/queer groups share comparable histories of dispossession and marginalization, but also struggle and resistance to colonial and neocolonial structures of oppression; they share a condition in which they do not amount to a unified entity, and are split into numerous constituencies across linguistic, geographical, and/or religious lines. Therefore, I think it is possible to investigate common trends of analysis and theorization, operating at the intersection of caste, gender, class, race, religion and nationalism. I will try and give an example building upon both Dalit and non-Dalit scholarship, drawing from a feminist and queer analytical lexicon.

1. Issues and Questions

During its initial phase Dalit writing presented a fundamental criticism of the caste system and all kinds of discrimination and voiced the demand of space for Dalits in the social, cultural, and political sphere. It was characterized by the urge to articulate protest, identity, angst, self-respect, and dignity, critiquing religion, politics and patriarchy. Hindu icons and symbols, alien to Dalit culture, were to be rejected. This was made clear when in 1927 Bhimrao Ambedkar publicly burned the *Manusmriti*. Less clear, though, was what to replace them with. A first step was made by Dr. Ambedkar in 1956 : embracing Buddhism, he provided an alternative to Dalits, and in the past decades there have been many other atempts at drawing from alternative literary, cultural and religious sources.

Contemporary Dalit writing is now markedly deviating from the established norms, styles and techniques of mainstream writing. For example, with reference to Hindi Dalit literature, established modes of fiction, imagination and romanticization in prose writings are replaced by different kind of narratives, blurring the distinction between realism and fiction, as Laura Brueck (2014) has extensively shown. Dialect and sociolect have earned respectability in the Hindi literary field while stylized syntax, pretentious diction and standardized styles of the Hindi literary canon have been put aside. Prose narratives have drawn from folk theatre forms, and Dalit deities, rural imagery and upturned value system have taken the place of hegemonic Hindu icons, imagery and value systems in literature. The notions of beauty and truth, that in the Modernist frame of mind of mainstream literature were identified in an abstract notion of imaginary beauty and archetypal experiences, have now undergone a drastic change, emphasizing the individual and his/her felt experiences.

In the attempt to theorize Dalit literature, many questions can be raised. The starting questions are: Who theorizes Dalit Literature? Who studies Dalit Literature in India? What does 'studying Dalit

Literature' mean? Most importantly, perhaps: Why one should study Dalit Literature at all?

Several studies in the past decades have been devoted to the thematic concerns of Dalit writing, investigating alternative techniques, styles and strategies that Dalit writers employ– or should employ – in their writings. The issue of identifying sources of alternative narrative strategies is particularly debated, as it asks for religious alternatives, Dalit deities, rituals and myths that literature can draw upon. It also questions the limitations of Dalit writing in creating/recreating cultural history, as well as the ability of Dalit writers to create/recreate Dalit icons and to negotiate their relations to *śūdra*'s cultural heritage in the *purana*'s: accepting each other's cultural history and tradition can be a strategical tool to develop a common opposition to the hegemonic upper-caste (*savarna*) cultural history.

From the linguistic and stylistic point of view, one can observe that the language of much Hindi Dalit writing is Standard Hindi, which seems to hint at the fact that the intended audience is not the underprivileged Dalit population, but rather the non-Dalit audience. This raises the issue of the relation between Dalit writers and the mainstream literary field. After the phase when Dalit writing was dismissed as an incomplete discourse by an empowered coterie of critics, now some critics claim that Dalit writing has lost stamina and is repeating itself. Instead of discarding such criticisms as an expression of mainstream disdain, I think, they should be taken into account in order to address an important issues: the failure of the Indian intelligentsia in acknowledging Dalit aesthetics and the critical debate that is still ongoing poses the issue of the possibility of reverse influence; in other words, the question is 'can Dalit writing modify mainstream writing?'

A major point of discussion is about the possibility of creating a 'speakerly' text (Hurston: 181), where dialect and/or Dalit sociolect replace standard varieties of language in order to project the spoken voice. Lakshmi Holmstrom, the translator of Bama's *Karukku,* in her introduction says:

> Bama is doing something completely new in using the demotic and the colloquial routinely, as her medium for narration and even argument, not simply for reported speech. She uses a Dalit style of language which overturns the decorum and aesthetics of received upper-class, upper-caste Tamil. She breaks the rules of written grammar and spelling throughout, elides words and joins them differently, demanding new and different pattern of reading. (XIX)

Translation is another crucial issue, as on the one side it ensures visibility and greater accessibility to Dalit literature, but at the same time it poses the issue of recreating in the target language the peculiar rhythm, register, style and texture of the source language. Another relevant point is the middle class nature of much Dalit literature. No doubt, one major theme of Dalit poetry is rural oppression, but actually not only Dalit writers very often belong to an urban middle class, but also even their attitudes are of middle class, in so far they have now appropriated the general middle class values and life style.

Finally, another issue deserving further investigation is whether and how dependent Dalit castes with rich cultural resources have the capacity to further enrich Dalit writing. Moreover, the process of cultural translation risks to merge the Dalit discourse into the globalized discourse of Human Rights. Therefore, a very relevant question is how translation can contribute to validate, mainstream, canonize and/or 'academicize' alternative literary strategies in Dalit writing. This further complicates the picture, as the insertion of the Dalit issue in a cosmopolitan urban globalized reality poses new challenges, in so far the claim that cosmopolitanism is a solution to discrimination practices is a false claim. Non Western or non-Westernized aesthetics are often classified as "impossible to translate" and *de facto* excluded from international discussion.

From this series of interrogatives comes another – not less important – set of questions that try to locate Dalit literature in the larger domain of creative knowledge and juxtapose normative theory. Over the past few decades the Dalit movement – and together with it the Dalit literary movement – has become so

influential that almost every university in India has Dalit texts in its curriculum, even if the prescribed texts seem to be very limited in number if compared to the large number of published material. Notwithstanding the pioneering effort of many intellectuals and scholars, research has been limited and lack of translations from Indian languages to English is a great hindrance to the understanding of Dalit literature in a wider context. Dalit literary texts have not yet received the recognition they deserve on the international stage, allowing the wider audience to engage with these unique production. Resistance to study Dalit literatures on the same terms as other literatures can be found on one side among some philologists and scholars of pre-modern India, that denounce the 'presentism' of literary studies in South Asia and claim that it is necessary to protect past cultures that are less and less studied in the Subcontinent. It surfaces also in the field of contemporary literary studies, where Dalit literatures tend to be investigated for their social, political, economic value, but not as full-fledged literary products. The prevailing attempt is to understand literature as a locus of counter hegemonic space and Dalit literary movements are understood as counter cultural movements.

The questions related to this framework are related on one side to the need to study Dalit literature as a literary phenomenon, and on the other side to the juxtaposition of Dalit literature and normative theory. There is no doubt that Dalits should stop making guest appearances in somebody else's formulations, and they have started restoring to themselves the agency to reflect organically on their own experience. To this regard, the main issue is: Can literature substitute normative theory (Guru and Sarukkai 2012)? How is it possible to move from experience to theory, from the immediate to the abstract? In fact, it can be argued that metaphor is important but not sufficient to capture the realities, therefore creative novels or poems can provide or support theory building but creative poetry or novel can't become a theory. Is literature able to reflect Dalit experience? Can fiction based on living experience actually be seen as a legitimate mode of theorizing?

When we study the position of Dalit writings in the literary field, a crucial point of investigation is the politics of inclusion/

exclusion of literary texts in the academy. Academics, teachers, curriculum making bodies often deny the possibility of a critical approach to Dalit studies, limiting themselves to including some excerpt of Dalit writing into the syllabus for a sort of political correctness, but avoiding to engage actively with the texts and authors. More generally, one should ask whether Dalit literature gets public appreciation, and if yes, what are its bases? Is it accepted as a part of general literature or is it identified just as 'Dalit literature'? Is this appreciation received from Dalits alone or from non-Dalits too? As for the non-Dalits appreciation, is it genuine, patronizing or ghettoizing, etcetera?

As for the position of Dalit literature in the academic world, according to many Dalits there should be an independent curriculum. On the other hand, this might lead to ghettoization. Therefore, the issue is: Should a Dalit Studies curriculum be designed for an independent discipline or should it be made part of already existing curriculum in political science, history, sociology, philosophy, economics, literature, etcetera? The making of a frontier curriculum – marginalized people are themselves frontier people–needs to be a carefully balanced process for building theoretical and practical skills. This would include a combination of fieldwork, lectures, discussions, seminar presentations and library work; a regular interaction with the larger social context, which includes the community and institutions of civil society; a system for critical reflection in place of assessments and evaluations and a network of libraries. A frontier curriculum is concerned with method to undo hegemonic practices. It should not be an imposition. In order not to be hegemonic it should equip a learner with skills to become intellectually, economically and politically self-reliant. Dalit studies can contribute to making education politically significant by equipping a learner with skills to be free of fear, to enable her to decide on her own and to live a life of dignity.

Of course, I cannot even hope to discuss extensively all these issues, nor it is my aim. I will limit my focus to suggest possible areas of investigation in the confluence of Dalit critique and other forms of postmodern/poststructuralist critique, such as the feminist

or queer critique. In my opinion this is a much fertile and promising field of research.

2. Dalit Aesthetics in a Global Framework

In the previous section I have introduced the sustainability of Dalit alternative literary strategies as one of the most interesting points of investigation. Criticism on Dalit literature has unfortunately been rooted in identity politics or questions concerning mainstream aesthetics, based on a brahmanical, Sanskrit textual tradition. It has rarely been subjected to a rigorous, critical reading with a nuanced theoretical position. Nowadays it is clear that a sustained, serious, critical evaluation and theorization on Dalit literary production cannot be postponed. Alongside a vibrant multilingual Dalit literature, a new discourse dealing with 'Dalit aesthetics' has emerged.

Much has been written about the need for elaborating Dalit aesthetics since 1988, when Sharad Patil first pointed out that most Dalit intellectuals and writers relied on brahmanical poetics. He rewrote the theory of subaltern aesthetics and emphasized its importance for annihilation of caste, challenging Dalit writers to forge their own theoretical "weapon" (Pa.toni.l, 6). The pioneering works by Sharankumar Limbale (2007) and Omprakash Valmiki (Vālmīki 2001) began to elaborate the issue of defining a new aesthetics, trying to theorize Dalit writing as a distinct and different stream of Indian literature, that offers novel experiences, a new sensitivity, a distinct vocabulary, a different protagonist, and an alternate vision.

The nineties in India were a time of major transformation: agitation against the Mandal commission, the demolition of Babri Masjid, and economic liberalization and globalization were key factors that brought about it. But, as I already stated, these phenomena should be analyzed from a world perspective if we want to understand them properly. In the post-1990 literary discourse, the works of Dalit writers such as Tulsiram, Omprakash Valmiki, Jaiprakash Kardam, Surajpal Chauhan, Dharmaveer, Mohandas Naimishrai, Kanwal Bharti, Sushila Tankbhaure, Sheoraj Singh Bechain, and many others, have shaken the world of Hindi literature and ideology. Also in other Indian regional languages a new idea of literature was brought up. This does not mean that Dalit communities or societies did not produce any literature earlier, nor that nothing was being written about them before this period. But till then, literature and ideology were dominated by *savarna* writers, who could master the mainstream, while those whom the society describes as exploited, deprived and oppressed were at its margins.

What changed in the nineties was that the writers of the groups concerned came to occupy the central place in what was being written about their communities: women were at the center of women literature, Dalit writers at the center of Dalit literature, Adivasi writers at the center of Adivasi literature, NRI writers at the center of NRI literature, etc. The writings of women, Dalit, and Adivasi writers, centered on their own experiences and thoughts, expanded the world of literature. I think that inserting the phenomenon of the rise of Dalit literature in the wider world frame and connecting it to postmodern trends such as black literature, women literature, etc., in the context of identity politics, can allow a better understanding of it and can also suggest intersections in the theoretical approach to it.

According to Dalit critics, both Sanskrit poetics (*rasa*) and western-imported theories such as postmodern theories, subaltern studies and postcolonial studies cannot deal adequately with the peculiarities and particularities of Dalit writing. For example, with reference to the postcolonial theory, Dalit literatures complicate the binary world of colonizers and colonized by focusing on caste divisions within Indian society, exposing how a subjugated society can simultaneously be a subjugating society and how that subjugation can continue in a postcolonial independent India (Limbale : 17), in a complex picture where a caste that is an SC in one state may be an OBC in another and an ST in still another. Nevertheless, I want to introduce some ideas about aesthetics that are found in postcolonial/postmodern/poststructural –more specifically feminist– theories, showing how they can offer interesting prompts for inter sectional research and analysis. Of course, the first and most evident point of union between Dalit and feminist critique can be found in Dalit women's interrogation

of casteist feminism, as well of Dalit patriarchy (Subramaniam 2006; Brueck 2016). In this section, though, I would like to focus on some traits of feminist critical approach to aesthetics that intersect the Dalit approach and that might be useful in fostering new research on theorizing Dalit artistic production.

Dalit critics often claim that a radical role of Dalit writing is to modernize literature. For example, Hindi literature is portrayed as stagnant, out of touch with contemporary social realities (such as the social injustice of caste) as well as exclusion of marginalized communities. Dalit literature is charged with bringing literature back in touch with 'real' Indian society and modernizing its aesthetic principles on the basis of social equality, progress, and consciousness rising. The issue here is "who is representative of India society?" This questions *savarna* perspective as 'traditional' literary aesthetics are not timeless; nor are they universal standards and "new literary trends cannot be evaluated with traditional literary yardsticks" (Limbale 2004: 103-121).

This contraposition to established standards and supposedly universal standards characterizes also feminist theory. When we talk about feminist aesthetics we mean a set of perspectives that pursue certain interrogatives about philosophical theories and assumptions regarding art and aesthetic categories. Feminist critique emphasizes the mark of gender that is present in the basic conceptual frameworks of virtually all areas of knowledge, despite the seemingly neutral and inclusive theoretical language of disciplines such as philosophy (of which aesthetics is a part). It is necessary to investigate the cultural influences that exert power over subjectivity: the social formation of gender, sexuality, and identity is framed by factors such as race, national origin, social position, and historical situation, which both are reflected and perpetuated by art. The notion of intersectionality (Crenshaw1991) is a feminist sociological theory that centers around analyzing and discussing how oppression often intersects, creating unique and varied experiences of discrimination. It allows to draw on multiple critical theories in order to take into account the different aspects of identity such as notions of gender, sexuality, race, and power.

Feminist perspectives in aesthetics have developed in conjunction with the postmodern debates about culture and society, beginning with an assessment of the western philosophical legacy. Therefore, to appreciate the significance of many contemporary artistic and literary movements – including feminist and post-feminist work–it is necessary to understand the traditional values and theories that they address and challenge (Rooney 2006; Kowaleski-Wallace 2009; Madsen 2000). First of all, fine art has for long time been referred to art that is created chiefly for aesthetic enjoyment. It has included at its core painting, music, literature, and sculpture, excluding crafts, popular art, and entertainment. The concept of 'art,' considered in its aspect of 'fine art,' is a gendered concept that selects as its paradigms mostly works that have been made by male creators. Moreover, the concept of fine art is closely related to notions about the creative genius of the artist, who is often conceived as possessing a unique vision expressed in art works. Feminist standpoint theory has generated the notion of 'situatedness' that emphasizes knowledge as positioned (Haraway 1988). This has been imported into aesthetics in order to draw attention both to audience positions of appreciation and to the perspectives evoked in works of art (Eaton 2009).

This kind of critique echoes the positions of many Dalit critics towards the hegemonic *savarna* artistic literary culture. The (upper-caste) literary establishment in India has readily acknowledged the social value of Dalit writing, but many scholars and critics have questioned its literary merit. In their view, Dalit literature is an 'artless art' because it lacks aesthetic qualities. They claim that in literature there cannot be any sort of affirmative action, according to which Dalit writers can demand equal representation: they can enter the literary arena only if/when they exhibit equal talent. A further accusation to Dalit writers is that they are divisive and sectarian, as they use disrespectful and offensive language towards Hindu divinities and traditionally revered figures. Moreover, they present a distorted version of pre-independence and postcolonial Indian history. The Dalit response is that their work should not be assessed by supposedly 'universal' criteria, which in India carry the markers of caste and class. Dalit writing has a particular purpose

and audience, both of which have an important bearing on literary and aesthetic decisions. As for Hindu religious literature, this is precisely what has nourished the unequal caste system, therefore Dalit writers deliberately reject the use of religious symbols; they only use them to deconstruct them or infuse them with a new meaning and purpose (Limbale 2007: 34).

The combination of artistic work and activism can be seen as another point of contact for Dalit and feminist theory. Awareness of fine art's exclusionary criteria is evident in contemporary feminist art practice as well as in Dalit writing. The history of aesthetics illuminates the work of many feminist artists because they share a political sense of the historic social subordination of women and an awareness of how art practices have perpetuated that subordination. The more politically-minded artists – especially those who participated in the feminist movement of the 1970s – often expressly set as a goal of their art the deliverance of women from the oppressions of male-dominated culture. Felski (2006) advocates that the feminist art products be assessed addressing their social meanings and functions in relation to women producers and audiences. Also a large section of Dalit aesthetics is characterized by this association of pleasure, experience and agency. It is this association that fictionalizes autobiographies, politicizes poetry, and sets the theoretical basis of most of Dalit aesthetics. Together with the celebration of the resilient 'character' that hardship and oppression create, there is also a revolt against the involuntary nature of conditions of life. This is also the location of the split between the middle class Dalit aesthetic and the radical Dalit aesthetics, that is much of the contradiction within Dalit aesthetics.

Another possible point of confluence between Dalit and poststructuralist positions regarding the need for new aesthetic paradigms can be found in the challenge of norms about beauty and style. The mainstream literary field rejected Dalit writing as unliterary, because of its crude language and a supposed lack of literary style. To this Dalit critics replied that the language of traditional literary aesthetics is inadequate to deal with Dalit literature, which is based on authentic experience and freedom of expression. Therefore, their evaluation is based on life values, through an

aesthetics affiliated with notions of equality, freedom, justice, dignity, and meaningful expression, that cannot be concealed in the name of culture and religion (Vālmīki 2001: 50). Crude language that for a certain literary criticism is due to lack of style, is at the heart of the newly formed literary aesthetics of Dalit writers who express the direct experience of skinning dead animals, cleaning toilets, prostitution etc. To be true, harsh and crude words are sometimes used in order to transgress traditional boundaries of Hindi literary aesthetics, but at the same time Dalit writers often use a highly sanskritized linguistic register to prove their literary expertise; they have, thus, internalized many of the literary standards established by the mainstream Hindi literary field. There is, indeed, an unresolved tension between Dalit writers' effort to enter the mainstream literary canon and criticize many of its basic tenets by employing the notion of *svanubhuti* and *Dalit chetna*, promoting Dalit separate aesthetics, while at the same time struggling to maintain a separate identity for Dalit literary field through the same principles.

In a way very similar to what happens in Dalit literature, many feminist critique too focuses on the norms of appearance of the human body, and the 'violation' of 'standard' norms according to race, age, history, disability, and variant sexual morphologies. Such standards govern not only artistic depictions, but also the way that real people shape and reshape their own bodies to conform to reigning standards of attractiveness (Devereaux2013; Wegenstein 2012). Since the turn of the last millennium there has been a veritable explosion of interest in beauty among philosophers, artists, critics, and cultural theorists – feminists among them (Brand 2012: 4-6). Feminists and critical race theorists have been especially mindful of diversity and suspicious of general norms and the harms that they can provoke. Yet at the same time, feminists have recognized the pull of pleasure and the importance of beauty in life as well as art. All of these critical investigations can be ordered into a sustained critique of aesthetic values, in particular, of beauty, seeking to decenter notions of beauty with reference to race, indigenous people, and subaltern cultures (Brand 2012;Felski 2006). Nor is this a theoretical effort alone; artists are major participants in the reclamation of beauty that takes as many forms as humanity offers.

As it is evident from what above has been presented, feminist philosophy introduces some strands of thought that lead investigation away from the worlds of art towards the presence of aesthetic features in lived experience. Sensation and the body as well as domestic environments become the objects of inquiry in the area of scholarship loosely defined as 'everyday aesthetic' (Saito 2007; Mandoki 2007; Leddy 2012; Light and Smith 2004). This has widened the attention of philosophy so that it more readily recognizes the role of creativity in domestic life. For example, many cultural traditions of Asia do not feature a distinction between 'fine art' and 'craft.' Artistic traditions and craft practices are often pursued in the home where many women continue to work, and daily activities – such as cooking, eating, gardening, arranging furniture, etcetera –have aesthetic features whose importance is relatively new to theory, but widely familiar in experience. By focusing on the intimacy of sensation and the presentation of one's own body, feminist scholars deviate theorizing in aesthetics away from art worlds and to everyday practice, and theory has expanded accordingly, exploring the body in its varieties and meanings, including, for example, sexuality and maternity.

If beauty and the sublime were touchstones of western aesthetic value of the 18th and 19th centuries, one might wonder if the parallel value at the advent of the 21st might be the disgusting. Mortality, death, injury, decay, gross physical effects, art that deliberately disturbs and disgusts, extreme representations of violence, dismemberment, and monstrosities, all these have been brought right before the eyes of the audience. Kristeva's notion of abjection (Kristeva1982) affords a theoretical analysis of disgust and of the female body that has been employed by a number of feminist critical interpreters of art. Disgust as an aesthetic response is the inversion of the sorts of 'feminine ideals' that frame restrictive norms–elegance, diminutiveness, and propriety–for personal appearance. In my opinion this line of theorization can be linked to the Dalit's bold efforts towards theorization of abominable feelings such as humiliation, theorization of a phenomenon which pervades social life, yet is often absent in academic analysis (Guru 2009). In such ways traditional philosophical categories modified and adapted as feminist and Dalit perspectives continue to probe the dimensions of the aesthetic.

3. Out of the Closet: Reading Hindi Dalit Literature through Queer Critique

In the previous section I have discussed the theoretical possibility of intersection between feminist and Dalit critique. In order to give an example of the possible confluence of Dalit critique and other forms of postmodern/poststructuralist critique, in this section I am going to use the notion of 'closeting' drawn from feminist/queer studies theory, in order to investigate the phenomenon as represented in two short stories by Ajay Navaria: *Nayākāydā* and *Godnā*. The question of what can and cannot be spoken, what can and cannot be publicly exposed, is raised throughout the texts, and it is linked with the larger question of the dangers of public exposure of caste identity.

In the vocabulary of contemporary queer culture, those who hide their sexual identities are referred to as 'closeted' or said to be 'in the closet.' As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick showed in her seminal study on the *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), the closet narrative is based on the implicit binary opposition between being 'in' or being 'out'. The notion of the closet is inseparable from the concept of 'coming out', that is, revealing one's homosexuality. Apparently, those who are 'in' are stigmatized as living false, unhappy lives: they are haunted by the shame and secrecy associated with their sexual orientation. But coming 'out' of the closet, whether or not that person desires to do so, is not easy and may be even dangerous, exposing people to physical and psychological violence. Even if being 'out' of the closet might be preferable to many, social, economic, familial, and personal repercussions are such that often individuals, whether consciously or unconsciously, to remain 'in' the closet. To remain in the closet can be a strategy to remain in an apparently safe situation, offering a layer of protection against ridicule and bullying. But, typically, it causes a tremendous psychological stress to the individual.

The nature of the closet is complicated because the sense of concealment is not always complete or total, although the closeted

individual is presumably used to conceal a facet of one's identity. The act of 'coming out the closet' is not a one step process because there is always more than one closet in the life of the homosexual. 'Coming out' is a process that must constantly be dealt with when encountering a new person. One may consider themselves to be out, but there is always someone out there who is not aware of one's sexuality due to its presumably unmarked nature, and there are times when remaining in the closet seems to be a more feasible, and at times safer, option:

> Even at an individual level, there are remarkably few of even the most openly gay people who are not deliberately in the closet with someone personally or economically or institutionally important to them. Furthermore, the elasticity of heterosexist presumption means that, like Wendy in Peter Pan, people find new walls springing up around them even as they drowse: every encounter with a new class full of students, to say nothing of a new boss, social worker, loan officer, landlord, doctor, erects new closets whose fraught and characteristic laws of optics and physics exact from at least gay people new surveys, new calculations, new draughts and requisitions of secrecy or disclosure. Even an out gay person deals daily with interlocutors about whom she doesn't know whether they know or not; it is equally difficult to guess for any given interlocutor whether, if they did know, the knowledge would seem very important. (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1990: 67-68)

The closet is strictly tied to notions of knowledge, concealment, and truth. It has become a central metaphor not only in the narrative of queer history and social life, but also to describe anyone who is hiding part of their identity because of social pressure. The term 'coming out' has been applied to notions that deviate from the disclosure of one's sexual identity, such as to 'come out' as a democrat, or to 'come out' as an atheist. It can be said that the notion of coming out has been broadened to such a degree that it is

no longer central to notions or matters of sexuality, but Sedgwick argues that in true universalizing fashion, this broadening demonstrates how pivotal queer and homosexual matters are for Western thought, and how integral they are to everyday actions and beliefs (72).

In my opinion, this notion is a promising tool and technique for non-dualistic thought, and it can be very illuminating in the analysis of two Hindi short stories that deal with Dalit closeting. The first one, *Godnā,* was published in Nayā Jñānodaya (Navriya 2012) and has been translated into English by Laura Brueck as *Tattoo* (Navaria 2013: 105-122). The setting is a posh gym near Khan Market in New Delhi. The protagonist, an urban, successful 40+ Dalit bureaucrat, is shown in attempting his own notions of gentrification. He gets a good government position thanks to the reservation policy. He belongs to the lower middle class, and is quite conscious of the money he spends. He pretends that he does not care about class distinction, as he feels protected by the anonymity of the metropolis, but he knows that there is no transformed consciousness of caste. In fact, he is constantly obsessed by the need not to disclose his Dalit status. There is a constant ambivalence, as he closets his Dalitness but at the same time feels the urge to speak out, to stop concealing, and to reveal his identity. This ambiguity is everywhere, and also the city is magical but lethal, money liberates but can also curse, and innocuous objects such as a pair of old gym shoes are transformed into loaded signifiers of caste. In fact, a pair of old and tattered shoes becomes what could be described as an "objective correlative"[3] of the protagonist's Dalitness. He tries to disguise them, hoping that no one will notice them, but he cannot/does not really want to get rid of them. The attention of the reader is repeatedly drawn to the shoes, that become emotionally charged and evoke a desired emotional response in the reader: their presence serves as a sort of bridge that brings the reader to accept the larger, thematic meaning in the work.

Even more so, this is true of the words 'Namo Budhhaya, Jai Bhim' tattooed on his forearm: he tries to keep them out of everybody's sight so that no one questions his social and economic

position, or link the tattoo and his economic status. This character is not someone recalling the terrors of facing 21st century caste oppression, but he lives in a constant attempt at closeting himself, and this causes a great deal of stress to him.

What is even more interesting, is that he applies to the people he meets, the very stereotypes that disturb him. He observes the color of people's complexion, and he somehow assumes that fair skin is synonymous with high caste, even if he knows that this is not the case. When he enters the gym, a young trainer sitting in front of a brand laptop invites him to sign up. This is a man in his twenties, fair skinned and with a long sharp nose that he reads as a "mark of his lineage". He wears brand sportswear and exhibits wealth and self-assurance. When they shake hands, even if the young man is not paying attention, the protagonist feels awkward and turn his "arm in such a manner as to hold it downward".

The closeting strategy operates also at the level of the name: the protagonist's full name is Subhash Kumar Paswan, but speaking it out would mean for him to come out with his Dalit identity, as Pāsvān is the name of a community of Dalit Hindus. In order to be recognized as a citizen and part of the nation, many mobile, middle-class Dalits, sever their links with their kinfolk, try to hide their identities by changing their surnames, accept the rituals and practices of those who stigmatize them and attempt to vanish into a common middle-class existence (Parmar 2015). In an effort not to be on the receiving end of a discriminatory environment, sometimes they adopt surnames with upper caste sounds and often they even mimic the 'pure' and privileged, becoming vegetarian or participating in aggressive Hindutva-type Indianness. This strategy, though, creates a schizophrenic individual.

The protagonist of *Godnā*, who is over-suspicious about any question because of his closeting, is alarmed when the trainer/ receptionist asks him about his employment, but is reassured when he finds out that he just wants to offer him a concession reserved to government employees. Nevertheless, he immediately has to face another threat, when his name and designation are inquired.

> "Your name, sir?" he asked, his pen poised over the column on the form.
>
> "Subhash Kumar…" I wanted to add Paswan, but desisted after a moment's thought.
>
> "Is that it, sir? Any surname?" Anger suddenly coloured my voice. This was a completely foolish, unjustified reaction. I looked again at my shoes, I had bought them seven years ago. They were quite cheap. I got them for Rs.450 at a Columbus company sale.
>
> "No, sir, it's not necessary" He smiled "Your designation, sir?"
>
> "Under Secretary" I took the ID card with the Government of India seal from my pocket and placed it on the table with pride. He didn't ask me anything else after this. He filled out all the form's columns with information from the card. (Navaria 2013: 113)

It follows a small talk where the protagonist muses about the necessity to have reservation policies for Dalits, as even with such a provision it is very difficult for them to get to higher positions. Hearing the reply to his question about the young man's name, the protagonist is even more worried, as "Rahul Upadhyay" sounds as a Brahmin name. On top of it, Rahul lives in a posh area and seems to act as a perfect counterpart to the protagonist, even sporting a golden bracelet on his wrist, while Subhash is constantly trying to hide his tattooed forearm.

Tattoo works on both aesthetic and political levels perfectly, as when the readers reach the conclusion of the short story they find out that Rahul is a Dalit, who tries to get rid of any marginalized identity marker and confirms to middle class upper caste aesthetic norms and exclusionary values. One day, Subhash answers the phone with the greeting "Jai Bhim", the phrase used by Indian people who converted to Buddhism with or by inspiration of Bhimrao Ambedkar. Rahul, who overhears him, approaches him discreetly,

and whispers to him "Sir, you're a Jai-Bhim-wala too?". Rahul's closeting strategy actually appears even more radical than the protagonist's, as his grandfather had changed his father's surname from Valmiki into Upadhyay — used in the Buddhist connotation of 'spiritual teacher' (pāli: *upajjhaya*). Observing Rahul's "gleaming white shoes" and comparing them to his "own dyed ones", Subhash thinks to himself "This one has changed his shoes." And he concludes that "old and discolored shoes can always be changed, but this tattoo?" (Navaria 2013: 121-122). The tattoo, a mark that cannot be changed, forces Subhash to stop the hiding of habits, names, identity, ways of life, that serve as a tool to be merged into the mainstream upper-caste middle class fold. He finally comes out, though with much ambivalence. Rahul's apparent successful closeting shows him in an equally complex position, as a person that can disclose his real identity only when he recognizes people who are equal.

The short story, therefore, concludes reinforcing the ambiguity and ambivalence linked to the public exposure of caste identity. Modernity, urbanization, and state led affirmative action policies have led to the formation of a Dalit middle class, increasingly dissociated from caste based professions. However, caste has shown tremendous capacity to rework its appearance, and the contradiction between caste and class has not been resolved: despite many Dalit person's ability to penetrate the middle class economic arena, their social status is not elevated and their merging with the upper caste counterparts are often resisted. Caste based oppression can be effectively challenged only when an individual can exercise one's choice without having to denounce or embrace one's caste identity to do so.

The second short story, *Nayā Kāydā* is published in the collection *Yassar* (Nāvariyā 2012b: 78-86); *New Custom* is an English translation by Laura Brueck (Navaria 2013: 65-79). Here I will briefly explore the roles that the closet metaphor and the act of coming out play the story. Hiding one's identity is not a foolproof guarantee, as the reaction may be even more evident when the identity is revealed. This is a narrative that appears in much autobiographical and fictional Dalit writing.

In *Nayā Kāydā* a case of mistaken identity proves to be an unnecessarily humiliating experience for a Dalit college professor who has come to a village for a wedding. The caste demons are more subtle but no less effective in this well-crafted story, whose protagonist is an educated man that has achieved success, yet he is not allowed to forget that he is an 'untouchable'. In the introductory sequence the protagonist sports a cultivated disdain for regressive village customs. His philosophy is that in the 'new order' money changes everything, and he owes his self-confidence to his being young, educated and salaried, even if he hails from a poor Dalit family. He is even shown in a flashback as aggressively contrasting his father who warned him that the caste prejudice is still firmly rooted in society, and even money cannot change the system.

In this short story, in the course of a chat, a teacup becomes an "*objective correlative,"* denoting oppression, while other descriptive details echo inequality, such as the runt and the pick of a litter of puppies wrestle in the dust, or a television broadcasting the American interrogation of Saddam Hussein. At the beginning of the story, the protagonist's 'coming out' is apparently complete, but soon it becomes clear that this is valid only in the urban setting. The situation is complicated when he reaches a village, and he loses credibility when he finds himself reluctantly but unmistakably proud on being misinterpreted as a *Thakur*. In fact, when he stops at a tea vendor shop, the shopkeeper mistakes the Dalit visitor from the city for a landowner, and serves his customer graciously. He addresses him respectfully as "darbār," stating that "seeing your coat and pants, and your commanding presence, anyone would know." While the *chāīvālā* is very talkative, the protagonist is reluctant and his replies are concise and standoffish. He does not make clear that he is not what the villager thinks, thus closeting himself, although with much ambivalence.

Things turn nasty when the protagonist's caste is disclosed and he refuses to wash by himself the glass where he drank his tea. In a rapid, efficient climax that matches the quickness with which a crowd gathers on the scene, Navaria points to entrenched discrimination. The Dalit protagonist who has finally 'come out'

challenges the crowd. He buys the glass, smashes it and goes away. While hinting at the power of money and education to disrupt it, the closing sadly records the unflinching attitude of *savarna* society: the final smile of the *chāīvālā* and the one depicted on the banknote – Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation – are, in fact, "not unlike."

This short story is a well-crafted representation of the way 'caste' is 'performed' or 'closeted'. Cast practice expresses itself via its performance. The closeted individual has to play out in inverted relation between its caste position, ethnicity, etc. Part of what caste one is, does not appear fully, as one has to keep the idea of 'caste' closeted and it can never be fully expressed. When it is fully revealed, it fails. In a way, caste – as ethnicity and class –is constituted by the possibilities that it is constantly excluding.

Conclusion

In the previous section I have presented an example of analysis that intersects Dalit literature and queer critique, reading two Hindi short stories by a renowned Dalit writer Ajay Navaria. I think this shows the potential of approaching Dalit writing from a world perspective, inserting it in the global literary production.

Dalit agencies in aesthetics account for the historical absence of Dalits from the canons of creative disciplines; recover and revalue the work of Dalit artists; critique theoretical structures that devalue the Dalit or exclude Dalit producers; and propose alternative aesthetics that centralize Dalit subjectivity or highlight the role of Dalits in art, literature and other expressive media. The same can be said about feminist or queer interventions in the aesthetic field.

The artistic products of all these theoretical approaches subvert older models of fine art, creating movements that perplex, astound, offend, and exasperate, reversing virtually all the aesthetic values of earlier times. They have challenged the ideas that art's main value is aesthetic, that it is for contemplation rather than use, that it is ideally the vision of a single creator, that it should be interpreted as an object of autonomous value. A wider attention to issues of diverse identity characterizes their theory in general and their aesthetics in particular. The theorists, critics, and artists active in Dalit studies as well as in feminist and queer studies, have employed different – even divergent –philosophies in their own investigation; they have elaborated and refined them, and, what is even more important, have formulated ideas that are independent of any particular theoretical allegiances.

Of course, this does not mean that any difference is erased. On the contrary, I think that all experiences of embodiment can be manifested in distinctive expressive styles that accommodate difference without essentializing. Practice, theory, and experience are intertwined, and dialogue is the process for coming-to-know. I really hope that voices in Dalit, feminist and queer theory get together to create a truly interdisciplinary dialogue that will define the terms of the debates between and within different theoretical frameworks for future research.

Notes

1. The SCs are the castes identified by the President of India under Article 341. The denomination was first used by the British in the Govt. of India Act 1935, prior to this were included among the 'depressed classes'– a category used for the first time at the beginning of the 20th century (Gupta, 1985, 7-35).
2. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines 'theorize' as " to think of or suggest ideas about what is possibly true or real: to form or suggest a theory about something". In the Italian dictionary we find also another defnition: "to systematize a subject according to general principles."
3. "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked" (Eliot 1932: 145).
4. This is a national symbol of ongoing caste oppression, as in many areas Dalits are not served drinks in glass tumblers

or cups, but in earthen pots; elsewhere there is a two-glass system and Dalits are forced to wash their own cups and pay without even touching the cashier.

* This article, dealing with Indian Dalit writing, requires a preliminary note on the positioning of its author. Being a non-Dalit, I remain wary of the extent to which I am able to claim authority and feel entitled to partake in, and write about, Dalit issues. But I got an invitation from the organizing committee to participate to the International Conference on "Emerging New Identities in Dalit and Tribal Literature and Society", held at Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, from 2 to 4 September 2016, with the request to talk about "Theorizing Dalit literature". Therefore I tried to think about what contribution I could give to the discussion as an Italian scholar in Hindi language and literature whose research is oriented to feminist and queer studies.

Works Cited

Abraham, Joshil K., and Judith Misrahi-Barak, eds. *Dalit Literatures in India*. New Delhi: Rutledge, 2016.

Anon. "A question about names and caste: how many % of Dalit names are recognizable as Dalits by name alone?" <https://www.reddif.com/r/india/comments/3a2tfd/rindia_a_question_about_names_and_caste_how_many/ (ultimo accesso: 22/05/2016).>

—. "For Dalits in State, it's all in the surname"<http://www.friends4education.org/scholarship/News/disc/reg/DalitsNameChange.htm (ultimo accesso: 22/05/2016)>

Ashley, Tellis. "Philosophising the movement: 'Venomous Touch' by Ravikumar & 'Writing Indian History' by Achuthan M. Kandyil.

<http://old.himalmag.com/component/content/article/122-philosophising-the-movement-venomous-touch-by-ravikumar-a-writing-indian-history-by-achuthan-m-kandyil.html(ultimo access on: 22/05/2016).>

Bama. *Karukku*. Trans. Lakshmi Holmström. Ed. Mini Krishnan. New Delhi : Macmillan India, 2000.

Bechain, Śyorāj Singh and Devendra Chaube. *Cintan kī Paramparā aur Dalit Sāhitya*. Hazārībāg, Bihār : Navalekhan Prakāśan, 2000.

Bhāratī, Kanval. *Dalit Sāhitya aur Vimarś ke Alochak*. Naī Dillī: Swarāj Prakāśan, 2009.

Biswas, Manohar Mouli. "Theory of Dalit Literature." *Contemporary Voice of Dalit* 7 (2014): 235-246.

Brand, Peg Zeglin. *Beauty Unlimited*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012.

Brueck, Laura. *Writing Resistance: The Rhetorical Imagination of Hindi Dalit Literature*. New York : Columbia Univ. Press, 2014.

—. "Questions of Representation in Dalit Critical Discourse: Premchand and Dalit Feminism." *Dalit Studies*. Ed. Ramnarayan S. Rawat, K. Satyanarayana, 180-201. Durham, N.C : Duke University Press, 2016.

Chaube, Devendra. Ed. *Sāhitya kā Nayā Saundaryaśāstra*. Dillī: Kitābghar Prakāśan, 2006.

——. *Ādhunik Sāhitya me Dalit Vimarś*. Dillī: Oriyanm BlaikSwān, 2009.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43.6 (1991): 1241-1299.

Devereaux, Mary. "Feminist Aesthetics." In *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*. Ed. by Jerrold Levinson, 647–666. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

—. "Is Medical Aesthetics Really Medical?" *Beauty Unlimited*

by Peg Zeglin Brand (ed), Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 175–91, 2013.

Duran, Jane. *Woman, Literature and Philosophy*. Hampshire UK: Ashgate, 2007.

Eaton, Anne. "Feminist Standpoint Aesthetics." *A Companion to Aesthetics*. Ed. S. Davies et al. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Eliot, T. S. *Selected Essays 1917-1932*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1932.

Felski, Rita, ed. 2006. *The Feminine and the Beautiful*, Special issue of *Feminist Theory*, 7:2.

Gajarawala, Toral Jatin. *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste*. New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2013.

Gowthaman, Raj. "Contemporary Dalit Literature in Tamil: A Comment." *Indian Literature,* 37.3 (161) (May – June), 1994: 184-185.

Guru, Gopal, ed. *Humiliation : Claims and Context*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Guru, Gopal and Sundar Sarukkai. *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory*. OUP: Delhi, 2012.

Haraway, Donna. "Situated Knowledges. The Science Question in Feminism and The Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14 (3): 575-599, 1988.

Hunt, Sarah Beth. *Hindi Dalit Literature and the Politics of Representation*. London: Rutledge, 2014.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1990.

Jodhka, S. "Engaging with Caste: Academic Discourses, Identity Politics and State Policy." IIDS and UNICEF Working Paper Series, 2(2), 2010.

Kosofsky Sedgwick, Eve. *Epistemology of the Closet*. Berkeley : University of California Press, 1990.

Kowaleski-Wallace, Elizabeth. *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Rutledge, 2009.

Krishnaswamy, Revathi. "Toward World Literary Knowledges: Theory in the Age of Globalization." *World Literature in Theory*. Ed. David Damrosch, 134-158. New York, NY : Wiley, 2014.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York : Columbia U P, 1982.

Kumar, Dr. P. Kesava. "(Un) Making Literature: Dalit Literary Imagination", 2016. <http://untouchablespring.blogspot.it/2012/11/un-making-literature-Dalit-literary.html (last accessed: 22/08/2016).>

Leddy, Thomas. *The Extraordinary in the Ordinary: The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*, New York: Broadview, 2012.

Light, Andrew and Jonathan Smith, Eds. *The Aesthetics of Everyday Life*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

Limbale, Sharankumar. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*.Trans. and Ed. Alok Mukherjee. Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 2007.

Madsen, Deborah L. *Feminist Theory and Literary Practice*. London : Pluto Press, 2000.

Mandoki, Katya. *Everyday Aesthetics*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007.

Meagher, Michelle. "Telling Stories about Feminist Art." *Feminist Theory,* 12: 297–316. 2011.

Navaria, Ajay. *Unclaimed Terrain*.Trans. Laura Brueck. New Delhi: Navayana, 2013.

— "Godnā." *Nayā Jñānoday*. August: 46-51. 2012.

Nāvariyā, Ajay. *Yassar*. Naī Dillī: Sāmayik Prakāśan. 2012.

Parmar, Rajnikant. "Transacting Caste in Neoliberal Cities: A Study of Dalits Changing Family Names in Urban Gujarat, India", (Report from SASNET Conference on the Structural Transformation of South Asia, Lund University, May 2015. <http://sasnet.lu.se.asiaportal.info/sites/default/files/rajnikant_parmar_full_article.pdf (last accessed 20/07/2016). 2015.>

Pātòil, Sìarad. *A Brahmanòi SahityanÞ ke Saundaryasìastra*. Punòe : Sugava Prakasìan, 1988.

Rooney, Ellen, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Saito, Yuriko. *Everyday Aesthetics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Savyasaachi. "Dalit Studies: Exploring Criteria for a New Discipline." *Economic and Political Weekly,* 39 (17): 1658-1660. 2004.

Subramaniam, Mangala. *The Power of Women's Organizing: Gender, Caste, and Class in India*. Lanham, MD : Lexington Books, 2006.

Turner, Elen. "Reconciling Feminist and Anti-Caste Analyses in Studies of Indian Dalit-Bahujan Women." *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific.* 34, 3: 1-12¸ 2014.

Vālmīki, Omprakāś. *Joothan*. Naī Dillī: Rādhākrishna, 2003.

—. *Dalit Sāhitya kā Saundaryaśāstra*. Dillī: Rādhākrishna, 2001.

Wegenstein, Bernadette. *The Cosmetic Gaze: Body Modification and the Construction of Beauty*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012.

Can Dalits Get Rid of Caste Hatred?

Santosh Kumar Sonker

"Caste System is a negative thing," observes Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in his essay "Annihilation of Caste" (265). For him "Caste does not result in economic efficiency. Caste cannot and has not improved the race" (267) but "It has completely disorganized and demoralized the Hindus" (267). He further states:

> Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. A Hindu's public is his caste. His responsibility is only to his caste. His loyalty is restricted only to his caste. Virtue has become caste-ridden and morality has become caste-bound. There is no sympathy to the deserving. There is no appreciation of the meritorious. There is no charity to the needy. Suffering as such calls for no response. There is charity but it begins with the caste and ends with the caste. There is sympathy but not for men of other caste. . . . There is appreciation of virtue but only when the man is a fellow caste-man. (Ambedkar 275)

Bijjala in Girish Karnad's *Tale Danda* has opined:

> One's caste is like the skin on one's body. You can peel it off top to toe, but when the new skin forms, there you are again: a barber—a shepherd—a scavenger! (21)

"Jyotiba Phule saw the caste system as the essence of Hinduism and sought to unmask the culture of oppression that it sustained, the brutal slavery that it sanctified," states Neeladri

Bhattacharya in "Editorial Preface" to *Dalit Visions* by Gail Omvedt (ix-x).

Caste system, developed by Manu who is regarded as the creator of law for Hindu society, is so deeply rooted in Indian society that human mind has accepted it as truth. Hierarchy ingrained in it has polluted the mind of some with caste pride and has developed in them a sense of supremacy. For years, some social reformers have been trying to challenge the caste hierarchal structure but sucess seems to be insignifcant. Even the age of globalization and technology has failed to establish social harmony in the society and to create an open society where each and every one can live with equal social status. When the world is celebrating post-modernity, India is still stuck to the social taboos like caste and creed. Caste hierarchy based social structure created years ago could not be restructured. Indian society still is regulated as per social laws given by *Manusmriti* which robes Dalits of all the religious, social, political and economical rights forcing them to live life worse than animals. Their imposed polluted identity drags them towards margins, poverty, disrespect, and untouchability. Against such pitiable conditions social reformers such as Phule, Dr. Ambedkar and Periyar E V Ramasamy started a movement which has brought some relief and raised consciousness against caste hegemony. As a result of movements lead by Dalit leaders, some writers have penned down their woes and sorrows in the form of literature. But Kancha Ilaiah, modern thinker, has expresses his dissent about the depiction of pain and suffering to fight against the hierarchal social structure. In an interview with Yogindar Sikand he states:

> To be honest I am seriously opposed to the writings of what is called the 'history of sorrow'—simply narrating all the oppression and sufferings that the Dalit-Bahujans have had to suffer under Brahmanism, although that, too, cannot be ignored. . . . If you want to defeat the enemy, you cannot remain contended with merely critiquing him, because even in that case he is the one who sets the term of discourse and you are playing the game according to the rules that he devises, so naturally it is he not you who wins in the end. Thus, rather than dwell simply on our historical oppression or the dangers of Hindu fascism, keep the focus on the process of Dalitisation, and thereby set the term of discourse and debate yourself. (338-339)

At present, untouchability has decreased to some extent due to legal provisions, but caste discrimination still persists. Now Dalits are less treated as untouchables, but they are discriminated and are deprived of opportunities even in public sectors. The game is psychological and subtle.

When British government made India its colony, there were two problems to rule over Indians: language and acceptability. They planned to increase number of English speaking people and to make themselves acceptable. To get the end, in the beginning of 19th century when caste hierarchy was very stringent and low-caste people were the receiving end of caste based atrocity, they opened the missionaries to educate Indians in their own language and tried to prove that they are their well wishers. Through the missionaries they developed the belief that they are the only good; they treat everyone equally. In the beginning they targeted elite class of the Indian society believing that they were influential groups and if they were accepted by the upper castes, others would automatically accept their servility. But their aim of increasing number of converted could not be fulfilled; elite class accepted their religion but for the sake of benefits only; it was a choice for them not the compulsion. With the passage of time they came to understand that their target group should be the depressed class of the society. As they started missionaries in Dalit and Tribal populated areas, they got better response. Both Dalits and Tribals had their own reason to accept life of missionary by heart and mind. Dalits, who were subjected to caste tyranny and were living menial life, found it as a way to live life of a human being in true sense. For Tribals who were cut off from the society, education and religion both were new things. A large number of Dalits joined the missionaries to escape feudalism, and also Tribals to get education, thus, people of both groups became Christians. But the question is—were they given what were they promised and could they get rid of the caste

hatred of the high caste? For the answer of these question the present paper analyses two texts–Bama's *Karukku*, and Rev Fr William Premdas Chaudhary's *An Unwanted Priest*.

Bama observes: "In this [Indian] society, if you are born into a low caste, you are forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until your death. Even after death, caste-difference does not disappear" (*Karukku* 26). She gets her education in Christian school which puts more emphasis on catechism classes where much focus is laid on the knowledge of Christianity as religion. To attend the class attentively is very compulsory failing which is rewarded with severe beating. From the very beginning the Sister terrifies her telling that if they commit sins, the Devil will chart it out in a note book; if the notebook is full with sins, he will peel the skin off their backs and write the sins there. Not only this, she is warned neither to touch the host by sinful hands nor to bite and chew the host at Communion by teeth because Jesus is inside that host. Instead she is ordered to swallow it gently with her tongue. Another hypocrisy told to her is that the Spiritus Sanctus will descend upon her when the Bishop would slap her cheek during the confirmation service. Living under psychological fear, she attains a matchless Christian identity.

From the very beginning of her life, she faces humiliation because of her being Paraya from Cheri Street. The so-called well-behaved and polished tiny Naikar children just born other day would call a Cheri old woman working in the field by her name and orders her while the old woman would call the little boy Ayya, Master and run about at his commands just because she belongs to the Naikar caste. Is it a code of conduct in civilized India? She observes: "Because we are born into the Paraya jati, we are never given any honour or dignity or respect. We are stripped of all that" (*K* 18). Bama has lived a life of utter poverty in her childhood as well as student life. Passing through hard times, she finishes her 12th Standard and against her father's will, she continues her higher studies with the help of a nun who pawns her ear rings for her admission in graduation where she realizes the power of money and feels humiliation occasionally. She describes such one moving moment:

> In my fourth year, the time neared for College Day. College Day was always celebrated on a grand scale. All the final year students were invited to party, which they attended dress in silk saris and decked out in their best things. As for me, I didn't have a single decent sari . . . . And on the particular day, I couldn't take myself away elsewhere, nor would they allowed me. So at last, I made up my mind and went and licked myself up in the bathroom. I wanted to weep and weep when I considered my plight. And I realized how deeply shamed one can be for the lack of a few rupees in one's hand. (*K* 75-76)

After finishing her B. Ed. she starts to work and life becomes very comfortable; she purchases what pleases her. It is what Savitri Bai Phule aimed and Baba Saheb sensitized. It is because of the awareness that "if we study and make progress, we can throw away. . . . indignities. If you are always ahead in your lessons, people will come to you of their own accord. . . . Work hard and learn", she sheds off her inherited identity wrapped up in poverty and humiliation, and gains a new identity (*K* 18). From the marginal space, she moves to the main space.

One who suffers penury knows the pain of it and coming out of it, he tries to help those who are prey to it and so does Bama. Motivated with the idea that ". . . if only the children on my street acquired a little education and found jobs, . . . they too could live reasonably well", she becomes a nun and enters a convent to work hard for the children, who struggle as she had struggled, in spite of the suggestion given by the village people about the presence of caste-differences in the convent itself (*K* 77). This is what Baba Saheb wanted: be educated and united. For the betterment of the children belonging to her community, she crosses over religious and cultural space but is shocked to observe the situation:

> . . . I understood, after I entered the order, that the convent I entered didn't even care to glance at poor children, and only wished to serve the children of the wealthy. In that convent, they really do treat the people who suffer from

the poverty in one way, and those who have money in their pockets in a totally different way. (*K* 77)

One day she is humiliated on the issue of date of birth written on the birth certificate by the Sister who states that "You Tamil people want to get admission into schools under false pretences, changing the dates on your birth certificates" (*K* 24). At that moments she fails to understand the meaning of being addressed as Tamil but gradually she comes to know that "Tamil people were looked upon as lower castes" (*K* 24). A few days before the completion of her training period to be full-fledged nun, she is told by the Sister in a class that "in certain orders they would not accept Harijan women as prospective nuns and that there was a separate order for them somewhere" (*K* 25) which comes to her as a thunderstruck. Before becoming nuns, they take oath to live in poverty but "that is just a sham"; "the convent does not know the meaning of poverty" (*K* 77). Contrary to the food served to the nuns coming from poor low caste family, they enjoy delicious food such as meat, fish or eggs etc and live luxurious life with bedstead, fan, table, chair and drinking water. Convent schools, she describes, are "full of children from wealthy families" and nuns match their "attitude and behavior to the power and prestige of those families" (*K* 78). Such experiences verify her suspicion that Convents are also not free from caste divisions. As far as jobs for the low castes in the schools are concerned, they are employed in the work like sweeping the premises, swabbing and washing the classrooms, and cleaning out the lavatories. In convent also she finds that low-caste people are not considered even as "human beings". It brings to her irritation and disappointment: "The more I watch this, the more frustrated I felt. My mind was disturbed. My conscience was battered and bruised" (*K* 78). She decides to move back to her original space. She travels from one space to the other and accepts one after another identities but prevailing mind-set in Christianity identical with "Mental Utopia" of Hinduism let not her enjoy adopted Christian identity and ultimately she is forced to renounce it and land back to the Dalit identity utterly weary, dispirited and orphaned. She finds herself nowhere. She reveals:

> Convent life had changed me fundamentally. I who had once been bold had become an extremely timid person, fearful of everything, ready to burst into tears, and without any strength. I felt orphaned, as if I had no family. I felt too shy to communicate with other people in a normal way. Sometimes I even thought to myself that it would be better to be dead and gone rather than carry on living like this. (*K* 78)

The new domain robs her of everything and leaves her to move like a mongrel wandering without a permanent job, a regular means to get clothes, food and a safe residence. She becomes a part of the same destitution not only experienced but also lived by all Dalits who, toiling painfully through fierce heat and beating rain, pass lives in huts with nothing but gruel and water and form the group of the poorest of the poor. Enjoying and reaping the labour of Dalits, the upper caste resists their progress and perpetuates atrocities. Knowing that those who dare to go against them will have to dance at their will as no one can fight against hungry, they control and crush Dalits. This mentality is practiced worse in the Churches where–

> . . . Dalits are the most in number alone. In everything else, they are the least. It is only upper-caste Christians who enjoy the benefits and comforts of the Church. Even amongst the priests and nuns, it is upper-castes who hold all the high positions, show off their authority, and throw their weight about. And if Dalits become priests and nuns, they are pushed aside and marginalized first of all, before the rest go about their business. It is because of this– even though Dalits like me might wish to take up the path of renun ciation, wefind there is no place for us there.(*K* 80)

The oppressed are not taught about the God who is just, righteous, against injustice, falsehood and inequality, rather they are taught in empty and meaningless ways about humility, obedience,

patience, and gentleness just to make them slave for always.

An Unwanted Priest is an autobiography of Rev. Fr. William Premdas Chaudhary, a converted Dalit Christian. It brings to light the conversion of Dalit Hindus into Christians and also unveils the discrimination and corruption on the basis of caste and locality involved in the diocese. Born in Kanhei, a village situated near the city of Gurgaon thirty five Kms. away from Delhi, capital of India. In 1960 the village was in Punjab which was divided in 1966 and Haryana became separate state. Having two castes in the village, the lower and the upper, it was famous as criminal village.

Hailing from a well family, the writer was very conscious and exceptional from his childhood. When at the age of 8 years, he went to Primary School he found "upper caste and lower caste students were sitting separately in the class" (*An Unwanted Priest* 17). Restoring his courage, he asked the headmaster why there was a division in the class room. Having been told that it was not his arrangement, the writer went and sat with upper caste students; one among them seriously objected it which infuriated the writer making him to beat the student. For it, he was punished by the headmaster. In the third standard, he noticed one student weeping who told that he was crying just because the Headmaster called him a Dalit. He collected the student and sat on strike which was called off after the Headmaster said sorry. After completion of his primary school, he took admission in Gurgaon where he found a teacher who hated Dalit students and did not enter them into his section. "He used to take only upper class students" (*AUP* 19). As the writer was very excellent in games and living style, the teacher misunderstood him as a non-Dalit student and asked him to sit in his class but he refused saying that he was also a Dalit. It infers his boldness in childhood which possibly lacks in Dalit students. If he wanted, he could sit hiding his identity but he asserted it. What turned the teacher's mind, his God knew, he insisted the writer to attend his class arguing that he was "different from the other Dalit students" (*AUP* 19).

Influenced with Akbar's policy of having religious scholars at Court even from the European countries, the Mughals also gave

space to the Jesuits who formed mission station at Agra. "They were catering to the spiritual needs of those Christians who had come in search of jobs and meanwhile they were converting the Local and Hindu Dalits into Christianity" (*AUP* 09). After Jesuits, Italian Capuchins came to North India who played an important role in the religious conversion by spreading Christ's message and love through the entire North India. Before the establishment of the first Archdiocese in Agra in 1865 and the first Church, St. Mary's Church, Capuchins missionaries were visiting Delhi to convert Hindu Dalits into Christianity though slowly. The process of conversion left not even the writer's village untouched. Though the Sisters of Mother Teresa used to visit the village on some Sundays of every month to teach catechism and distribute medicines but with the arrival of the Prabhu Dasi, Sisters of Ajmer, the condition of entire village changed with active participation of the villagers in the Church including women who had no activity in church before. The classes on catechism run by them were compulsory for every child. In spite of the resistance from the family members and villagers, he accepted Christianity because of Late Rev Fr. I. dos Santosh, who being influenced with his acting skill, invited him for camps in Delhi. When the news of his decision to become a priest spread in the village, they waged the opposition against him which he describes:

> My great uncle . . . instigated the villagers against me . . . to stop me. The news spread like a fire in the village. Staunched Dalit Hindus said that a member of Hindu family cannot remain unmarried according to Hindu tradition. My uncle called panchayat many times and there was social pressure on me. I was harassed . . . . My piece of mind was lost . . . . I was socially boycotted by the villagers . . . . (*AUP* 23-24)

He had to arrange a boy for the marriage of a girl with whom his family members planned to marry him. The revelation to become the priest brought a shock to the girl from Rajsthan working with Sisters of Prabhu Dasi in his village, because she silently fostered a love for him; he had to convince her also. After keeping aside all

the hurdles, while he started to leave the village, he faced another emotional problem:

> . . . they [*Panchayat*] put the pagari (turban) in front of me so that I should not walk over it and not to go beyond it as it was the custom of Hinduism. No one can walk over the pagri (turban) in the village. For a moment I thought . . . and immediately I . . . With out of respect took the pagri and kept aside and walked out. (*AUP* 26)

The conversion aimed at the changing life and future of the Dalit youths. After entering the Minor Seminary at Lucknow, UP, in 1980, he realized a different life from village and learnt a lot through activities. First he faced problem of language but gradually he overpowered it by working hard and became at home in English conversation with South Indian brothers. During his life at ST Charle's Seminar, Nagpur from 1983 to 1991 he noticed lot of politics and problems in the Seminary as prevalent in the Society. He narrates:

> Brothers were living in miserable condition and not treated with dignity. No one dared to question the authority. Brothers were unnecessarily forced to leave the seminary and some brothers were not promoted for the ordination even after completing the courses for seven or more years. (*AUP* 31)

As soon as he was elected as General Perfect, he reminded the Rector and other administration of their failure in following rules and regulations and their involvement in harassing brothers, calling them dog, punishing illogically and taking revenge in exams; not only this but also he wrote letters to the Rector to dismiss the Vice-Rector as he was an unwanted professor for the brothers because of his behavior. It landed him in crisis at the time of promotion for ordination to be the priest. In two meetings out of three held for ordination, his result was not declared. As per the rule, before the third meeting, the Rector had to discuss with the brother, so he was called to the Rector office at 11 pm where a hot talk held between Rector and him. In the third meeting, the matter

could not be decided but the Rector had to promote him because most of the professors except him and Vice-Rector silently voted in favour of him. His struggle for justice to the brothers ended with his victory. Finally after his ordination held on April 10th, 1991 which lots of his relative and villagers attended, he became the only local Dalit person to be the priest for Delhi Catholic Archdiocese from Haryana State.

"Heard melodies are sweet but those unheard are sweeter" line composed by John Keats in his "Ode to Grecian Urn" seems to be very much applicable in the case of Dalit Hindu's acceptance of Christianity which was a very new and promising for them. They welcomed the message of Christ and adopted Christianity just because they thought it would get them rid of ". . . social evils of casteism" and untouchables would have "honour and self respect" in the new religion (*AUP* 187). It was communicated by the missionaries that "you are Christ's body and each one is part of it"; so "there is no division in the body, but concern for one another" (*AUP* 187-88). But the writer realized just opposite to it. The strategy of the missionary itself was based on the divide and rule policy. The families, relatives and villages were divided just because the missionaries neither converted all the members of a family nor all the families of the same Dalit Hindu community. Not only this, but also they practiced division even among Catholics. The division in Delhi Catholic Archdiocese between the North Indian Catholics and the South Indian Catholics and other Catholics who have come from other parts of the country based on caste, language culture etc still prevails.

The Dalits have been accepting Christianity to get relief from the evils of Hinduism but it seems for them a far off thing. Their caste becomes a stumbling block there also. "Casteism is very much existing and is being practiced in Catholic Church in India. Denial of casteism in Catholic Church is injustice to Dalit Catholics," says the writer (*AUP* 41). The upper caste Catholics were and still are ruling the Delhi Catholic Archdiocese. Dalit Catholics who form the 70% of the Christians in India are kept aside in the Churches. The writer clearly states that he has been discriminated and denied equal right in Delhi Catholic Archdiocese by Rt Rev. Vincent

Cancessao, Arch Bishop of Delhi. He claims that it is not only his case but also the case of all the Dalit Catholics.

Thus, the religious conversion especially in India is no way helpful for Dalits to get equal identity because there also, hungry people with Sawarna exploitative mentality are in power who do not want to see Dalits in pleasant condition. The dream shown to them by the priests proves to be a fancy only, which can never come true. But it does not mean that Hinduism is helpful for Dalits. Neither Hinduism nor any other religion relives Dalits of caste hatred; if they want to get rid of it, they will have to develop either their own "new" religion or live without religious identity.

Works Cited

Ambedkar, B. R. "Annihilation of Caste." *The Essential Writing of B. R. Ambedkar.* 13th impression. Ed Valerian Rodrigues. 2002. New Delhi: OUP, 2014. Print.

Bama. *Karukku*. Trans from Tamil by Lakhmi Holmstrom. 3rd ed. New Delhi: Oxford U P, 2011. Print.

Bhattacharya, Neeladri. Editorial Preface. *Dalit Visions: The Anti-caste Movement and the Construction of an Indian Identity*. Gail Omvedt. 1995. *Rev. ed*. 2006. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan-Longman, 2010. Print.

Chaudhary, Rev Fr. Premdas. *An Unwanted Priest: The Autobiography of a Dalit Catholic Priest*. Delhi: Jaykay, 2012. Print.

Ilaiah, Kancha. *Dalit Leaders*. Ramesh Chandra and Sangh Mittra. New Delhi: Commonwealth, 2003. Print.

Karnad, Girish, comp. *Tale Danda*. *Collected Plays*. 7th impression. 2 vols. 2005. New Delhi: OUP, 2010. Print.

Keats, John. "Ode on Grecian Urn." <https://www. Victorian web. org/previctorian/keats/urn.text.thml> 14 August, 2018 11.52 pm

The Margins and the Mainstream: Spaces of Adivasi and Dalit Identity in Hindi Literature

Heinz Werner Wessler

Introduction

Social issues are important concerns in modern Hindi literature from its beginnings in the 19th century, as can be seen for example in Bhāratendu Hariśchandra's famous drama *Bhārat Durdaśā*. Under the postcolonial predicament however, questions of social perspective, representation and identity became important. This led for example to the discovery of women authorship as such and to the development of what Indu Prakāś Pandey calls "romantic feminism" and, since the 1980s, to a broad scope of female and feminist writing.

Similarly, since about 1992, Dalit literature– defined by the social identity of the author– has developed as an important genre in Hindi literature. The publishing of Dalit short stories, poems, and occasionally essays as well as autobiographical texts became a regular feature of practically all the important literary journals in Hindi in the 1990s. Soon after, at least some samples of Hindi Dalit literature started to appear in the syllabi of educational institutions, which further sponsored a certain mainstreaming of Hindi Dalit literature. The upcoming of a wide range of Dalit authors in all kinds of literary genres over the recent almost one quarter of a century has often been appreciated as an important contribution to Hindi literature. Without doubt, some of the most interesting pieces of short story and autobiographical writings in Hindi are in Dalit

literature. This has changed the identity of Hindi literature as such.

At the same time, the representation of the socially marginalized in non-Dalit literature has been more and more questioned, as the controversy on Premchand's novel *Rangabhūmi* and some of his short stories particularly *Kafan* illustrates. The binary between *anubhūti* ("experience") and *sahānubhūti* ("co-experience", i.e. compassion) has become central in the debate on the literary imagination on Dalit issues (somehow echoing the categories of "male" and "female" in feminist writing).This binary naturally also is a central issue in Adivasi writing that has become a strong genre in Hindi literature more recently.

A new perspective on history has evolved, and the rediscovery of *Nirgun Bhakti* as a resource for the reconstruction of Dalit experience in particular has led to a fundamental challenge for the conventional narrative of Hindi literary history following the model of Rāmchandra Śukla from the late colonial epoch. New constructions of the history of religion in Northern India of what in recent academic writing is often termed "Early Modernity", i.e. the centuries before the dominance of the British East India Company, have come up (for example Braj Ranjan Mani).

Today we witness a new generation of Dalit and Adivasi authors coming up, who reflect more and more middle class urban identities and try to develop new forms of the narrative, going beyond the social realism of the earlier authors. They also question the dominance of the autobiographical elements, sometimes in opposition to the older generation, for example, the magic realism in some of Ajay Nāvariyā's short stories and in the melancholic poetic imaginary of Jacintā Kerkettā.

Ramanikā Guptā (born 1928) as the editor of the magazine *Yudhrat Ām Ādmī*, and Rājendra Yādav (1929-2013) as the editor of the *Hans*, inspired a large number of Dalit as well as Adivasi intellectuals and activists to take up the pen, lectured their writings, gave feedbacks and tirelessly molded authors into what they became. These two highly engaged persons not only discovered and inspired creative voices, but also linked them up with the mainstream of debates on Hindi literature, and cultural and social representation in general. Since 1999, the Dalit literature yearbook in Hindi (*Dalit Sāhitya Varshiki*), edited by the Dalit author and activist, Jayprakash Kardam, has soon turned into an important medium of Dalit publication and writing. Something equivalent is yet to develop in Adivasi Hindi literature, but perhaps the "Ādivani" publishing house (Kolkata) is developing into a similar platform, even though its publications are unfortunately mostly in English. Ruby Hembrom, the young and dynamic publisher and a Santhāli herself, is at home in several languages, including Hindi, the perhaps most blossoming literary medium of the multilingual Adivasi speaking and literature.

From the perspective of the connoisseurs of Hindi literature, these developments are extremely fortunate. Surely, Hindi literature and language have become more inclusive and more original with new voices challenging, but at the same time reaching out to the mainstream and enriching the composite culture of India with new expressions and modes of communication.

The 19th century social reform agenda geared up several issues, including women education, caste segregation, widow remarriage and similar issues. The scandalous practice of untouchability and the social uplift of the socially marginalized, however, were not an important concern before the 20th century.

Hindi literature somehow is an echo of this lack of concern. Bhāratendu Harishchandra (1850-1885) whose innovations in early modern Hindi literature in the fields of essay writing, satire, journal editing and drama are acknowledged overall, was concerned with a lot of issues, but his treatment of caste issues does not show much concern on the downtrodden, as his famous drama *Bhārat Durdaśā* ("The Bad State of India", 1880) may illustrate. Rāmchandra Śukla sees this text in his classical history of Hindi literature as a key text not only for the beginnings of modern Hindi drama, but also of the initial phase of modernity (*Adhuniktā*) in Hindi literature altogether. This play, written primarily for the performance on Bhāratendu's own private stage in Banaras, and similar some other plays starting from *Bhārat Jananī* (1877) vividly describe the discontent and despair in respect to the contemporary state of Indian society and culture. The alcohol drinking and smoking Indian elites copy their colonial masters and don't respect Indian traditions of courtesy and behavior any longer, and the Muslim

element is seen as even more terrible element in Indian culture than the British influence.

Bhārat Durdaśā is on the shortcomings of Indian and Hindu society and the necessity of social reform. As a kind of climax of the play, a certain general "Total Destruction" (*Satyanāś*) dances on the stage in the third act, with a terrible song on the evils of Bhāratendu's contemporary Indian society.[2] General "Total Destruction" sings: "My name is Total Destruction. I have approached the king. / Took with me thousands of appearances. Have destroyed the whole country. / I have worked hard to spread out religion [dharma] / have increased the deeds of untouchability [*chuāchūt*] / …".[3] Further it goes: "I have created a lot of castes [jāti] and made high and low".[4]

Bhāratendu as a confessing Vaishnava - a belief inherited from his wealthy Agravāl family background - does not hesitate to make polemical remarks on the Shivite Advaitvāda. The general Total Destruction remarks to the king: "My Lord, Vedānta has been extremely kind. It has made all Hindus into Brahma. Nobody has to follow a responsible duty any longer … enough, praise to Śiv!".[5]

Bhāratendu does not really fit into the modern definition of a secularist author, even though the term *dharma* is used here in a clearly polemical way. He does not hesitate to make clearly sectarian statements, containing a concept of religion as a source of cultural resilience and some form of reformist agenda. At the same time it appears to be incompatible with the religion based cultural anti-colonialism as expressed in Bengali novels starting from Bankim Candra Chatterjī's (1838-1894) *Sāmya* (1879)[6], some Bangali prose literature of the 1880s and in Vivekānanda's (1863-1902) all-embracing Vedānta of the 1890s and the early 20th century.

Realism

Hindi literature went towards social realism (*Yathārthvāda*) and the common reformist agenda in the spirit of cultural nationalism from the beginning of the 20th century, initiated by Mahāvīra Prasāda Dwivedī (1864-1938) as an editor of the journal *Sarasvatī* (from 1903) and then from the 1910s onwards particularly from the work of Premchand (1880-1936). Hīrā Dom's *Ek Achhūta kī Āh* ("The Cry of an Untouchable"), published in *Sarasvatī* (ed. by Mahāvīr Prasād Dwivedī, Allahabad 1900-1925) 1914 is often taken as an early example of Dalit writing in Hindi, even though the identity of the author and the whole context of its production in the "uplift of the untouchable" (*achhūtoddhāra*) discourse of the early 20th century is probably non-Dalit.[7]

The basic bias was the discovery of indigenous cultural and social resources for resilience against the colonial intervention against the necessity of social reform and the idea of equality. Sisir Kumar Das explains in his chapter on the "narratives of suffering" in Indian literature in the late colonial to early post-colonial epoch: "… writers found it extremely difficult to reconcile their pride for Hindu social organizations with the ideas of equality" (301).

Premchand frequently made the fate of the marginalized in Indian and Hindu society a subject of his short stories and novels. However, in the later phase of his writing, he replaces nationalist idealism inspired by the non-cooperation movement of the early 1920s more and more by social pessimism. His famous novel *Godān*[8], published 1936, has been interpreted in different ways, but one of the readings is the fate of a small farmer in modern agrarian society from a marginal social background, even though the main characters' – i.e. Horī and Dhaniyā's - exact caste status cannot be ascertained in the text of the novel. I have tried to show in another article how the narrative model of one of the most famous and well written novels in Hindi Dalit writing, Jayprakāś Kardam's *Chappar*, relates to Premchand's famous novel and can be read as a response to it. The main character and cultural hero, Chandan is drafted as a Dalit response to the failing hero, Horī, who never finds a way out of the spiral of his financial problems and whose dream of a good life until the end of his life is the gift of a cow to a Brahman.[9] A similar approach towards social reform can be detected in Indian literatures in other languages as well, including English. Mulk Raj Anand's *The Untouchable* from 1935 is usually taken as the starting point of the Indian novel in English.[10] The main character in the novel is the latrine cleaner Bakha. Even though he strongly dislikes his occupation, he does not find a way out of his dilemma. Incapable to understand the nature of the

discrimination he experiences, he does not understand the meaning even of the anti-colonial movement. His only vision for the future is the introduction of a technical innovation, i.e. the water closet, which might set him free of his occupation. Similarly, Ghīsū and Mādhav in Premchand's famous short story *Kafan* ("The shroud", 1936)[11] from about the same time portray the Dalit as somebody who is hardly capable to understand the nature of his discrimination, or to visualize another form of social interaction, left alone the incentive for social change: a corrupt social setup produces its corrupted victims. Degrading behavior of the rural cast society towards the socially excluded produces degraded personalities – so goes Premchand's message.

Dalit criticism of Premchand's treatment of Dalit issues starting from Omprakāśa Vālmīki's article in 1994[12] has in recent years over and over again focused on *Kafan* and the portrayal of his Dalit characters as passive victims of the circumstances. These characters are often contrasted with the positive Dalit hero– like the cultural hero Chandan in Kardam's novel, *Chappar*– in some pieces of Dalit fiction, which portray their central characters as the positive hero, who manages to master his fate, terrible circumstances notwithstanding.[13] Another controversy arose on Premchand's novel *Rangbhūmi* from 1925, i.e. from the idealist phase of his life as an author.[14] One of the main characters of the novel is the blind beggar and kind of Gandhian selfless hero *Sūrdās Chamār* ("Sūrdās the tanner"). The explicit reference to the low caste identity of the blind Sūrdās has been interpreted as derogatory and offensive and as an element that is meant to pacify caste Hindu readership. Students, so the argument, should not be exposed to casteist terminology, even if the author is a capacity like Premchand. This sentiment leads the Dalit activist Sohanlal Sumanakshar and members of the Bhāratīy Dalit Sāhitya Akādemī to go so far as even to burn copies of the book in 2004.[15] Following this dramatic event, the reference to the *Chamār*-identity of *Sūrdās* were replaced by *Sūrdās Dalit* in schoolbook editions of certain sections of the famous novel.

Many authors define the positive hero as the true embodiment of *Dalit Chetnā*, i.e. the proper Dalit consciousness.[16] However, this content-oriented definition does not really fit to reality. Dalit

fiction is full of failing heroes, of hopeless victims of vehement forms of social discrimination and the history of failures– which illustrates the complexity in defining criteria of what Dalit literature actually is beyond the fact that the authorship is biologically Dalit.

The Female

Under the postcolonial predicament, questions of social perspective, representation and identity became important. This led for example to the discovery of women authorship as such and to the development of what Indu Prakāśa Pāndey calls "romantic feminism" and, since the 1980s, to a broad scope of female and feminist writing.[17] In an epoch of an ever-deepening consciousness of gender issues, we are more than ever before aware of gender perspectives. At the same time, it is clear that the female voice never is a single voice. It always consists of a multitude of voices, representing a wide scope of opinions, arguments, and narrative tropes.

As in the case of Hindi literature, for example, much honoured senior writer Krishna Sobti and among the younger ones Gitanjali Shree constantly refuse to be put in the category of feminist or even female writing. They insist to be perceived as authors as such. This is not meant as a denial of their own gender perspective, which certainly is clearly visible in their writing, but as a refusal of labeling a certain type of literature according to the biological features of the author.

Dalit writing in Hindi includes some wonderful pieces of the male and compassionate imagination of female Dalit experiences, like in Sūrajpāl Chauhān's short story *Ahalyā*, which refers to a mythical female character who turned into a stone by the wrath of Indra. Similarly in a poem of Rām Dayāl Munda in Adivasi literature, a kind of compassionate, transsexual solidarity runs through the verses: "Exactly like you, I also": "Exactly like you, I fix cow dung as burning material for the oven"[18] – while "you" is the aged grandmother.

There is a strong tendency to portray forms of sexual violence– the public stripping of Dalit women and rape in particular– as an atrocity against Dalits as such as a process of "scripting atrocities"[19]. Besides, there also are stories with the positive hero

in the center. Mohandās Naimiśrāy's novel, *Āj Bāzār Band Hai*[20] for example is on how the innocent journalist, Sumīt, clearly a kind of alter ego of the author, discovers the prostitutes as the "daughters of the nation", inspires them to restore their honour, to challenge their fate and escape their perceived immoral way of living. However, the selfless intervention of Sumīt reveals a kind of patronizing attitude towards the unhappy prostitutes.

Dalit women write differently[21]: Dalit female authorship has much in common with the Dalit male voice, but at the same time it has something in common with non-Dalit female authorship as well. An autobiographical text like Kausalyā Baisantrī's *Dohrā Abhiśāp* ("Double course")[22] challenges the common non-gendered perspective, since it contradicts statements on gender issues in Dalit society that describe male-female relationships as categorically different in Dalit society than among caste Hindus. An autobiographical text like the life-story of Viramma, a South Indian Dalit working class woman interviewed by French anthropologists, demonstrates that indeed the husband-wife relationships in the rural working class are different from middle class relationships.[23]

Many Voices

Similarly, Dalit writing consists of a multitude of complementary, but sometimes even contradictory voices. Since about 1992, Dalit literature– defined by the social identity of the author– has developed as an important genre in Hindi literature. In recent years, Ramanikā Guptā was the main force behind the formation of the *All India Tribal Literary Forum (AITLF)*, which has organized several conferences on traditional and modern tribal literature.[24] In the field of Adivasi literature, the contribution of Ramanika Guptā is particularly remarkable. This goes back to her life in Hazarībāgh in modern Jharkhand and her political activism in the Congress Party and later in the Communist Party of India (CPI), for some time as a member of the legislative assembly of Bihar. As in the case of female as well as of Dalit and Adivasi literature, "experience" becomes an important issue, which is related to representational writing. In Hindi and other North Indian languages, the categorical divide between two etymologically closely related terms, i.e. compassion (*sahānubhūti*) contrasted by experience (*anubhūti*), play a central role in defining the authenticity of Dalit authorship. Some authors go as far as to deny the authority of non-Dalits to write on Dalit issues altogether.

The question of authenticity related to individual experience reminds of the long discussion on Gustave Flaubert's famous novel *Madame Bovary*, which is often seen as the first modern novel in French literature, reflecting on the frustrating life of a middle class woman. When the (male) author was once asked in an interview about his relationship to his female main character, he responded with his famous "Madame Bovary, c'est moi!" ("Madame Bovery, it's me!"). This is not the place to go into the long discussion on the novel and the author's prominent statement about it. It suffices to say that the statement does not form the novel into a piece of female literature. The biological factor makes the difference. This is also too for a novel like Premchand's *Nirmalā* (1927)[25], which is based on the (male) author's compassion for his main character in the novel, a young woman who is married of to an elderly widower – an important novel in Hindi literature, but not a piece of female writing. Similarly, a novel on Dalits by a non-Dalit can be good or bad, but it certainly cannot go as Dalit literature.

The publication of Dalit short stories, poems, and occasionally essays as well as autobiographical texts, starting with the first part of Mohandās Naimiśrāy's "To Each his own Cage" (*Apne-Apne Piṇjare*) in 1995 (second part published 2000) became a regular feature of practically all the important literary journals in Hindi in the 1990s and continues until today.

The outsider as well as the insider perspective with its focus on *Anubhūti* as the substance of the creative incentive of a Dalit author usually relate strongly to the common perception that Dalit writing is supposed to be primarily autobiographical, which however might be a misunderstanding. Several authors complain that publishers prefer autobiographies rather than fictional Dalit writing. There is a widespread and rarely questioned understanding among the general readership and even a strong fraction of Dalit authors,

who believe that the autobiographical is the most authentic.

The Discovery of History

At the same time, new perspectives on history evolved, and the rediscovery of *Nirguna Bhakti* as a resource for the reconstruction of Dalit experience in particular. The common tropes in the interpretation of classical poets like Kabīr, Raidās, Chokhā Melā and many others are questioned and sometimes replaced by new tropes. This led in some cases to a fundamental challenge to the conventional narrative of Hindi literary history following the model of Rāmchandra Śukla from the late colonial epoch. Gail Omvedt and Eleanor Zelliot have shed light on the visions of social change in *Nirguna Bhakti* literature, but much more research has to be done, combining the re-reading of traditional literature with philological erudition and critical methodology. The complicated questions on the establishment of an original corpus of certain authors, on the original language, on manuscript traditions and editorial principles, on the interaction of orality and literality still need more research. Statements on the historical authors and the traditions in their name are often simply repeated over and over again without any proof. Simple guessing, even though it might sound impressive, cannot replace the self-reflexive scholarly research. The first rule is: Hard facts often speak another language than once expects.

However, the Dalit reading of *Nirguna Bhakti* literature is much promising and marks the way towards a deeper insight into this peculiar tradition of North Indian literature, and of Dalit religiosity[26] as well. Let us just take the example of Kabīr here, whose rediscovery as an important contribution to Indian intellectual history actually goes back to Rabindranath Tagore and his edition of hundred poems of Kabir. This had a tremendous impact on the writing of the history of Hindi literature in its formative phase after the first World war and the construction of *Bhakti Kāl* (epoch of *Bhakti*) with its non-literary dividing lines between *Saguna* and *Nirguna Bhakti*. Under the inclusive paradigm of a nationalist history of Hindi literature, *Sūfī Premākhyan* (Sufi love story telling) came under the category of *Nirguna Bhakti*, while Kabīra – even though technically a Muslim *Julāhā* (*Ansārī*), i.e. weaver – was

labeled as *Gyānāśrayī* ("knowledge seeking").

This appears to be a comfortable place for Kabīr in the history of literature, as has been reproduced in literary history until today.[27] It takes some more reading to understand that this is a biased reading. Rāmchandra Śukla, in his interpretation of Kabīr, is quite explicit on where he sees the shortcomings.[28] He argues that Kabīr had put together some "raw elements of Indian monism" (*Bhāratīy Advaitvād kī Kuchha Sthūla Bāten*) to create his hybrid philosophical message, which can be found in its fully developed form in the great tradition of monism with Śankara (traditionally dated 788-820 AD) as its first and foremost thinker. Śukla like many other Kabīr interpreters from Hajārī Prasād Dwivedī to Bhīsm Sāhnī in his drama on Kabīr from 1981[29] accept the often reported elements of the historic Kabīr as represented in the traditional Kabīr biography *Kabīr Parichāy* by Anant Dās from the beginning of the 18th century.

The decision of whether certain couplets really go back to the historical Kabīr, while others were simply composed under his name or in the spirit of the original couplets is tricky. Some authors, and particularly Dharmvīr, take the compatibility to modern Dalit sentiment as the key to decide on the authenticity of individual couplets. These arguments underestimate or even completely ignore philological methodology, the necessity of an understanding of the editorial tradition and the manuscript situation. The most important is the categorical divide between the Kabīr tradition and the historical Kabīr himself, who remains to quite some extent enigmatic to the contemporary reader and listener.

Leading Dalit activists and Hindi-language literary scholars are continually emphasizing the continuous role of *Nirguna Bhakti* in Dalit communities in contemporary India and draw a direct line from Buddhist belief and practice to *Nirguna Bhakti*. Some authors, like Bhagvān Dās, go even further back in history and draw the line in an epic biography of a latrine-cleaner hopping over times and epochs from the Indus river civilization to the*śramana* traditions (including Buddhism) and towards the undercover social egalitarianism in religious terms until *Nirguna Bhakti* under the Hindu umbrella.[30] Dharmvīr sees *Nirguna Bhakti* as a clandestine survivor of the lost *Jīvikā* religion, and interprets Ambedkars

conversion to Buddhism as his principle political mistake.[31]

Similarly, the discovery and reconstruction of history is an essential part of Adivasi identity discourses. "The books still have to be written" is the title of a poem of Mahādev Toppo, "your history / on the pages of history / is not yet cast into words" (Gupta *Kalam ko Teer Hone Do* 2015, 119).[32]

To sum up, History writing is never "objective" and uniform; it is always dependent on dissenting perspectives and controversies. New reconstructions of the history of religion in Northern India are coming up from the margins, not in a single, homogeneous voice, but in a multitude of voices. It is only but natural that developments in recent academic writing in what is often termed "Early Modernity", i.e. the centuries before the dominance of the British East India Company, are under discussion. This also includes the deconstruction of what is commonly called "caste origin stories" (*jāti birādarī kī kathā/jāti kathā*), which often explain the identity of a certain Dalit caste as a former warrior caste that by some error or heinous trick was let down in the hierarchy of castes. The problem of these stories from a Dalit perspective is that they confirm the existing social hierarchy as such, but complain about the unjust treatment of one's own caste.[34]

The most conclusive preliminary effort of an alternative, and heterodox history writing following Dalit fault lines is perhaps Braj Ranjan Mani's *Debrahmanising History* (2005). However, the effort to reconstruct Indian religious and cultural history with a new terminology for political and cultural interventions into the public space already goes back to much earlier efforts, and particularly to Swami Achūtānand and the Adi-Hindū-Mahāsabhā of the 1920s.[35]

Ādivāsī and Dalit Discourses

The particular importance of Ramanikā Guptā for the Ādivasi literary discourse has already been mentioned. In particular, the two important collections of Ādivasi poetry and short fiction Guptā 2002 and Guptā 2015 – mostly published in *YuddharatAm Admī* before - demonstrate the wide scope of Ādivasi literary activities. Vīrendra 2013 and Mina 2014 on the other hand illustrate the scope

of Ādivasi criticism in the form of essay writing. The book title, and the number of essays by non-Ādivasi authors in the book show how Ādivasi literature in Hindi or in Hindi translation is in a process of being mainstreamed – similarly to what has happened with Dalit literature a little earlier.

A word on the language is essential in this context. While in the contemporary Dalit literature Hindi has from its beginnings been the undisputed language of creative writing– i.e. Modern Standard Hindi (Kharī Bolī) with some stray elements of dialects in between– , Hindi is a relative newcomer in regions with a prominent percentage of Ādivasi population. Giving the growing importance of Hindi in education and media, particularly in the state of Bihar and since 2002 in the new state of Jharkhand, many authors turn towards Hindi as their language of creative writing, while they would continue to use a tribal language at home and in other fields of communication.

Nirmalā Putul for example started writing in Santhāli. Some samples of her poetry in Hindi translation by Ashok Singh are included in Guptā 2002. In 2004, her first poetry collection was published in a bilingual edition in Santhāli (in Devnagari script) and in a Hindi translation by Ashok Singh.[35] Guptā 2015 again includes some selected poems by Nirmalā Putul, but this time no name of a translator is mentioned and it appears that these are her poems written in Hindi. Similarly, Jacintā Kerkettā's poems are in the part of the book that represents Kurukh, but her poetry is originally composed in Hindi. Similarly, Mahādev Toppo is under the rubrique "Kurukh", even though he also composes predominantly in Hindi, while perhaps the most prominent contemporary Ādivasi intellectual and Hindi poet, Rām Dayāl Mundā (1939-2011) is to be found under "Mundārī" in this volume. The name of the language indicates certain tribal identities, which does not necessarily mean that authors use the tribal language.

Clearly, Hindi is making strong advances as a common tongue of Ādivasi writing, and metropolitan spaces like Ranchi, the capital of Jharkhand, are catalysts of a homogenized Hindi speaking Ādivasi counter public. On the long run, Hindi with its huge public sphere has the better cards within the multilingualĀdivasi setup. Jacintā Kerkettā

for example, one of the most promising young Ādivasi authors, who has recently been translated in a wonderful bilingual edition into German, sees herself first and foremost as a Hindi author. She even refuses ascriptions to female authorship, as well asĀdivasi authorship, even though these identities are quite obvious in the content as well as in the rhetoric of her poetry.[36] The German edition is published as a cooperation between the Draupadi Publication House in Heidelberg (Germany) and Ādivaani (Kolkata) with its dynamic editors Christian Weiss (Draupadi) and Ruby Hembrom (Ādivaani).[37] Ādivaani is a publishing house focused on the multilingual Ādivasi literature in English translation. Within a short time span, Ruby Hembrom – who is herself a Santhāli, and at home in several languages, including Hindi and Bangali - has managed to give out about two dozens of wonderfully edited books, including a volume on Canadian indigenous stories.[38] "We seek the participation of Ādivasi contemporary writers, poets and researchers and anyone who feels for the Ādivasi cause to help, preserve and amplify the Ādivasi voice, the adivaani," says the publication house about itself.[39]

Perspectives

Dalit and Adivasi discourses have much in common, and some terms have been suggested to indicate the common of both. The two most important terms, namely *bahujan* and *mūlnivāsī* refer to competing political agendas. In the literary field, Hindi Dalit literature has in the1990s started off as a kind of follow up of the strong tradition of Marathi Dalit writing that came up with the political activism of the Dalit Panther movement of the late 1960s. In the course of time, the Hindi discourse has produced a diversity of voices of people from all kinds of marginal castes that goes beyond the more homogenized Marathi Dalit writing.

In the world of Hindi, authors come from different social and regional background and develop different and sometimes contradicting opinions, as for example on the necessity of conversion to Buddhism. The discourse of the appropriation of Dalit religious and cultural history is in full swing, but has as yet only started to develop its proper methodology and scope. The rediscovery of *Nirguna Bhakti* as a form of Dalit religiosity is an important step

towards a more conclusive image of Dalit history and reconfigurations of identity.[40] There also is a strong local focus on Delhi in Hindi Dalit writing. The space of Dalit writing is to quite some extent the center. The metropolitan provides to some extent a space in which the middle-class Dalits can rely on a certain degree of anonymity, and forms of interaction that go "beyond caste"[41].

The authors of the first wave of Dalit writing in Hindi in the 1990s are now challenged by another generation, which draw on metropolitan experiences that are different from the experiences of the first generation that still had memories of extremely crude and very direct forms of discrimination, while the discrimination and experiences inflicted on the urban middle class can be quite subtle and discrete, but nevertheless traumatizing. This is not the place to go into details of the generational gap that opens up in recent Hindi Dalit writing. Some hints may be sufficient: In present writing, we witness a new generation of Dalit and Ādivasi authors coming up, who reflect more and more middle class urban identities and try to develop new forms of the narrative, going beyond the social realism of the earlier authors. It is, however, clear that the social experience changes with education, change of space through migration from the provincial to the metropolitan, from the lower class to the middle class, and last not least from Hindi to English.

The gap between narrated and the narrative time of writing has been there from the beginning, since traumatic experiences are usually put into words only after certain period of time has gone by. This is for example also true for the trauma experiences of holocaust survivors in German concentration camps of World War II. Most authors who have published on their experiences either in form of autobiographical or fictional texts started writing or even reporting only decades after.

Education changes the meaning of *Anubhūti*. This is true for the first generation of Dalit authors. Mud-house authors are only very few, i.e. manual laborers-cum-authors. The great majority of authors look back to experiences of discrimination that were mostly made in their childhood or as young adults. Authors usually have gone through the common higher education in Hindi and are well aware of trends and tendencies in the society. Hindi literature in

general. When Omprakāś Vālmīki reports his mother's reaction, when he as a young boy is asked by the members of his caste to join the skinning of a pig, she responds: "Omprakāś doesn't have to do this kind of work!" (*Joothan* 59)[42]– i.e. he will not do as the other uneducated boys and men from his caste, since he is one of the first boys that go to school in his neighbourhood. This, however, does not change the outsider perspective: The educated Dalit, or similarly the educated Adivasi, is nevertheless perceived as Dalit and Ādivasi after all, and suffers even from the common forms of discrimination inherent in this status, irrespective of the educational success or the social uplift that may go together with it.

Young authors question the dominance of the autob iographical altogether, sometimes in opposition to the older generation. They may focus on new forms of narrativity, as for example in the magic realism in some of Ajay Nāvariyā's short stories and in the melancholic poetic imaginary of Jacintā Kerkettā. Experiences and the identity relating to it do change over the time and generations, but the challenges mark the fertile ground on which Dalit and Ādivasi voices have been blossoming in recent decades.

From the perspective of the connoisseurs of Hindi literature, these developments of the Dalit and Ādivasi literary voices are extremely fortunate. Chandra Bhan Prasad, the famous author and editor of the "Dalit Diary" in "The Pioneer" since 1999, in his campaign for English has argued that "Indian languages are more about prejudices, discrimination and hatred and less about expressions and communications"[43]. In other words, English is on arguments and communications, regional languages are not. Chandrabhan Prasad is a strong advocator of English education for Dalits, since mother tongue education is used to prevent the marginalized to improve their lot.[44] Truly, English is not just a medium of communication in South Asia as a whole, but a social stratificator and systematically excludes the majority of the population from the participation in meaningful discourses. Chandra Bhan Prasad's polemical arguments, culminating in his Lord Macauley's birthday parties and the Goddess of English temple, are wonderful pieces of mocking at the contradictions in dominant discourse on English and cultural resilience in South Asia. However, he cuts a long argument

a little bit too short. First of all, Raja Rao argued already in 1938, in the preface to his famous and often reprinted novel, *Kanthapura*– a key novel of Indian English literature– that Indians cannot and should not write like the English, even though they may use their language. As everyone knows, most of the famous modern authors in Hindi– including Premchand– have a good command of English and read foreign literature in English original or English translation from other languages. The famous non-Dalit Hindi author Agyey (1911-1987) once warned in an article on "Language and Identity" explained the importance of literature in regional languages like this: Indian authors were in the immediate danger that they end up in "living in translation": "It may seem a cruel observation, and I should hate to be cruel to people younger than myself, but more and more of them appear to have been content with a situation, in which they try to express in one language, what they only found possible to experience … in or through another language" (142-43). This argument on experience (*anubhūti*) as a central element in the construction of identity and authenticity can be linked up with Dalit and Ādivasi discourses.

My argument in favour of Dalit and Ādivasi literature in Hindi and other regional languages is that the eradication of prejudices and discrimination have to be fought out on the ground and in the language of the people, and that the change from a regional language towards a language of higher social status or even global importance – i.e. Chinese, French, English, Portuguese, Spanish – does not mean that discourses change automatically together with the linguistic medium. Without doubt, Hindi literature and also the Hindi language as such have become more inclusive and more original with the Dalit and Ādivasi voices challenging, but at the same time reaching out to the mainstream and enriching the composite culture of India with new expressions and modes of communication.

Notes

1. I quote Indian languages, including author's names, in correct transliteration, i.e. including diacritical marks. I apologize for any confusion to those who might not be used to this method.

2. *Bhāratendu Granthāvalī: Pahlā Khand*. Ed. by Śivprasād Miśra. Vārānasī VS 2039, p 137ff
3. *Hamārā nām hai satyānās. Āe hain rājā ke ham pās. / Dharke ham lākhon hī bhes. Kiyā chaupam yah sārā desh. / Bahut hamne phailāe dharm. Badhāyā Chhuāchhūt kā karm*. Item p.138
4. *Jāti anekan karī nīch aur ūnch banāyo.* Item p.139
5. *Mahārāj, vedānt ne badā hī upkār kiyā. Sab hindu brahma ho gae. Kisī ko itikartavytā bākī hī na rahī. ... Bas, jay śarkar kī.* Item p.139
6. Bankim Chandra later withdrew his novel from the public because of his growing conservatism, even though parts of it were later reprinted in his collection of essays under the title *Bibidh Prabandha* (1892).
7. The poem has eventually been composed by Rāmchandra Śukla. Compare Rawat 2015, p.345
8. In more recent editions, including the text in volume 6 in the *Premchand Rachnāvalī*, the spelling of the title is Godān (in one word), but the original edition published by Premchand's own *Sarasvatī Press* in Banaras and the Hindī Granth-ratnākar kāryālay in Bombay has the spelling in two words. The original edition is recently re-edited by Goyankar, Kamal Kiśhor, Godān (pratham sanskaran , 10 Jūne 1936 : mūl pāth). Naī Dillī 2015. In his erudite introduction, Goyankar explains the complications of the fate of Premchand text editions in general and of *Godān* in particular. The original manuscript and other material relating to the novel is in the collection of Kalā Bhavan, Banaras Hindu University. A proper philological edition of this probably most famous Hindi novel altogether still remains a desideratum.
9. Kardam, Jayprakāś, *Chappar (upanyās)*. Dillī 2003 [revised ed., first published 1994]. Compare Wessler 2010.
10. Bheemaiah 2005.

11. *Premchand Rachnāvalī*, 15, p.401-407.
12. *Samkālīn Janmat* (1.-15. September 1994); compare Beth 2014, p.237.
13. Compare Gajarawala 2013, p.174ff; Brueck 2014, p. 43ff; Beth 2014, p.237ff. I will not go into Dr. Dharmvīr's analysis of *Kafan*, which he relates to a biased form of representation of the sexual exploitation of Dalit women. Compare Dharmvīr, *Therīgāthā kī Striyān aur Dr. Ambedkar*. Nayī dillī: Vānī Prakāśan, 2005 (mātrasattā, pitrasattā aur jārsattā; 4). Dharmvīr's reading and his opinions on Dalit women in return has led to a strong reaction on the side of some of his critiques, as for example Guptā, Ramanikā, "Premchand: Sāmant kā Munśī: Dharmvīr kī Tālibānī Naitiktā kī Kasautī Par", *Yuddhrat ām ādmī* [December 2005], p.4-5, a very sharp response to certain opinions on Dalit women in general by Dharmvīr. On the controversy as a whole, compare the careful interpretation of Gajarawala 2013, p.175ff.
14. *Premchand Rachnāvalī* 3.
15. Compare Gajarawala 2013, p.7.
16. Ramanikā Guptā lays particular stress on *Chetnā* ("consciousness") as a defining character of Dalit literature, which she prefers to call Ambedkarian literature, which according to her may exclude the famous Marathi Dalit author Nāmdev Dhasāl because of his open cooperation with certain political groups.
17. Pandey, 1989.
18. "Tumhārī hī tarah main / tumhārī hī tarh main gobar phenktī hūn / …" Guptā 115, p.46.
19. Brueck 2014, p.156ff
20. Naimiśrāy, Mohandās, *Āj Bājār Band Hai*. Nayī Dillī, 2004.
21. Compare Brueck 2014, p.169.

22. Baisantrī, Kaushalyā, *Dohrā Abhiśāp*. Dillī 1999.
23. Viramma; Josiane Racine; Jean-Luc Racine. *Une vie paria : Le rire des asservis*. Paris 1995.
24. Compare http://www.ramnikafoundation yuddhrataa madmi.org/tribal.php (16.8.2016)
25. *Premchand Rachnāvalī* 4.
26. Compare Deliège 2004; Manohar 2010; Rawat 2015; Bellwinkel-Schempp 2011.
27. Compare Agrawal 2000.
28. *Āchārya Rāmchandra Śukla Granthāvalī: Bhāg 5 – Hindi Sāhitya Kā Itihās*. Omprakāś Singh (ed.). Pūrva Madhya Kāl: Bhakti Kāl (VS1375-1700), prakara 1 http://hindisamay.com content Detail. aspx? id=4648 & pageno=4 (3.8.2016):
29. Sāhnī, Bhīsm, *Kabirā Khanā Bajār Mein*. Naī Dillī 1981.
30. Dās, Bhagvān, *Main Bhangī Hūn.* Dvitīya Sanśodhit tathā Sanvardhit Sanskaran, Lakhnaū 1998 [pratham sanskaran 1981].
31. Compare Dharmvīr, *Kabīr aur Rāmānand: Kimvadantiyām*. Nayī Dillī: Vānī Prakāśan, 2000. (Kabīr-naī sadī men; 2).
32. "Rachne honge granth / itihās tumhārā /itihās ke pannom par / gadhā nahīn śabdon mein".
33. Compare Narayan 2006, p.41ff.
34. Compare Bellwinkel-Schempp 2011; Rawat 2015
35. Putul, Nirmalā, *Apne Ghar kī Talāś Mein*. Dillī 2004- Published by the Ramanikā Foundation, i.e. Ramanikā Guptā.
36. Kerkettā, Jacintā, *Glut – Angor: Gedichte Hindi-Deutsch*. Heidelberg 2016
37. Web addresses draupadi-verlag.de and adivaani.org (16.8.2016).
38. Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake, *Dancing on our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-creation Resurgence, and a new Emergence*. Kolkata 2011
39. Compare adivaani.org/about/
40. Compare Webster 1999, p.101ff.
41. Compare Guha 2013.
42. "Omprakāś yah kām nahīn karegā!" Vālmīki, Omprakāś, *Joothan*. Naī Dillī ,1999. [repr. of 1997]. English translation: Valmiki, Omprakash, *Joothan: An Untouchable's Life*. Trans. from Hindi by Arun Prabha Mukherjee. New York, 2003.
43. Chandra Bhan Prasad. *The Pioneer*. (Dalit Diary), 29. October 2006.
44. Compare chandrabhanprasad.com (16.8.2016). Compare Prasad 2011 (first chapter)

References

Agrawal, Purushottam. "Reading Kabir in the Times of Identity." *Hindi Language Discourse Writing* 1.1 *(2000),* S.218-225

Agyey, Hirānand Sachchidānand Vātsyayan. "Language and Identity." *Language and Society in India*: proceedings of a seminar. Shimla 1969, 135-144.

Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis, 1996.

Aston, N.M. *Dalit Literature and African-American Literature*. New Delhi, 2001 (= Literature and marginality).

Bellwinkel-Schempp, Maren. "Bhakti and Buddhism: Text, Context and Public Representation of Dalit Religiosity in Uttar Pradesh." Maren Bellwinkel-Schempp, *Neuer Buddhismus als gesellschaftlicher Entwurf: zur Identitätskonstruktion der Dalits in Kanpur, Indien*. Ed. by Peter Schalk, Gabriele Reifenrath, Heinz Werner Wessler. Uppsala 2011, p.187-233 (Acta universitatis Uppsaliensis: Historia religionum; 31).

Baisantrī, Kaushalyā. *Dohrā Abhiśāp*. Dillī, 1999.

Beth, Sarah Hunt. *Hindi Dalit Literature and the Politics of Representation*. New Delhi, 2014.

Bheemaiah, J. *Class and Caste in Literature: The Fiction of Harriet B. Stowe and Mulk Raj Anand*. New Delhi, 2005.

Brueck, Laura R. *Writing Resistance: The Rhetorical Imagination of Hindi Dalit Literature*. New York, 2014 (South Asia across the disciplines).

Dās, Sisir Kumar. *A History of Indian Literature 1911-1956 : Struggle for Freedom: Triumph and Tragedy*. New Delhi, 1995.

Deliège, Robert. *La religion des intouchables de l'inde*. Villeneuve, 2004 (= Mythes, Imaginaire, Religions , 3).

Fernandes, Walter (ed.). *The Emerging Dalit Identity: The Re-assertion of the Subalterns*. New Delhi, 1996.

Guhā, Sumit. *Beyond Caste: Identity and Power in South Asia, Past and Present*. Leiden, 2013

Gajarāwālā, Toral Jatin. *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste*. New York, 2013.

Guptā, Ramanikā (ed.). *Dalit Chetanā: Sāhitya*. Hazārībāgh, 1996.

—. *Ādivāsī Svar aur Nayī Satābdī*. Naī Dillī, 2002.

—. *Nij Ghare Pardesī: (Jhārkhand ke Ādivāsiyon par Kendrit)*. Naī Dillī, 2004.

—. *Kalam ko Tīr Hone Do (Jhārkhand ke Ādivāsī Hindī Kavi)*. Naī Dillī, 2015.

Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Fighting the Indian Caste System*. New York, 2005.

Kardam, Jayprakāś. *Chappar*. Dillī, 2003 [revised ed., first published 1994].

Kerkettā, Jacintā. *Glut – Angor: Gedichte Hindi-Deutsch*. Heidelberg, 2016.

Lāl, Chaman. *Guru Ravidās: Dalit Sāhitya ke Agradūt*. Panchkūlī, 1998.

Mani, Braj Ranjan. *Debrahmanising History: Dominance and Resistance in Indian Society*. New Delhi, 2005.

Manohar, Murali. *Dalits and their Religion(s)*. New Delhi, 2010.

Meenā, Gangā Sahāy (ed.). *Ādivāsī Sāhitya Vimarś*. Naī Dillī, 2014.

Mehra, Parmod Kumar. *Literature and Social Change: Emerging Perspectives in Dalit Literature*. Delhi, 2015.

Naimiśrāy, Mohandās. *Āj Bājār Band Hai*. Nayī Dillī, 2004.

Narang, Harish (ed.). *Writing Black Writing Dalit: Essays in Black African and Dalit Indian Writings*. Shimla, 2002.

Narayan, Badri. *Documenting Dissent: Contesting Fables, Contested Memories and Dalit Political Discourse*. Shimla, 2001.

—. *Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India: Culture, Identity and Politics*. New Delhi, 2006 (Cultural subordination and the Dalit challenge; 5).

Omvedt, Gail. *Dalit Visions: The Anti-caste Movement and the Construction of an Indian Identity*. New Delhi, 2006 [revised ed.] (Tracts for the Times 8).

Pandey, Indu Prakash. *Romantic Feminism: in Hindi Novels Written by Women*. New Delhi,1989.

Prasad, G.J.V. *Writing India, Writing English: Literature, Language, Location*. London, 2011.

Putul, Nirmalā. *Apne Ghar kī Talāś Mein*. Ramanikā Foundation: Dillī, 2004.

Rawat, Ramnarayan. "Genealogies of the Dalit Politics: The Transformation of Achhut from 'Untouched' to 'Untouchable' in the Early Twentieth-century North India." *The Indian Economic and Social History Review, 52. 3* (2015): 335–355.

Sāhnī, Bhism. *Kabirā Khanā Bajār Mein*. Naī Dillī, 1981.

Sharma, Pradeep K. *Dalit Politics and Literature*. Delhi, 2006.

Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. *Dancing on our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-creation Resurgence, and a New Emergence*. Kolkata, 2011.

Śukla, Rāmchandra. *Hindī Sāhitya kā Itihās*. Kāśī VS 2042 [repr. of ca. 1937-1940] (Nāgarīprachārinī Granthmālā; 53).

Viramma, Josiane Racine and Jean-Luc Racine. *Une vie paria: Le rire des asservis*. Paris, 1995.

Vīrendra, Kumār (ed.). *Ādivāsī Vimarś aur Hindī Sāhitya*. Dillī, 2013.

Webster, John C. B. *Religion and Dalit Liberation: An Examination of Perspectives*. Delhi, 1999.

Wessler, Heinz Werner. "Sterben verhindern, um zu leben: Sozialutopie und persönliche Umkehr im Roman 'Die Hütte' von Jay Prakāś Kardam." in: Bigger, Andreas; Mertens, Annemarie; Krajnc, Rita; Schüpbach, Markus; Wessler; Heinz Werner, Release from life - release in life : Indian Perspectives on Individual Liberation. Zürich 2010, p.271-290 (Festschrift Peter Schreiner).

—. *'Der Brachvogel bin ich': Themen und Tendenzen gegenwärtiger Dalit-Literatur in Hindi.* Wiesbaden, 2014 (Beiträge zur Indologie; 49).

Zelliot, Eleanor, Mokashi-Punekar, and Rohini (ed.). *Untouchable Saints: An Indian Phenomenon*. New Delhi, 2005.

Aesthetics of Dalit and Tribal Literature: A Counter Cultural Discourse

M. Dasan

"Only those who have lived experience of a Dalit have the moral right to write about Dalits" (Gopal Guru 28). The position maintained by majority of Dalit writers and critics is also applicable to Tribal/Adivasi literature. Though the history, culture, and worldviews of various communities, ethnic and racial groups differ, a little attempt has been made to understand the literatures of culture specific indigenous writers including Dalit and Tribal/Adivasi from the perspectives and worldviews from within. In other words, oral and written texts—poems, songs, narratives—short and long—, autobiography and drama by Dalit and Tribal writers from various parts of the country have most often been discussed and evaluated from the perspectives of male/mainstream world view, aesthetics and theoretical positions. This has resulted in the dismissal of Dalit and Tribal literature as inferior as they do not conform to the aesthetic standards of the dominant discourse. Just as indigenous traditions and writings were ignored by the colonial Europeans as they do not conform to the western aesthetic standards, in India Dalit, Tribal/ Adivasi and minority writings were inferiorized and ignored as they do not confirm to the Indian/Sanskrit aesthetics.

The insistence of traditional scholars who often decide and dictate terms and agenda for evaluating literary texts that all literatures are to be judged according to the aesthetic standards (which they call universal) already constructed by dominant discourse (little realizing the politics and ideology behind setting

such standards and aesthetic criterion) has been revealing their intolerance to alternative world views, epistemology and aesthetics. However, in spite of continuous and persistent attempts to dismiss and erase "Other" voices —oral and written—, literatures by Dalits and Tribal people in India emerged substantially during the post 1960 period and has been on the increase not only quantitively but also qualitatively.

Being a multi-lingual country, most of the writings by Dalits and Tribals were available only in regional languages and until translations were available from one language to another and to international languages, especially English, it was not discussed at pan Indian level. Despite the fact that Dalit/Tribal literature are culture specific and the issues reflected have regional as well as universal undertones, the discussion on aesthetics was developed among the Dalits only very late. The Dalit critics, writers and academics in Marathi and Hindi like Sharankumar Limbale, Omprakash Valmiki, Debendra Choubey, have contributed much to the emergence of Dalit aesthetics. As their writings were originally in regional languages it was discussed widely in 1980s and 90s only when it was translated into English.

The paper attempts to explain Dalit and Tribal aesthetics in the larger frame work of African American aesthetics, indigenous aesthetics and fourth world theorizing and tries to critically examine the poetics and politics of Dalit and Tribal writing so as to point out the similarity and difference between Dalit/Tribal aesthetics viv- a –vis Indian /Sanskrit aesthetics focusing on the counter cultural stance of Dalit and Tribal literature. Attempt will also be made to problematize how Dalit/Tribal writings contribute to the emergence of new identities even as they are divided in terms of religion and sub-groups. As the majority of Dalits follow established religions, especially, Hinduism and Christianity—and the majority of Tribals follow the cultural practices of Euro Christian tradition having embraced Christianity, emergence of new identity among Dalits and Tribals has not been an easy task.

Even though majority of the ex-untouchables/Dalits have been following the cultural practices of Hinduism and the converted Christians following Christianity they have been facing

discriminations based on caste within their respective religions. Despite official/dominant historiographers ignored the resistance discourses from the untouchable communities, in both religions the question—Can a Dalit/Tribal person assert his/her true identity by being a Hindu or Christian?—remains pertinent even now. Having been incorporated into the dominant religious and cultural discourse, through Sanskritization or internalization, what are the possibilities for the emergence and assertion of new Dalit/Tribal identity based on egalitarian philosophy, religion and spirituality? Could Buddhism or Ambedkarism help the indigenous people of India (Dalits and Adivasis) to emerge as a countercultural entity subsuming the sub-caste differences and inter-Tribal conflicts?

The double consciousness that W.E.B. Du Bois spoke of in the context of African Americans seems to be the real life experience of a Dalit and Tribal in contemporary India. The paper would facilitate debate on the issues of identity, religion, art and aesthetics of Dalit and Tribal literature in theory and practice. Savarna critics have always been asserting the view that all literatures are to be evaluated and understood from the perspective of universal values and criteria. They are of the opinion that anyone can empathize with the experience of the "other", in this case Dalits and Tribals, and can envision their life world and write about it. They hold the view that theory is universal and has no connection with experience.[1] They argue that the subjectivity, identity and life experience of the author is not a criterion to be taken into consideration. This view is predicated on the dichotomy between theory and experience, and it rules out and delegitimizes the role of experience in the construction of theory. But Dalit and Tribal writers observe that it is impossible for a non-Dalit and non-Tribal to write Dalit /Tribal literature as it is the product of Dalit /Tribal Chetna (Dalit/Tribal consciousness) and is shaped by the lived experience of these oppressed identities. As Kancha Ilaiah points out: "Tribal societies are interpreted and constructed in the manner the Brahmanic scholarship wanted to construct them—not in their own image but in the image of Brahminism" (Ilaiah 3).

As the contemporary context of indigenous writing, its aesthetics and theorizing is increasingly being discussed in relation

to its counterparts, in other parts of the world the discussion of the aesthetics of Dalit and Tribal writing has to be seen in the context of the definition of African American Aesthetics on which Dalit aesthetics is modeled and Indigenous/Aboriginal Aesthetics propounded by Australian Aboriginal and Amerindian writers and critics. [2]

Dalit literature is defined as writing by Dalits, for Dalits and of Dalits deriving inspiration from the definition of Black Art and Black aesthetics propounded by African American theorists like Hoyt Fuller and Larry Neal and Addison Gayle Jr. The umbilical connection between African American socio-political and cultural movements to its literature and aesthetics is applicable to Dalit movements and literature as well. Though there are differences in terms of religious, cultural and political positions and perspectives within the Dalit population, they do share many things in common especially in terms of the function and purpose of Dalit literature.

The definition of Tribal literature also have to be seen in the light of the definition given by American-Indian and Australian aboriginal writers like Thomas King and Mudrooroo Narogin.

Dalit/Tribal Literature in Translation

Dalit and Tribal literatures (including oral traditions of stories, legends, myths, etc.) are unique and culture specific and are written mostly in various regional or tribal languages. Our understanding of them is through translations. Each tribe has acquired, during long stretches of time, its own peculiar way of expressing itself due to the formative influences of individual disposition, group configuration, and natural environment. The language of the tribe, especially during story-telling, not only influences behavior, but also reflects a customary response and attitude. The uses of Native language repetitions and images of cultural significance can be understood to a certain extent, but the nuances of language seldom survive translation. Trying to explain the subtlety of meaning is like trying to explain why a particular joke is funny. It can be done, but the results are not the same.

The rich diversity of tribal communities and cultures in various parts of our country makes it impossible to speak in a general

universalizing way about "Things Indian". For instance, we have a number of communities with a variety of sub identities and a large percentage of Tribal people are mixed breeds as a result of colonization both internal and external. Both native and non-native scholars have attempted to delineate the components of native worldview and discussed the importance both for native and non-native community in general. All of them agree that one of the prime requisite for native literature is a reflection of a shared consciousness or an identifiable world view. Despite the fact that many Indian Tribals write from very diverse cultural backgrounds there is to a remarkable degree a shared consciousness and identifiable world view reflected in their literature, a consciousness and worldview defined primarily by a quest for identity. Divided into numerous cultural, religious and language groups our Tribal people practice many different religions and customs. However, there are some perspectives on their place in the universe that many Tribal groups share and continue to share.

Although individual Indians today vary in the extent to which they follow Tribal traditions, their worldviews and values continue to reflect those of their ancestors. It follows that the literatures they produce would reflect such worldviews and values.

The foundational values of Tribal people are holism, equality, respect, harmony and balance, which is different from and antithetical to the mainstream culture. Native literature demonstrates the importance of living in harmony with the physical and spiritual universe, the power of thought and word to maintain this balance, a deep reverence for the land and a strong sense of community. Tribal literature also reflects the four features common in indigenous spirituality. These include a shared notion of cosmic harmony, emphasis on experiencing directly powers and visions and common view of the cycle of life and death. Tribal people believed that they belonged to the Earth rather than the Earth belongs to them. Tribal literature is "Communitistic" to borrow a term from Jace Weaver, a prominent Native American critic. He defines it as an orientation of felt purpose within native writing that causes individual authors to "write to and for native peoples" (61) and to use their texts "to participate in the healing of the grief and

sense of exile felt by native communities and the pained individual in them" (xiii)

The cultural history of India was written pretty exclusively from the point of view of those who had triumphed in the contest between "civilization" and "savagism," with the result that the voice of the "Other" (Dalits and Tribals) was simply silenced. But there is always a return of the repressed in one form or another and now it is no longer possible to pretend that the "Other" is simply silent or absent because the formerly conquered write—as they fight—back. Today, the commentator on Indian culture who ignores or resists this fact does so at the risk of guaranteeing his or her own irrelevance to any attempt both to understand the world and to change it.

Tribal cultural production is based upon a profound wisdom that is most certainly different from a Western, rationalistic, scientific, secular perspective. Nor can anyone who would comment on tribal culture and literature ignore the perspective from which it is produced. Whereas the analysis and interpretation of Dalit and Tribal writings were done by the mainstream writers in the initial phase, the current literary situation in India bear witness to Dalit and Tribal writers restoring the agency to themselves.

Theorizing Dalit Literature

Dalit literature is unique in its insistence on the social upliftment and the realistic portrayal of Dalit experience in all its diversity. It is countercultural in that it offers resistance to any kind of hegemony, hierarchy and emphasizes materiality, equality, justice and ethics. It prioritizes lived experience as opposed to "anuman" (imagination), beauty and pleasure emphasized in Sanskrit aesthetics. Hence one must develop a different aesthetic criterion to evaluate Dalit literature. Artistic craft does not assume an important place in Dalit literary debate and the message forwarded by the text is given a higher position and hence it necessitates a need for a separate aesthetic criterion. As Limbale argues Dalit literature is radical and revolutionary in its output and hence it does not adhere to the traditional canon and aesthetic standards evolved by the dominant discourse. The savarna discourse valorize Sanskrit aesthetics

evolved out of the world view which was primarily religious, spiritual and Brahminic where as Dalit aesthetics evolved out of the material world, their involvement in productive labour, Amedkarist and Buddhist thought.

Whereas Dalit writers draw inspiration from the writings of Phule, Dr. Ambedkar, Periyar and Ayyankali, Savarna writing has its basis in the Hindu religious texts/scriptures (*Smritis* and *Shrutis*) defending and perpetuating caste hierarchy, hegemony and gender injustices. Dalit writers give more importance to the content and not to the form. The preference for "form over content" in the dominant theoretical discourse is not applicable to Dalit literature. Dalit literature calls for liberation, change, freedom and radical reordering of society so as to make it egalitarian. Sanskrit aesthetic which is often synonymously described as Indian aesthetics hardly has any relation with the quotidian life of the vast majority of people living in the country. Whereas a large majority of people lives in poverty, denied of basic human rights and right to live with dignity, valorizing an aesthetics born out of elitist and casteist worldview would tantamount to being colonial. Literary texts in India has more or less been judged and evaluated from the perspective of Indian aesthetics which does not take into consideration the life and world of the "Other". Even the aesthetic concepts/poetics prevalent during the Sangam period and the aesthetics reflected in Sangam literature do not form part of the canon formation of what is called Indian aesthetics. Dalit literature projects an alternative worldview and aesthetics based on the quotidian life experiences and do not subscribe to Paterian "L'art pour art". Instead, they write to bring about changes in the stratified and hierarchal society based on caste system, which has been perpetuating gender and caste discriminations, and valorizing the dominant discourse.

Dalit writers do not want their writing to be judged from the aesthetic criterion propounded by the hegemonic discourse as they think it is insufficient to address and evaluate their body of writing. In fact, Dalit critics reject the theoretical and aesthetic premises of the hegemonic discourse and bring out the alternative aesthetics based on their real life experiences. It is no longer a writing or pleasure or beauty based on imagination. Dalit literature

is produced out of the bitter experiences of Dalit masses over ages and it expresses the angst of the subaltern in a variety of forms. In fact, Dalit writing is resistant writing or counter cultural writing. Sharankumar Limbale has stated it clearly. While identifying the characteristics of Dalit writing, he observes that Dalit literature is based on three important things: Social commitment of the writer, self affirming values and the ability to raise reader's consciousness of fundamental values of life—equality, freedom, justice and fraternity (33)**.** Laura Brueck's observation in relations to Dalit writing in Hindi that it is wrong to think of Dalit literature as speaking in a single voice in the Hindi literary and political landscapes is applicable to Dalit literature in all languages. She adds that there exists a plurality of people, life experiences, literary voices and perspectives that often find themselves at odds with one another.

Dalit Chetna (consciousness) is a fundamental component of an emerging theory of Dalit aesthetics, or *Saundarya Shastra*. Critical commentaries such as OmprakashValmiki's *Dalit Sahitya ka Saundarya Shastra* (*Aesthetics of Dalit Literature)* include chapters on the definition and correct understanding of Dalit Chetna. Three anthologies of essays, interviews, poems and stories published in the late nineties and edited by Delhi-based publisher of Dalit literature: (Ramnika Gupta entitled *Dalit Chetna: Sahitya* (*Dalit Consciousness: Literature,* 1996), *Dalit Chetna: Kavita* (*Dalit Consciousness: Poetry*, 1996), and *Dalit Chetna: Soch* (*Dalit Consciousness: Thoughts*, 1998) are instances of Hindi Dalit writers and critics debating the specific understandings and applications of Dalit chetna. The first line of Alok Mukherjee's 2004 translation of Sharankumar Limbale's *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* also defines Dalit literature as the writing about Dalits by Dalit writers with a Dalit consciousness (32). "The values, philosophy and teachings of Dr. Ambedkar form the key source of the ideological, theoretical position of Dalit literature" (Dasan 56). All Dalit critics agree that Ambedkarite thought and Buddhism are the prime inspiration for this consciousness.

Dalit consciousness is an important seed for Dalit literature and it is separate and distinct from the consciousness of other

writers. One of the major characteristics of Dalit Consciousness pointed out is: Rejection of traditional aesthetics and non conformity with the definition of 'great poetry'. The act of deconstruction that the concept of Dalit chetna articulates with respect to 'mainstream' literary culture and canon is being enacted methodically as an exercise in critical re-reading and revisionist aesthetics in public forums of literary critical discourse. The concept of Dalit consciousness is being developed as a strategy for Dalit critical analysis, a kind of 'test' by which Dalit critics can judge the 'Dalitness' of any work of literature. The critical act of reading and analysis, with a separate set of theoretical tools, allows Dalit readers to be restored to the position of subject, to be the ones writing, rather than simply being written about. "Dalit aesthetics rejects the degraded Hindu social set up and exposes the inhumanities and prejudices of dominant society and instills new social and cultural consciousness" (Dasan 57). It is an expression of denial, a theoretical tool that contributes to the destabilization of traditional notions of social hierarchy and cultural authenticity.

Dalit and Tribal Literature: Similarities and Differences

Though the paper addresses Dalit literature and Tribal literature together it may be noted that it is not synonymous though similarities can be found. Let me try to identify the similarities and differences.

- As both are critiques of Brahminic/Hindu culture and aesthetics they are countercultural discourses.
- Both are culture specific and region specific and are diverse and vibrant.
- Tribal and Dalit literatures foreground the culture, language and worldview of these subjectivities/collectivities.
- Both are functional and stress the social function of literature and believe that literature should contribute to the betterment of society.
- Both are based on the real life experiences of Dalits and Tribals respectively.
- They reflect indigenous spirituality in contrast to the institutionalized religions.

- Both are critical of patriarchy and argue for equality of women.
- Both aim at the establishment of an egalitarian society.
- Both give importance to the questions of morality and ethics.
- But in practice there seems to be a lot of difference between Dalits and Tribals in terms of their real life situations.

As majority of Dalits have been living in proximity with the other caste groups and were interacting with them for long, they have been exposed to the religious practices, customs and traditions of upper castes and many of them have internalized Hindu/ Brahminic cultural and religious practices. Dalits in our country are also divided on the basis of religion and sub-caste identities and often quarrel among themselves creating a huge challenge for the emergence of common identity and unified action. Besides, a substantial number of Dalits have embraced Christianity as a means to overcome discriminations based on caste though they are still being discriminated within the church. Tribal people have been more or less living in exclusion in remote areas and forests and hence have been able to maintain their own specific traditions and identity. But many of them have also embraced Christianity and have been living with a kind of double consciousness—living as a Christian and a Tribal. Their spirituality, traditions, customs, even languages have been replaced by colonial languages, traditions and customs. This is not specific to India only. The indigenous people of all the world (Africa, North America, Australia and so on) have been trying to grip with the reality of living between two worlds. Except very few languages (Santhal, Ho, Khasi, kokborok) most of the Tribal languages in India are now extinct. Yet their writings in regional languages try to project what it means to be a Tribal and foregrounds Tribal culture, worldview and aesthetics.

Dalit/Tribal Literature as a Counter Cultural Discourse

What do we mean by emerging new identities? I believe it refers to the emergence of a new Dalit/Tribal identity asserting its agency to express what it means to be a Dalit and Tribal based on his or her own life experiences. The philosophy, ideology and aesthetics of these writings ought to be counter cultural, that is, Shramana/ Budhist/Ambedkarist. How is it possible for the Tribals and Dalits who have been following the traditions and rituals of institutionalized religions like Christianity and Hinduism which still discriminate them on the basis of caste /race and ethnicity to retain and assert their traditional indigenous culture? What are the strategies that could be adopted to retrieve the identity of the indigenous people, their culture and languages? What are the possibilities of bringing in the idea of "ethics of reading" in which the academic reader engages deeply with the text to try and understand more about the cultural context in which a Tribal text is produced? Why Tribal literatures are represented in a certain way not only in the First World but even in Third World Universities? Why collective identities on the basis of cultural self-assertion are dismissed as essentialism? Even as Eurocentric and Brahman centric academy argue that there is no such thing as indigenous perspective; the Tribal/Dalit scholars have to confront this position.

Notes

1. See the debate between Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai in *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory*. New Delhi: OUP, 2012 . Print.

2. See Addison Gayle. Jr. Ed. *The Black Aesthetics*. New York: Anchor Books, 1972. Print.

Mudrooroo Narogin. *The Indigenous Literature of Australia*. Victoria, 1997.

Thomas King, "Godzilla Vs Post Colonial." *World Literature Written in English*. 30.2 (1990): 10-16. 183-190.

Craig S. Woomack, *Red on Red: Native Literary Separatism*. Minneapolis, Uty of Minnesota Press, 1999.

G. N. Devy .et al. eds. *Indigeneity: Culture and Representation*, N.D. Orient Blackswan, 2009.

Works Cited

Dasan, M. "Validating the Voice of the Avarnas: A Study of Vaduthala's Caste Stories." *Calicut University Research Journal*. Vol.3:1, July 2002. Print.

Ilaiah, Kancha. *Post Hindu India: A Discourse on Dalit–Bahujan, Socio-spiritual and Scientific Revolution*. New Delhi: Sage, 2009. Print.

Limbale, Sharankumar. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations,* Trans. Alok Mukherjee. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004. Print.

Weaver, Jace. *That People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community.* New York: OUP, 1999. Print.

Image of Dalits and Tribals in Indian English Fiction : A Study

Rajashekhar S. Mulimani & Vijay F. Nagannawar

It is a verifiable fact known to many that Indian English Writers, by and large, belong to upper echelons of the society. They deal with many issues the nation is besotted with. One area which is conspicuous by its absence is that of the Tribals. A Tribal in India is someone who belongs to the other world for them. It is an arduous task to come across Indian English novels based on this theme. Be that as it may, there are some instances of such novels for example, Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case Of Billy Biswas* (1971), Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams*, Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra* (1993), and Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* are a few works dealing with varied aspects of Tribal and Dalit India. One element of similarity among all these novels is that they present Tribal folk as an exotic, undeveloped, mysterious, faithful and brave and Dalit as an uncivilized, backward, and uneducated ruffians.

Arun Joshi's novel *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) revolves around Bimal (Billy) Biswas and his encounter with the Tribals. The story has been narrated by Billy's friend Romesh Sahai. Billy Biswas is the son of a Supreme Court judge. He is sent by his father to the United States to study Engineering. However, he studies anthropology there. He reads books on Tribal attitudes and customs and gets immensely interested in the Tribes described in them. Billy's interest in the tribals goes back to his youth. At the age of fourteen, he had a strange experience at Bhubaneswar. When he watched a Tribal dance he felt that had he belonged to that Tribe, and became obsessed with the culture of the Tribal people.

In America, Billy comes across a Swedish girl called Tuula. Billy and Tuula are very good friends and share many intimate moments together. Tuula understands that Billy is interested in the primitive world. After some years, Billy comes back to India and joins Delhi University as a Lecturer of Anthropology. During this period, he undertakes a number of expeditions to investigate primitive communities. Sometime later, he decides to marry Meena, a sophisticated and very beautiful girl from his Bengali community, but this marriage turns out to be unsuccessful. On one of the expeditions to a hilly region of Madhya Pradesh, Billy mysteriously vanishes, leaving his wife, his beautiful child and his parents behind. A great search is launched by the police, but they fail to locate him. The police declare that Billy has been killed by a tiger in the deep forests. Ten years after his disappearance, Billy meets Romesh Sahai, who is a District Collector now and who is on a tour of the Maikal Range. Romi sees Billy wearing a loincloth and nothing else. At this point, Billy discloses some of his experiences during these ten years to Romi, and tells him how he hates the so-called civilized world.

Billy's wife and father come to know about Billy being alive through Romi's conversation with Situ, and move the police force to locate Billy in the forests, despite Romi's efforts to save Billy from the police. In the confusion that follows the search, Billy is shot down by a policeman.

It is imperative at this point to dwell upon the notion of primitiveness in brief. Billy Biswas is obsessed with primitiveness. His obsession is a result of his dislike for modern civilization. Primitivity is something that is considered the opposite of modernity or as something which is pre-modern. In this context what Michael Bell says provides a context for an understanding of Billy's attitudes. As Bell points out: "Primitivity is dauntingly ancient and characterized with a correspondingly wide range of manifestations." It refers to the classical concept of the golden age: the first state of innocence, before man knew how to sin. If we look at the development of this concept we find that primitivism and the popular fashion of admiration for the 'noble savage' began in the Eighteenth century. As mentioned in the third chapter,

Rousseau preferred the natural man to his civilized counterpart. Some of Rousseau's ideas are present in the poems by Goldsmith in which he evokes the idyllic. Influenced by his strong obsession, Billy goes into the Tribal society. Before he disappears he writes to Tuula mentioning the strange obsession that he has about the Tribal woman who appears in his dreams. The concrete form of the Tribal woman is Bilasia, whom he meets in the Maikal region. As a part of his search for primitive culture and his desire to be with them, Billy marries Bilasia. Billy's action reminds one of Verrier Elwin, who in a similar way went into the Tribal society and married twice into the Tribal community. The first marriage to a Gond woman was unsuccessful, but later he married a Pardhan woman by whom he had two sons.

Kamala Markandaya's novel *The Coffer Dams* (1969) appeared two years before Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* was published. For Markandaya the Tribals are not as primitive as in Joshi's novel. Clinton, founder and head of a firm of International construction engineers, arrives India to build dams, bringing with him his young wife, Helen, and a strong team of aides and skilled men. They face a formidable project, which involves working in daunting mountain and jungle terrain, within a time schedule dictated by the extreme tropical weather. Inevitable setbacks occur; accidents and friction among the mixed labour force present further complications. But to Clinton the building of the dam is more than a challenge; it is an obsession which is not, however, shared by Helen. Appalled by her husband's concern with structures rather than with men, she turns to the local Indian tribesmen, finding in them the human values which she finds lacking in the British camp. With relations between Clinton and Helen becoming increasingly raw-edged, the first rains fall. As the torrents sweep the valley and the level of the river rises, so does the tension in the beleaguered camp. The vital question looms: to breach the coffer dams, or allow them to stand, thereby placing the lives of the tribesmen in jeopardy. It is a fundamental question that splits the camp exposing the lingering prejudices of a bygone colonial era. They take part in the construction of a dam. One of the Tribals is an engineer. It is necessary to provide here a profile

of Markandaya in order to understand her perceptions about Tribal people. Kamala Markandaya's domain as a novelist has been both urban and rural India. She has written novels concerning social issues confronting rural India. She has also written on urban life. Her novels help us to look at issues from a woman's point of view.

The third novelist is Manohar Malgonkar. He depicts a different picture of the Tribals in his novel *The Princes* (1963). Set in Central India, the novel shows power relations between the erstwhile Maharaja and the Tribals. Manohar Malgonkar, like Arun Joshi, is not involved with Tribal activism. In this respect, he and Joshi are different from Mahasweta Devi who is deeply involved. However, for Malgonkar Tribals are not alien. As a hunter and politician he has observed them and mingled with them. As a writer Malgonkar has an important place in Indian literature in English, with more than ten novels, three collections of short stories, three histories, three works of non-fiction, and a play. He has been well appreciated by a number of reputed critics and creative writers. K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar compliments Malgonkar for "his sound historical sense". Speaking about Malgonkar's novels, M.K. Naik in his celebrated work *A History of Indian English Literature* comments that "Malgonkar's novels are neatly constructed and entertainingly told." Malgonkar's novels are conceived on a large scale; they are full of action. They are exciting stories. They are also valuable documents for our purpose.

The Princes depicts the dilemma and anxieties of the Maharaja of Begwad around the time of Independence. When the proposal for the merger of the Princely State comes, the ruler is reluctant to accept the proposal. On the other hand, the Congress is insistent on this issue. The Congress as well as the Maharaja seeks the support of the Tribals, the Maharaja appealing to their traditional loyalty. The Congress, however, fails to get Tribal support in spite of its attempt to lure the Tribals with its attractive plans of building dams and other modernizing programmes. They show their loyalty to the Maharaja. However, in the end the Maharaja has to succumb to the pressure of the Government and ultimately the State is merged into the Indian Union. The relationship between the Maharaja and

the Tribals is very peculiar. Abhay, the Maharaja's son and narrator, feels that the Tribals have been kept in the dark to prove the Maharaja's supremacy. They are not allowed to get the benefits of civilization or be assertive. As he points out, the relationship between the ruler and the people is a kind of "mystic [or] ritualistic bond" (*The Princes* 92). It is the only influence that holds the turbulent people together.

It is true that the king's treasury is in Bulwara where the tribals live, but ironically the tribals living around the treasury have no light of civilization. Abhay rightly points out: "As we approached, we passed small groups of men and women going towards the camp, all almost naked except for little wisps of cloth around their middles, the men wearing twists of coloured rope for turbans and the women chains of flowers on their heads"(*P* 95). The Tribals, in spite of their poverty and illiteracy, support the Maharaja. They do not want an ordinary person like Gour Babu to rule them in spite of the fact that he promises to do a lot of things for them. The Maharaja, however, enjoys their support and recognizes them as his great weapon against the nationalists led by the Congress.

Mulk Raj Anand (1905-2004) is a prominent and prolific novelist, a pioneer of Indian writing in English. His literary works are noted for his realistic, socialistic, iconoclastic and sympathetic documentation and delineation of social, political, religious and economic issues. Poverty, inequality, injustice, oppression, discrimination, exploitation, suffering, untouchability are the key themes found in his novels. *Untouchable* is his debut novel which centres round an eventful day of an outcaste, Bakha, a scavenger who being a prototype of millions of untouchables of India symbolizes their plight and predicament, hardship and humiliation, merciless tortures and inhuman torments to which they were subjected. The subcolonial dominant discourse of casteism in traditional Indian society runs parallel with the hegemonic discourse of British colonialism. As an example of subaltern studies, *Untouchable* takes the perspective of Bakha as the 'Other' who is muted and silenced by the dominant discourse of caste-hierarchy. *Untouchable* can be marked as an instance of subaltern studies with twofold implication and signification. The novel investigates the dominant

discourses or the ideological assumptions in traditional Hindu society. This humanist, social reformer adheres to the doctrine of humanism and Gandhianism and envisages a casteless and classless nation. Like Charles Dickens he makes use of photographic realism. As Charles Lamb he feels for the poor and the downtrodden and as Karl Marx he is the fountain of proletarian humanism.

The analysis establishes that Dalits like Bakha are subjected to endless conflicts between multiple ideological assumptions of the traditional Hindu culture and the desperate attempts of the Dalits to recover their rights and identities. Society intervenes to prevent them from mounting the platform surrounding the well for taking water, from entering into temples, from touching any high-caste Hindu, from going to schools which " were meant for the babus, not for the lowly sweepers"; religion interferes in the hypocritical representations of Pundit Kali Nath and Colonel Hutchinson to exploit them; politics intercedes to make the mass accept the ideological philosophy of a political party. Economical exploitation is the prerogative of the deceitful shopkeepers who deceive the untouchables knowing that they will not protest. Even they are compelled to repay compound interest for the money obtained on loan.

Works Cited

Anand, Mulk Raj. *Untouchable*. New Delhi: Surjeet Publications, 2007, Reprint.

Chaturvedi, A. K. *Tribals in Indian English Novel*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 2008. Print.

Iyengar, Srinivasa K. R. *Indian Writing in English*. New York: Asia Pub. House, 1973. Print.

Joshi, Arun. *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. New Delhi: Orient Publications, 2008. Print.

Mahanand, Anand. *Lo(k)cal Knowledge: Perceptions on Dalit, Tribal and Folk Literature*. New Delhi: Authorspress, 2013. Print.

Malgonkar, Manohar. *The Princes*. Newyork: Viking Adult, 1963. Print.

Markandaya, Kamala. *The Coffer Dams*. Gurgaon: Penguin India, 2008. Print.

Identity Crisis in Derek Walcott's *A Far Cry from Africa*

Mamta Gupta

It is ironical that Derek Walcott should think about giving back whatever the British rule had given him and tribal Africa. To me give back amounts to supporting the British rule and in his case it amounts to a betrayal of the African cause through an attempt to dilute it by mixing up issues. Robert Young described literature as 'a licentious and vagrant category' because it can never be pure and intermingles freely with literatures produced by other persons, societies and cultures. Literature travels in strange ways and there are no definite paths and routes which even change our way of experiencing and perceiving experiences. Books fall into hands of strange people and influence both the consumers and producers of literature. There are no definite rules and literature produced by a particular author can interfuse itself with that produced by any other community or person across all boundaries and restrictions. It is this permissiveness and freedom which literature has always asserted, turned into license, that has made Young call it 'licentious'. The results have often been to our advantage and they have created interesting, immodest and immoderate problematic just as a relationship between people belonging to two entirely different communities can yield. In open societies such activities are cause for celebration and a lack of restraint has made matters more challenging and vibrant. This licentiousness with ideas at a time when people were being brutally murdered makes Walcott's act an unpardonable one. The transgressive cultural formations actually build up a conspiracy against Africa and the discursive dynamic becomes a kind of apology for the English rule. Robert Hamner

believed that Walcott inherited two conflicting worlds and that it was the poet's business to give an expression to a people who are still searching for their own authentic voice. The colonial elements bound to become important inter-texts because they were a part of the general experience in which the cosmopolitan and the regional had to be reconciled (Hamner 2-3).

Walcott is actually trapped inside his Englishness, his connections with the whites and he cannot get out of this situation in which he is likely to land himself into trouble because Africa symbolizes all things poor and hopeless, especially when the people were caught in the throes of a conflict which meant huge losses and openings for development. The unconscious structures of Walcott's mind make him choose the English tongue which was as much a language of creativity as it was of prosperity and domination. Since English was and is the language of power, Walcott's love for it is rooted in his hybridity. Had it been the language of the Africans and of poverty, the poet's love for it may have disappeared because no special privilege would come his way and whatever would be his lot would be within the ambit of blood, toil and tears. This is why his listening to a far cry from Africa makes him to adopt an unrealistic approach, make ambiguous poetry out of something that was too deep for words for the Africans. Language has been the source of much controversy in India and Tribal Africa, especially English, because of domination and hegemony implicit in the episteme which it carries. Walcott had turned away from Africa and the Kenyans and chosen to live in the metropolitan luxuries of London, therefore, this tendency to 'betray them both', the colonials and the colonized. It was his own personal interest which drove him even in the middle of much slaughter and made him unable to take firmly a side.

His poisoned blood spreads poison at a crucial and cruel juncture of African history because his tearful fooling was only making matters worse rather than clarifying the issues or sorting out the problem. Oloruntoba-Oju says that language was the most powerful mode of oppression which was used by the colonials against the blacks and that the blacks were gradually imprisoned in the colonial tongues by their rulers. "Liberation from slavery, therefore, also

meant liberation from the 'master's' oppressive language; not just because there was the need for a replacement, but more because of the need to give expression to a uniquely new existence" (Oloruntoba-Oju 13). When all the suffering people of the world were with African Tribals, Walcott pops up with his ambivalent sensitivities which cover up and obfuscate the barbarities which were being perpetrated in a power struggle. Walcott chose freedom for himself and not outright freedom for the Africans which makes his stance morally suspect. Walcott was living within the broader English culture and the English language, and these special conditions were responsible for his apprehending the larger African reality in a different manner. No victim of colonial violence would have perceived the Mau-Mau rebellion as Walcott did because their epistemology was bound to be more intimate, injured and different, constituted by the direct play of historical forces.

The interplay of the mental structures of the African mind at this historical juncture could not but have been more aggressive, re-active, and transformative rather than self-contradictory. Interplay between Walcott's subjectivity and the tragedy of Mau Mau rebellion take us away from a solution and we drift into poetry which subverts hitting the nail on its head. Walcott becomes an agency for syncretism and hybridity which assists in the creation of an intellectual imperialism rather than deconstruction and this agency appropriates the authority to speak from a vantage point in England against those whom the rebellion was going on. The power of poetry or the agency makes the African and other post-colonials passive recipients of destabilizing syncretic culture and ideas which strengthens the colonial mould and reduce the chances of the natives. Walcott's aporiatic position destabilizes the African and British certainties, leads us away from decisiveness which was a must given the stakes after the bloody encounter of the Mau-Mau rebellion for independence. Would any native deny himself freedom after reading Walcott? Would his wounds heal? Would the plunder of the land which had been going on for decades be restored?

The aporiatic position therefore must be understood as anti-African and as anti-freedom, at best it can be a plea for some restraint to both the sides but the stakes could not be changed if

only because of their very basic seriousness and implications. The death of the child murdered by the Blacks is used to off-set the death of hundreds of Tribal Africans, build a dialectic that is uneven and completely disproportionate. To sympathise with the Whites we need to blow up the crimes of the Black and vastly reduce the enormity of their own. The aporia created by Walcott itself appears suspicious, wrong in scale politically. It is unfair to juxtapose barbarian acts of two different degrees, project the enormity and then create an aporia in the name of humanity which creates confusion. This disproportionate comparison of violence indulged in by the Blacks and the Whites creates a polyphony when the agenda before the anti-colonial powers was to get rid of the colonial authority by all means. Walcott's subjectivity and love for colonial language and culture carry a political burden which diffuses the dialectic which seems to be working against the colonizers because it points in the direction of an assimilationist politics by covering up the large scale slaughter of the tribal blacks with those stray incidents of violence which they had indulged in successfully. Fanon always argued that it was necessary to retaliate against colonialism with violence because it came into existence through the use of violence.

The Kenyan synergy for liberation would be lost pragmatically speaking were they to follow the logic of Walcott. The contest for freedom and supremacy was between unequals and in the prevailing situation the kind of discourse that Walcott's poem encourages appears counter-productive. It was a moment when it was necessary to fight and not indulge in any kind of breast-beating through such discursive constructions. Walcott's conflictual position explains his subjectivity but fails the Africans in a moment of crisis and it sensitizes us, but serves no politically achievable end because for the Blacks there could not have been any compromise with their political freedom. In fact, Walcott appears to be a case of miscegenation when viewed from the African point of view with political correctness. The poem is an open ended one and does not push towards any final solution which is precisely what the Kenyans were looking for. Looking at the situation and the poem from the point of view of Kenyan sufferers, the poet encourages us to revert to the structures of domination because he also articulates the

sufferings that the Whites had to undergo to maintain their strangle hold on the natives. By expressing his inability to choose between Africa of the crushed and the achievements of English language and culture Walcott was actually trivializing the extent to which the Blacks have been made to suffer. Walcott's narcissism or self-love is paramount because he wants to dump both the warring parties. This no African would be able to say if located in Africa itself because there was no way out to remain neutral in this people's strife nor was it possible to be with both the sides. There is also a feeling that Walcott was safe in London, therefore, he had the opportunity to sentimentalize the issue. He was deeply moved but not deeply affected due to his location and his intellectual subversion by the creative solutions of the West which make him politically passive. Nowhere in the poem does he categorically say that he wants the colonials to withdraw from Africa. Walcott saw himself as a marginal person in St. Lucia and in Britain and exploited his marginality to the hilt, especially in poetry. Norval Edward talks about "Walcott's consistent investments in a creolized double-consciousness that is situated at the borders of languages, cultures, identities, and ethnicities. Paradox, ambiguity, and contradiction are constituent elements of Walcott's poetics, a poetics which conceptualizes language as ineradicably marked by division, "in-between-ness", cultural and racial dichotomies, contending histories and geographies, and mimicry and originality" (Edwards 12-13). We are told that Walcott was extremely self-conscious about his unique position in terms of hybridity and this reflects in his creative works, including *A Far Cry from Africa*.

A Far Cry from Africa is the result of an identity crisis from which Derek Walcott suffered because he happened to be of a mixed parentage, Black and White– the coloniser and the colonised. This hybrid identity gave him an advantage over the natives which he exploited to the full. A hybrid identity, while it led him to a problematic situation in which choices had to be exercised between the Blacks and the Whites, it also gave him the benefit of understanding the human situation as it prevailed during the Mau Mau rebellion. Thus this identity crisis placed him at an advantageous situation as compared to the others but the tendency to underplay

the large scale slaughter of the blacks and to equate a handful of killings of white people with the massacres of the blacks proved that identity wise he was more comfortable in the White camp because they were the dominators and the rulers. Walcott tries to build up a paradox to explain away his crisis of identity but his explanations are unconvincing for those who found themselves on the suffering side. Walcott tries to slip away as it were with a slick answers, by opting out of the political crisis. Identity also helps in giving meaning to our lives and comes to our rescue when we try to give a meaning to our lives. The trouble arises when one has to exercise choices and Walcott does not exercise any choice by pleading his helplessness at a time of crisis. He is happy to isolate himself and let the trauma prevail, make poetry out of it which does not resolve battles. He suffers and introspects but in the end he places himself and his indulgences in poetry above all political strife. It is his ego, his love of his poetic art and the English language, which prevent him from making a choice which could have gone against him. It must be remembered that Leopold Senghor, poet and President of Sengal, always advocated la Francophonie despite the logic of negritude and anticolonialism going against it, and that under his leadership French culture thrived very well in Senegal. Such examples may have given Walcott strength in his decision making in favour of English language and culture, another face of domination.

Ego identity of Walcott smothers the drive towards the inescapable warfare in which taking sides was a necessity. The freedom of the natives was never a clean cause for Walcott, morally justifiable; that the struggle of the Blacks should have been 'dirty' shows that Walcott was never entirely sympathetic towards them. Nowhere in the poem does Walcott hint at the fact that the English and much earlier the Spanish had imposed their authority by using violence and chicanery in his own country, St. Lucia. He does not bother to explore how colonials entrench themselves on the Black lands; and it was only after firmly entrenching themselves in authority that they decided to streamline the administrative system. The White people were not there for the love of Africa or the welfare of the Tribal Africans but primarily because they wanted

to derive the pleasures of the exercise of power and mint money. The aims and ambitions behind the colonial enterprise are nowhere touched because the poet's sympathies are more with the White people and it was through them that Walcott wanted to fulfill his writerly ambitions. The natives had little to offer him except their poverty and exploitation, which could be blamed on themselves. This pathetic reality may be soul-shaking but for Walcott it had little significance. Walcott knew very well on which side his bread was buttered and he was not embarrassed to make a politically correct choice.

In Walcott's case it is his ego identity which defines his preferences in the middle of a violent crisis between the colonials and the natives. It is as though being of mixed parentage, Black and White, gives him the right to place himself above all conflict which was a question of life and liberty for the Blacks by rejecting all else. The love of the English tongue also signifies the love of his own poetry and prosperity. The ego identity helps Walcott in deconstructing both the sides by displaying their short-comings and brutalities. Violence against each other expresses the cruelties and senseless behaviour that they were capable of, being cruelly irrational against each other out of spite. To make poetry out of it becomes the privilege of the egotistical which Walcott enjoyed mercilessly. Instead of choosing one of the rival causes, after exposing them and their short comings, he finds a lame excuse to choose himself. The reason was simple: Walcott was not directly involved in the conflict nor was he likely to be caught in the crossfire. The west had its comforts open for him, seductions of a literary existence in comfort. Edward Hirsch says that Walcott was reasonably comfortable with his surroundings at St. Lucia and with other Black folk whose Tribal ancestors had arrived from Africa to work on the plantations but he always suffered from 'a sense of self-division and estrangement' also (Hirsch 110). Walcott was angry with those people who saw the world in terms of Black and White and in whose opinion people like him were "illegitimate and rootless."

The other thing is that Walcott had spent some of his crucial years in St. Lucia, and Africa was thousands of miles away and

the cause of the Blacks there was "A Far Cry" for him. He could be dispassionate unlike the Africans because he was not likely to be killed or trampled. In no way was the poet's material or creative existence threatened by the Mau-Mau rebellion. Being of mixed blood made Walcott thrive as compared to the other Blacks, and, therefore, he remains brutally frank and shameless about his love for the English language which most blacks could never have learnt without entering the slavish domain of the colonials. The English language itself was the vehicle of prosperity and power for Walcott. It made his command on English gratuitous and its usage made him superior to not only the Blacks but the vast majority of the White colonials. Therefore, to give up the language of the colonials for Walcott would be to give up his privileged position in society. His identity as an individual would take a beating without the English tongue. Those who were fighting for their independence among the Blacks were very clear about their identities and perhaps were clearer about their collective identity during the time of warfare. They were willing to sacrifice themselves to assert their collective identity and independence. The cultural ramifications of African identity were being crushed by the colonials who wanted to impose their culture were also negative.

Cultural invasion is no less serious a matter because it destabilizes the identity of the oppressed and Fanon advocated authentic communication among the oppressed. Paulo Friere believed that the cultural superiority was always imposed with the use of force by the colonials and therefore, recommended participative pedagogy. The Whites were there to rule and conquer and in the face of opposition stood united. There was no identity crisis among them and their loyalties were with their respective European countries. Nowhere in *A Far Cry from Africa* does Walcott hint at the division in the ranks of the natives and the colonials. They were fighting it out with each other and each party was convinced that it was right. The White man's superior airs gave him cause enough for moral uprightness, and the responsibility of carrying the White man's burden because the natives were in their eyes half devil, half child; made them feel responsible though in practice they were plundering. It was philanthropy plus the

commissions through business and exercise of power! Plunder and domination had unified the colonials and they had won over many natives on their side, including men like Walcott who saw huge advantages in being with the supposed opposite party. The conflict between the natives and the colonials can be seen as a conflict of identity and contesting purposes.

Works Cited

Edwards, Norval. "Derek Walcott: The Poetics of the Two Margins." *Mississippi Review*, 24. 3, (1996): 12-35.

Hamner, Robert. "Introduction: Out of the Ordinary, Derek Walcott." *Callaloo* (Derek Walcott: Special Issue), 28.1 (2005): 1-6.

Hirsch, Edward. "Poetry: Derek Walcott." *The Wilson Quarterly*, Vol. 21. 4 (1997): 109-11.

Oloruntoba-Oju, Omotayo. "The Redness of Blackness: Revisiting Derek Walcott's Mulatto Aesthetics." *Caribbean Quarterly*, 52.1 (2006), 12-25.

Young, Robert J.C., *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, New York: Rutledge, 2005.

Angaliyat: A Saga of Triumph

Amod Kumar Rai

The Dalit proponents have repeatedly emphasized that this literature devotes itself to nothing else but humanism. One such inkling is extracted from *Asmitadarsh*, a Dalit literature magazine—

To me, Dalit is not a caste
He is a man exploited by
The Social and economic
Tradition of this country.
He does not believe in God,
Rebirth, soul, holy books teaching
Separatism, Fate and Heaven
Because they have made him
A slave. He does believe in
Humanism. Dalit is a symbol
Of Change and revolution. (23-24)

This poetic assertion of Pantwane evidently evinces that the Dalits reject the main stream tradition, which is not inimical in the least as Eliot posits that minor or new trends are also important in making literary tradition vital (7) and for Dalit Literature low caste man and their sufferings are of prime importance. Baburao Bagul propagates similar views. "Dalit literature is not a literature of vengeance. Dalit Sahitya is not a literature, which spreads hatred. Dalit Sahitya first promotes man's greatness and man's freedom and for that reason it is an historic necessity" (56-57). Joseph

Macwan, a sparkling name in the firmament of Gujarat literature, translates Bagul's views intact in *Angaliyat*. Dalit literature has transcended the roots of its origin because Dalit people are invariably living in all the states of India in similar vein.

Located in Gujarat, Macwan's present book *Angaliyat,* although I'm not always very firm that a creative writer writes with a definite ideology, seems to be a perfect embodiment of Sharankumar Limbale's views regarding the form, purpose and function of Dalit literature:

> Dalit literature is written with the purpose of conveying the anguish and suffering of the Dalit and demands as antidote for it. Its aim is not to teach or preach. It derives its strength through the depiction of hard reality. So the basis for aesthetics of Dalit Literature is pain. Agony and torture are not devastating but acting as an irritant. (24)

It is exactly what happens in *Angaliyat*. Originally written in Gujarat by Macwan and awarded with the Sahitya Academy award in 1988, it is later translated in English by Rita Kothari in 2004 as *The Stepchild*. Like *Sangati*, *Angaliyat* too disowns the conventional trends of mainstream literature. It has no organic plot, not a single hero or heroine, nor any antagonist, nor any didactic value but it is only a cultural representation of the Dalit world of Gujarat in the form of a novel. *Angaliyat's* "acknowledgements" bears a corroboration to such promises e.g. "Suffering, want, pain, exploitation, social injustice—the marginalized Dalit community is continuously victimized by all these evils and yet it has a culture of its tales of courage" (vii).

Macwan emphasizes the same page that mainstream literature of the region has ascribed only a stepmother treatment to these aspects considering it not its real offspring. *Angaliyat*, thereby, is a compensation to Dalit concerns, which is marginalized by the big tycoons of literature. *Angaliyat* tells and in a way acknowledges the strength and character of Dalit world. It narrates the story of oppression and exclusion but by transforming the vanquished into the victor and by pushing the periphery to the core. Achyut Yagnik, scribes, an aptly commensurate honor to Macwan's attempt in the

Introduction of the book: "For the Dalit intelligentsia, *Angaliyat* was the first Dalit novel in Gujrati, written by a Dalit writer about Vankars (weavers), a community of Dalit" (7).

Therefore, again like *Sangati*, *Angaliyat* too is a pioneering attempt to portray the writings of Dalit world. Its emanation is a phenomenal one in the long history of Gujrati literature. It poses a challenge to the eminent literati's apathy towards their onus of assimilating the socially derelict class within the cozy cried of privileged does. Macwan moves even a stepfather besides innovating the Dalit novel for Dalit in Gujrati i.e. establishing the beauties and values of higher class through characters from the lowest stratum of the society. Valji, Teeha, Methi, Kanku, Bhavankaka, Goke etc. all are Vankars but all of them are embodiment of several human virtues like love, sacrifice, justice, truth, loyalty, intimacy and above all of Ambedkar's ideology. In striking contrast to them Meghi Patel, Ramlo, Ranmal, Dehlavala, Manji, Nanji, Phoolji Patel etc. are embodiment of several human vices viz – envy, greed, lust, betrayal loath, perfidy deceit, lechery etc. It is, in multiple ways, a reminder of Edmund Spenser's magnum opus *Faerie Queene,* an allegory of usual clash between human virtues and vices. This is the intricacy of literature that it invariably entails multidimensional layers in it. A single literary text may have a realistic, allegorical, metaphorical or symbolical layer inextricably riveted with each other. *Angaliyat* is one such text loathing any incidental exception to this literary phenomenon. On the one hand it exposes the inherent malice of appear caste people for the socially downward on a veritable or realistic level, while on the another hand on its allegorical level *Angaliyat* oscillates around an archetypal theme, i.e. tussle between virtues and vices, and not only raises but also celebrates the Dalit custom of "naatru", second marriage even of widows, of carrying the off spring of first marriage to her new home and of all other rituals of their world. Even the title *Angaliyat* itself is metaphorical and symbolical. Not only the main characters are Angaliyat, stepchild, but the entire Vankar weaver, community is treated as a stepchild by the upper class and caste in the rural Gujarat. All human beings are children of God and consequently brethren among themselves but discrimination is made to the people

of lower strata as if they are their stepbrothers. So the title of the novel is quiet appropriate. In the context of society as well as that of the novel, *Angaliyat* bears within itself the age-old discrepancy between the center and periphery in the Dalit society of Gujarat. Angaliyat stands for a stepchild who, as a consequence of mother's discriminatory attitude is always deprived of his due emotional support, the novel portrays just the opposite. Goke, an Angaliyat in the village of Teeha, is given more affection and love by Teeha and Kanku than their own children. This is what literature in general and novel in particular is supposed to do. Terry Eagleton grimly asserts: "Novel censors what is amiss in a society" (97).

One more aspect should be discussed before we penetrate and delve deeper in the theme of the novel. It is the peculiar style with which Macwan has succinctly conveyed and rendered the Dalit world of rural Gujarat in the form of *Angaliyat*. Achyut Yagnik in the Introduction of the book has precisely adjudged it —

> Interestingly, his style reminds us again and again of the performing arts tradition of storytelling. It is noteworthy that the Dalit society of Gujarat has its own castes engaged in the occupation of performing arts and storytelling like Turi, Bart, Gadhvi and Sadhu. Macwan has drawn on the rich legacy of this oral tradition of Dalit. His narration moves on linear progression mode without flashbacks, without spiral movement. (8)

Further he adds that the dialogues of the book are also in accordance with the oral folk tradition. It subtly reveals the verity of characters at once. While all his verdicts are true in context of the text but Yagnik's one premise i.e. his "narration moves on linear progression without flashback, without spiral movement" doesn't see aright in Toto. Yes, there is no flashback technique but narrative. To mention one such instance is Methi's rescue by Teeha in second chapter of the novel. Methi is rescued first and then their coincidental meeting at the same time and place is elaborated- likewise in the 20th chapter. Methi's marriage with Chunthia is related directly and then it is followed by the details of the conspiracy which precipitated in their marriage. Thereby Yagnik's claim bears less validity.

As it has been aforementioned that Dalit Sahitya promotes man's greatness and man's freedom rather than spreading hatred, *Angaliyat* accomplishes this mission infallibly with several others viz changing and challenging the conventional set ups, creating and endorsing Ambedkarite ideology, projecting the beauty and valor of the Dalit world, and ascribing the glamorized virtues, to Dalits etc. The author has achieved this goal with his superb characterization. The endurance, the striving for self-identity, the struggling not only against the social system but also against the members of their own clan and above all their revolt and outspokenness of the major characters make the novel a beautiful saga of triumph. Although this triumph is obtained with the cost of their lives yet loosing life means only the perishing of body not the soul. Their deeds and virtues are memoriam of following posterity. Her's is not another ordinary death but an act of martyrdom as they die while accomplishing a noble mission i.e. for the proper rights and identity of their people. They are martyred not for protecting any country, always an abstract phenomenon, but for the cause of their people, for their attempt of bringing their life in equilibrium with that of the Patidars clan. Hence, their martyrdom is for a moral purpose on humanitarian grounds. This martyrdom is like that of Celia of *Cocktail Party* who dies but becomes a savior for many poor people threatened by impending death because of a disease. Likewise Teeha, Valji, Methi die so that rest of their clan awake— awake from the age-old slumber of their deprivation. *Angaliyat* will be largely celebrated in the literary world for a very strong portrayal of characters.

It is through characters that the plot of *Angaliyat* develops and the development of characters is interring dependent among each other. No individual character seems to grow on its own behalf but needs an aid from others. Teeha's ideals and heroism emerges only on account of his sacrifice, love, loyalty, faith, generosity etc. for Valji, Methi, Kanku, Bhavankaka, Goke, Danji etc. Similarly Methi's fortitude, endurance, love, benevolence, belligerency and sacrifice are lightened in her relationship with Chunthabhai, Motibhai, Heera Kaka, Teeha, entire Dalit folk, Kanku, Valji and others. Then there are Valji and Dano whose

intimacy and apprehension for Teeha lead them to sacrifice farmer's life and latter's to an entirely unenvisaged and unforeseen life. Kanaka's concerns, besides her two marital life– one with Valji and second with Dano, are largely associated with Teeha's life before and after his marriage. Now if we construe the characters from the other side that is the villainous characters of Shikpaar like Dhoolsingh, Dehlavala, Meghi Patel, Phoolji Patel, Ranched, Manji etc. are all schemers and from the very beginning till the end involve in scheme and hatching conspiring against Teeha who has openly threatened them in their own and put their fake prestige at stake. The entire upper caste, therefore, colludes against him. But Teeha is only a symbol they are tackling with, in reality they are combating with the newly born confidence that has crept in to Dalits represented by Teeha regarding *Angaliyat*. He is the central character of the novel and a puce rebellion against the deplorable system that degrades Dalit and discriminate s them to periphery

The locale of the novel is the furthest rural area of Gujrat and the period is that of pre-independence around the third and fourth decade of the twentieth century. Character is among one of the most fertile land of Gujarat as it is located between two rivers-Sabarmati and Mahi. The landed community, Kanbi is benefited the most and has become the dominant community of Patidars. The process of industrialization has deprived the Vankar community of its usual income and only the hard working and deft weavers have managed to survive. It is where the novel opens with two diligent but simple Vankar friends in an idyllic and ethereal atmosphere. The life begins in the village with two things-(i) with the stirring of the musical chord of Bhavankaka's sarangi and (ii) with the rhythmical sounds of Teeha's loom. It is followed by Bhavankaka's usual morning hymn:

> Look, there sits the swan on the edge of the brimming lake,
>
> Oven him stretches the pearl filled sky,
>
> Where should he peck, he Knows not Ram

> Where should he peck, he Knows not Ram
>
> What can I know of its fate, O Ram? (2)

The song is purely symbolical and delineates the wretched conditions of the Vankar and the lot, which has brought attrition for them. Like the swan, they are put aside the brimming lake. The world, sky and earth are teeming with rich resources but it is largely inaccessible to the Dalit. Uncertainty rules over their life and the swan they do not know what to do, where to go for their bread. But Teeha with his circle is a man of skill and profound energy, of dauntless courage and little ambition, of exceptional power and gusto, of excellent stamina and sharp wit, of sensibility and kindness. He inherits three houses and a productive loom and has become orphan at the age of eighteen. He is alone, but has not developed any addiction and lives his friendship with Valji in full swing. They work together, trade together, everything together but Valji is married and Teeha is not. This occasionally creates scuffles between them where Valji would insist Teeha to get married and he would resist it with firm determination. Valji's emotional cooking would fail:

> "That means I mean nothing to you!"
>
> "Of course not. You are my Valbhai always."

This easy and friendly chatting often leads to noisy scuffles but in the words of novelist "These too were an unusual pair. Inseparable row, bodies with a single soul." Teeha is more experienced than Valji who is easily succumbed and cajoled with people's words that it is Valji who is not willing of Teeha's marriage as he wants to possess Teeha's property. But in verisimilitude it is Valji's hearty concern to see his friend married. Moreover, his wife is foisting on him to persuade his friend to arrange his ceremony. She would constantly remind him that he is living a married life and his friend is living in oblivion. Valji at such remarks feels extremely distressed and queasy in the pit of stomach and rejuvenates his attempts with couple vigor. He even threatens him of forsaking his intimacy with Teeha: "I do not like this confrontation. You are not willing to bend even a bit on this issue. Obviously, I am of no consequence to you. Why do not you say it in so many words?

Very well then, I'll not set foot on this threshold again!" (12). So much deep affection, caring and love are exemplary and phenomenal which Teeha properly repays in absence of Valji. But such assertions are made in a fit of emotional berserk too weak to last long. As soon as the night is over, the usual composure of their intimacy would habitually bring him to Teeha's door. Then together they would go to their joint enterprise of bidding and selling clothes. If Valji is emotional in character, Teeha is a bit rational and practical. He has his own ethics with which he perceives and runs his life. He is a born disbeliever in social conventions laid down eons ago by Brahmins. He would, therefore, not observe the feeding of pallbearers and the death rituals and ceremony of his mother. He would not be moved even a bit with the duress of his own relatives and would reply to any such allegation in a bold but lucid way—

> You will merely eat and forget. How will it benefit my poor dead parents? I do not see how you're eating and drinking can reach my wretched parents! The good deeds they earned are gone with them the rest is only display and I'm not for it. You people may do what you like. (13)

This defiance and aggression in him is not only shown in domestic disputes like this but also everywhere whenever there is a proper need for it. Besides he is an adept errand salesman who knows all the skills of bidding his cloths at maximum benefit and he does it with full pride. Besides he is a man of sheer energy and stamina and his physique is strongly built. He can carry a burden of forty to fifty kilos on his shoulder and can walk miles and miles to reach his destination. He has apt business discretion too and is conversant of all contiguous surrounding villages. He knows it well that the sackcloths which he weaves and prepares on loom will have a promising market in villages than in towns and cities as only farmers purchase such sackcloths. It is suitable to them in their fieldwork as well as economically. Teeha begins every new work with formerly made plans while Valji does not easily deviate from the usual routine. He is not so much confidant of the new place, a village, as a suitable and lucrative market but he firmly satisfies his apprehensions: "Why, are auctions done only in towns? After all

our sales are for villages, aren't they? Who but the farmer needs this sackcloth? Keep going. Business and relations take place where you want them too" (14).

This assertiveness of Teeha is also a reflection of his unswerving mental makeup. He makes his way where he wills. He knows that human will, tight decisions, immense capacity and a sharp clairvoyance can earn success to a man wherever he goes. This belief leads him to this village. Shilapaar– a "god forsaken village." Teeha has already some known there. One such is the Thakore who meets them on the way to the village. The author cuts on ironical remark in their discourse. They are going together but Thakore except the burden of sackcloths does not allow either of them to sit in the bullock cart. They talk freely, laughs joke at each other but without any physical contact: "This too was sad and ironic- you could accommodate the woven cloth in the cutout not the weavers themselves. They were imputing! In fact one could talk freely and openly, but without any physical contact" (21).While Valji feels it and is humiliated, Teeha remains unperturbed because these matters are not his concerns. In the novel the upper castes discriminate them in the normal routine of life, Teeha too retaliates by not heeding to the social customs of saluting or bowing on their passing across his way. This is the sole reason when Valji defends Ranched Dehlavala, Teeha reminds him his brutality in the endemic epidemics when he has refused any sort of help to the poor clan. Teeha stands for goodness irrespective of endings. Likewise he can't endure treachery anywhere either in his own house or in an alien village, either of his own caste and class or that of the Angaliyat i.e. the upper caste of Patidars or Patel's. He is as dauntless as some legendary Achilles or Odyssey or like the legendary Dalit martyr Mahya. As he has tamed an infuriated bull daring one of his auctions in the town market, the stories of his bravery spread like the fire of jungle in all neighborhoods. The impact of his bravery in the words of the author is thus:

> And that is why Teeha was never harassed by robbers, no matter how late it was, on his way along the peddling route. Teeha could wield his measuring rod like a sword.

And the dagger at his side 'took no sides.' Although called a dagger, it in reality only a knife used for cutting cloth but its sharpness guaranteed that if necessary, it could be a lethal weapon. (16)

Besides this repute of his bravery, the repute of his integration in business and his skill of weaving make him highly popular in the region. His cloth, as Teeha often claims, can hold water and not lose a drop, so close and tight is his weave. He never makes even the least compromise in his venture. As a result nobody repents having spent money on his cloth. Above all he has a certain style of his own teeming with confidence, which has certain lure for the customers. Who on the earth would not be persuaded by this proselytizing appeal?

Come buy! Come buy! Come buy!

Your crop will rejoice in my cloth

The tiniest grain will say

You have found an honest man;

Check thrice if you will

Make sure of the cloth

Come buy my wares

Try the cloth as a water bag

Not a drop will fall through.

My heart and my soul in my weft and my warp. (11)

Teeha's popularity, undeniably, is earned by dint of his virtues but in this world jealousy destructs the prospect of as ideal fraternity.The growth, progress and success of a man, if he is from the lower echelon, incurs malice, envy and scowling of others who are superior to him either in caste or in economy. And if this man of bright prospects is also disrespectful then it is like adding fuel to fire. When Teeha's procession of bidding is at its full swing, suddenly a stone strikes his hand and his attention is stork on a woman completely drenched from tip to toe. Teeha is not hurtled even in

the least by the stone but is infuriated on the petty remarks made by those scoundrels on the woman. They belong to the dominant class of Patidars but they care least for the ethical fraternity of the village. Their mischief are openly made and ignored by their parallel clans as well as of the lower ones as they can't afford to incur Patidar's enmity. But that day is ominous one as Teeha is present on the spot and has witnessed everything from the beginning to the end. He challenges the scoundrels at once and assaults on them with his cudgels and alone gets over them. Patel's are taught a good moral lesson and they would have been pacified had this preaching came from a person of their own class. They are abashed and insulted as they are put down by a dhed (low-caste). They shout at once to the Mukhi, Dhoolsingh Thakore- "You are the Mukhi. I want to file a police complaint against this dhed." The elders and the respected one of the village come to avenge against the daring of this lower caste man and not to stand for him even when they know that he is right and their own children mischievous. The entire Patidar community start stone pelting to which Thakore's uproar brings halt and the crowd gradually drifts from there. People, both the upper and the lower caste, have become accustomed to such molestations of female folk of their village and seem to allow it willy-nilly. Thakore angrily alarms this to Teeha: "Look Teeha, this happens every day and it will go on. You shouldn't have unnecessarily picked a fight-It's just as well that we Thakore's have authority here; otherwise you would not be alive. You think those people would have let you go? Forget it" (22). Thakore's assertion evidently reveals the condition of the village where women's molestation is a general case and people know not or do not hinder it. But those who are in a position to check it, like Thakore, are also a tamasha watcher. Teeha replies him bluntly—" Hell with living Thakore! Who is to lament my death? People talk of independence, but look at what's happening to our women folk. Doesn't that matter to anyone at all" (27).

With this Teeha and Valji start walking the village out. Teeha is bleeding but is not offered any first-aid even by his own community members, as they are afraid of getting Patel's enmity by sheltering them. It is the one reason of wretchedness of the

Dalits. In an hour of crises instead of getting united they are more disunited. The upper-caste threatens them with matters of work and money and they become estranged to their own people. This timid folk readily forget that the twenty-five families of Patels would be utterly powerless if they stand together. Only a single cause goes in Patels favor i.e. their money, which makes even the Thakore's dependent on them. And money, Mark anticipated in 1857, is the biggest power, which determines evenly other discipline of life, and so is the permanent subjugation of the lower caste. Motibhai, a friend to Teeha and Methi's nearest relative, asserts the same that it is their caste which suppresses all their boiling and they cannot think of developing enmity with crocodiles while living in water. At last when they have become fully disappointed Methi and her mother shelter them. Methi is the woman who has been responsible for this entire ruckus. They, unlike, their community are not afraid of any social exclusion or economical deprivation and in a way compensate for the rest of the community. Here lies the beauty of *Angaliyat*. Macwan has portrayed the barren Dalit world with oases of hopes. It is a hope, which leads these characters to triumph. Methi is among one of them. She, despite being a woman in the decade of favoritism, dares to offer help to two strangers who have stood beside her when all men of her own village have only cowered down.

Thakore's word that the Patels will not forget the insult, soon turns to be true. Patels have compelled him to summon Teeha in the village square. Nanio, son of Megha Patel, the victim on the other hand, lays with some other goondas of his clan on Teeha's way. Teeha has got a sixth sense and he anticipates the lurking threat to their life. Even in this moment of crisis he exercises his wit and manages a safe escape for Valji:

> You are not to say a word. You have a family. Borrow a sari from Matibhai's wife and wear it. Walk like a woman and also keep a lota in your hand; it will keep you away from people. Start walking through the fields. At the slightest suspicion, throw the sari and run. Nobody can run faster. And if it becomes absolutely essential, use this knife. Finish off at least two of them. If I remain alive your wife and family will have no problem. (36)

This fascinating working of art in a daunting and dismal situation is a rare thing. Teeha is absolutely aware of the impending trouble; he arms himself with a sword and enters the village square all atone. Without any proper litigation and hearing, the Mukhi makes the verdict, certainly under the economic compulsion of Patels, that Teeha has to pay a penalty of one hundred twenty five rupees. Teeha obviously refuses to pay and challenges the entire crowd with a naked sward in his hand and flies from there. At the outer frontier of the village he encounters Nanio with seven other fellows and alone drives them away. Nanio is at his mercy there but Teeha leaves him and feeds no pride in hitting an enemy no knees. This is the goodness on his part. No true valiant slays a meek enemy. But treachery entertains no morals anywhere in life. The defeated Patels can't easily digest such aloes. They collude together to vanquish this man and to avenge their public humiliation. This pitfall will be nurtured by them till it becomes unbearable and claustrophobic for him. They begin this battle by putting fire to the fields of Mote and Heera who have hospitalized Teeha after the furor. Nay their gratification will come only if these two families are ostracized by their own clan- Patels stick posters giving a clear caution forbidding them to any kind of communication with Ratnapar, Teeha's village. Even this too will not satiate their ego. They try to influence Mukhi who refuses to collude with them and Patels, having no solid option left, go in bout of wait and see.

Meanwhile the first encounter between Teeha and Methi sparks the emotion of love. Macwan has portrayed this love with a very different colour. This love flourish without any physical contact and lust never encroach their pious relationship. It is the platonic love, a communing of two souls, body is denied and they never long for sexual gratification. This piety of love between two Dalits is contrasted with sheer lechery of Patidars. Macwan, by all means, has created glimpses of beauty and ideal and the consequent triumph of the Dalit world of *Angaliyat*. *Angaliyat* celebrates and glorifies Dalitism. But unmagnified and unexpressed love, inevitably entails

complexities and not only troubles them but also effects their intimacy. Teeha who is so brave and bold in other affairs of life is equally shy in the matter of love and depends entirely on Valji's assistance in it. *Angaliyat* presents not a single but multiple facts of love. Besides the love of Valji and Kanku, husband and wife, and Teeha and Methi, there is love of friends between Teeha and Valji. This love binds them most closely and it is perhaps the most immaculate bond in the novel. Valji will not let Teeha down in his reliance on him for his matrimonial settlements. Valji does not hesitate in putting his own life on stake. Methi's marriage would have been least problematic had the Patels been pacified. They rather become more vigilant and agitated. First they plan to rape Methi and thwart all possibilities of her marriage with Teeha, but they are warned by Mukhi. Patels are concerned only with Teeha and not with Methi, so in order to deprive Teeha marrying a girl from their own village they coax and cajole Ehunthalal:

> Look bhai, our interest is to ensure things in our village, at least those that we know about, do not go awry. We have heard that Heera is not arranging the aanu and somebody from another Paragon is making plans to elope with your wife- The caste may be yours, but our village will earn a bad reputation. (21)

Patels have a great belief in the power of money so they also propose money to him, which enrages Chunthia as much as anything and he refuses them bluntly. Money does have power if it has not worked upon Chunthia; it affects another greedy neighbour of Chunthia who promises to assist them in overcoming this matter.

With this plot of conspiracy, of love, of intimacy and of enmity is connected Macwan's cognizance and attempt of manifesting Ambedkarite ideology. It is embodied throughout the text in *Angaliyat*. Ambedkar's ideology is not the only one, it is often compeered and contrasted with Gandhi. At times this Gandhian philosophy seems to excel over Ambedkar's one. The simple and uneducated Vankars, who constitute the majority of the village and the poetical aspirants like Dehlavala, are swamped with Gandhian

principles where as an educated elite like the Master in the novel is with Ambedkar's philosophy. The poor gentry of the village is even not familiar with the true name of Ambedkar as it is evident from an interesting chatting of Valji with Dana and his likes–

> 'I couldn't make much of what he said about Gandhi ji and Babusaheb Hendyakar. The rest is absolutely right, one hundred and one percent right. I must say, that's bloody education for you!'
>
> 'Ho…. ho…. ho laughed Dano;' you blundered. It's not Babu or Hendyakar. Its Babusaheb Ambedkar!'.
>
> 'Now who's that?'
>
> 'You remember that photo on master's table, with the clothes of a 'gentleman'— the coat and patloon, and a noose around the neck-that is Ambedkar!'
>
> "Is he a gora saheb?"
>
> 'No bhai, Master says he is one of our caste or us! He went against Gandhi ji for us!'
>
> 'Now why did he have to go against Gandhi ji? Gandhi ji is supposed to be for the poor?'
>
> 'Supposed to be whether he is one, Master will be able to explain it. Any way, swaraj does not appear to be of use to us'. (41)

This conversion clearly shows that Valji has not a clear knowledge of Ambedkar and his views but he expresses much of the similar views of Ambedkar. Like Ambedkar, Valji and his brother have also faced the atrocities of Dalit world and have said what they have felt. He knows that Dalits are weak because they are divided and don't bother for each other rather they are always making mountain of a molehill. Valji furiously snipes his fellow brother for carrying their quarrels openly to the streets. Their bravery and outspokenness are exceptional when they fight with

each other but it is upper community. Ambedkar, himself, it seems, is incarnated in Valji's following speech:

> Master rightly says that we are not human beings, we are mere cadavers. Even when thorns prick us, we rub dust on ourselves and keep walking. Do not we ever feel hurt? But if we have to fight among ourselves, then we can be more warriors like than even the Rajputs! How this Bhikhlo and Bablo fought! Would they have stopped, had they not been forcibly stopped? (51)

The period of Angaliyat is per-independent India when many ideologies were cress-crossing it, the novel too portrays approaches, often conflicting with each other, of Ambedkar, Gandhi and Congress. Yet none of these is practiced in its pure and complete form except the Gandhian approach which is represented by the teacher or 'Master' in the novel. Like Gandhi he helps the poor in legal and administrative matters with Non-violence. It is he to whom Teeha, Valji and Dana frequently visit for help whenever they need assistance from higher level—administrative officers or political leaders. He also motivates and supports the Dalit throughout the novel. In fact Master himself is a curious product of the tension between Gandhian ideology on the one hand and Ambedkar on the other. As for as his act of developing awareness among Dalits is concerned he seems to stand with Ambedkar and goes to the extent of discriminating Ambedkar against Gandhi ji and it is evident from the pacific temperament and insistence on operating within lawful means making the oppressors like Patel smug which is largely a Gandhian doctrine. Dehlavala, cunning and knave, represents not only the Congress approach but also the symbiosis of the dominant community and Congress politics in the post-independence era. He exploits his position to harass and oppress his foes and supports the Patels even when they are the real perpetrators. Although from time to time he is checked by the high commands of party but his opportunism and knavery continues till the end. Actually he is the wrong person whom the Congress has confided in. He is first confronted by a veteran Congress leader and an inhabitant

of Bapu's ashram who has come to attend Valji's beans. He scolds Dehlavala openly in the meeting:

> Whatever else Dehlavala Seth might be, he should not have been a part of that scheme. I live in the ashram. At Bapu's instance, I move around from one place to another and inform him about what goes on in our villages. We are striving for Swaraj for everybody. Not for any particular caste, nor do we want independent country if the poor continue to suffer. As for as the villages are concerned, all castes have to live in harmony. (57)

Secondly he is confronted and criticized by the senior official leaders when he has acquired more power and has pocketed all the petty officials to the level of District Collector to harass Teeha, Jeevan and Dana. He is directed, through a letter by the Regional President, to amend his behavior, to go to the Vankars and ask for forgiveness of those who have been unnecessarily harassed. His knavery is once again punished and he can't help public embarrassing. Master remarks aptly: "The Sun of Gandhi Bapu is still warm in this country, Dehlavala!"(109)

In the text this conflict between political and social ideologies is riveted with the control plot i.e. the chasm between the emerging Dalit class and the Patidars. The spark of love between Methi and Teeha grows but it never becomes a burning flame. Both smolder slowly in love but never let it dominate over their normal routine of life; it affects Valji more than Teeha. He is after all the closest friend to him and is most concerned of his welfare. From the day he is restless with making plans for a proper arrangement of the nuptial ceremony. His rationality does not offer any aid, then he turns to his source of permanent reliance, Bhavankaka. He is the most experienced man with gentle counsels in social as well as medicinal life. His expertise has earned admiration and veneration for him even among the upper castes. There is none who can compete him in social reputation within hundred miles. After the death of his wife, Bali, at the age of twenty-six, he has abandoned the world and worldly affairs and has started luring a saintly life.

Seventy-six years have passed in between but he has never peeped in personal and private life of somebody. When such a man goes on the door of Heera for persuading him to give his consent for the marriage of Methi and Teeha, success seems to be inevitable. But social prohibitions and customs intervene and Bhavankaka is refused. While returning he comes across Methi who has deliberately come to him to urge for an arrangement of marriage at the earliest, and that she is even ready to elope with him. This is the urge of pure love that has made this young girl to keep all honor and modesty at stake. He becomes more nonplussed as to whose request he is going to comply. The author portrays his dilemma clearly:

> Losing face in the same sense as his daughter talked of saving face. If I say nothing of the truth to Valji then I'll have committed the sin of making a young miserable. On the other hand, advising abduction and therefore a defiance of social norms, makes me guilty of the sin of incitement. Dear God, what kind of dilemma have you put me in. (26)

So, Bhavankaka delivers Valji only the news that Methi would be waiting on the noon of the next full moon day by the fallow land for Teeha and there is no other way to get her. Valji now realizes that his friend's marriage needs some extraordinary venture and it has to be accomplished by him only as nobody else can be relied upon. He takes Danji in his confidence and plans to abduct Methi from her village. All this is to be kept surreptitious. In advertently Kanku, his wife, keeps her hand on his aching sore when she is trying to give him a compliment. Valji's mother, Monghi, was the second wife of Bijal, Valji's father. After their marriage Valji was born at a premature stage only in the seventh month. This created a rumor that Valji was only born in Bijal's house but he was an Angaliyat. Although nobody is outspoken about it but every now and then this rumor is whispered in his ears. It splinters his heart and he loses all confidence in himself. At such a critical moment Dano reminds him that Teeha, Bhavankaka and all other good friends never think him an Angaliyat, so there is no need to ponder over such a fuss. This is Valji's fatal flow in an hour of emotional crisis that he loses his rationality which brings his doom.

With Danji, Valji goes to Golan, the taxi-driver, for his purpose of abduction but he refuses to assist them in the venture. Then Danji who knows a sacred of Dehlavala uses his influence to take Golan's service. This proves to be their service mistake. As Dehlavala hoodwinks them by his cunningness and gets the details and itinerary of their entire plan and hands it over to Patels who are restlessly looking for an opportunity to spoilt Teeha's life. On the fixed day Manji and Nanji grabbed Methi and Valji dies while attempting a rescue for Methi. Valji even at his last hours thinks only about Kanku: "With blood filled eyes he had a momentary and fading visions of Kanku smiling with a son in her arms, Teeha breathlessly slapping the loom and that was the end of his consciousness" (201). This tragedy gives just an opposite of what have been expected. Methi is enmeshed in Khushlo Khont, an aide of perpetrators, snare and Teeha, instead of getting his wife loses his dearest friend. He considers himself responsible for such a calamity and after giving a splendid farewell ceremony to his friend, resolved to devote his entire life to his friend's family. On the other hand Methi too realizes that Valji dies because of her and now she can't show her face to Teeha. Both forget that it is more the treachery of Patels and not of themselves, which has brought both of them from the blue. The author has portrayed the farewell ceremony with a bit of sublimity of Dalits. Kanku adorns herself in the someway as she has adorned her marriage and when her morning seems not to be over Bhavankaka consoles her:

> True renunciation means removing Maya completely from one's mind. But what does our caste know of detachment and renunciation? What do you have to renounce? Miseries, that's all. I am not unhappy about his death. You people may think he died in pursuit of worldly matters. In my opinion he died in pursuit of a higher truth, of true *parmarth*. (223)

Bhavankaka's consoling has multiple levels. It portrays the plight of Dalits on one hand; on the other it disregards the concept of renunciation i.e. Moksha, a brahminic concept; on another level it glorifies Valji's death as martyrdom, a death for the sake of a

noble purpose; in other words it is a deed of *parmarth*. It also seems to be the real purpose of the novelist too. He portrays the precariousness of the Dalits not for sympathy but for their wriggling against it and gaining triumph over their adversity. The huge gathering on Valji's death is another evidence of creating Dalit's glory. People from 93 villages come to attend his besna and all of them are fed and served well. The credit for it goes to Teeha. Now Teeha remains alone with Danji. He shoulders the onus of looking after Valji's widow and child. He has to realize the man he loved and the company he cherished. He takes a pledge of not getting any pleasure till he makes Kanku happy. He has lived friendship with Valji but even after his death he has to live it with more meticulous attention. Therefore, he sacrifices all prospects of his own happiness and denies marrying a proposal. Teeha asserts clearly:

> Motisha I cannot say that I do not have affection for Methi. How can I falsify my own feelings? But my time is over. More than mine, it was Valji's dream to make Methi his sister-in-law. Now he, my friend to rejoice in it has gone. It's been six months of grief, but Kanku has still not changed her clothes. If she spends every moment in agony and I enjoy the luxuries and fruits of youth, never mind what the world says, what would my conscience say? (197)

This denial of Teeha is very crucial and entails even worse consequences than offering a solution. This denial along with Patidar's forgery leads Methi to Chunthio's house where she starts a normal life and wins everybody's affection by her deft hand in pediatrics. But a good relationship persists only if it is grounded on virtues of truth and faith, otherwise it is certain to go astray. Chunthio's fake friends conspired to grab his property and drag him in several addictions of intoxications. Chunthio came under their influence and in a fit of drunkenness is likely to kill Methi and her child when he is given a heavy hit and lose consciousness. Methi flies to her home but is refused a shelter by Moti and Vijam

as they consider her a murderer. She is greatly panicked and decides to commit suicide and at the peak moment Teeha rescues her. He takes her to his own village and hands her to Kanku who is now married with Danji on advice of Bhavankaka. Both of the women are overwhelmed to see each other. Methi wants to offer her penance of service to the lady whose husband has died while saving her. Kanku wants Methi to settle Teeha's life –a mission for the accomplishment of which her husband died. This is inextricable and ideal one. But this bond has still to endure much. Methi has a compulsion that she can't marry Teeha until a divorce is arranged between her and Chunthio. This is honesty and ideal life. Despite having all happiness at a stone's throw, nobody is going to contradict the poor fellows of the same community who always whisper in other ears—why Methi is living with Teeha? That she is only a hypocrite. To Methi's rescue once again comes her skilled hand in maternity. With the successful delivery of Jeevan's wife, when everybody has left hope, she once more becomes the cynosure of every conversation in the locality.

When everything seems to settle down, a fresh turmoil begets with Jeevan's thrashing of Ramlo, a yes man to Seth Dehlavala who has now risen to the post of Minister in the State Assembly. Power always corrupts normal human conscience. This little dispute enrages the Patels and they agitate against the entire Mohalla of Teeha in general and Jeevan's house in particular. To everybody's surprise a group of ten to twelve Patels trying to break in to Jeevan's house are defeated by the wit and courage of a single lady, Kanku. While she is retaliating alone against the tyrants, all the brethren have shut themselves inside the door. It is cowardice embodied par excellence and in fact this has been the sole reason for the subjugation of their big community by a handful of Patels:

> The whole caste is a cur etched one, Methi! How can two or three strong ones be enough! But I am very anxious about those two. If they come through the village, the rascals will gherao them there itself. Both of them are completely oblivious. Who will caution them, no one is so much as peeping out? (206)

Initially only Kanku worries for Teeha's loneliness but now she has got Methi who is equally concerned for his happiness. Both of them decide to arrange Teeha's marriage. This is sacrifice in its sublime form. Methi loves Teeha more than herself yet she is doing what none other can even dare to think. She has attributed even her son, Goke, from Chunthia to Teeha and has given his name to Goke. She opens her heart to him:

> You are the lord of my dreams. You are the only one I have longed for. Whatever has emerged from my body has been born of my desire for you. Whoever the world may consider Goker's father, for me, in my mind, word and deem, you are the father. When the two of us cease to be; he will still claim your lineage. (31)

Methi's generosity is beyond every praise. It ought to be paid with commensurate benevolence and Teeha is a man who is never frugal in showering his affection over Goka, Methi's son. Despite a clandestine enmity with Methi, which often comes to the surface of his wife, Valji, he continues to assist Methi because it is for his sake she has decided to keep herself an anchoress. Methi, notwithstanding Valji's malevolence for her, always tries to cherish a healthy and happy rapport between them. She with Kanku cajoles Valji in keeping Teeha happy and satisfied. She cavorts with thrill on Teeha's becoming father and herself takes care of Valji's pregnancy. Gradually their children gained adulthood. Kanku's son, Jaggu, becomes Jagdish and has gone to city for education. Teeha's two sons, Mohan and Manvo, go to village school and Methi's son Gokal has imitated Teeha in toto. He has learnt not only his skills but also his virtues and attitudes. People see Teeha's reincarnation in Gokal. It is Teeha who arranges Gokal's marriage splendidly like his own son. This once again poisons Valji's mind and she makes direct inquiries but in vain. Valji can forget what pains Methi has borne in keeping Teeha' household on tock. But how can Teeha forget that Methi has been contributing incessantly for twenty years. He confesses it openly to everybody's ear: "It was my duty to spend money on Gokal, yet I have not spent a rupee. His mother has been weaving for me for the last twenty years, but she hasn't charged me a single poise. Thanks to her capability, my burden was reduced" (199).

Teeha is never so much broken in his life even in the most critical conditions. Without his soul in him he goes for action where Dehlavala, nephew, the newly elected Mukhi, demands two bales free of cost which Teeha refuses. It follows a lethal skirmish where old Teeha fails to resist a group attack of twelve persons and receives fatal blows. Even policemen under the urge to appease the minister, Dehlavala, beat the remaining life out of his body. All serious efforts of Gokal, Methi, Kanku, Bhavankaka and that of master bear no fruits. All administrative officers refuse to cooperate on Teeha's matter and Master whose only dream is to be an eyewitness of the new dawn of Swaraj marbles in complete disappointment, "Gandhism disappeared with Gandhi ji." Teeha dies wanting a medical treatment. This seems to be a heavy loss to all who considers Teeha as a pride of Dalits. The entire system instead of getting better goes worse with independence. But human tragedy is more a consequence of ill will rather than of any ideology. To Master's remark, "this is our Swaraj and this is our Ramrajya" Bhagatkaka, more experienced and adept in human psychology explains:

> Do not blame the Swaraj, Master, blame the human heart. Till Ram inhabits the human heart, Ramrajya will be a distant dream, and I feel the death of a single Valji or a single Teeha can't bring that Rajya. Many more Valji's and Teeha will have to die like this; our eyes will not open otherwise. (229)

Teeha's death entails many other tragedies. Methi has lived all her life under his shadow. Now when he is no more, nothing in this world can lure her. Widowhood has struck more to her than to Valji. She renounces eatables and dies with the wish of being buried just beside Teeha's grave. Bhavankaka leaves the village on the eve of his life. Kanku becomes insane; Dana leaves the village for the city for even. But Goka remains there and decides to pay off Teeha's debt and keeps his name alive. Notwithstanding, the

nonchalance of Valji and her two scoundrel sons, he supports them with hearty will. But the two ugly sons collude together to deprive him of the home, which Teeha has given to his mother. They leave even their own mother in lurch where Goka has once again rescued her yet he doesn't incur even the slightest motherly affection from her. Ramlo hoodwinks Mania and get the possession of Teeha's ancestral house. It is, they think, their final victory as they remove Teeha's name even from his own house but they forget that Teeha is reincarnated in the guise of Gokal. Teeha has not endured any sort of subjugation in his life. So how Gokal can endure the deletion of his ideal Kaka's name? He bids the highest donation of seven thousands and one rupee in the presence of Dehlavala Seth for the inscription of Teeha bhai Gopal bhai Parmar on the marble plaque in the front yard. This is coup disgrace of Dalits to end the vanity of upper caste. This is their final triumph in retaining their place with honor. This is the transformation of the vanquished into the victor. Evil tries its best to subdue the general goodness of Dalits but never triumphs. Teeha and Valji die but their names are immortalized forever. The novel celebrates Dalitism and its beauty in its own peculiar way and without being intentionally didactic puts forth an ideal way to live life i.e. make others happy even when you are in a lurch.

Works Cited

Bagul, Baburao. "Dalit Sahitya: Man's Greatness, Man's Freedom." *Asmitadarsh*, vol 1, 1973.

Eagleton, Terry. *The English Novel*. London: Blackwell, 2005.

Eliot, T. S. "Tradition and Individual Talent." *Collected Essays of T S Eliot*. Ed. G. Hopkins. OUP, 1987.

Iser, Wolfgang. *The Act of Reading*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978.

Limbale, Sharankumar. *Towards Aesthetics of Dalit Literature* Trans. from Marathi by Alok Mukherjee, Orient Longman, Bombay. 2004.

Macwan, Joseph. *Angaliyat, the Stepchild*. Trans. Rita Kothari. New Delhi: Oxford, vii, 2004.

Pantwane, Gangadhar, the founder editor. *Asmitadarsh*. Vol I, 1973.

Stratagems of Caste and Patriarchy in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

Satya Prakash Prasad

Arundhati Roy with the publication of her maiden novel, *The God of Small Things* became one of the literary luminaries on the global literary scene when her novel won the prestigious Booker Prize in October 1997. Reviews to her novel were polemic and ambivalent. Despite the criticism, Arundhati Roy seems to be unperturbed and engages herself in the spirit of the novel that is the social, cultural and political divide between small things and the large things. The chasm between them remains well guarded through a matrix of codes and laws. The novel exposes those glaring gapes and debunks them by privileging the events and episode when- "the unthinkable became thinkable and the impossible really happened". Roy herself admits in an interview with Kingsnorth that the novel is meant to bring out "how the smallest things connect to the biggest things" and "a pattern… of how in these small events and in these small lives the world intrudes…and because of this, because people being unprotected, the world and the social machine intrudes into the smallest, deepest core of their being and changes their life" (N. pag.).

The novel offers a concrete set of strategies to change the position of women in Indian society. She puts a lot of energy in encouraging a critical, rebellious perspective to consider current patterns of female identity in India. While assessing the novel in his article Tapan Kumar Ghosh remarks that Roy's purpose with *The God of Small Things* is to write about an unfair, male-dominated society that treats women and low-caste people very badly: "Her

focus is on the small, individual lives of men and women who, without any heroic pretensions, break the long-cherished social taboos and tamper with the rules that lay down the social codes of behavior" (186). Roy describes the different treatment of the sexes and between the castes, which is decided by the social norms that determine how everyone should be treated. Contrary to the traditionally promoted accommodating, submissive, meek and devoted figures, Roy constructs rebellious and dissenting characters. Brinda Bose remarks, "Roy's novel focuses on the lines that one cannot, or should not, cross—and yet those are the very lines that do get crossed, if only once in a while" (61).

The God of Small Things is indeed an angry text, echoing other Indian women writers like Nyantara Saghal, Sobha De, Bharati Mukherjee in their impatience with some aspects of Indian traditions.Told from the perspective of children, the dizygotic twins Rahel and Estha, the story of *The God of Small Things* centers on events prior and posterior to the visit and drowning death of their half-English cousin, Sophie Mol. Due to the English girl's death, complicated by the twins' mother's forbidden affair with an untouchable, Velutha, the lives of the two Indian children as well as the whole family and Velutha are completely changed forever. And the episodes are narrated by the 30-year-old Rahel, who returns from the U. S. after a divorce and after a 23-year separation from her brother Estha, and the narration weaves back and forth from the present in the 1992 to the past in 1969 and even further back across centuries to bring out the plot, present histories about the nation, the society, the religions, the village, the family and the characters, and most important of all, scrutinize why a singular event can claim such a heavy toll on so many people's lives.

Irrespective of the way one looks at the novel, Roy's *The God of Small Things* is accredited as one of the most scriptable text that the Indian novelists writing in English have ever produced. The diverse form of reactions that the novel has been receiving not only reflect on the nature of the narrative produced but also the social historical issues related to author's locus of enunciation, mode of production and the politics that novel exposes before the readers. It draws response from the readers across the world. Even a harsh

critic such as Ahmed could not resist himself from acknowledging the merit of the novel, by regarding as "the most accomplished, the most moving novel by an Indian author in English" (103).

In *The God of Small Things* Arundhati Roy very adroitly exposes and debunks the politics of subaltern and she does so through questions of corporeality, gender and race positioning. She questions the prevalent and dominant social and cultural codes that not only put fetters on individual freedom and social interaction but also mute the expression of body and discourse of desire.

Ammu being a touchable herself commits the ultimate transgression of "Love Laws" by daring to touch the untouchable Velutha, the God of Loss. This transgression not only eliminates the barriers of the rigid caste system in Indian society but it also tempers with the "love laws" about who can be touched and who cannot. According to Hindu tradition the untouchables remain outside the caste system and are considered to be polluted and mere touch of them makes everything polluted including the touchable. In an orthodox Indian society the sexual relationship between an upper caste woman and an untouchable man is far more serious transgression than that of a touchable man and an untouchable woman. Such codes were well-charted in *Manu Smriti*, the ancient Hindu social regulations for instance, the code, inscribed in Manusastra VIII. 374 reads "A Sudra who has intercourse with a woman of a twice-born caste (*Varna*), guarded or unguarded, (shall be punished in the following manner): if she was unguarded, he loses the part (offending) and all his property; if she was guarded, everything (even his life)" (N. pag.). Social and cultural critic Michel Foucault talks of social codes in his book, *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and held them as instruments of discipline, with clear mechanism of punishment. They control the citizen by exerting pressure to make the individual fit certain patterns of behaviour and public morality. Prejudice, marginalization and public exclusion are some of the forms of social punishment that prevent transgressor from escaping their individualism, and to discipline the potential rebel to obey. Since no law can regulate affection, feelings and sensitivity, they are highly transgressive areas that are controlled within the social transactions. Ammu's transgressions can be seen

from a feminist angle as an assertion of female desires that are locked and forbidden and at the same time, they disturb the established patriarchal system.

Apart from violating a caste taboo, Ammu indulges in a "sexual" liaison with Velutha, thus challenging the patriarchal definition of women as being fundamentally mothers. It is significant to note how woman in India is basically conceived as 'mother', for the common Indian word for 'woman' is 'stri' etymologically the 'bearer of children". Women's identity and existence are determined by motherhood and marriage, and the ideal woman is what the whole Indian lore- religion, myth, fable and history- celebrate. Prasanna Sree rightly remarks, traditionally "a good woman" is always synonymous with good wife and good wife must be chaste, faithful and virtuous like Sita or Savitri . . .the ideal woman has been traditionally personified by Sita who is portrayed in the *Ramayana*, as the quintessence of wifely devotion . . . in scripts and myths, woman is always depicted either as a goddess or sub-human creature, never as a complete human being. The exaggerated emphasis on women's role as mothers and humble wives results in the denial of their sexuality

The corporeal transgression carried out by Ammu and Velutha eventually leads to their dreaded predicament. After the transgression is exposed Velutha suffers the consequences of his transgression through the repression of body. He is made scapegoat for a series of incidents that occurs in the novel to incriminate him. He is brutally thrashed and mutilated by the touchable police and his untouchable and subaltern body is completely swept away and erased from hegemonic historical accounts. Rahel's observation of "Velutha's body gets finally validated that his body leaves "no footprint in sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirrors" (250). The graphic and repulsive description of torture inflicted on Velutha's body in the novel is intended to shock the reader:

> If they hurt Velutha more than they intended to, it was only because any kinship, any connection between themselves and him, any implication that if nothing else, at least biologically he was a fellow creature – had served

> long ago. They were not arresting the man, they were exorcising fear. They had no instrument to calibrate how much punishment he could take. No means of gauging how much permanently they had damaged him . . . they were merely inoculating a community against an outbreak. (293)

The fatal lynching of Velutha in the police custody and the subsequent mutilation of his body is an expression of dominant mindset that "small things" are non-existent and invisible in the brahminical/feudal/patriarchal system. The police, the modern disciplinary structure also join hands with 'big things' to ostracize these 'small things'. When Ammu approaches the police for help, she is humiliated by the inspector which is the testimony of the fact how muted subalterns are disciplined for their transgressions of the stilted and fossilized social norms, the "love-laws":

> He stared at Ammu's breast as he spoke. He said the police knew all they needed to know and that Kottoyam Police didn't take statements from *veshyas* or their illegitimate children . . . If I were you, he said, 'I' d go home quietly. Then he tapped her breast with his baton. Gently. *Tap, tap*. As though he was choosing mangoes from the basket. (8)

The death of Velutha and disclosure of her affair with him render Ammu devoid of any locus standi. She is treated as an outcaste and suffers unbearable agony of being ostracized in her own home. She is made to leave Aymenmen so that the 'untouchable affair' may remain concealed and the glory of the great Ipe family intact. Getting rejected by her family and isolated from her children, she works as a receptionist in a cheap hotel. Working there she becomes ill and finally gets discarded by the management in preference to the healthier receptionist. Her health starts deteriorating further and eventually she dies in ignominy in Bharat lodge located in Allepay. Ammu's dead body is refused to be buried by the church. Her dead body is lastly carried to a deserted crematorium by Chacko:

> No one else from the family was there.
>
> The steel door of the incinerator went up and the muted hum of the eternal fire became a red roaring. The heat lunged out them like a famished beast. Then Rahel's Ammu was fed to it. Her hair, her skin, her smile. Her voice. (163)

Her voice is gutted to the red roaring of the incinerator but she dies fighting, making efforts for her survival and for her children. The body is finally reduced to a receipt no. 'Q498673'. This receipt is a jarring slap on the face of social, political and religious structures that claim to be egalitarian, democratic, disinterested and universal. R.S. Sharma is right in his observation that "her death in ignominy and disgraceful cremation brings the story of her life to an end-more sinned against than sinning (78).

The foregoing analyses of the novel lays bare before us the visible and invisible patriarchal strategies that keep on spreading their tentacles in different manifestations. The novel shocks the reader with its exposure of stark realities of a woman's life and tempts him/her to question some of the social institutions that are usually taken as innocent and innocuous. Ranga Rao's remark about the novel certainly holds water, "a comprehensive protest novel which describes atrocities against the powerless: children, women and untouchables" (13).

Works Cited

Ahmad, Aijaj. "Reading Arundhati Roy Politically." New Delhi: *Frontline*, 8 August 1997. Print.

Bose, Brinda. "In Desire and in Death: Eroticism as Politics in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things." ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*. 29.2. Canada: University of Calgary,1998. Print.

Ghosh, Tapan Kumar. "Tomorrow Will Never Die: Arundhati Roy's

Tryst with History in *The God of Small Things*." *Arundhati Roy: The Novelist Extraordinary*. Ed. R. K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Sangam Books, 1999. Print.

Kingnorth, Paul. (Interview) "I wish I had the guts to shut up." *Ecologist*, 30.6: September 2000. Web. 15 Jan 2008

Rao, Ranga. "The Book(er) of the Year." New Delhi: *The Hindu*, Sunday Nov. 16 (1997). Print.

Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2002. Print.

Sharma, R. S. *Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things*: *Critique and Commentary*. New Delhi: India Ink Publishers, 1998. Print.

*The Laws of Manu.*Trans. George Bühler. In *Sacred Books of the East,* Vol-25. Web. 21 Aug 2008.

Dalit Autobiographies : A Study of the Conflict between Space and Education

Anand Kattimani

Ooru and Keri / Cheri

"*Ooru*" in Kannada, Tamil and Telugu means village, and "*Keri*" or "*Cheri*" means Dalit settlement. In Karnataka Dalit settlements are called *"Keri"*. In the present times, in urban areas, the areas that Dalits live are called *"Bhim Nagar"* or "*Ambedkar Nagar"* since Dalits have been forced to live in a particular area. The caste Hindu people living in mainstream area do not rent houses to Dalits. Sankeshwar, a semi-city, is in the district of Belagavi and it has Pattan Panchayat. Dalit Lecturers and the Assistant Professors who have hailed to the city from various parts of Karnataka have faced hurdles in getting a house on rent. At first enquiry itself the upper caste Hindus ask what caste the people belong to. The fact is learned through various discussions held with the Dalit professionals. Dhananjay keer has explained that on his return from Columbia, Ambedkar joined the state of Baroda as it was agreed upon, but it was just impossible for Ambedkar to get an accommodation either in a lodge or a friend's house. Ambedkar managed to get a Parsi lodge but when the Parsis came to know that Ambedkar was not a Parsi but a Mahar, he was forced to vacate the lodge. Malagatti's father was transferred to Hunagunda in Karnataka, and he was unable get a house on rent. The ironic part of it was when he wore the linga (an identity to recognize a caste called Lingayat), he got a house. He even hung the linga

from a hook at the entrance of the rented house (Malagatti10). In Telugu speaking areas, Dalit settlements are known as "palle" (Malapalle or Madigapalle). They are also called "gheri" or "wada" in other regions like Telengana and also in some districts of Andhra region. Madduri Nagesh Babu's anthology of poetry is titled *Velivada*, meaning a habitation of ostracized communities or an excommunicated colony. Siddalingaiah titled his autobiography *Ooru Keri*, symbolizing the spatial, socio-economic and cultural division between a village and a Dalit settlement.

The Dalit autobiographies under study make a clear mention of the separation between a caste Hindu village and a segregated Dalit settlement called Cheri or Mala Palle or Madiga Palle. The beginning paragraph of Siddalingaiah's autobiography, *Ooru Keri*, refers to the fringes of the village where Dalits have to inhabit. The text begins with the following lines:

> Ours was the last house in the colony. There had probably been a house beyond ours, but its roof had collapsed and its mud walls, three or four feet high, were all that remained of it….the land owned by Ainoru stretched out 500 or 600 feet beyond these walls. (Siddalingaiah 1)

The title itself clearly indicates the division between *Ooru,* a village inhabited by caste Hindus, and *Keri,* a ward inhabited by Dalits on the fringes of the village.

During my visits to the villages in the states of Maharashtra, Telangana and Karnataka it is witnessed that social stratification on the basis of caste is strictly followed in the villages wherein practice of untouchability and caste hierarchy are kept intact till date. One can see the separate Dalit settlements, for instance, in the villages of Dundaga and Alawandi in Maharashtra and Karnataka respectively and a village nearby Suryapet in Telangana. One of the ways in which caste divisions and hierarchy based on purity-pollution has been kept inviolable in Indian villages is spatial segregation in villages with separate settlements for each caste. Aravind Malagatti and his community, the Mahar community of Limbale, and the communities of Chamar and Bhangis of Bechain live in a separate locality away from mainstream village. Bama

depicts in her autobiography the spatial division of her village as a symbol of graded caste inequality based on traditional caste occupations. The village division also signifies unequal distribution of resources (both traditional and modern) and the monopolization of power by the dominant communities in her village. This deliberate unequal distribution of resources like water, well, temple, public institutions (village panchayat, school, post office, etc), and small scale industries, like minor mills, flour mills, are introduced only in the mainstream village. This leads to Dalits' perpetual economic dependency upon the upper castes that causes starvation. Bama writes:

> Just at the entrance to village there is a small bus-stand. There is the terminus. The bus will take you no further. It is as if our entire world ended there. Beyond that, there is a stream. If it rains, it runs full of water. If not, it is nothing but a stinking shit-field. To the left there is a small settlement of ten to twenty houses, known as Odapatti. It is full of Nadars [a Dalit community] who climb palmyra palms for a living. To the right there are the Koravar [a Dalit community] who sweep streets, and then the leather-working Chakkiliyar [a Dalit community]. Some distance away there are the Kusavar who make earthenware pots. Next to that comes the Pall settlement. Then, immediately adjacent to that is where we live, the Paraya [a Dalit community] settlement. To the east of the village lies the cemetery. We live next to that.
>
> Apart from us, one after the other, there were the houses of the [communities such as] Thevar, Chettiyar, Aasaari and Nadar. Beyond that were the Naicker streets. The Udaiyaar, too, had a small settlement there for themselves. (*Karukku* 6)

Bama's community of Paraya and many other Dalit communities live disconnected from mainstream village and they live next to cemetery. The bus stop divides the mainstream village and Dalit

localities. As Baba explains it is as if their world ended there at bus stop, then it is understood that the Dalit communities are not allowed to cross the bus stop and enter the mainstream village.

Commenting on the village structure in Andhra Pradesh, G. Kalyana Rao points out that when deeply thought it can be figured out that there is a horizontal dividing line in the Indian society. His autobiography, *Antarani Vasanthan,* confirms the horizontal dividing line. Kalyana Rao gives the following description of the horizontal division of the villages:

> On this side of that horizontal line live touchables and on the other side of it live untouchables. Touchables are placed definitely on the elevated landscape in the village and the untouchables are surely placed in the downside or on the slope. ….without this we cannot draw its picture or map. (13)

Both Kalyana Rao and Bama wonder from when the people in this country had been divided as "touchables" and "untouchables". Both of them raise doubts about the historical reasons as to why, when and how Dalits had been stigmatized and segregated as "untouchables" in India. Commenting on Ellanna, Kalyana Rao's ancestral figure, the author says, "Ellanna's life falls at the bottom side of dividing line. We do not know when his ancestors were pushed down to this side of the line" (13).

Dividing line between *ooru* and *cheri* marks the social elevation of caste Hindus and social degradation of Dalits in villages. Siddalingaiah mentions that his village, like any other village in India, has been divided on the basis of caste lines. The roads, buildings and government offices in mainstream village unquestionably ratify unequal caste arrangements in Indian villages. Siddalingaiah points out one such example from the village where he was born and his formative years of childhood were spent. Siddalingaiah remarks, "A tarmac road, laid by the government, divided the village and the Holeya colony. On that side were houses of caste people" (9). Siddalingaiah uses the tarmac road, laid by the government, as a modern metaphor that marks the spatial division between the caste Hindus and the "outcaste".

Children from both sides of the road used to stand and watch the buses, but they never attempted to cross the road and befriend the children standing on the other side of the road. Without a protesting tone to the caste prejudices operating as an undercurrent in the frozen childhood relations, Siddalingaiah suggests, in a subtle manner, that children too are indoctrinated with caste Hindu ideology. Though he does not dwell in his narrative upon such anti-social and anti-secular aspect, he hints that the Indian state endorses the existing unequal social hegemony and caste prejudices. Bechain's formative childhood days too were spent in pain and humiliation, and with a hungry stomach and nostalgic feelings of his father. Bechain lost his father Radhyeshyam at an early age, and his mother kept him reminding that he was then fatherless and as a result had to look after the family as well as him. Whenever she reminded Bechain of the loss of his father, mother broke down. She advised her child with deep sob, "Now you have to tend for yourself with our own income. Leave your tantrums and learn some trade. If nothing else, learn to mend cycle punctures at least" (58). Whenever his mother reminded of this, his childhood became a load which might weaken him. Of course, any child of any community who loses her/his father at an early age may undergo this trauma. But it is to be understood that it is an additional hurdle on the top of the untouchable life of Dalit children.

What is more crucial about the village structure in Indian caste Hindu society is that the dominant caste people do not have to visit a Dalit *cheri* for anything as everything has been well arranged for the benefit of the dominant castes in their own locality. In almost all ways the village structure proves beneficial for the dominant castes while it proves detrimental for the Dalits. Modern institutions such as "the post-office, the panchayat board, the milk-depot, the big shops, the church, the schools all these stood in their street. So why would they need to come to our area?", Bama asks (6). "Besides, there was a big school in the Naicker street which was meant only for the upper-caste children," observes Bama (6). Obviously, one understands that there is no meaning in saying "unity in diversity" as far as India is concerned. It seems the term 'diversity' does not include the account of deprivation and stigma

of the 'other'. The caste Hindu hypocrites claim that there is "unity in diversity" in India, and at the same time paradoxically treat "untouchables" the 'other' as whose presence is deemed polluting. By the very nature of the village geography Dalits face various disadvantages and are prone to several kinds of humiliation. Without even a minimal disruption of the asymmetrical village structure, modern institutions of the State find their place in the dominant caste locality, thereby conforming to the dynamics of the caste system in Indian villages. No one questions such a biased arrangement. Caste system in India absorbs many such things including modernity. The monopoly of power by dominant castes, especially, at the micro level "village and small towns"often increases atrocities against Dalits and other marginalized castes.

Dalit and Education

As far as childhood and upbringing are concerned the individual self in Dalit autobiographies seems inseparable from the Dalit community. Until they move away from the village, Dalit children hardly experience any social mobility and self-worth even while they are going to school. However, education does hold a promising future for Dalit children, at least, in terms of breaking away from the traditional shackles of caste-ridden village structure.

But as long as they remain in a caste Hindu village and pursue their school education Dalit children do not experience much positive difference in life. They grow up learning traditional ways of living in villages. For example, they learn that Dalits are inferior to the caste Hindus and therefore they must be obedient and subservient to the dominant castes in a village. Once in his grandparents' village, for instance, Siddalingaiah when he was a small kid followed his grandmother to the main village. His enthusiasm suddenly dissipated when a caste Hindu stopped him and warned him against his "carelessness" Siddalingaiah recollects his first encounter with caste in the following manner:

> One day, I was running along the streets at a wind speed. My hand brushed against the clothes of someone coming from the other direction. The man stopped in anger. I stopped too. He went away only after Ajji had begged his forgiveness over and again. She was afraid we might have to face the wrath of the upper castes because of my carelessness. She said I should never ever run. She ordered me to join my hands and say "Namaskara, swami" (greet submissively with folded hands) every time I came across someone big, I followed this policy without fail and won everybody's praise. (14-15)

Bama comes to know the impact of purity-pollution ideology in her very first encounter with caste in her village. Ironically, it appears quite amusing for her when she sees an elderly person from her street walking in quite a funny manner. Bama says:

> I wanted to shriek with laughter at the sight of such a big man carrying a small packet in that fashion. I guessed there was something like vadai [a fried dish] or green banana bajji [a fried dish] in the packet, because the wrapping paper was stained with oil. He came along, holding out the packet by its string, without touching it…the elder went straight up to the Naicker, bowed low and extended the packet towards him, cupping the hand that held the string with his other hand. Naicker opened the parcel and began to eat the vadai. (13)

After she goes home, she tells this story in all its comic detail to her elder brother. But her brother does not feel amused by her recounting of the story. She says, "Annan told me the man wasn't being funny when he carried the parcel like that. He said everybody believed that Naickers were upper caste, and therefore must not touch Parayas. If they did they would be polluted. That's why he had to carry the package with its string" (13). The very next moment she stops laughing at the Paraya man. A series of questions haunts her on the social status of Dalits in the society. She feels so angry that she wants to go and touch the wretched vadai herself. She begins to question as to why Dalits should work for such arrogant caste Hindu fellows who humiliate them in every walk of life.

Compared to Bama's protesting approach towards purity-pollution ideology Siddalingaiah's approach seems quite normal.

For an uncritical reading, it apparently seems like Siddalingaiah unquestioningly complies with the caste Hindu social norms whereas Bama questions them overtly for their adverse impact on Dalits. It may also be noted, however, that Siddalingaiah shows his radical indifference towards such social norms by conceding to them. The fact that Siddalingaiah chooses to narrate this incident and the comical tone he adopts in the narration stand evidence to his indifference. However, according to Dalit thinkers documenting the incidents is itself a protest. Thus both Siddalingaiah and Bama are forthright in condemning the purity-pollution ideology as they think that it makes Dalits docile and sub-humans.

Bama continues her questioning of purity-pollution ideology from her first encounter with it. Bama gets infuriated whenever she sees the tiny Naicker children call her grandmother by her name and order her about. It is here that she comes to know, for the second time, how her own grandmothers are treated scornfully by the Naicker women. She recounts:

> Naicker women would pour out the water from a height of four feet, while Paatti and the others received and drank it with cupped hands held to their mouths. . . . It was a long time before I realized that Paatti was bringing home the unwanted food that the Naickers gave. (14)

The reason for their submission is dependency on caste Hindu upper castes such as Naickers. Absence of self-respect makes Dalits submissive. Another reason for their uncritical submission to the dominant caste Hindus is their lack of knowledge about the anti-caste movements that introduce new ideas of protest against structural inequalities. On the contrary, Baby Kamble's grandmother, a contemporary of Bama's and Siddalingaiah's grandmothers, does not concede to the caste Hindu supremacy. She draws courage and motivation for self-assertion from the Ambedkarite movement. Another crucial reason for her self-assertion is her non-dependence on caste Hindus of her village.

Urmila Pawar's mother too does not feel subservient to the caste Hindus. It is because of her non-dependence on them for material needs. She bravely questions a dominant caste teacher in

public for punishing her daughter without a proper reason (56). Thus, both the non-dependence of Dalits on caste Hindus for material needs and exposure to anti-caste movements enable Dalits to maintain certain critical distance from caste Hinduism. Baby Kamble's autobiography provides many examples. The discursive arbitration at the Dalit chawdi between traditional Mahars and Ambedkarite Mahars on matters of Dalit emancipation serves as a classic example in this regard. Therefore "self" is not the same for everyone; one's historical awareness, economic independence, social standing and cultural understanding play a crucial role in determining one's self-worth and sense of self.

Such a defiance of social norms, however, is not without any threat or counter-resistance from the caste Hindus. Not accepting *joothan* (left over), for example, would be considered a serious offence. As Arun Prabha Mukherjee notes in the introduction to *Joothan*, "High caste villagers could not tolerate the fact that Dalits did not want to accept their *joothan* anymore and threatened them with violence if they refused it" (iv). Like Omprakash Valmiki Kalyana Rao too in *Antarani Vasantham* depicts how caste Hindus take offence at the Dalits' refusal to comply with the traditional code of conduct. Thus, Dalits' self-assertion might sometimes lead to violence against Dalits. Quite obviously there are counter attacks from the mainstream people. In India, a dominant caste Hindu male is the normative subject. Knowledge, space, public domain, law and power are, therefore, Hindu male centered in India. Anything that has got to do with Dalits, a counter-Hindu or counter-hegemonic subject, is seen and shown as deviance by the Hindu society or Hindu civilization. For instance, 26 dominant caste people were acquitted by the Bihar High Court, as it is reported in an editorial of *The Times of India,* in 2014. There must have not, of course, been sufficient argument, in the court, from the other side. But what these 26 and others did in 1997 to the Dalit family of Mahendra Chaudhary and his villagers of Lakshmanpur Bathe, which is just 125 kms away from Patna, is known to everyone in the state of Bihar. They killed Mahendra Chaudhary's family along with 57 Dalits of the village. The killing in the village of Lakshmanpur Bathe was the fourth time in less than two years. It took place just because

the Dalits did not undergo the suppression of the dominant upper castes. The Lakshmanpur Bathe Dalits had demanded voting rights, respect and better wages, and also distribution of the land which was illegally encroached by the dominant caste people (*The Times of India*, 2010). This is what happens if Dalits do not conform to the norms 'constructed' by the oppressors.

Here education for Dalits plays a crucial role in emancipating them from the shackles of oppression. However, securing education does not go smoothly for Dalit children. Caste Hindu schools also practice untouchability. The brahminical society does not allow an untouchable to become a literate. Most of the Dalit's children are not admitted to schools. If any Dalit child is happened to have admitted to a school, then s/he is maltreated, hence humiliated. It is evident in all the Dalit autobiographies discussed in the paper. Muli, in his autobiography, *Untouchable: An Indian Life History,* narrates such an incident:

> The villagers never forgot, nor did they let us forget, that we were untouchables. High caste children sat inside the school; the Bauri children, about twenty of us, sat outside on the veranda and listened. The two teachers, a brahmana outsider, and a temple servant, refused to touch us, even with a stick. To beat us they threw bamboo canes. The higher-caste children threw mud at us. Fearing severe beatings, we dared not fight back. (67)

Discrimination is part and parcel of caste Hindu schools. Muli's autobiography narrates his struggles to get education. However, he miserably failed due to his untouchable caste, Bauri. Like the narratives of Muli and Hazari, the narrative of Laxman Mane too is a struggle to get education. Hazari was successful in securing education thanks to the Britishers; but Muli miserably failed to secure education. Fortunately Laxman Mane was successful, as he narrates his experiences in his autobiography, *Upara,* in earning education though he had to experience many odds in his childhood as well as adulthood. However, his dream of being a government employee did not materialize. Mane was the first person from the Kaikadi community to have obtained a graduate degree. The Kaikadi

community even regarded education as superstitiously bane. Therefore, the community sanctioned a social boycott against Mane's family when he began to go to school. This is the heightened circumstance of the scheme of the upper caste to deprive Dalits of education. Mane confronted two powerful adversaries –his own people as well as the upper caste people. In spite of his hard work Laxman Mane did not get a government job. He blames his caste for this. He says that just because he is a Kaikadi, he is neither respected nor touched. He is not given a job and is kept away from the main stream people. He expresses his anguish, "I was so harassed by my caste that I failed to understand why my caste was low" (164). Frustration aroused in him anger against humanity at large, "Truth to say, I no longer had any faith either in people or in humanity" (193). Mane confessed a thought of his, which sprouted out of his rebellious character:

> I thought of throwing a bomb on the Parliament and do away with this disease of poverty, once and for all! And, in fact, I dreamt that I had thrown a bomb on the Parliament which I imagined to be the 'government of the people' but not for the poor and oppressed people like me, and I saw it going to pieces. . . . The truth is that I was just waiting to explode myself like a volcano buried under tons of soil. When someone talked about reservations of the B.C. posts, I felt like strangling him. They were all hypocrites. I felt that I should tear off the masks of these people. (190)

In the same way as Bechain narrates in *My Childhood on My Shoulders* that "he had to hide his school books every day in one of his friend's house. Otherwise his step-father Bhikarilal used to get infuriated at the sight of those books and would burn them since his own son was not good at school" (82). At the end Bhikarilal was successful in removing Bechain from the school and was put to the work of searching carcass. Later he could not go to school for almost twelve years since he was removed from the school. It reveals the harsh reality within the community which prevents Bechain from being educated. Limbale recollects his

childhood days during which most of his friends were removed from school and put to agricultural labour at a Patil's farm. Limbale too sometimes missed school and would play around the pond. Here is another narration of childhood days of Bechain in *My Childhood on My Shoulders,* which is paradoxical to the former incident of Limbale. Bechain stole a note of one rupee out of the bundle of notes from Daalchand's kurta. He felt happy and proceeded to market to buy books. He was happy to know the price of a book and notebook because he could buy both of them in the money he had, that was one rupee. He was thrilled to think about it. Looking at Chhottelal approaching him, he left the shop without buying the book and notebook. *My Childhood on My Shoulders* is also an autobiography of a Dalit boy's struggle to secure education. In spite of the hurdles in his life, Bechain did not give up his thrust for education. While he was out of school, he read all kinds of books, filmy songs, folk-songs, socio-religious treatises, etc. He would save every penny and buy a roadside book and would read them (88).

Anyway, some Dalits have been successful in obtaining education and such educated Dalits who have been exposed to civil rights, anti-caste philosophers and liberal discourse in cities pose serious challenges to the traditional village norms. For example, Bama's elder brother, Raj Gauthaman, who has finished his M.A., comes home for the holidays. Bama writes about this:

> He would often go to the library in our neighborhood village in order to borrow books. He was on his way home one day, walking along the banks of the irrigation tank. One of the Naicker men came up behind him. He thought my Annan looked unfamiliar, and so he asked, "who are you, appa, what's your name? Annan told him his name.
>
> Immediately the other man asked, "Thambi, on which street do you live?" The point of this was that if he knew on which street we lived, he would know our caste too. Annan's reply was sharp, like a slap in the face, "I am a Paraya from the Cheri street." Then he walked off, as fast as he could. Naicker was furious. He felt he had been shown up. He asked someone else there, "Who is this fellow?" (14-15)

The Naicker man does not like the way in which Bama's brother has replied. Then he comes to know that he is Rakamma's grandson. The next day, when Bama's grandmother, Rakamma, goes to work at the Naicker's home, he expresses his anger against her grandson's "disrespectful" behavior towards him: "How dare your grandson talks to me so arrogantly?" (15). As if she has been waiting for such a radical change in Dalits' attitude towards the caste Hindu oppressors, Bama's grandmother surprisingly justifies her grandson's behavior by replying to the Naicker: "See, Ayya, he's an educated lad; these college boys will talk like that" (15). Rakamma seems to believe that modern education would provide a breakthrough for Dalits from the feudal social shackles. This can be marked as a significant change in the thinking of Dalits. It is also during this time that the caste Hindus begin to "look at Paraya lads from the Cheri street in a certain way, with certain contempt," says Bama (15).

However, when Bama's brother goes to a local library to return books, he adds his degree, M.A., to his name on an impulse. Seeing this, immediately the attendant brings him a stool to sit on, and begins to address him as "Sir". Dalits' access to modern education does seem to provide a breakthrough or a disjuncture in the social relations between Dalits and caste Hindus. However, it should also be noted that from some quarters there is special recognition for Dalits if they are highly educated and there is also contempt from others, the dominant castes' domain. Even though education does not fully emancipate Dalits from the dominant caste oppression of Dalits, it does help Dalits to make a dent in the hitherto unquestioned caste Hindu supremacy. Education, thus, provides partial relief for Dalits from the codes of rigid social hierarchy. The caste Hindu contempt against Dalits due to their exposure to education and modernity, on the other hand, has major consequences to Dalits. There are instances where large scale atrocities are heaped not

only upon individual Dalits who defy caste rules but on the whole Dalit community.

In order to escape such dominant caste oppression and for better social mobility, modern employment and education, Dalits choose to migrate to cities. Even though there might not be a qualitative change in fulfilling their material needs, Dalits certainly experience relative freedom in cities. Siddalingaiah, for example, feels rejuvenated with his thrilling experiences in Bangaluru, capital city of the state of Karnataka. Freedom and anonymity that he enjoys in Bangaluru throws him much hope for a better life. The cinema theatres, big roads, traffic and hotels in Bangaluru fascinate him most. Though he does not have money to watch films, he goes around the theatres and gazes at the buildings. Siddalingaiah finds a friend in the same slum where his family lives. This friend of him often shares his food and worries with Siddalingaiah. One day this friend comes home and calls him out and invites him to a hotel:

> It was the first time I had been to a hotel. It was probably a first visit for the others too. We stepped in anxiously but in high spirits. We sat around an empty table. My friend placed orders with self-confidence. My delights knew no limits when I saw the idli, dosa, chutney, saru and the many other eats. I didn't know that the chutney and saru were side dishes to be eaten with idli and the dosa. I devoured them as though they were the main dishes. I was filled with gratitude, and began to feel this friend was our real leader. (34)

No one at this hotel asks them to sit at a distance from others unlike in his village. Not only this, contrary to how it happens in his village, he is not treated as an untouchable at this hotel in Bangaluru. Siddalingaiah and his friend are served with delicious food and chutneys at their table. Siddalingaiah's anonymous identity in the city of Bangaluru, thus, gives him both freedom and human dignity. Here he does not have to choose between food and human dignity. Rather he enjoys both at a time unlike in the village where it is the exact opposite. Life in the city, therefore, seems emancipatory for him. Not only that he also gains self-confidence

and he begins to assert himself gradually. He does not want to reveal his caste identity to others in the school. It is not that they would not find out but, given a choice, he does not want to submit himself to the dominant caste people. The government school that he attends is located near a graveyard, a sign enough to make out who attends that school. A dominant caste teacher called Andalamma seems to show compassion towards the poor students in this school. Siddalingaiah recollects one such instance, "One day she asked all poor students to stand up. Some stood up. Madam distributed among them the free pencils and books that had come from the government" (31). Even though Siddalingaiah belongs to the same economic class as the other students, he remains sitting because, as mentioned earlier, Siddalingaiah does not want to reveal his caste identity. However, Siddalingaiah could not conceal his caste identity for much longer. One day his father comes to school looking for him. Siddalingaiah's teacher sees his father and feels sad. She asks Siddalingaiah, in annoyance, why he had not responded when she asked poor boys to stand up. Siddalingaiah says, "My father's tattered clothes, his submissiveness, and his unshaven, pleading face proclaimed his poverty" (32). Further he says, "Her affection increased after she came to know that I was the son of an utterly poor man" (32). Siddalingaiah's father here is seen by his teacher as an embodiment of poverty and attracts her sympathy, precisely what Siddalingaiah hates so much. The submissive body language of his father indicates his untouchable status in addition to his poverty. Thus, Siddalingaiah's true identity is found out by his teacher after seeing his father. His yearning for an anonymous identity ends thus. "Slum" and "poverty" here function synonymously with the lowered caste status. Like Bama's grandmother, parents of the slum, where Siddalingaiah lives, fervently wish their children to study and come up in life. "A man would make his school-going son sit in front of a kerosene lamp, place a book before him and tell him to read. The boy's mother and brother would assemble for the reading," writes Siddalingaiah (32). One of Siddalingaiah's childhood friends goes to school but he has not been good at school, therefore he stumbles at reading. However, he tries to

read before his mother, father and brother, and as a result they hand over him a paise each for every word he reads. Such is the fascination among Dalit families towards education. But dashing their hopes the government school teachers do not bother to train these students in any useful way apart from showing sympathy for their poverty and tattered clothes!

As we have seen, well-educated Dalits, like Bama's brother, mark the distinction between traditional village life and the urban modern life. While the urban space, in a way, enables young Dalits to claim their human rights and freedom, village appears as a site of monotonous routine where Dalits lead lives of poverty, hunger and exploitation in spite of their hard work. Their daily earnings are barely enough for feeding their families. As Sheoraj Sing Bechain writes, "after his father Radheyshyam's untimely demise all his relatives start visiting his house in order to sympathize with the family. But financial condition of the family is so worst that Bechain's mother cannot provide those relatives with food" (17). Bechain's family does not have money even to carry out the ritual on the thirteenth day after the demise of his father.

Some students like Siddalingaiah and a few others pursue education with a lot of passion and hope. Therefore, they take up part time jobs in factories or any small work that fetches them money to buy books and clothes. Some sell ice-candy, while Siddalingaiah works in a soap factory and even works for the municipality to dump the muck during the nights. Thus, they continue their education and settle in decent white collar jobs like Siddalingaiah, who becomes a Professor. Diverse ways of earning in the city help them work hard and succeed in life. Thus, the metropolitan cities give them freedom, relative dignity and unprecedented highly paid and well respected jobs.

Works Cited

Bama. *Karukku*. Chennai: Macmillan, 2000.

Bechain, Sheoraj Singh. *My Childhood on My Shoulders.* Delhi: Vani Prakashan, 2009.

Dangle, Arjun (ed). *Poisoned Bread: Translation from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature* (2009). New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2012.

Freeman, James. *Untouchable: An Indian Life History.* Stanford University Press, 1979.

Hazari. *Untouchable: The Autobiography of an Indian Outcaste.* New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970.

Kamble, Baby. *The Prisons We Broke.* Chennai: Orient Longman, 2008.

Keer, Dhananjay. *Life and Mission of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar.* Popular Prakashan, 2003.

Malagatti, Aravind. *Government Brahmana.* Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2007.

Mane, Laxman. *Upara.* Translated as *Outsider* by A. K. Kamat. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1997.

Pawar, Urmila. *Aaidan* (Marathi). Bombay: Granthali, 2003.

Rao, G Kalyan. *Untouchable Spring*. New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan, 2010.

Siddalingaiah. *Ooru Keri.* Translated by S. R. Ramakrishna. Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2003.

Valmiki, Omprakash. *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* (1997). Calcutta: Samya, 2003.

Dalit Women's Assertion : A Critique of Dominant Narrative in Bama's *Sangati*

Shyam Babu & Samy Victor Marandi

Dalit literature in the Indian literary tradition emerged in Maharashtra as a discrete body of 'writing of protest' by Dalits. It challenges the Brahminical hegemonic caste system and the dominant literary narrative that inscribe the former 'untouchables'. In the process of deliberation over the oppression of the Dalits, it began to identify itself by a parlance of productive protest for the purpose of provoking a critical re-examination of the authoritarian and unequal caste hierarchies in the society. It undermines the dominant episteme by insisting on re-presentation of Dalit subjects in the central position of the literary parlance. Hence, Dalit literature is the virtual 'space' to give focus to the Dalit experience; and to show the social ostracization of these oppressed communities such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Dalit woman. Dalit women discourse emerged in 90s with its primary focus across the 'caste' and 'gender' lines within and beyond the Dalit community.

'Dalit Feminism' emerges against the discourse of main stream Indian Feminism which does not consider the caste discrimination, poverty and the anxiety of earning daily bread that a Dalit woman faces. Prominent female Dalit writers such as Urmila Pawar, Baby Kambale, Vinodini, Volga, V. Padama, P. Sivakami, and Bama among several are distinguished as the powerful feminist voices in the 90s. These Dalit writers produced immensely subversive literary writings ranging from autobiography, drama, novel, poetry, etc. Their writings are hugely based on their personal experiences of

marginalization that is twofold; that is being a 'woman' and a 'low caste /untouchable'. Dalit Feminism engages itself to reach out the core issue of Dalit women that is identity formation and social 'positioning'. The struggle, however, is also intended to upright the 'epistemic coercion' of Dalit women and to race out their identity in plurality and specificity. The discourse also aims at to overturn the historiographic narrative of Dalit woman experience. The famous Dalit feminist critic Sharmila Rege argues, "The Dalit feminist standpoint is about historicity locating how all our identities are not equally powerful, and about reviewing how indifferent historical practices, similarities between women have been ignored in an effort to understand, to underline caste-clan identities, or at times differences ignored for the feminist cause" (cited by Lakshmi Holmstrom, Introduction to *Sangati*, vii).

In Tamil Nadu in early 90s, a laudable attempt coupled with penniyam (feminism) and Dalityam (Dalit studies) was advanced by Bama. Faustina Soosairaj popularly known as Bama, is one of the younger Tamil writers, who is recognized for her strong voice in Dalit women writings in India today. She is not only known just because of the forceful portrayal of atrocities on Dalits in Tamil Nadu, but also because the very act of writing itself becomes an act of empowerment in her works. Her writings are clear stance of 'fighting back' to the patriarchal hegemony and the caste domination. She maintained that writing of Dalit experience is resistance to the oppressions:

> My mind is crowded with many anecdotes: stories not only about the sorrows and tears of Dalit women, but also about their lively and rebellious culture, their eagerness not to let life crush or shatter them. . . about their passion to live life with vitality, truth, and enjoyment; about their hard labour. I wanted to shout out these stories. . . (Introduction)

As it is obvious from the above, Bama's writing has a deep engagement with Dalit community, their untold misery particularly of women. She unequivocally articulates the collective voice of these doubly oppressed women. She speaks in 'collective fashion'

the hitherto unheard annals of Pariah Dalit women and she concedes that Dalit literature is not an individualistic writing. It is an exclusive narrative dealing with the culture, literature and habits of Dalits. She maintains:

> Dalit literature should not be viewed as a mere story of the individual's tragedy. Instead, it should be the story of the Dalit struggle and its relationship with Authority. It produces a political reaction. It is provocative and unpalatable to the champions of the oppressive caste and class system. It should bring about chaos into the hierarchical relationships between the dominant and the dominated. It is singular in concept but plural in practice. (*Indian Literature* 97)

Dalit women's writings mostly bear the witness of their suffering and pains they are subject to in society as individuals. Autobiography is the most convenient generic form for their self expression. This is the kind of genre which is close to their lived experience. All Dalit women's autobiographies are mostly written in their "mother tongue". The lack of translation and publication of Dalit women writings is another big challenge to the whole Dalit literary discourse. Translation, no matter is considered to be a process of inter-mediation between source and target language; it does remain the major alternative language of visibility of Dalit women's non-existent position in society. However, some of them managed to get attention of general readers due to their unflinching spirit to fight back the oppressions among which Bama is the most noteworthy.

Bama's celebrated autobiographical *Karukku* has drawn much critical acclaim for her radical stand in which she problematizes the very ideas of patriarchy, caste and ideology of literary genre. Through *Sangati* (1994) another seminal work, Bama tries to bounce back the bi-fold oppressions of Dalit women. It is a testimonial writing having an account of her personal experience as a victim of caste discrimination. However, *Sangati* is more of a celebration of Dalits' collective-self than mere assertion of an individual's identity. This characteristic distinguishes Dalit

autobiography from non-Dalit autobiography. The text does not follow any conventional generic ramification. It consists of Bama's life events, social condition of Pariah women collectively, state developmental politics and sexual division of labour at the working sites. The structure of the narrative is not prioritized over the message. The urgency to shout out these stories was much greater than to spend time in thinking about the structure of a particular lived experience as Bama states in her introduction. The disjuncture with the generic poetics is made keeping in mind a political strategy of production and reception of the narrative. The text does not elide itself only to the written literary narrative; rather it follows an oral narration and method of objective historiography where subject seizes to exit. In this manner the text is a political testament on the condition of Dalit women. It depersonalizes itself and throws open the wider sociopolitical contexts to the readers. That is why *Sangati* appears to be a narrative of hybridization: the mythic, the historical and the immediate experience; all are merged together to make Dalit women's condition palpable and visible.

Sangati is primarily told in first person; however, it also has an undercurrent of omniscient narration as women's conversations between her grandmother and her friends happened and their opinions are delivered through anecdotes. It follows the oral tradition of storytelling which is shared and passed on among the community, a feature Paula Richman claims produces a 'dramatized audience' (Richman, 147), thereby giving a chance to see and hear the events through different women's lenses. During the narration individual creates a language of the self (personal) which interacts with and draws upon the language of the community (oral). In the dialogue with her grandmother, Bama categorically interrogates her on various issues regarding separation in marriage, of child labour, of choosing one's husband. Bama also gathers the news and opinions from the ground about what's happened to people who have dared to trespass the social boundary. She conducts a sort of interview collecting answers to all her queries, interpreting those in her own way. The narrative methodology is woven in such a manner that the particular is interwoven into the general status of women across the society.

In the text *Sangati,* women such as Mariamma, Mukkumma are no longer subjugated; rather they actively resist and assert their individuality through hard work, collective action and in most of the cases through ostentatious display of their body. The use of obscene language and the display of their body work as the locus of resistance. Their body is the site where they find it comfortable to fight against the oppression. Their body also acts as a strong gesture of repudiation of whole notion of masculinity. In most of the cases they use their body as a safety valve to avert the cruelty of 'masculinity' and 'power' within the confinement of home and in the outside public domain. Their resistance-both passive and active to oppression makes *Sangati* a piquant depiction of the Dalit cause. However, she laments the 'double oppressions' of Dalit woman as the undeniable reality of their life. As they are molested by the upper caste at work and by their own husband at home, "it is not the same for women of other castes and communities. Our women cannot bear the torment of upper-caste masters in the fields, and at home they cannot bear the violence of their husbands" (*Sangati*, 65).

Sangati is written in an engagingly simple style and displays a rich array of colloquial words or substandard Tamil which is inexplicable to the general readers. Bama argues that the language of a Dalit gives "a violent disturbance to the seemingly natural posture and superficial orderliness of the status quo. This will go against the 'standard' languages, pure, classical, divine and 'cultured' — the academic languages" (*S* 65). Thus, it overturns the decorum and aesthetics of upper-caste, upper-class Tamil so as to tease out a positive cultural identity as Dalit and woman which can resist upper-caste norms. In *Sangati* it is quite appalling to see Dalit women's condition as to how Dalit women suffer because of economic condition, caste malaise? How they are exploited by their own husband at homes and sexually assaulted by the upper caste men at workplaces is bizarre situation they have to face on daily basis. However, they still do not give up easily and struggle to survive as they are. Once a Dalit woman steps outside of her small-town community as an educated woman, enters a caste-ridden and hierarchical society which constantly asks questions

about her caste identity, she must then have to ask herself questions who she is, and where she belongs to. Bama problematizes the notion of 'history' taking clue from the stock of Indian reformation movements. She contends that the issue which Dalit women faced was never considered as an issue in the entire historical movements. In the present time of cultural re-awakening, Bama drew her inspiration from the socialist ideas of Jyotiba Phule, B. R. Ambedkar who fought against Brahminical oppression, patriarchy and took pains to educate and raise the Dalit consciousness. Her work *Sangati* bespeaks Dalits' suffering individuality and their struggle for cultural identity.

Sexual Division of Labour and Women Position

Sangati moves from self to community intermittently. The move from the 'self' to the 'other' in the narrative has been abruptly driven through the anecdotes. While proceeding into the novella, the entire narration is about Mariamma, and the way sexual division of labour is practiced on the basis of gender and caste in Indian society till date. Women are presented as wage earners as much as men are, working equally as men in agricultural and building-sites as labourers, but still earning less than men do, thereby highlighting socialist-feminist concerns. The money that men earn is their own to spend as they please, whereas women bear the financial burdens of running the whole family, often even single-handedly. They are constantly vulnerable to a lot of sexual harassment in the world of work. Through the anecdotes of Bama's grandmother, we get to know the terrible fate of Dalit women and how vulnerable they are: "If upper caste fellows clap eyes on you, you're finished. They'll drag you off and rape you, that's for sure…" (*S* 8). Within their community, the power rests with Dalit men as the caste-courts and churches are male-dominated. Even Dalit men are dominated by upper caste men because of power that the latter possesses by virtue of being upper caste. This renders them helpless for they can do nothing but accept and blame their women. There is male domination in the whole chapter starting from upper caste Mudalali to elders in her community and as well as her father even though they know the truth that it's always the women who should

bear the consequence. "In spite of her innocence, the men shout down the women, fine Mariamma for misbehaviour and her reputation is soiled" (*S* 23).

Male/Upper Caste Hegemony vs. Women/Lower Caste Struggle

The novella critiques the patriarchal hegemony which dictates how a woman should behave in the society. Bama in the conversation with her *patti* (grandmother) throws light on the social norms of gender discrimination which is quite prevalent in the family as baby boys only are taken care of while the girl child is left to cry in cradle even if she is hungry. A woman is ascribed to a normative behaviour and any sort of freedom against the set male norms is perceived to be the direct violation of social values. The conversation gives substantial evidence to this thesis which is quotable at length:

> 'Don't you go dreaming that everything is going to change just because you've learnt a few letters of the alphabet.'
>
> 'So, Paatti, does that mean that whatever men say is bound to be right? And that whatever women say will always be wrong?' I spoke out because I was really chafing inside my mind.
>
> 'Whether it is right or wrong it is better for women not to open their mouths. You just try speaking out about what you believe is right. You'll only get kicked and beaten and trampled on for your pains. And it isn't just here that it happens, you know. It's the same throughout the world. Women are not given that kind of respect.'
>
> . . . . . .
>
> 'Why can't we be the same as boys? We aren't allowed to talk loudly or laugh noisily; even when we sleep we can't stretch out on our backs nor lie face down on our bellies. We always have to walk with our heads bowed down, gazing at our toes. You tell us all this rubbish and keep us under your control. Even when our stomachs are screaming with hunger, we mustn't eat first. We are allowed to eat only after the men in the family have finished and gone. What, Paatti, aren't we also human beings?' (*S* 29)

The oppression of women appears to be perennial down the lines of gender and caste. It is due to their gender and caste that the Dalit women have to undergo cruel forms of punishments like lynching, whipping, and canning. Bama unequivocally writes about the violent treatment of women by their fathers, husbands, and brothers. The domestic quarrels and violence which are carried out publicly becomes their fate from the first day of their marriage. The number of coerced marriages creates marital disharmony which Bama projects unequivocally. From being beaten, dragged by the hair, trampled upon, and to forcible rapes, "most of them put up with all that violence and suffer a life of hellish torment". As a radical feminist Bama explores the psychological stresses and strains which become a reason for the women's belief in their being possessed by the spirits or *peys* which is just an outburst of their suppressed feelings and a means to escape from the torment of men. Depending upon individual stamina, only the strongest can survive. To quote from the novella, "if we lose the courage in our hearts, we lose our strength and become good for nothing. If we are brave enough, we can dare to accomplish anything we want. . . . Just as we work hard so long as there is strength in our bodies, so too, must we strengthen our hearts and minds in order to survive" (*S* 58-9). Thus, many women who are not able to find an outlet to their anger surrender to various forms of madness; the most frightening among them is getting "possessed" by *peys*. She also raises some extremely relevant questions against the coercive methods of male control of women in the society. The reproductive power of women is abhorred and they are meted out with sterility processes so that they can also forge to make financial support to the family. For men to go for the sterilization procedure is always the lost point to think of. She remarks:

> Women rarely go into hospitals, but deliver their children at home in a makeshift way. Many women die at childbirth or soon after. Almost immediately the men marry a second time. As for birth control, the men won't do it. They say they'll lose their strength if they do. And women say that if they are sterilized in a haphazard way by people without proper training, they will not be able to work in the fields as before. (60)

Religion vs. Women Subject

Religion often plays an important role in shaping the common people's thinking. It induces power among the people to fight against the social injustices and institutions which perpetuate oppression and distress. However, the same religion becomes the source of exploitation and hegemony when it is controlled by some people in their vested interest. Dalits and tribals are at the receiving ends. In *Sangati* religion has not been valorized in any form whatsoever. Religion whether it is Hinduism or Christianity is virulently critiqued by Bama as it has lost its spiritual dimension. In the novella there are instances where we get to know that Dalit community converts itself into Christianity. However, conversion from one religion to another does not bring about any change for the Dalit women in her socio-political position but on the contrary, it adds quite a few torments to their already suppressed beings. They are threatened by bishops in the name of heaven and hell, eternal punishments, or heavenly and spiritual rewards. Bama, however, feels that in spite of all the oppression and exploitation that they have faced, they have found a way to survive but the state of upper caste women is still worse than them.

Through the speaker's account we enter into the territory of a Dalit woman's world who steps out of her caste based small town, only to enter a caste-ridden and hierarchical religion-Christianity, which constantly enforces her to do the menial job at church. Realizing that leaving her religion or community is no escape, she has to come to terms with her identity as an educated, economically independent Dalit woman who chooses to live alone.

Thus, she describes the dual disadvantages or two folds slavery faced by Dalit women: being a woman and being a Dalit and a converted Christian. All Dalit autobiographers irrespective of genders are insecure about their social position. Their search for social position is still unfulfilled and they aspire for their social identity and position as an ordinary Indian citizen. Of course, many things have improved in society with regard to class tolerance and promotion of equal opportunities regardless to say the cult of violence in Dalit communities continues to mangle women's lives.

Bama in *Sangati* tries to maintain that Dalit community life is dogged along the lines of caste, gender and religion. She, however, asserts that Dalit women find a way to survive by accepting all odd situations. They struggle to assert social identity and position as an ordinary Indian citizen. Dalit women oppression, she reiterates, is still a 'continue' despite many corrective measures being taken in the name of reformation, social justice and equality.

Notes

Peys is a Tamil word which refers to the witch or haunted spirit.

References

Bama. *Sangati*: *Event*. Trans. L Holmstrom. London & NY. OUP, 2004. (All textual references are from this text) Print.

—. "Bama Faustina: Conversation with Jaydeep Sarangi." *Muse India*, 45 (2012). n.pag.<http://www.museindia.com viewarchive. asp? myr=2012 & issid=45>

Bama and M. Vijayalakshmi. "Dalit Literature." *Indian Literature*, Vol. 43.5.193 (1999): 97-98. *<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23342648>*

Eva, Maria Hardtmann. *The Dalit Movement in India: Local Practices, Global Connections*. New Delhi: OUP, 2009. Print.

Kumar, Raj. "Beyond the Margin: Dalit Women's Autobiographies."

Dalit Personal Narratives: Reading Caste Nation and Identity. Hyderabad: Oriental Blackswan, 2011. Print.

Richman, Paula. *Many Ramayana: Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia.* U California Press. 1991 Rpt. 2008. Print.

Singh, Ranjana. "Dalit Women Identity in Bama's *Sangati." The Criterion*: An International Journal in English, 4.4 (2013).

The Struggle of Stragglers in Dadasaheb More's *Gabal*

M.R. Banjare & Charu C. Mishra

I

Dadasaheb More is one of the most prominent figures of Dalit Literary Movement in Maharashtra. He belongs to the nomadic Pingale Joshi (astrologers low in the caste hierarchy) tribe in Maharashtra. The word "pingala" means a species of an owl that calls only at dawn, and people in general believe that the people of this community understand the bird's language. This tribe used to travel from village to village rattling their bhamba (a kind of musical instrument), begging alms and foretelling the future of the people, to earn their livelihood. They stand at someone's doorway and go on jabbering soothing words whatever comes to their mind. People believe that whatever they say are only a repetition of what the pingala has said. They generally speak no evil to the people and used to repeat– "May victory attend upon you. . . May Lakshmi attend on you– May your prosperity grow. . . May success wait on you." before someone's door and ask for alms (133). As his family had no permanent residence, Dadasaheb hardly had an opportunity to attend school, and until the age of almost seven, he took to the family tradition of begging and earning his livelihood. Against all odds such as abject poverty, superstition, discouragement from the elders in the community, Dadasaheb continued his education up to graduation. After completing his Higher Secondary, he supported his education initially by doing menial jobs and later acting in drama, and by scholarship. Dadasaheb is now working as a Dy. Director in Yashwant Rao Chauhan Open University, Nashik (MS).

II

Dadasaheb's autobiography *Gabal* is written originally in Marathi and published in 1983. This is one among the early Dalit autobiographies which plays an important role in Dalit Literary Movement of Maharashtra. The extracts of it has been translated into English as 'The Stragglers' by G. V. Bapat and published in 1992 in Arjun Dangle's edited book, *Poisoned Bread*. It is also translated into Hindi as 'Deradanger' (The Household) by Dr. Arjun Chauhan and published in 2001. *The Gabal* by Dadasaheb covers his childhood and early youth. According to Dr. Arjun Chauhan:

> *The Stragglers* is a kind of self-narrative that depicts the life of a man and through him, his whole society, his life style, his culture, his questionable life, his sufferings and agony, his defeat, his fall and rise, and he can't die . . . but is cursed to live a life with fear and as straggler due to its injustice and suppression. (vi)

Unlike many autobiographies where the protagonists are presented as a hero, 'The Stragglers' focuses on the sad and hellish life of the community which the hero lives in. In this self-narrative Dadasaheb sketches the real picture of pain and suffering, traditions and beliefs, rites and rituals, blind faith, illiteracy and ignorance, and the animal like the life of women of Pingale Joshi (Kudmude Joshi or Duggi Joshi) caste.

III

The story begins with Dadasaheb's reminiscences of his childhood, when he was a seven year old boy. The people of his tribe were gathered at Salgare village in Miraj Tahsil of the southern Maharashtra. They used to live in a temporary house made of tents. Dadasaheb's father wanted to educate his son. He sent Dadasaheb to the primary school of Salgare. When he reached the school all the students looked at him as if he was a clown of the circus. When the teacher saw him, he asked Dadasaheb whose son he was. As Dadasaheb spoke that he was the son of a Joshi, the teacher retorted, "You are a son of a beggar. . . . How can I admit you in the school. . . . Go . . . tell to your father. . . . You can't get admission in the school. Go . . . go away from here" (*G* 15). Dadasaheb felt sad and started weeping. When the teacher saw him weeping, he allowed him to sit outside the classroom and let him listen to whatever is taught. But the teacher was far away and inaudible. He had no slate and pencil to write anything. When he returned from the school his mother asked what was taught in the school. Dadasaheb simply replied that the teacher had taught a lot.

It was afternoon and the men who had gone for begging were returning with their bags hanging in the side. The women were looking very eagerly under the bags. And when they found any piece of vegetables on the loaf of bhakri they became happy to eat it. The naked children with their flowing nose wept for the stale bhakri. Dadasaheb's father also returned from begging. Dadasaheb with his brothers and sisters ran to him to find something to eat but there was nothing, and the hope of them changed into despair. His father asked Dadasaheb if he had gone to school. Dadasaheb replied in positive. The next day was Tuesday. It was a weekly market day of Salgare. Dadasaheb's father promised to buy a slate and a pencil for him. Dadasaheb could not sleep the whole night as he was excited about getting the new slate and the pencil.

Dadasaheb went to market with his father and his younger brother Abas. His father bought him a slate for twelve annas and two pencils for five paise from the market. But when he asked his father to buy him five paise worth of ber (a kind of berries), his father became wild with rage and slapped him hard saying, "I have spent such a lot on you already. . . God knows if you'll be a scholar or a rotter! To heel, like a dog!" (*G* 126). The next day when Dadasaheb went to school he sat in the courtyard in the open. Dadasaheb regularly attended school for seven or eight days. He had managed to learn the letters of the alphabet. But the next week their household had to move for another place.

Dadasaheb's father was worried about the education of his son. When he talked about it to Grandpa Nagoo, he thought for a while and then said:

> Listen Malhari, let him go on the rounds from tomorrow asking for alms. If he is not fated to be a scholar, then

> we wouldn't be able to support him by asking for alms, nor would he has the benefit of good schooling. . . . Think, we kept wandering like this. Our bellies ride our ponies. How then can we give him any education? He will starve. No one would employ a person from our community, even to clean the cowshed. (*G* 132)

So it was decided that Dadasaheb should go about begging for alms from the next day. Dadasaheb's mother objected the idea and asked his father, "Do you know that the child doesn't know how to ask for alms. . . How can you send him on the rounds?" (*G* 133). His father angrily replied to her, "Should he go around when he is a grey-beard then?" (*G* 133). He declared that Dadasya would go on the rounds from the next day. Dadasaheb remarks on the decision of his father, "As for me, I had no choice. I was like a dog which, at the word 'choo', pricks its ears" (*G* 133).

Dadasaheb had no experience of begging. His father trained him in the art of begging. He instructed Dadasaheb that he should repeat the words like, "May victory attend you. . . May Lakshmi attend on you. . . May your prosperity grow. . . . May success wait on you' before someone's door and ask for alms" (*G* 133). He also warned that he should not leave the door until he got some piece of bread. After much practice Dadasaheb learnt begging but he still remembered his slate and whenever he found the time he used to write the letters of alphabet on it. In this way he spent two months wandering and begging for alms from one place to another. The rainy season was approaching and they had to return to their village. It was a tradition of the village that every family had to offer a goat at the temple of Margamma Devi. Dadasaheb was very happy to know that they were returning to the village. He wanted to attend the school at village. His father bought a goat to offer to goddess Margamma. He also bought new clothes for the children.

The next day they moved towards their village Bavchi. When they reached village everyone was busy in cleaning the house and arranging the house hold. Dadasaheb was busy in searching for his slate. He asked his mother to convince his father to send him school. The next day his father took Dadasaheb to the school and admitted

him. Dadasaheb started attending school regularly. He used to learn more letters from the alphabet and counting numbers up to hundred. A weeklong festival came to an end and Dadasaheb had to leave the village and go for begging with his family. The next day he went to school with his father and informed the teacher that they were going for begging. The teacher said to his father, "More . . . the boy is intelligent. . . . Buy him a table book. Let him study by himself. Don't make any loss to him" (*G* 62). His father promised the teacher that he would bring Dadasaheb to the school at the time of examination and left.

Their journey started from one village to another. They struck their tents, tied them up into bundles and packed up their belongings. They loaded their ponies. Some of them slung their bundles across their shoulders. They were on the march again like pilgrims not knowing about the town or village where they were going to. They would set up their camp where they could get something by way of alms, space for their camp, and grass for their ponies to graze on and a source of water close by. But it was not always easy to find such a place. Dadasaheb writes on the hardships of their lives:

> On some days we walked on and on from daybreak to sundown. The children, suffering from a raging thirst under the blazing sun, drooped. The hot ground scorched our feet. If one of our smaller animals strayed into a field, we had to submit to the owner's abuse and threats; sometimes the farmer would turn violent. Still, not a word could we say in return, because we were born in one of the lowest communities in society. So we had to suffer abuse and violence without a word. (*G* 127)

Once they began their journey to another village. The heat was terrible and the earth was scorching hot. Pandurang Vayaphalkar, an elderly man of the group suddenly felt giddy. His daughter Sundra shouted for help. On hearing Sundra's shouts everyone in the group screamed. The women wailed loudly. With all that noise Pandurang Grandpa lost his consciousness. The men folk lifted him off his pony. Nivritti Shinde ran off and returned with a pitcher-full of water that he had got from somewhere and

splashed it on grandpa's face. Dadasaheb's father went to the field and came back with fresh onion, green shoot and all, in his hand which he had pulled out from someone's field. Hastily the onion was split open. It was held against Grandpa Pandurang's nose. Just then a farmer, carrying a whip in his hand, ran up; no sooner was he close enough, than he lashed Subhash furiously. He was trembling with anger and wanted to know who had run out from his farm. Dadasaheb's father stepped up to him saying, 'It was I who had come, master. . . . One of our elders was stricken and dying. . . . He was unconscious so I took an onion. . . . It's my mistake, master . . . ." (*G* 129). His father's meek, submissive tone went searing into his heart. But he could do nothing because if he had spoken a word, he would have received half-a-dozen lashes of the whip. Finally the farmer warned, "Don't do it again . . . . or someone will whip you till your bowels burst" (*G* 129). When Grandpa regained his consciousness they marched ahead and reached Arag. Everyone was busy in untying the luggage from the back of ponies. Dadasaheb's father was busy in making the tent. He asked Dadasaheb to help him in fixing the pegs. When Dadasaheb could not do properly his father shouted at him, "Stupid! Can't you hold it right? Such a big lump and can't even hold the cloth! How are you going to ask for alms tomorrow?" (*G* 131). At last their tent was fixed. His father entered the tent and arranged the bag, the harness and other things neatly. He asked Dadasaheb's mother if there was any bhakri left. His mother poked about in the bag with her hand and extracted a small bundle from it. Only two or three bhakris which had been saved from their breakfast were placed before them. A few pieces were tossed to the two dogs. Dadasaheb with his younger brother Abas and his mother and father ate the remaining bhakris but none had enough to make a full meal. So they ate just the chutney on top of the pile because there was not a piece of bhakri to go with it. All of them were very hungry. So they were thinking of preparing dinner.

Early morning Dadasaheb's father put on a kudmude – a rattle shaped like an hour-glass – round his neck, put a bundle of almanacs into his bag. He slung the bag on to his shoulder and picked up a stick, went away. Dadasaheb narrates that every Joshi had to dress

up like that to be identified as Pingale Joshi. All grown-up men folk went to the villages to ask for alms between cock-crow and sunrise. With sunrise they had to return to the tents because the pingala, a kind of owl, calls only at dawn, and people in general believe that this community understands the bird's language. They go about a town, rattling their bhamba. They stand at someone's doorway and go on jabbering whatever comes to their mind. People believe that whatever they say are only a repetition of what the pingala has said. Dadasaheb again mocks on the ignorance and the blind faith of the people and says:

> Why should the pingala worry over the sorrows of the world? It is also true that everyone in our tribe knows that the pingala doesn't speak to him, nor does he understand the bird's language. Many a beggar doesn't even catch sight of the bird. How can it be seen in the early hours of the morning? Still, our tribe uses the bird's name as a means to earn a livelihood and manages to keep body and soul together. (*G* 134)

The rain brings happiness to the life of people but for the Joshis, it was a big problem. Once they were in Kumbhari village it was raining very heavily. Vimal Shinde, a lady of the group gave birth to a child. The tent was totally drenched and she was shivering with cold. Their all belongings were wetted. The ponies were standing outside the tent. All the people spent their night awakening. Dadasaheb comments, "All the people of our community take birth and die in the jungle" (*G* 66).

They were in Khilegaon. Dadasaheb's exam was only fortnight away. He did not know anything about exam. Dadasaheb used to go for begging in the morning and study in the night. He returned to Bavchi with his father to appear in the examination. The next day he went to the school. The teacher asked him table for up to hundred and the letters of the alphabet. Dadasaheb answered all the questions of the teacher. The teacher called Dadasaheb's father and said that the boy has passed class one exam and buy him books for class two. The very day they returned to the tent. Dadasaheb's father bought him books for class two.

The next day, in the morning Dadasaheb went to village with his brother, Abas, for begging. That day he got more chapattis than the other days. He wanted to collect more chapattis that day as he was standing in front of a big house. But unfortunately he was bitten by a stray dog on his leg. He was crying loudly and trembling with fear. A man from the house started shouting, "fuck their mother. . . there are no works for the children of beggars. . . keeping the plates in hand and started begging. . . it's good that he was bitten by a dog. . . no one will come here again for begging" (*G* 74). Dadasaheb felt very angry. But what could he do than weep in silence. From the next day he didn't go for begging and started going to school. There he learnt primary mathematics like addition and subtraction. But after some days he left for another village with his family.

Dadasaheb reached the fourth class and now he had to attend school regularly. For this he had to stay in the village. So he was left in the village with his grandmother. Dadasaheb used to help his grandmother in her works and started going to school regularly. He passed the fourth class board exam and was admitted to the fifth class in the school of Nimbodi. He sold his books of the fourth class and bought books for the fifth class. He got note books from the school on concession. Nimbodi was three miles away from Bavchi. Dadasaheb used to go to school by walking with other students. He used to read in the light of kerosene fueled lamp. The smoke of the lamp went to his nose and his mouth became black but there was no other option except it. When the exam was over Dadasaheb used to go back to his tent.

The next year Dadasaheb's grandmother refused to keep him with her. His father took him to the tent. After the summer vacation the school had to open in a few days. But there was no hope of Dadasaheb's going to school. Finally his maternal grandmother agreed to keep him with her. He went to Gondhlewadi with his maternal grandmother and was admitted into class six. There he used to work on daily wages and continued his study till class seven. He was admitted in the school of Jat in class eight. He borrowed books of class eight from the school library. His maternal grandmother used to send him tiffin. But one day he got a letter

from his maternal grandmother informing him that she could no longer send him tiffin.

The next morning Dadasaheb left for Athani to meet his parents. It was thirty five miles away from Jat and Dadasaheb had to go by walking as he had no money for the bus fare. He reached Basrangi in the afternoon, which was fifteen miles away from Jat and enquired about his tribes. He spent the night at the S. T. Bus Stop. Early in the morning he left for another village. He moved from village to village and enquired about his people but all his efforts went in vain. He spent the next night in the Hanuman temple of Mangsuli. He was sleeping in the temple. The priest came and enquired who was sleeping. When Dadasaheb replied that he belonged to Joshi community and had come in search for his people the priest shouted, "You are Joshi. . . and sleeping in the Hanuman temple? Don't you feel shame? Get up. . . looking smart. . . ." (*G* 139).

He stood up and got out of the temple and passed the night on the scaffold outside the temple. He was unable to understand what would happen if a Joshi sleeps in the temple. He blamed god for his predicament by saying, "Why the god has given him birth in this caste. It would be better to born like a dog" (*G* 139). He spent fifteen days wandering from here to there in search of his people. Finally he reached Inchalkarji where he met Waman Sinde from his village. But his parents were not accompanying with them. He spent the night in Waman Sinde's tent. He borrowed five rupees from Waman Sinde and came to S.T. Bus Stop in order to return to Jat. He boarded on the bus and reached Miraj. He had no money to buy ticket for Jat. He thought of begging some money for the ticket. But the next moment he thought who would believe him but will be abused by them instead. He thought of committing suicide by taking poison but the next moment he thought of his parents. Undecidedly he stood up and went to the front of Bus stop. Amazingly he found that his mother was sitting there with her little daughter. They hugged each other and wept for a while. Dadasaheb told his story to his mother. She gave him five rupees to buy medicine for his scabies. They returned to Akiwad where his father's tent was fixed. He lived for a week with his parents. His scabies was cured. When he asked his father that he wanted to return to school,

his father burst with anger and cried, "Set your school on fire. Be here. . . go for begging . . . and live near our eyes" (*G* 146).

Anyhow Dadasaheb convinced his father and returned to Jat. The next day he went to the headmaster and told his story. From the next day he started going to school. He appeared in annual examination and returned to his tent with his mother. Again he started going for begging with his brother Abas. After the summer vacation he returned to Jat to continue his studies. He was admitted in class tenth. He opted for morning shift So that he could attend classes and could study in his room in the afternoon. He also admitted his brother, Tatyasaheb to the hostel of Hunnur. Dadasaheb, used to play some role in school drama. In this way he passed his SSC examination with first class marks.

Dadasaheb got admission in the junior college of Jat. There he had to prepare his meal by himself. He also used to go for work like cleaning of sewer and running of boring machine to earn some money in order to continue his study. He also used to earn money by playing role in the drama in village functions. Any how he passed his HSC examination and got admission in the college of Sangli. He also got admission in the college hostel. There he used to play role in the drama to earn some money. He passed B. Com. first year exam and got admission in the second year but this time he was not allowed to avail the mess facility because he had not yet got his scholarship and could not pay the mess bill of previous year. He went to the house of his relative Suman Jiji and asked if she would arrange his food for two months. Suman Jiji agreed to give him food to continue his study. Her husband Manik Mama said to Dadasaheb, "It is important that you are studying fighting with the problems. Children in our community should study like you. Without it our caste will not improve" (*G* 192). Dadasaheb appeared B. Com. Final year examination. He ends his self-narrative with the following note:

> Who knows what will happen in future . . . ? The Time will decide how much I suffer . . . ? I reached at this stage fighting with many difficulties and striving with fate. I want to stand firmly coming out of my nomadic and helpless life. . . But now I am in dark about my future. . . . Who will help a passenger of darkness like me except the darkness. . . ? And why. . . ? I have seen ray of hope many times in my mind…but who knows when will it really happen in my life. . . ??? (*G* 195-6)

But his struggle for education did not go in vain; Dadasaheb continued his studies and now he is working as the Dy. Director in Yashwant Rao Chahvan Open University Nasik (MS).

IV

People of his community lived in dire poverty. If they visited weekly market, their torn clothes with many patches attracted the attention of people. Being apprehensive that they would steal things, everyone in the market steered clear of them. No one offered to buy the mixed grain or the hen from them. So they had to sell the mixed grain and the hen at half of market price. Dadasaheb writes, "Thus the articles we had to offer had practically no value. After all, we didn't count as members of society. We might as well have belonged to a different world altogether" (*G* 125).

On the market day many of them did not go round begging for alms. They would stay at home as if it were their weekly day off. On those days as narrates Dadasaheb:

> We got busy heaping into one pile what had been saved from the grain we got by begging in the early morning. The grain, collected from different homesteads, wasn't one of a kind but a dozen. Rice, jowar, wheat, chana, moong, bajra, maize and other such varieties were all mixed up. But the money it fetched when we sold it, was just enough to pay for our necessities like oil and salt. (*G* 124)

Besides this assortment of grain, some of them could manage to secure a few hens too. It had been earned by telling a pack of lies to the people in trouble. They were promised happiness, prosperity, children, and an end of quarrel in family and so on. They were asked to sacrifice the hens to come out of their problems.

The ignorant, superstitious people made over the hen as an offering. Dadasaheb mocks the ignorance and blind faith of people in superstitions. He writes, "This society of ours doesn't have the sense to wonder why a man who can bring untold wealth to others should be unable to do so for himself, but go begging from door to door" (*G* 124). In the day time they also used to go for fishing.

Whenever there was a wedding ceremony in the village, the whole community visited the place as if they were invited and would watch outside the pandal. If someone comes out from the pandal the elder one would approach him and ask for some food. They would get meagre food after a lot of abusing. Once they visited such a wedding, they saw an elderly man was instructing the men who were distributing foods. Thinking him as the Patil, Nagu dada went to him and asked, "Saab. . . we are Joshi. . . we beg and wander all around. . . we came to know that there is wedding in your house. . . we come with great hope. . . please give us some food" (*G* 46). The Patil stared at the group of twenty five to thirty people sitting with their plates and shouted angrily, "If there any one left in the tent. . . ? Call them. . . Fuck your mother. . . The whole community has come thinking the food is served free. . . Being smart. . . Go away" (*G* 46). They requested again and again to the Patil. At last they could get meagre watery kheer.

The people of this community used to drink on the market days. When the other people saw them murmuring while returning from the market, they commented, "What a strange people these Joshis are! They used to go for begging and drink from the money they got. Fuck their mother…the tribe of beggars is insolent" (*G* 82).

Due to ignorance and traditional belief the people of this community were not interested in the family planning programme of the government. Whenever the team of health workers visited their tents, they used to escape from the scene and hide themselves behind the bushes in riverside. After many persuasions Dadasaheb succeeded in getting tubectomy of his mother.

Dadasaheb's father named all his sons' name ending with 'saheb' which means master or an officer of high rank. Dadasaheb comments on the irrelevance of their names with their life styles. He writes: "My name was Dadasaheb; my brother's name was

Abasaheb and Tatyasaheb. All of us were 'sahebs'. But these 'sahebs' used to go for begging every morning and move from door-to-door with plates in their hands for piece of breads" (*G* 95).

V

The people of this community not only used to befool the villagers in the name of superstition; but they too practice the same. Every year, in the month of Ashadh (beginning of the rainy season) the Pingale Joshi people returned to their respective villages to celebrate a week long religious festival of their deity called Malgamma Devi. In this festival every family of the community had to offer a goat, a ship or a hen to the goddess. If any family was unable to buy a goat or ship, they borrow money from the other family. Once they were in Nandeshwar. Dadasaheb's father had no money to buy a goat for offering. He was unwilling to go to the village. Instead he wanted to offer a hen to the goddess living in Nandeshwar. He went to Nagu Dada and informed him about his decision. Nagu Dada shouted furiously, "Malhari have you mind or not. . . ? We live on Her mercy. . . And you want to forget Her . . . You will not get grains. . . . Come to the village silently" (*G* 48). Nagu Dada arranged money for Dadasaheb's father.

The next day they left for the village. On the day of festival the Goddess was offered goats, sheep and hen with grains and sweets as offering. The next day Dadasaheb went to school. He saw the clots of blood in front of every house and the flies buzzing over it. Dadasaheb was disgusted with all that and he could not concentrate on study that day. He felt ashamed of the practice of his community.

If someone in the family got ill, they did not take him to the doctor, instead they engaged in superstitious practices. Dadasaheb narrates such a story. While moving with their household, Pandurang Grandpa (an elderly person in the group) got ill and became unconscious. Gangu Maushi declared that the goddess Amba wanted a hen and some grains as an offering to recover him from his unconsciousness. Nobody took him to the doctor. Anyhow Pandurang Grandpa recovered from his unconsciousness. The next morning he went to the village for begging and returned to his tent

in the noon. He again felt uneasy due to over-age and weakness. Gangu Maushi again declared that Pandurang Grandpa felt uneasy because he had not offered the goddess what had been promised. She further declared that now the goddess wants more offering than the previous day. She said, "Today the goddess wants a hen. . . seven chapattis. . . five lemons . . . two coconuts. . . and a plateful of rice . . . and if it is not offered by today evening. . . . She will take Pandurang Grandpa with her" (*G* 32). The matter was discussed in every tent. Pandurang Grandpa's wife went to each and every tent to seek help in arranging the things for the offering. Anyhow she could arrange the things for the offering to be performed. But this could not save the life of Pandurang Grandpa and he died after some days.

Works Cited

More, Dadasaheb. *Gabal* (Deradangar). Trans. from Marathi by Dr. Arjun Chahvan. New Delhi: Radhakrishna, 2001.

— . "Gabal" (The Stragglers). Col. *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*. Ed. Arjun Dangle. Bombay: Orient Longman, 1994.

Voice of Protest in Devanoora Mahadeva's *Odalala*

Mahantesh Hurali

Dalit Literature, literature about the Dalits, the oppressed class under Indian caste system, forms an important and distinct part of Indian literature. Dalit literature emerged into prominence after 1960, starting with Marathi, and soon appeared in Hindi, Kannada, Telugu and Tamil and almost all the languages in India through self-narratives, like poems, short stories and most importantly autobiographies and novels known for their realism and for their contribution to Dalit politics. It is a literature of militant protest against upper caste literature. Writers like Namdev Dhasal or Narayan Surve, or novelists like Daya Pawar, Laxman Gaikwad, Devanoora Mahadeva, Aravinda Malagatti and many others reflect in their writings the anguish of a community, and demand the shaping of a just and realistic future for the underprivileged and the outcast in society.

Dalit means broken, oppressed, untouchable, downtrodden, and exploited. The exploitation is the result of discrimination practiced by an age old caste system in the society. This has been the reason for oppression of Dalits in every walk of life in the society. So the Dalits have been subjected to poverty, oppression and humiliation. Dalit movement is a struggle against the socio-economic and cultural hegemony of the upper classes, an anti-caste movement fighting for the construction of a modern secular and democratic Indian identity. It is a movement of the poor people in the downtrodden that craves for justice through the literary works, dramas, songs, cultural organizations and all the other possible means. So it can be called as a movement which has been led by Dalits to seek equality

with all other castes of the society. They come from the poor communities which under the Indian caste system used to be known as untouchables.

There are many definitions of the word Dalit. According to a Marathi Dalit writer, Gangadhar Pantwade, Dalit denotes not only caste; it means the man who is exploited economically, socially by the traditional society of the country. He does not believe in God, religion, rebirth, Holy books, Heaven, Hell of this land. Since all these things have made him a slave, he believes in humanism. Aravinda Malagatti is of the opinion that the people who are economically, socially, politically exploited from centuries, unable to live in the society of human beings have been living outside the village depending on lower level of occupation, and unable to spell out their names, lived as "untouchables" are regarded as Dalits. Such people organized themselves and started raising voice against the existing conditions of the society and opposed the ills and evils practised. They took form into movements in the course of time.

The term 'Dalit Movement' is used in Kannada literature with reference to the movements that took place in the 1970s and after. It does not mean that there were no such movements in the annals of Karnataka history. In the 12th century itself Basavanna and others raised their voice against the caste discrimination in the northern part of Karnataka. It is recorded as a social reform movement, which gave rise to a new kind of writing in Kannada literature, Vachanas. This is also referred as Vachana Movement.

In Kannada, it goes back to the first Vachana poet of the 11th century, Madar Chennaiah, the cobbler. The 12th century Dalit saint Kalavve challenged the upper castes in the following words:

"Those who eat goats, foul and tiny fish:
Such, they call caste people.
Those who eat the Sacred Cow
That showers frothing milk for Shiva:
Such, they call out-castes".

While talking about Dalit movement in Karnataka, one cannot forget its contribution to the field of Kannada literature. It gave rise to a new trend in literature named as Dalit literature. It emerged

out of friction in religion, political, economical and social fields. The Kannada Dalit literature emerged in a different platform, and included women writings, and writings of minorities, with notion that they are also exploited from the Hindu society and they too expect change in the existing condition. The birth of Dalit movement in a way is the birth of awareness among Dalits which can be termed as 'Dalit Consciousness'. Dalit consciousness is a mental state of people who always aspire to throw away the yokes of exploitation. Dalit consciousness does not accept somebody as superior to others.

Kannada Dalit literature emerged with a programme called "Dalita-Bandaya Sahitya Sammelana" held in 1979. It was supported by Dalit Writers' Association of Karnataka. Devanoora Mahadeva and Siddalingaiah are considered to be the pioneers of Dalit literature. There are questions of comprehensive discussion about what Dalit Literature is. Is it a literature written by Dalits on their own lives or the literature written by non Dalits on Dalits? Many scholars opine that Dalit literature refers to the writings of Dalits on Dalit life. The Dalit writers argue that the experiences and the humiliation undergone by Dalits cannot be imagined or explained by non Dalit writers. Non-Dalits who wrote about Dalit life were identified as only 'protest writers'. Their ideas were more concerned with economic inequality. But the prime concern of Dalit Movement writers was social injustice. Dalit literature has expressed itself in almost all the genres. Through these genres Dalit literature serve the society to remind the mistakes and faults of the society. There is common wave between Kannada Dalit literature and the African Black literature. The feelings, pain, exploitation, harassment, expressed here could be seen even in the writings of Chinua Achebe, NGugi wa Thiang'o and Wole Soyinka.

Dalit literature is different because of its own rich culture. Such culture gets expressed of its customs and beliefs in its adaptability of language. The language looks totally different in its style of presentation. The writers used the language of the out-castes and under-privileged. Because of the anger against the age-old oppression, the protest of the Dalit writers has become sharp. They used the language which is known to them and considered

rustic by the previous writers. They follow the language of their own people and their dialect without refining it. Therefore, it gets a special attention in Kannada literature. For example, the language used by Devanoora Mahadeva in *Odalala* and *Kusumabale*, by Dr. Geetha Nagabhushan in *Baduku, Dhummassu* and *Hasi Mamsa Mattu Haddugalu* and by Chaduranga in *Vaishakha* is entirely different. They used the dialects or the language used by Dalits and tribal people. This kind of language could only express the real feelings and intensity of the writer. The reader then only can identify the "Dalitatwad" or "Dalitness" in Dalit literature. This is the main intention of the Movement. Dalit feelings come from Dalit language only. It is interesting to note that the literary movement that started in the early 1970s continues to exist till today, of course with refinement and noticeable differences. The early writers looked raw and rugged in their expression but the later ones carefully chiseled and fine-tuned their works of art before print, may be, because they had the past and knew history. Dalit Movement in literature tries to compare the past of Dalits to the present and future generation make Dalits aware of their pitiable condition and to show them a way to channel their struggle against the oppressors. Siddalingaiah set a new trend in poetry, a norm of course, unthinkable by others. His contemporaries like M.N. Javaraiah, Chennanna Valikara, Mulluru Nagaraj, B.T. Lalitha Naik, Geetha Nagabhushana, Munivenkatappa and others practiced literature for a longer time and their contributions are acknowledged as greater.

Devanoora Mahadeva still commands reverence despite the miniscule Dalit literature he has produced, as its quality reigns supreme even to this day. He not only tells the story of Dalits in his own dialect but also changes the idiom of storytelling. The critics were puzzled to receive him but continued to adore him. The writers have analyzed how Dalits have been treated and what their roles have been in their social context. The next generation writers like Aravinda Malagatti, Sarjoo Katkar, Mudnakudu Chinnaswamy, K. B. Siddaiah, Sukanya Maruthi, Mallika Ganti, L. Hanumanthaiah, Mogalli Ganesh and others picked up their own idiom and even now they continue to enthrall the literary audience. They traverse through the Dalit milieu and the stigmatized lives of individual selves

and bring out the untold misery to the fore. Their works have been widely acclaimed and translations of their works in other languages are well received. The third generation appears to be more sensitive to the academic discipline and is catching the eyes of readers. N. K. Hanumanthaiah, Subbu Holeyar, Lakkur C. Anand, V. M. Manjunath, T. Yellappa D. Sarswathi, Anasuya Kamble are the prominent names.

Dalit literature has found its own voice. The Dalit voices are more authentic and will certainly influence the society in this transitional period of building modern India which dreams to have a casteless society. Their stories told in Marathi, Tamil, Hindi, Kannada and Telugu are now being translated into English, French and Spanish. The Dalit writers no longer depend on empathy of non-Dalits to tell the world, their own story. Dalit literature is slowly emerging as a discipline of academic study as well. Most of the Universities are prescribing the Dalit literature for their P. G. courses.

The protest gained its first expression in the form of a new literature called Dalit Literature. Dalit writers provided useful insights on the question of Dalit identity. Dalit suffering is not just the suffering of the individual. The reality of their life is too hideously shocking, beyond the capacity of fantasy or imagination. They have been subjected to the worst atrocities. Dalit literature is experience – based. This experience takes precedence over speculation. To Dalit writers, history is not illusionary or unreal. That is why authenticity and liveliness have become hallmarks of Dalit literature.

Devanoora Mahadeva, who expressed Dalitism through short stories and fictions, has been grown up with the 'Navya' cult in Kannada literature. His stories of Dalit consciousness have come from a realistic base. Most of his characters submit themselves to the system or try to raise their voice instantaneously and fail. He has efficiently depicted the inevitability of selling themselves for the much-needed goods in the day-to-day life. The Dalit language is powerfully used in his writings. The language they used to spell out their inner feelings and humility they experienced is the thing that shows their way of transcending the canonized sophisticated language used by non-Dalit writers.

Odalala (*The Inner Depth*) is a long story. Hunger is the

theme here. Whether the theft to satisfy the hunger really amounts to theft is the indirect question raised here. The work also says that the law protects the rich instead of the meek. It also questions such attitude.

The advent of modernization, the struggle of existentialism, dilemmas are important here. The novel traverses sticking to a central path. The distinct individual incidents are its strength. The work proves indirectly that the language of one community reflects its culture. This work is enacted on the stage and has the credit of being recognized as 'the poetry of dialects'.

The best of Dalit writers not only brought a new content but a revolutionary new idiom drawing images and metaphors from areas of life unfamiliar to the non-Dalit world. They also created glorious heroes from among the common Dalit men and women. Sakavva, the protagonist of Kannada Dalit novel, *Odalala* (*The Inner Depth*), by Devanoora Mahadeva, boasts that she is not afraid of death-god Yama because he cannot devise greater sufferings for her than what she has already weathered. Through a Dalit woman, Sakavva, the author unveils the condition of the Dalit family. With her special Kannada dialect the novel gets its novelty in depicting the characteristic features of a social order. The language used by Devanoora Mahadeva could only express the real feelings and intensity of the writer. The reader then only can identify the feelings of Sakavva.

Though the novel is written by a male with predominant male viewpoint, one cannot ignore the female voice in the form of Sakavva. The male characters are predominant in the novel but the woman is able to control the whole family. Because of her stuff she gets value and her character is developed deeply and her personal concerns are considered important and the result is her growth throughout the novel. The reader ends up caring about this character.

The story starts with the theft of her cock. In the early morning she starts searching for that. She does not find it even at the end of the story but loses another cock. Cock is also a character here which becomes the reason for her anger against the system. The police are interested in searching the Itappa's groundnut thieves

but not the thief of the cock. She is affected by the actions of a rich person called Itappa and the police inspector. At the end Itappa gives one rupee note as tip to Sakavva for bettle nut which shows the upper class system of exploitation. At the end Sakavva cries helplessly towards the empty dusty road which has carried away the police vehicle. The dust symbolically represents the emptiness of her meek voice. The plot also includes her family, the dilemmas, inter-relations, grudges etc, which represent the momentum of a culture. The author ironically creates a character called Revanna, a police constable, who throws light on the pathetic conditions of Dalit life.

In this novel, the inner world of Sakavva encounters the outer world of Itappa, and the police inspector and she faces the pressure laid on her by the outer world. The losing of the first cock and snatching of another cock by Itappa and the inspector in the end create much anger in her and she protests silently but in vain. The protest she puts has made any effect on the whole set up of the novel. It shows her helplessness. It is the condition of all the Dalits. Even though they protest, there won't be any result. The system continues.

Sakavva is a woman with all the qualities of a rustic woman. She has self-respect, love, sorrow and innocent ignorance. She is kind enough to help others. She is used to abuse also indirectly in a dirty language which is common in Dalits of the author's own village. Because of her innocence she loses everything including her pet cock. This innocence of Sakavva makes others to exploit her. Even the lack of education in Dalit women creates most of the problems for them. There are Sakavva's in-laws with their quarrelsome qualities, Putagouri with her young potentiality, there are quarrels between Sakavva and her daughters-in-law and with sons, there are compromises; all lead to result in making a kind of complete character of Sakavva. There is human affection in all the characters which has given the novel integrity.

Sakavva, throughout her life, worked alone, brought up her sons and settled their families. This has given her some kind of ego that she has earned all the property that the family lives on. When her younger son, Sannayya, asks her for the division of property,

Sakavva naturally gets angry and tells that the property is her own and she has earned it. This economic independence has given her right to claim the headship of the family. Whatever may be the financial condition of the family, they used to sit around the fire and eat groundnuts with all the human concerns. This is possible only because of Sakavva. She has control over her family members and their actions. Her sons are not able to earn enough to satisfy the needs of the family. She is the pillar of the family.

Devanoora Mahadeva by writing this novel has shown new possibilities for the young writers to write with patient observation of the Dalit conditions.

References

Dinkar, D. C. *Swatantrata Sangram Mein Achhuton ka Yogdan*. Lucknow: Bodhisatva Prakashan. 1990.

Malagatti, Aravind. Ed. *Dalit Marg*. Bangalore: Kannada Pustaka Pradhikara. 2002.

—. *Nalku Daliteeya Kadambarigalu*. Bangalore: Christ College Kannada Sangha. 1991.

Mendelsohn, Oliver and Marika Vicziany. *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1998.

Munivenkatappa, V. *Dalit Sahitya Darshan*. Bangalore: Kannada Sahitya Parishattu. 2002.

Narayan, B. *Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India: Culture, Identity and Politics*. New Delhi: Sage. 2006.

Vidrohi, M. R. *Dalit Dastavej*. Delhi: Satyam Prakashan. 1989.

Female Emancipation: Dharmshastra and B. R. Ambedkar

(A Comparative Study)

Kaushal Panwar

Introduction

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, widely regarded as the father of the Indian Constitution, was one of the greatest social reformers of modern India. He tenaciously worked for improving the social status of women and the depressed classes. He tried to do away with the hurdles in the path of advancement of women in India. He drafted a common civil code for Hindus and other sections of the Indian society. He was among the few Indian socio-political thinkers, who dwelt deeply on the Hindu social system and the status of women in it. His education in England and America exposed him to the western ideas of humanism and rationalism. The low status of women in the Hindu society shocked him. He not only worked at the grassroots level to increase awareness about the poor status of women but also wrote extensively to challenge the views on gender relations that were validated by the *Shastras* and sanctioned by tradition. He believed that women should get the opportunity for their all-round development, and, besides their physical wellbeing, their socio-cultural rights should be taken care of.

He wanted that women of all sections of society should get their due and their dignity and modesty should be protected. He worked hard to challenge the unequal gender relations obtaining in the Hindu society so that it can be rebuild on the basis of modern democratic ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity.

Objectives, Methods and Materials

This study highlights the harsh reality of the suppression, struggle and torture women face in their daily life in Indian society. The hardships of Dalit women are not only due to their poverty or lack of education, but are directly born out the exploitation and suppression of Dalits by the upper castes, which are sanctified by Hindu religious scriptures. A number of Hindu religious books including the *Manusmriti, Atharva Veda* and *Vishnu Smriti* and the divine status granted to them by the Brahmins (Hindu upper priestly caste), build a society where gender equality was a far cry. Treatises like the 'Manusmriti' created a stratified caste system, which did not give equal status to men and women.

Manusmriti says women cannot get education, take independent decisions or acquire wealth. It not only objectifies women and promotes child marriage but justifies violence against and atrocities on women**.** India is yet to develop an understanding of gender issues and it is next to impossible for women to grow and realise their potential**.** Obviously, it is essential to organise women and develop their leadership. Only political and economic empowerment, making them self-confident and equal participation of Dalit women in politics can bring about social change in India. This should be our final objective.

This paper seeks to enunciate Dr. Ambedkar's views on the problems of women in pre- and post-independent India and the relevance of his ideas in contemporary times. Secondary data collected from the Internet, government publications, newspapers, published papers, and books and speeches delivered by Dr. Ambedkar in Parliament, conferences and meetings form the study material of the study.

Dharmashastras and Gender Discrimination

Women had a respectable and equal status in Hindi society before Manu. They were free to acquire education, divorce their husbands and remarry and enjoyed economic freedom. It was *Manusmriti* and its growing acceptability that brought about a precipitous decline in the status of women. They were subjected to the severe restrictions. Manu had a poor opinion of women. It forbids men from being in the company of even their mothers, sisters or daughters. In no stage of their lives should women be allowed to live independently and they should always be under the protection of males - fathers in childhood, husbands in adulthood and sons in old age. It also says that even if the husband is devoid of all virtues, a faithful wife must revere him like god.

Astantrah Striyah Kāryāh Purusaih Svairdivānišan, Vish ayeshu Cha Sajjantyah Samsthāpayā Ātmano Vaše, Pitā Rakšati Kaumāre Rakšati Yauvane, Rakšanti Sthavire Na Stri Svātantryamarhati. (9/2-3 Manusmriti)

Manu allowed men to divorce their wives at will but insisted that women should not be given this right under any circumstances. Men were even allowed to abandon and sell their wives. Even after repudiation by her husband, a woman was not free and could not become the legitimate wife of another.

Vihšîlah Kāmavritto Vā Gunairvā Parivarjitah, Upacharyah Striyām Sādhavyā Satatam Devavatmatih. (5/154 Manusmriti)

A wife could be subjected to physical punishment by her husband. She was akin to a slave. Yagnavalkya (Mītākšar, Chapter 77) states that it's "a woman's" duty to follow her husband's dictates, and in this lies her salvation. Even if what the husband says is immoral, the wife should follow his words without any demur.

"A woman, whose husband is away from home, should not entertain, should not make herself beautiful, should not celebrate festivals and should not go out of the house." (Chapter-84, Mītākšar).

Like *Shudras*, study of *Vedas* was prohibited for women too.

According to Ambedkar, the three important pillars of patriarchy in Hindu society– religious scriptures, caste system and endogamy– were responsible for discrimination against women and the lowering of their social status.

Struggle for Gender Equality

Dr. Ambedkar challenged the ideological foundations of the caste hierarchy that denied equality, freedom and dignity to Hindu women. He believed that the horrendous caste system should not

determine societal relations. In "The Annihilation of Caste", he suggests that Hindu minds should be purged of the thralldom of the *Shastras*. To quote him, "Make every man and woman free from the thralldom of the *Shastras*, cleanse their minds of the pernicious notions founded on the *Shastras* and he or she will inter-dine and inter-marry without your telling him or her to do so." He believed that education, inter-caste marriage and inter-dinning were the tools for annihilating caste and patriarchy perpetuated through endogamy.

Dr. Ambedkar's perception of women issues and his emphasis on their right to education, equality and property and their involvement in the political process was exactly what the western feminists too were demanding at that time. As J. S. Mill wrote in the *Subjection of Women*, the legal subordination of one sex to the other is wrong per se and one of the chief hindrances to human development. It ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no privilege or power on the one side or disability on the other.

While launching his movement in 1920, he said, "We shall see better days soon and our progress will be greatly accelerated if male education is persuaded side by side with female education…" He launched a powerful movement against the Hindu social system. He founded two newspapers 'Mook Nayak' (1920) and 'Bahiskrit Bharat' (1927), through which he propagated his views on these issues. These journals championed the cause of both women and the depressed classes.

An association of women was founded in Bombay in 1928. Its first president was Ambedkar's wife Ramabai. Addressing a press conference in 1931, Radhabai Vadale said, "It is better to die a hundred times than live a life full of humiliation. We are ready to lay down our lives for winning our rights." It was Ambedkar's encouragement that gave voice to Radhabai and many such women and gave them the courage to make such bold statements. More than 500 women participated in the Kalaram Mandir movement at Nasik in 1930 and many of them were arrested and had to face maltreatment in prisons. It was Ambedkar who imbued women with self-respect and firm determination.

Relevance of his Ideas

Dr. Ambedkar clearly proved that while women enjoyed equal social status and economic independence in the pre-Manu age, their status declined in the post-Manu period due to the *Manusmriti*. The treatise upheld caste and endogamy and that was responsible for the decline in the social status of women. The inseparability of caste and gender inequality in Hindu social system, as enunciated by Ambedkar, is the key to understand the hurdles in the empowerment of women and needs to be taken care of by the Indian feminists. Dr. Ambedkar not only countered the orthodox Hindu views about women but also worked at the grassroots level to organise and empower women of the depressed classes so that they can battle for their rights, including the right to drink water from wells etc and to enter temples. Both the rights were denied to them by caste Hindus.

Dr. Ambedkar encouraged a large number of women to take to the streets to reclaim their social rights and self-respect. He spent his life for the betterment of women - even those involved in professions like prostitution. And he influenced the lives of people. David was a pimp working for a brothel at Kamathipura in Nagpur. Influenced by the teachings of Ambedkar, he quit his profession. He even persuaded all the prostitutes to lead a life of honour.

On the contrary, Manu only has contempt for women. He considers them slaves, devoid of intellect. He denies them the right to acquire knowledge and own property; and forbids them from performing sacrifices.

As India's first Law Minister and the Chairman of Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly, Ambedkar thought it his duty to free women from slavery by reforming the Hindu social laws. He drafted the Hindu Code Bill. The Bill, the most formidable legislative measure of modern India, sought, among other reforms, to put an end to a variety of marriage systems prevailing in India and legalise only monogamous marriages. The Code also sought to confer on women the right of property and adoption which had been denied to them by Manu.

It was due to Dr. Ambedkar that provisions like Article 14

(Equal rights and opportunities in political, economic and social spheres); Article 15 (Prohibition of discrimination on the ground of sex); Article 15(3) (Affirmative discrimination in favour of women); Article 39 (Equal pay for equal work); Article 42 (Humane conditions of work and maternity relief); Article 51(A)(C) (Fundamental duties to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women); Article 46 (The state to promote the educational and economic interests of weaker section of people and to protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation); Article 47 (The state to raise the level of nutrition and standard of living of its people) were made in the Constitution. Articles 243D (3), 243T (3) and 243R (4) provides for reservations in the Panchayati Raj System.

Conclusions

Dr. Ambedkar was concerned with the status of women of all sections of society. He said that women must be treated equally with men. He tabled the Hindu Code Bill in Parliament and urged all members to help to pass the legislation. Eventually, he resigned for the same. (*I hope you know in what circumstances he had to resign, somebody may ask*). The teachings and thoughts of Dr. Ambedkar are relevant not only for women but also for all Indians even today. His deep concern for women is evident from his every sentence and word. In his last speech in Indian Parliament he quoted the famous words of Irish Patriot Daniel O Connal: "No man can be grateful at the cost of his honour, no woman can be grateful at the cost of her chastity. And no nation can be grateful at the cost of his liberty."

Dr. Ambedkar can be regarded as one of the greatest intellectuals and social reformers of modern India, who struggled throughout his life for the liberation of Indian women (particularly of the depressed classes) from the lifelong bondage and slavery imposed on them by the Hindu social institutions. By conceptualising caste and gender inequality as inseparable constituents of Hindu social order, Dr. Ambedkar laid the foundations for India's march towards gender justice.

References

Agesh, K. S. *Aiteraya Brahmana*: *Editor* Pune, 1866 Harvard Oriental Series, Part 25, Cambridge, 1920.

Ahir, D. C. *The Legacy of Dr. Ambedkar*. B. R. Publishing Corporation, New Delhi, 1990.

Ambedkar, B. R. "Women and Counter Revolution "Riddles of Hindu Women." *Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 3, Department of Education, Govt of Maharashtra, 1987.

Apte, Harinarayan. *Taittiriya Aranyak.* Pune, Edition 1868.

Arya, Sudha. *Women, Gender Equality and the State*. New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 2000.

Geraula, Vachaspati. *Arthashastra*. Varanasi: Vidyabhawan, 1952.

Haridas (Ed.). *Pārāśar Smròiti*. Sanskrit GranthaMala, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series. Varanasi (UP, India). First Edition, 1983.

Muller, Max. *Rigveda (With Sayana's commentary),* second edition, 1890—1892.

Saraswati, Maharshi Dayanand . *Rigveda* Volume 1, Volume-5, *Hindi Bhashya,* New Delhi: Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha.

Sharma, Râmchandra. *Atharvaveda Samhita*. Trans. Sanatan Dharma Mantralaya, Muradabad, First Edition 1983.

Shatpath Brahmana: (Shrimdwajsaneyimadhyandin Shatpath Brahmana) Shri Maitreyi Bhashyakaar Sayanacharya Virachit Vedartha Prakashakhyabhashya Sametam, Ganga Vishnu Shrikrishnadas Laxmivenkateshvar, Kalya, Bombay, Chaturthi Bhaag, 1997, Saka 1832, San 1940-1940.

Tandya Brahamana: (With Sayan's commentary) Vittal Bibliotheca Indica Series, Calcutta.

Weber, Vajsanehi. *Samhita* (With Mahidhara's commentary), London, 1852.

Yâjñavalkya Smriti, Vishwarookrit Bhashya Sahit, Trivandrum Sanskrit Edition 1922-24.

Ambedkar in Popular Imagination: A Study of *Bhimayana*

Vishakha Kardam

Popular culture is based on the tastes of ordinary people rather than educated elite. As the 'culture of the people', popular culture is determined by the interactions between people in their everyday activities such as styles of dress, use of slang, greeting rituals and the food that people eat. Graphic novels can also be seen as a part of this culture. Stories depicted in graphic novels are often derived from oral stories prevalent in a society or a group of people. This makes graphic texts easy to read by the common masses. However, a graphic novel is different from a comic text. According to Nandini Chandra, graphic novel "can be said to cater to the combined power of urban youth and pop art culture as opposed to the more degraded comic" (22). This definition of graphic novel makes it seem like an anti-genre to comics. It is a hybridized media which combines journalism, pictorial narrative and, to a lesser extent, words.

As opposed to a comic, *Bhimayana*, a graphic novel, is political in content. However, Nandini Chandra in her review of the book writes, "the political or oppositional content of most graphic novels becomes increasingly suspect" (22). But politics enters the social life of young adult readers through this book. The narrative makes one aware of the politics of caste and marginalization of Dalits in India and also retrieves Ambedkar from the Indian history in which he is represented only as the person who drafted the Indian constitution. It can be seen as an act of re-writing Ambedkar and his ideology in the minds of the masses.

The text under discussion in this paper, *Bhimayana*, reproduces the autobiographical notes of Ambedkar from the section titled

"Waiting for a Visa". *Bhimayana*, a graphic novel, was published by Navayana and written by Srividya Natarajan and S. Anand, with artwork done by two tribal artists, Durgabai Vyam and Subhash Vyam. The plot of the book narrates the incidents in the life of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, which also puts this book in the same league as the Hindu epic *Ramayana* which tells about the incidents in the life of Rama. This similarity with *Ramayana* makes *Bhimayana* almost like a story-telling session, a *katha*. But this *katha* does not describe any battle or war of or between the Gods. Rather, it describes incidents through which Dr. B. R. Ambedkar learnt, understood and fought against discrimination. While *Ramayana* has been read as an epic, *Bhimayana* works as a mock-epic. The title of the book also undercuts the title of the original epic, i.e., *Ramayana*. Here, the Brahmanical God Rama is equated with Ambedkar, pushing into the forefront the fact that Ambedkar has a God-like importance in the lives of Dalits and that his fight, like that of Rama, is going to be against an evil system of society.

The way Ambedkar is presented in the novel is unlike the other descriptions of Ambedkar as a demi god figure. The title of this novel celebrates Ambedkar- the man, his life, his journey for liberation of Indian people from the clutches of caste-based discrimination. In this text, Ambedkar has been shown as a normal human being who suffers, feels bad and gets angry at his discrimination. The attempt here is to situate Ambedkar in the popular imagination of people and not in the mythic world. This book appears to be an introduction of his life and contribution to the lives of Dalits and non-Dalits as well. He no longer figures like a distant person who is superior to others. This book makes him and his thoughts accessible to its young readers.

The narrative opens in an urban space where two educated people are discussing caste-based reservation and the views expressed by one of them appears ironical in the modern setting and context of the narrative. The man appears to have views against reservation but the woman comes across as an activist who defends caste-based affirmative action and explains to the man the reality of caste system in India in the past and the present as well. The stigma of caste and untouchability makes many people hailing from

these communities to hide their caste identity. For upper caste people, a mere touch of a lower caste person is abhorrent. Discussing the phenomenology of untouchability, Sundar Sarukkai writes, "The moment of contact is also the act of erasing the distance between us and the object. Touch could be seen as something that erases the distance between the subject and the object" (163). Thus, untouchability creates inequality between the people who belong to the lower caste and the upper caste community. Sarukkai also writes that "the skin is literally a boundary. . . . The practice of untouchability has to do with a boundary that cannot be crossed. . . . The skin as the defining quality of a person means that a person whose skin is untouchable is himself an untouchable" (170). The skin of an untouchable becomes untouchable because of the degrading jobs that have been assigned to them in Hindu religious texts. The extent of their degradation can be understood from an instance in the book where Ambedkar wonders that even animals/ beasts are allowed to drink water from a public pond, but not Mahars. In the same incident, he also questions as to why no barber in the village would cut their hair, but would not mind using their scissors on beasts.

The artwork of *Bhimayana* is what strikes one instantly. The artwork is also what binds the world of Dalits and Tribals together in this book. The tribal world manifests itself in the narrative in the form of birds and animals that form silent spectators/ listeners of *katha*. The animal imagery suggests the inhuman treatment of Dalits at the hands of caste Hindus and how nature has been a witness to all the cruelties inflicted on Dalits. Events are narrated in a non-linear fashion which also shows that focus here is on storytelling, not on linearity of events.

The first image in the book is a dedication to Jangarh Singh Shyam, with the image of a man holding paintbrushes in hand. This image of a tribal with paintbrushes is an empowering figure as it shows the oppressed ones with the means to narrate their stories. The medium adopted is also the one used by an oppressed community- painting or art instead of words. The art used in the text is Pardhan Gondi artwork. Gond artists have used Digna patterns all over the book. Rectilinear panels and boxes that enclose the

action or the characters have also been done away with. The Vyams wanted their art to be *khula* and not enclosed within a box. One could say that they have been successful in thinking 'out of the box'. They have been able to carve out for themselves an open space, unlike the narrow world of the caste Hindus. Their art brings together distinct worlds of nature and cosmopolitan society, but also distances itself from the conventional form of writing one's experiences.

In this book, the visuals narrate the story more than words do. It can also be seen as a reaction against the Brahmanical code which did not allow Dalits and Tribals to use *vac* or word of the mouth. *Vac* has always been the stronghold of the Brahmins, but in the worldview of this novel, hegemony of words is subverted and tribal artwork dominates the narrative. The imagination of Tribals expressed in what they paint because they have been denied the privilege to articulate themselves. Also, popular literature exists outside the domain of canonical literature, so the use of art can be seen as a way of breaking away with the idea of importance of language in the novel.

The *chetna*, or consciousness, seems to have permeated the life and minds of Dalits rather than that of upper caste Hindus. Laura Brueck writes about Dalit *chetna*, "A contemporary understanding of Dalit *chetna* is necessarily grounded in the Ambedkarite principles of political liberation, renunciation of Hindu identity, and caste eradication from Hindu society" (73). This idea of Dalit consciousness is reflected in the way this graphic novel is created. Since the beginning of the narrative, we see Ambedkar questioning the unjust caste system that oppresses a particular community in the society.

Towards the end of the composition, we see him achieving success in his attempt at raising the consciousness of Dalits through his speeches and mass conversion to Buddhism. Gauri Viswanathan sees conversion "as a form of political and cultural criticism" (213). Reflecting on Ambedkar's decision to convert to Buddhism, she writes, "Many critics are of the opinion that Ambedkar's famous declaration in 1935, announcing his intention to leave the Hindu fold and convert to another faith, can be traced

to his intense frustration and anger over failing to secure self-representation for untouchables." However, she continues, "despite his disappointment with the aborted demand for separate electorates, his conversation was less a rejection of political solutions than a rewriting of religious and cultural change into a form of political intervention" (212).

Journalism, a form of reportage, is also incorporated in the text as various newspaper cuttings are used to convey the depth of caste based discrimination in Indian society. This device also helps in legitimizing the incidents described in the book. It also brings out a contrast in the Indian society of early twentieth-century and twenty- first century, and illustrates how things have not changed much for Dalits in the contemporary age. The newspaper reports also add a touch of realism to this narrative about Ambedkar and help in reclaiming the cultural memory of its readers. Since realism is what forms the foundation of Dalit literature, such an addition is significant. According to Toral Jatin Gajarawala "the everyday becomes a central category for the understanding of a Dalit realism" (190). This 'everyday' is explored in *Bhimayana* through newspaper clippings.

The book is divided into three main sections, titled- Water, Shelter and Travel. These form the basic necessities of life and a denial of these amenities points towards the life of deprivation that has been the hard reality for Dalit community since the age of *Manusmriti*. The journey motif is noticeable in the novel. Ambedkar undertakes journey in all the three sections. In the first part, he faces discrimination for the first time while travelling; in the second he tries to hide his real identity, and in the final section, he comes out as a leader of Dalit masses and projects his Dalit identity to the world by converting to Buddhism. All the incidents discussed here are political.

The politics of the novel becomes more evident with the newspaper clippings which are interspersed with the narrative of the past trying to highlight the fact that discrimination on the basis of caste is not a thing of the past; rather, it is the harsh reality of the modern India. The places where narrative is set in are all urban towns and cities. The opening of the novel takes us into an urban

space which has paved roads and concrete houses with cars passing by. But in the midst of this modern setting, we encounter people with venomous views which have been represented in the shape of scorpion-sting dialogue bubbles highlighting the fact that their views are still caste-biased. Modernity of such city-bred Hindus is under question here.

The first section titled 'water' introduces the reader to Bhim, a young boy who is prohibited from drinking water from the same source used by his other schoolmates because of his low caste origins. In this scene, the image of a fish is fused with the corporeal frame of Bhim to show the intense thirst that he feels even in the presence of ample water. The imagery of water is a binding factor in the book. In the first section is shown Mahad Satyagraha, which takes place near the Chavadar tank. Thus, it illustrates that the desire of Dalits is to be allowed to live freely like water. Like water imagery makes the narrative flow from one artwork to the next, Dalits also wish for the same freedom of movement without any fear or restrictions of any sort.

The first section presents Ambedkar as a young boy who questions the discriminating behavior of his school peon and classmates. The fact that he is treated differently from others gradually becomes evident to him. The second section titled 'Shelter' shows a grown-up and foreign-educated Ambedkar who is proud of his achievements. However, this feeling of pride is short-lived as he realizes that education does not matter if a person does not belong to an upper-caste family. This section also brings to the fore the fact that the idea of caste is not only restricted to Hinduism, but followed by people of other religions as well.

In the same part of the text, Ambedkar has to face the ire of Parsis for staying at, and hence polluting an inn meant only for the people of their community. His friends who converted to other religions are also shown as unwilling in extending a helping hand to him and he is forced to spend a night in a public park. This makes him realize that a Dalit, however highly educated he is, will always be an object of disgust and ridicule for the upper caste people. The third section of the book titled 'Travel' talks about the same theme of caste discrimination. By now, Ambedkar has become a Dalit leader who is trying to make people of his community conscious of their rights.

Ambedkar, a highly educated person, could not bear to see his community living in the shadows of Brahmin scriptures which want them to suffer in silence. Gauri Viswanathan writes, "Inflamed by these experiences of extreme indignity, he threw himself into the uplifting of the untouchables; not however, by working for reform within Hinduism but by asserting the rights of untouchables to full equality before the law" (211). Since he was a barrister at law, it was possible for him to adopt a legal route to fight for the rights of Dalits.

The Gondi artwork employed to depict the events in the text derives its inspiration from nature. The animal imagery used is also a way of making readers aware of the abhorrent nature of discrimination which treats lower caste people as worse than animals. Also, on most of the pages of the book, one notices a profusion of hands, feet, heads, and legs, etc, which points towards the constant toil and hard work Dalits have to do in order to be able to survive. However, the multiple fingers drawn could also seem accusatory, a way of directing the blame on the upper caste people. In the world of the novel, nature and inanimate objects are represented as indiscriminatory towards anyone. In the first section, a huge tree is depicted which provides its shade to everyone, irrespective of their caste, unlike the school peon who discriminates against Bhim and does not give him water to drink (18).

In section one, when Bhim, along with his siblings, reaches Masur, they are perceived as 'touchable' children by the station master. The same station master, however, behaves differently once their caste identity is revealed. This change in the way station master perceived them can also be seen in the way the clock is painted. Initially, when the siblings look like upper caste, educated children, the clock encloses the image of a beautiful bird with a crown on its head. The numbers on the clock are also written in Roman numerals. Once the caste identity of these children becomes known to the station master, the bird in the clock loses all its grace and now looks haggard, shown without a crown. Also, now the clock is held firmly by two arms/ hands, suggesting the desire of upper

caste Hindus to control the lives of the lower caste people.

The iconography within which Ambedkar has been situated so far is primarily about his role in drafting the constitution of India. However, in this book, what we see is a hagiography of Ambedkar, which attempts a revisionist retelling of his life. Moreover, his story is used to interpret the current issue of reservation rights. There is a movement back and forth in time, which is foregrounded by the newspaper clippings which bring us back from the past with the realization that caste system is not yet a thing of the past.

The past is, thus, linked to the contemporary newspaper clippings. Also, the subject matter of the book is very much Indian, but the art form used is one that is globally recognized. This production for the global audience also works towards creating a modern debate with roots in the past. The looking back at the past is not nostalgic in this book. The past is evoked along with its bitter memories of disrespect, humiliation and servitude. This going back is also a way of understanding the present through the past, more so for the young and uninformed readers of the book. The book talks about an Indian subject, but the language employed, i.e. art, is universally understood. The use of Gond art can also be seen as a way of recuperating the non-verbal way of expression used by those who have not had access to words. So instead of lexical literacy, this book appeals to people's visual literacy. Thus, the idea of literacy is also renewed in this book.

Works Cited

Brueck, Laura R. *Writing Resistance: The Rhetorical Imagination of Hindi Dalit Literature*. NewYork : Columbia University Press, 2014. Print.

Chandra, Nandini. "Ambedkar Out of the Frame." *Biblio: A Review of Books* 16.3(2011): 22-23. Web. 05 June 2016.

Gajarawala, Toral Jatin. *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013. Print.

Guru, Gopal, and Sundar Sarukkai. *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012. Print.

Viswanathan, Gauri. *Outside the Fold*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. Print.

Vyam, Durgabai, Subhash Vyam, Srividya Natarajan, and S. Anand. *Bhimayana: Incidents in the Life of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar*. New Delhi: Navayana Publications, 2011. Print.

Exploring the Issues of Caste, Gender and Identity in Bama's *Karukku*

S. B. Biradar

Dalits were treated as a marginalized group. They suffered exploitation and oppression since ages. They were treated as a part of culture of silence by the hegemony of upper class. They were regarded as untouchables, their views and ideas unethical. Dalit's struggle against exploitation, inequality, oppression and caste tradition has a long history. Dalit literature reflects the suffering and discrimination undergone by the Dalits from time immemorial. The cause for this suffering is the ancient '*Verna'* system propagated by Manu. It leads to the caste-based hierarchy in the Hindu society forcing the low caste people to undergo wrenches of humiliation. They became the puppets in the hands of upper caste people. The embryo of protest and rebel against these good old practices are found in Dalit literature. Issues of caste, gender and identity are consistently addressed in Dalit literature.

The term 'Dalit' implies oppressed and destitute. It is extensively discussed in the Manifesto of Dalit Panthers. The term 'Caste' works as an identity which gives the most significant dimension to Indian society. Referring to the issues of caste, a noted critic G. N. Davey remarks in his work *The Outcaste,* "The origin of the notion of the caste is so obscure and its manifestation in social life is so complicated that it is almost impossible to think of it as a 'system' with 'rules' that can be articulated and reasoned out" (xiv). Caste continues to hold prime identity marker in Indian society. It is a lived social experience than a standard mode of social classification. In this grim condition of caste ridden society, many movements came into force to eradicate caste system.

Dalit literary movement clearly exhibits its deep concern for caste discrimination. It tries to bring social justice and humanity. This revolutionary movement thoroughly critiques the legacy of *Verna* system. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar undertakes the most realistic stance against the prevalent injustice in the name of caste discrimination. He is a great visionary and a democratic humanist. He believes in the upliftment of Dalits through education. Hence he advocates "to educate, organize and agitate" (Ambedkar, 49). In the same vein Sharankumar Limbale says "A feeling of rebellion is invariably accompanied by an extreme psychological commitment. As Dalit sensibility seeks to bring about compatible changes in the social consciousness, it is rebellious as well as fundamentally optimistic and revolutionary" (Limbale, 1992: 267).

Raj Gautaman posits out, "it is the function of Dalit writing to awaken in every reader, a consciousness of the oppressed Dalit, and to share in the Dalit experiences as if it were their own." Further, he continues his argument and says :

> *Karukku* is a singular example of a piece of writing which achieves this. Tamil Dalit writings fight for human rights and social justice against traditional and orthodox practices. Bama's *Karukku* explores a changing Dalit identity. It exhibits a very powerful sense of the self and community as a Dalit. It rejects the notion of Varna and mainstream Hindu values. Bama tries to break a mainstream aesthetics. She proposes a new identity of her own and tries to change hearts and minds of the readers. It explores altogether a different world of experience.

Bama, the Tamil born Dalit Christian writer in her touching work *Karukku* (1992) establishes a strong voice of women in Dalit discourse. *Karukku* seeks to address, comprehend, evaluate and explore the issues of caste, gender and identity and offer a rich perspective and discourse. The analysis will definitely give an insight and enrich our understanding of pain and anguish of Dalit community. Bama tries to break a mainstream aesthetics. She proposes a new identity of her own and tries to change hearts and minds of the

readers. It explores altogether a different world of experience. The views from the marginalized sections have been disrespectful with their singular experience of oppression, exploitation, subjugation, suffering and endurance. They remained silent for many years. The silent anguish finds no substitute until the indestructible experience of disgrace sensitizes their identity. It urges them to move from invisibility to visibility. This move marks the breaking of the age old silence. It results into an act of self assertion. The journey from unknown to known is very hard. It is a rewarding experience for the marginalized self. *Karukku* explores a new horizon for the marginalized and subjugated.

Karukku focuses on every day caste and class based discrimination and exploitation that often demands some serious moral and social scrutiny. It explores many accounts of 'unspeakable' horrors and horrendous degree of exploitation. It added new dimensions significantly to the growing corpus of discourse on caste, gender and identity. Bama presents a tale of intense personal suffering. Though Bama's *Karukku* is an outcome of regional experience, it creates an affluent variety of national consciousness and ethos. Bama explores the dialectical binaries of privileged-unprivileged, rich-poor, upper-caste-lower-caste and male-female to unravel the multilayered complexities of exploitations and discriminations.

In one of the interviews Baba asserts "Casteism must be annihilated basically" (Bama, Interview, 2009: 268). She addresses the caste issues effectively in her work. The title *Karukku* justifies her critical condition she lives in. The word 'Karukku' means the saw-like double-edged stem of the 'palmyra' leaves with their saw-toothed edges on both sides which are like double edged swords. On the other hand it also gives meaning of embryo or seed, which indicates freshness or newness. In her foreword, Bama draws attention to the symbol, and refers to the words in Hebrew (New Testament), "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews, 4:10).

Bama belongs to 'parayas' community. Parayas are lowest

of the low Dalit community in Tamil Nadu, a state in South India. Bama heard the word 'untouchable' at the age of nine during her early school days. The first time she comes to know the pathetic state of her community while she was returning from school. She finds an elder from her street holding out a small packet of snacks tied on a string. The elder was giving the snacks to a Naicker of the village by holding the strings without touching the packet. The self questioning has begun in Bama with wonder. Bama writes: ''What did it mean when they called us 'Paraya'? Had the name become that obscene?'' (*K* 16). Bama starts to watch out for means to uplift herself and her community from this dismal existence. Her elder brother finds a solution for this disparity. He informs her that education is the right path and the only way to attain equality. Bama portrays the oppression which she faced as a student and a teacher. Since she was bright in study and teaching, she managed to escape from the violent oppression to a certain extent. Her life took a big turn, when she took the vows to become a nun at the age of 26. But in the seminary and later in the convent, Bama apprehended the bitter truth that the situation of Dalits will always be the same. Seven years later, Bama walked out of the convent and outside the convent she faced lots of questions directed upon her. It is her resolution to account the experiences in the form of her autobiography that saved her from ending her life in the midst of all that struggles.

The protagonist is a marginalized Dalit woman and never named. She was muted physically and psychologically in the name of caste, sex and religion. She tries to break the age-old silence by converting herself into Christianity. Conversion into Christianity has not reduced the pathetic state of Dalits. The non-Dalit Christians never assimilate the Dalit Christians into their fold. In India, Christians also follow the same caste system of the Hinduism which results in caste hierarchy, caste subordination and exploitation. Above all, spousal exchange between Dalit Christian castes and non-Dalit castes is very rare. *Karukku*, depicts the casteist practices of a Christian priest who shows preconceived notions about Dalit Christians: "The priest's first response was to say, "After all you are from the Cheri (Dalit colony). You might have done it.

You must have done it" (Bama 19).

Bama's *Karukku* explores and critiques many forms of caste and gender based discriminations. Significantly it exposes the evil of caste operation existing within Catholic Church in her region. She writes, "It is only upper-caste Christians who enjoy the benefits and comforts of the Church" (*K* 80). She realistically portrays how people of the low social status lead a hard life fighting with hundreds of battle daily. She clearly states her motif, "*Karukku*, written by a wounded self has not been dissolved in the stream of time… it has been a means of relieving the pains of others who were wounded" (Bama, 2012: X).

Bama radically speaks about her culture, the problems of her community and also of her individual struggle to find out her identity. *Karukku* critiques the aspects of caste-hierarchy and oppression. She depicts how her own people live in the utter poverty and their hard work gains no dignity of labor, ". . . our society is divided into those who toil and those who sit down and feast" (*K* 79). She expresses her deep sympathies for the people, "Who toil far more painfully through fierce heat and beating rain, yet live out their lives in their huts with nothing but gruel and water. Those who labor are the poorest of the poor Dalits. But those who reap the rewards are the wealthy, the upper-castes" (*K* 79). The work records the instances of the way her family quelled the bouts of hunger: "Sometimes we boiled and ate drumstick leaves" (72). The work tells the story of her struggle to search for her identity during her formative years. During her school days she would find some menial and farm work like gleaning groundnuts, collecting firewood and picking up dry dung. Even after the attainment of higher education she endures the hardships of being alone in the corrupt world of jobs. For she believes, "The task of finding a job seems monstrously difficult" (*K* 118). Apart from the pangs of poverty, Bama suffered from various forms of caste, class and gender oppression both within her village and outside. *Karukku* records how the upper-caste people took an undue advantage of their poor economic conditions and the hassle of their life. It shows how they were immediately thrown out of their jobs on account of their reaction and protest. Bama takes serious cognizance of such brutal and

inhuman acts in her writing. She strongly raises the question, "For how long can you live in disguise?" (*K* 116).

Bama's *Karukku* questions about her 'quest for identity' and the plight of her community. It shows the hardships of a low social status. Bama always faced the hardships of life. Through hard work and perseverance, she accomplishes her academic career and finally becomes a teacher in a convent school. She goes to an extent of becoming a Catholic nun to serve the poor and the destitute. But when she gets into a religious order she notices that even this domain is not free from the evil and the dichotomies of upper-caste and lower caste. Finally, she arrives at a conclusion that the work culture of the Church helps to the high caste to intentionally discriminate the unprivileged people. For she writes, "They never asked, why do people suffer, what is the state of this country, what Lord Jesus actually did for people, why did we become nuns, how can we undo these injustices. Such questions never came out of their mouths" (*K* 111-112). The work records her helplessness and the facts about how she becomes extremely alienated as she could not share her life with the poor and the destitute. Bama concludes her experience about the church in a radical statement, "There seemed to be one god within the Church and another outside" (*K* 107) Thus, *Karukku* concludes on a tragic note, revealing the facts about her grim future. She finally resigns from her teaching post in the convent realizing the futile nature of her teaching profession, for she says, "What use would I be then, to society?" (*K* 131). Further, she returns to her village to mingle with her own people and to do something to enhance their social status. Bama is conscious of what is really meant to be a destitute and poor.

In *Karukku*, we find that Bama's quest for identity gains much prominence and recognition which can never be ignored. In this regard, Lakshmi Holmstrom, the translator aptly says, "Bama captures a moment that contains a paradox: she seeks an identity, but also seeks a change which means an end to that identity" (Holmstrom, 2012: XIX). Further, she praises the work, "Yet it has a universality at its core which questions all oppressions, disturbs all complacencies and reaching out, empowers all those who have suffered different oppressions" (XIV).

In conclusion, it may be stated that *Karukku* has emerged as an epitome of protest and rebel. The discourses of caste, gender and identity have sensitized Bama. It is a conscious endeavor to interrogate the fundamental issues emanating from the ubiquitous sites of oppression and resistance.

Works Cited

Ahmad, Imtiaz and Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay, eds. *Dalit Assertion in Society, Literature and History*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2010. Print.

Ambedkar, B. R. "Annihilation of Caste." *Writing and Speeches* Vol -I 49.

Bama. "Interview." *Journal of Literatures and Aesthetics,* Jan-Dec, 2009.

–. *Karukku*. Trans. Lakshmi Holmstrom. Ed. Mini Krishnan. Chennai: Macmillan, 2000. Print.

Kumar, Raj. *Dalit Personal Narratives: Reading Caste, Nation and Identity*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2010. Print.

Limbale, Sharankumar. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations*. Trans. and ed. Alok Mukherjee. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004. Print.

Omvedt, Gail. *Dalit Visions*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2008.

Beauty Lies in the Eyes of the Beholder : Dr. Tulsīrām' s Autobiography

Marina Rimscha

Dr. Tulsīrām couldn't answer my question about his target group. What I wanted to know in the end was whether he wrote his autobiography for Dalits or non-Dalits. It seemed obvious: either you write to show fellow sufferers that a way out is possible or you aim to accuse oppressors and show them just exactly how ugly and disgusting their actions can be. But Tulsīrām Jī didn't even think of trying either: "No, no, no, I didn't write it for anyone". Unlike Omprakāsh Vālmīki, who, when asked, said that he did write for Dalits, Tulsīrām didn't pursue a goal with his autobiography, he said, he wrote just exactly what happened, without any planning or trying to convey a message.

He actually never wanted to write an autobiography. He said that he wrote it because he was virtually forced to do so by Akhilesh Jī, the editor of Tadbhav magazine. It was very hard to write *Murdahiyā*. "One doesn't write an autobiography, one cries it."[1] He used to write at night alone, and often had to cry. "How did you feel afterwards?," I asked. "Very good," he said. "So many people liked the book, so many responses came, a lot of graduate students began to do research on the book. I was surprised, but then I thought, well, if they like it so much, I should write it properly." This is how he came to write the second book, *Manikarikā.*

To say that I've enjoyed reading Tulsīrām's autobiography may at some level sound heartless, because essentially it is a story of pain, fear, hunger, discrimination, lack of love. But the

way the author himself manages to see positivity and beauty in an often unbearable reality and to find relief in the worst situations is so inspiring that when thinking about the subject of my first presentation on his autobiography, I couldn't help but decide to write about its beauty, its often painful, scary, sometimes even macabre beauty.

With Buddha's Help

A true Buddhist at heart Tulsīrām Jī found a way to explain hardship away, when it reminded him of the hardships undergone by Buddha himself. This is a strategy of coping with suffering he developed early on, when he first read about Buddha in school. In the four-roomed primary school building only three rooms could be used as classrooms (the fourth was needed to cook food for the teachers in it), so many classes were held in the open. Students used to fight over the space under a big and shady tree – fight to the point of physical injury. So, the headmaster was forced to make a rule: whoever managed to be the first under that tree, would stay there with his whole class during that day.

> We studied inside school only until the end of second grade. Then, until the end of fifth grade our studies continued under various trees. Sparrows and crows that lived in those trees, were our classmates. Years later I found out that in ancient times it used to be customary to learn in the shadow of trees, that Gautama Buddha did the same and that he even got enlightened under one. Who would not be proud to become a tiny particle of this great tradition? This is why I do not dare to complain about there not being a proper school building for us to learn in. (*Murdahiya* 53-54)

Besides, being from a poor family, virtually unable to spend, however, little money for his studies, he even saw an advantage in learning outside school building :

> We were studying in a field in front of the school in open sunshine. But I had great profit from studying in a field: I was solving mathematical problems with a stick on the ground and then wrote the results in tiny letters into my notebook. The reason for this was that I always had a lack of notebooks, so, in order to save paper, I solved mathematical problems on the ground. (*Murdahiya* 53-54)

Years later, living in Banaras in a room without electricity, being forced to read at night in the dim light of a kerosene lamp, he again finds a reason to see the situation's attraction:

> Under the lamp there always was darkness, so I had to take the book in one hand and move it from right to left while reading. At that time, I used to be reminded of Buddha's words that every happy experience is followed by sorrow in the same way, in which there is darkness under a light. I started to like the kerosene lamp very much, because it always reminded me of Buddha. (*Manikarnika* 62)

Murdahiyā, a cremation ground, but also a grazing site, a playing ground, a "multipurpose religious locality", has two meanings in Tulsīrām's vocabulary (*Murdahiya* 5). One is, in fact, cremation ground. The other is a place inside a person, where one buries one's pain and sorrow, and here's how he writes about it after having narrated one of the most macabre and terrifying experiences of his life:

> On that day I too felt deeply that a Murdahiyā had been born inside me, and who knows how much sorrow and pain would be burned and buried there in future. When at the age of 15 after finishing high school I ran away from home in 1964 to continue with my studies, I spent an endless number of times in that Murdahiyā. Actually, I was alone, but in fact, with me had gone my Murdahiyā. When I realized that in the world there is suffering, the cause of suffering and its end too, it seemed to me that before finding this truth Tathāgata Gautama Buddha must

have spent some time or other in my Murdahiyā, too. *(Murdahiya* 52)

When living in Varanasi and working for the Communist Party of India, Tulsīr*ā*m found himself accused of being casteist; according to him, one was called a "social reformer" if one addressed caste-discrimination issues as member of a high caste, but being a Dalit and addressing Dalit discrimination issues made one casteist. But in fact, Tulsīrām was quite the opposite, even as an unhappy boy, a bad omen for his own family, he feels compassion for the daughter of a pundit, who was taken out of school and married off at the age of 12, for the sole reason of having been seen on Tulsīrām's shoulders – when he – not seeing any other way – helped her to cross a stream (*Murdahiya* 114).

Tulsīrām generosity never stops to astonish: when, having run away from home living in Azamgarh in a hostel and suffering from hunger for a long time, he finally gets a scholarship, another young man, whom Tulsīrām calls his friend, demands one half of it in the name of friendship, Tulsīrām gives it to him without a word of reproach. The reason for this might have been fear or simplicity or an internalized sense of inferiority. What's astonishing in the end is his present day comment: "Should I meet him today, I surely would feed him pakodas just as I did back then."

Laughter through Tears

The two books also contain several funny episodes; episodes, reading which one cannot help but laugh out loud, and about which Tulsīr*ā*m Jī himself laughed merrily, when we discussed them two years ago in his rooms at the JNU campus. "I was a little fool", says he happily, when explaining that having been told to watch a piglet that had previously been killed by the young Tulsīr*ā*m himself, he stood on guard in front of it with a stick lest that it would run away. A short time later he eats a plum and accidentally swallows its core. A boy at school scares Tulsīrām into believing that as a result, a plum tree is going to grow out of his stomach. Even though a friend explained a few days later that such a thing would never be possible, Tulsīrām was afraid of eating plums for several years to come. The grown-up Tulsīrām says that he feels privileged to have had these experiences: the contrast between them and the present-day author of *Murdahiyā* emphasizes the long and hard way he had come.

Tulsīrām's childhood was surrounded by superstition, the very first page of *Murdahiyā* describes these surroundings in a very picturesque manner. But however seriously religious beliefs – or, rather, "religious superstitions", as Tulsīrām hardly ever calls them other than that – were taken, there was reason for laughter for the whole community, when it became known that the ghost that made a rich neighbor ill, was none other but the young Tulsīrām himself. One evening Tulsīrām climbed up a mango tree to steel as many fruits as possible. His cousin Cikhurī collected the fruits on the ground. When the owner saw Cikhurī, he came running out of his house with a lāthī. Cikhurī fled, Tulsīrām stayed up in the tree, hiding as best he could. The owner gazed up at the tree with an angry expression and saw a foot hanging down from a branch. Suddenly, screaming "jay śuddhū bābā kī, jay śuddhū bābā kī" he fell flat on the ground and, being in a semi-deranged state of mind, never stopping to repeat his mantra, half run, half crawled back home. Having reached it, he immediately fell sick and a number of sorcerers gathered in his house in order to make him better. The reason for the owner's strange behavior lay in the fact that a few years previously a Dalit named Śuddhū had climbed up a tree, fallen down and died. So, "śuddhū bhūt" became one of the most feared ghosts of that area.

> Having learned the truth of śuddhū bhūt, people from our bastī enjoyed themselves and laughed a lot. They even went to other villages and told this story to their relatives. The comedy resulting from this incident probably gave momentary relief to the people suffering from hunger during the drought of those years and I myself believe to this day that in his greed for mangoes up that tree had climbed a simple thief, but when he came down and ran away, he became a dangerous ghost. As a result of that incident I became a very popular and interesting character in the village for some time. (*Murdahiya* 94)

Other amusing anecdotes are of a tribute to wit and inventiveness. There lived a woman in the bastī, who used to come outside at night and cry out loud that a certain thing had been stolen from her. She would cry and cry until the thief returned her property. In fact, people thought that no one did steal from her. It was just her way of getting whatever she needed. People worked hard and needed their night's sleep, so there always was someone, who gave in and brought her whatever she was screaming about just in order to make her quiet.

Another character, Bankiyā Dom, used to play a *singhā*- an instrument he had made himself, which was a kind of a trumpet. Whenever there was a wedding or some other gathering, he used to arrive there without any kind of invitation, playing his *singhā* with force. It seemed he was drumming war drums. In reality, he was indeed doing war–a war for food. He ate very little then and there, but he tried to take as much food as he could with him in his bag. The hosts often fought with him. And whenever someone didn't allow Bankiyā Dom to take food with him, he went at night from village to village playing his *singhā* and screaming that so-and-so was mean, stingy, heartless, a thief etc. People feared Bankiyā Dom and his nightly excursions, so they tried not to make him feel done out of his share. However, whenever he had been served a nice meal and was allowed to take food with him, the procedure was the same: at night he went from village to village playing his *singhā*, but screaming that so-and-so is a very nice man, generous, selfless, just like Rājā Hariśchandra, etc. In this manner, whenever people heard Bankiyā Dom and his *singhā*, they invariably knew whether he had been well fed or deprived of food. (*Murdahiya* 32)

Writing about his journey to Banaras before the start of his first academic year at the BHU, he describes the absurdly funny manner, in which porters used to help their customers to find seats on trains. The porter would go inside and, upon finding an empty seat, would cry: "candā" to which his customer should reply "bijlī" and follow the porter's voice. When the train came and people stormed inside, many voices cried "cand*ā*" from the train and a number of those waiting on the platform answered "bijlī". Tulsīrām

decided to squeeze into the train by himself, and when he managed it, he saw his porter sitting under the ceiling in the luggage compartment, staring at him and saying "candā". "Bijlī", answered Tulsīrām slowly. Upon this, the porter jumped down, lifted Tulsīrām and put him in the luggage compartment as easily as if he was a piece of luggage. (*Manikarnika* 35)

Another episode makes one wonder: one would have expected indignation, in fact, this was exactly what I felt myself, but for Tulsīrām it was nothing but funny. A friend's uncle was an ayurvedic doctor. He was famous for the way he used to take his patients' temperature: he let them hold one end of a string and himself held the other. Having thus measured the temperature, he would announce the result. This way of measuring seemed to the sick people nothing less than a miracle. One day, Tulsīrām mentioned this miraculous uncle to his friend. His friend, Vimal Dīkshit, replied laughing: "But you're a fool, too! Uncle is a man of old views. Among his patients there are many Chamārs and people from other low castes, he cannot touch them, this is why he is taking their temperature with a string." "Having learned the secret of the string, I, too, couldn't stop laughing", says Tulsīrām (*Manikarnika* 142).

In 1975, a terrifying atrocity against Dalits made the world buzz. Two Dalits were lynched by Bhūmihārs and the whole Dalit bastī went up in flames. Being the editor of a party journal, Tulsīrām decides to visit the village of Sherpur and to find out first hand, what had happened. Being there and talking to the people, he relates thus:

> Upon my request, they sat down on the ruins and the photographer that had come with me, started to take pictures. Being photographed appeared to be a great reason for them to be happy. Seeing the camera, a small child crawled under a bedstead and started to cry. Having seen the child's action, we were just about to start laughing, when a man that stood nearby, said in order to ask the photographer to wait a minute: "Bābū Jī, wait a minute, let me extinguish the *bidi* else the photo will burn".

Because of the naiveté of the child and the man, we all started to laugh violently.

It occurred to me that the people from that bastī must have been laughing with such force for the first time since their bastī had been burned. (*Manikarnika* 177)

Poetry in Poverty

Since Dalit literature has been accused of not being asthetically beautiful, it gives one special pleasure to mention several beautifully poetic passages from Tulsīrām's autobiography. Narrating the first general elections he ever witnessed, Tulsīrām doesn't only write about the political parties and reasons for people voting for them, but also about the women's colorful dresses, the songs they sang and the games children played:

> These elections also became memorable for me because it was the first time I saw that motor, that is "lorry", and when it started, it shook violently and made dust fly, and together with several kids I, too, had run after it and came a long way. At that time, it was difficult to make out whether we were following the motor or a flying tornado. In the beginning, the motor moved some distance and stopped at some point with a "gho-gho" sound. At that time a lot of people gathered around it. People started to say that until the motor won't hear some music, it won't move. This superstition had spread in villages at that time. A loudspeaker had been placed on the roof of the car and inside was a black gramophone record player that in the village language was called "phone glass". So, as soon as a record was put on, a song played :
>
> *'हे हो संवरिया, जो जइहो बजरिया तो*
>
> *लइहो चुनरिया खादी की,*
>
> *जय बोलो महतिमा गांधी की।'*
>
> A little later the motor started and with us started the tornado, too.[2] (*Murdahiya* 39)

But also some very sad facts of life were told by Tulsīrām in a very poetic manner. Describing their living in the village he remembers the games kids used to play to while away the cold days of the winter, when the whole family gathered in one room to sleep at night with only straw and a dhotī to warm them.

> When I remember those days, it seems to me that lying down like corpses – straw below us, straw above us and we in the middle covered with a shroud – we didn't sleep, we were all night long waiting for our respective funeral pyres to be lit up.
>
> But whatever there was, even in those terrible days in every part of the village life there were musical sounds– whether it was the hinguhārā, pathhārā, chudihāra, or Jogī Bābā's violin or Tukbandiyās or war-making Bankiyā Dom's trumpet – laughing thanks to all of them and tearing poverty to shreds we felt a lot of relief.[3] *(Murdahiya* 34)

In the end of the 1950s the area suffered a drought, which was made worse by casteist beliefs that Dalits - whose job it was to irrigate fields - were not allowed to take water out of several wells, which, of course, resulted in there not being enough crop and starvation especially for members of the lower jātis. However, narrating this time, Tulsīrām doesn't forget about the "unique beauty of this famine"[4], which was in the cracks that had sprung in the dried out earth of the fields: "in some cracks one could see a bird's beak, a camel's neck and mouth, and an elephant's trunk" (*Murdahiya* 67).

Autobiographical writing is invariably associated with painful experiences, and one could argue that Tulsīrām falls back on literary techniques of figurative language in an attempt to deal with the traumatic aspect of his writing. On the other hand, trauma might seem less real, when told in a beautiful and poetic style.

Perhaps one of the worst experiences of his life was a "nine days vrat," nine days, during which Tulsīrām didn't eat anything but two cups of chāy a day, and those too were borrowed: the

chāyvālā expected to be paid once in two weeks. On the eighth day in the hope of some sort of help Tulsīrām undertook a six kilometers long journey on foot to the house of a relative, only to find it locked up and the relative gone to his village. On his way back he came to the Daśāśvamedha ghat, sat on the stairs and dropped his feet into the water. "In the heat it was a relief to drown one's feet, but I was forced to realize that Gangā can wash away one's sins, but not one's hunger" (*Manikarnika* 44). A few boatmen addressed him and asked whether he would like to take a trip on the river. "How were they to know that having mounted my hunger I already was travelling on the Ganga" (*Manikarnika* 44). Having left the ghat, he met with a crowd of beggars, all of whom were staring in one direction : two men were distributing khicharī out of a huge pot. "More than once I thought that I, too, should find a place between two beggars, but in the worst situations I had never lost my self-respect and never complained about hunger to anyone. So I took the khicharī's aroma, went back, had one more chāy and went to sleep" (*Manikarnika* 45).

Tulsīrām says that one of the reasons for his coming to Banaras was that according to one of his teachers, one never went hungry there. "Somehow or other in the evening one always got food. I had come to have an unbreakable belief in that view of his. But in Bhadainī[5] this belief broke and shattered" (*Manikarnika* 45). Here, too, help came from the Buddha. Having gone hungry for a long time he had discovered that the brain doesn't work on an empty stomach. On the ninth day of his "vrat" Tulsīrām, too, felt that his brain was leaving him. To buy food he sold one of the two Shakespeare dramas he had bought for a university course. And when, in the evening, he cooked his own khichari, he had visions of Othello lying on his bed, Desdemona cooking the khicharī, and when finally eating, of having rice with Shakespeare himself.

Durmukh

Two major themes that stretch through the two books are Tulsīrām's search for identity and his wish to belong. From the age of three he wasn't able to truly feel a sense of belonging to his community or at least his own family because of the mark that was left on him by smallpox: his right eye had lost sight forever. So, from an age of three he was ridiculed, laughed at, feared and seen as a bad omen. In the very beginning of *Murdahiyā* we find an enumeration of bad omens of the village: "Jangū Pānde, Vidhavā Panditāin, the pond owl, the bird that went "kho-kho" and I myself- the five of us were true bad omens, and when people saw or heard us, their souls began to tremble" (*Murdahiya* 49).

This is the first group of beings that Tulsīrām identifies himself with in his autobiography. A number of other birds and animals used to be seen as "part-time bad omens", among them vultures; the young Tulsīrām used to think that if he himself were a vulture, he wouldn't be such a bad omen as he was as a person. Being a "bad omen" was perhaps the biggest trauma of his life, even though he doesn't dwell on the subject. Another situation, in which he mentions a sense of being among his own seems only a little less tragic: When travelling to Asansol before the start of his first academic year at the BHU, Tulsīrām left his train compartment in Bodhgaya to drink some water. When he returned, the door of the overcrowded compartment was closed and people didn't let him back in. The only way to continue his journey was to stand on the footstep outside the door, holding on as best he could.

> Two other men were standing on the footstep already. The train began to move. Every moment it seemed that death was standing in front of me. I was in a bad state from tiredness. The two other men that were standing on the footstep, asked me, where I was going. Having heard "Asansol" they repeatedly advised me to keep holding on to the rod. I was very relieved by their words. They were going to Howrah. At around 3.45 at the night, weak and exhausted, we arrived in Asansol. In Asansol the door of the compartment opened and people started to go out of it. So, the two men that had travelled with me on the footstep, went inside. I folded my hands in a namaskār. In response one of them said: "Never travel like this again". As long as the train didn't move, I, too,

kept standing. On the Asansol station those two men seemed beyond measure to be my own. When the train started, they said: "Go, bābū, go". Having heard this, I broke out in tears. (*Manikarnika* 22)

Tulsīrām did try to find his own people and occasionally did find himself around people with if not the same, at least similar interests and goals, but – and this is especially characteristic for the second book, in which he is a grown-up – one is invariably left with the feeling of his not-belonging: he was either a bad omen among Chamārs or a Chamār among schoolchildren or a Dalit in the hostel or in the communist party. He also remarks that "this much was certain that I was the only student whose opinion was totally different from the others" (*Manikarnika* 142); so that even among other students he didn't feel as one of them.

One might have broken down under this weight, but Tulsīrām found an identity that seems to have suited him well: he found Durmukh. The short story from Rāhul Sānkrityāyan's *Volgā se Gangā* impressed Tulsīrām very much.

> Durmukh was a person, who used to declare the true state of things, which is why people called him "the one with the bad mouth/face". Opposing religious superstitions Durmukh resorted to the principles of the great Buddhist philosopher Dharmakrīti. In that bleak era, he used to throw Dharmakīrti's principles at people like hot coals, from which the whole society would become enlightened.
>
> Having read this, I made a far-reaching decision that I, too, will be "Durmukh" for my whole life and will declare the bitter truth, whether people like it or not. All my writing and discourse symbolize this. I am very happy about the fact that because of smallpox I was a "Durmukh" by face even before, but later I also became Durmukh by speech. (*Manikarnika* 64)

Tulsīrām is true to this statement on almost every page of his two-volume autobiography: whether he is uncovering the exact methods used by the local astrologist to make his predictions or explaining away the magic sorcery that was performed by his distant relatives, or even talking to his neighbours in Kolkata and explaining just how the local priests manipulate them out of their money or writing an article on inter-caste marriage and getting angry responses on both occasions.

Finding Durmukh and identifying with him Tulsīrām not only symbolically transformed his life-long handicap into a major advantage but also accepted his not-belonging as a side-effect of his pursuing a goal that for him was worth losing his family. That is, removing ignorance, which, according to himself, was his hereditary legacy, and which, according to many other Dalit writers, is one of the most important goals on the way to removing casteism and caste-based discrimination.

Notes:

1. "आत्म कथा लिखी नहीं जाती है, बल्कि रोई जाती है", said in an interview on 28-09-2014

2. यह चुनाव मेरे लिए इस लिए भी यादगार बन गया था कि पहली बार मैंने वह मोटर यानि "लोरी" देखी थी और जब वह जाने लगी तो बहुत तेज फड़फड़ाकर धूल उड़ने लगी थी और बच्चों के साथ मैं भी उसके पीछे दौड़ता हुआ बहुत दूर तक गया। उस समय यह फर्क करना मुश्किल था कि क्या हम मोटर का पीछा कर रहे थे या उड़ते हुए बवंडर का।

   शुरू में कुछ दूर जाकर वह मोटर एक जगह घो–घो करके रुक गई। उस समय आसपास के ढेर सारे लोग इकट्ठा हो गए। लोग कहने लगे, जब तक मोटर गाना नहीं सुनेगी, वह चालू नहीं होगी। उस समय ऐसा ही अंधविश्वास गावों में फैला हुआ था।

   उस मोटर की छत पर एक भोंपू लगा हुआ था तथा अन्दर काले तवे वाला रिकोर्ड बजने वाला ग्रामीण भाषा में "फोनगिलास" रखा हुआ था. उस पर तवे रखते ही गाना बजा– "हे, हो संवरिया, जो जईहो बजरिया, तो लइहो चुनरिया खादी की, जय बोलो महतिमा गांधी की"। थोड़ी देर बाद मोटर चल पड़ी और चल पड़ा था हमारे साथ बवंडर भी।

3. वे दिन आज भी जब याद आते हैं, तो मुझे लगता है कि मुर्दों–सा लेटे

हुए हमारे नीचे पुआल, ऊपर भी पुआल और बीच में कफन ओढ़े हम सो नहीं रहे बल्कि रात भर अपनी अपनी चिताओं के जलने का इंतजार कर रहे थे।

चाहे जो भी हो, उन दारुण दिनों में भी ग्रामीण जीवन के हर अंग में व्याप्त संगीतीय ध्वनी, चाहे वह उस हिन्गुहारे या पटहारे या चुड़िहारे कि हो या फिर उन जोगी बाबाओं की सारंगी या तुकबंदियों की या कि उस तुरमची बंकिया डोम के युद्धोन्मादी सिंघे की, इन सब के सहारे हँसते हुए दरिद्रता की धज्जियां उड़ाने में हमें बड़ी राहत की अनुभूति होती थी

4. "उस अकाल का एक अनोखा सौन्दर्य"

5. This is where he lived at the time

Works Cited

तुलसीराम, डॉ., मुर्दहिया. राजकमलप्रकाशन : नईदिल्ली, 2014

Tulsîrâm, Dr., *Murdahiyâ*. Râjkamal Prakâúan: New Delhi, 2014.

तुलसीराम, डॉ., मणिकर्णिका. राजकमलप्रकाशन : नईदिल्ली, 2014

Tulsīrām, Dr., *Manikarikā.* Rājkamal Prakāśan: New Delhi, 2014.

References

बैसंत्री, कौसल्या, दोहरा अभिशाप। परमेश्वरी प्रकाशन : दिल्ली, 1999

Baisantrī, Kausalyā. *Dohrā Abhishāp*. Parmeshvarī Rakāśan: Delhi, 1999.

Beth, Sarah. "Hindi Dalit Autobiography: An Exploration of Identity." *Modern Asian Studies* 41.3 (2007): 545-574.

---. *Dalit Autobiographies in Hindi: The Transformationof Pain into Resistance*. In: Eklund/ Mishra/Mishra 2005, S. 54-72.

Mukherjee, Arun P. "The Emergence of Dalit Writing." *The Toronto Review,* Winter 1998.

वाल्मीकि, ओमप्रकाश, जूठन, राधाकृष्ण प्रकाशन प्राइवेट लिमिटेडः नई दिल्ली, 1999

Vālmīki, Omprākash. *Joothan*. Rādhākrishna Prākaśan Private Limited: New Delhi, 1999.

Webster, John C. B. "Who is a Dalit?" *Dalits in Modern India: Visions and Values*. Ed. S. M. Michael. Sage Publications, 1999.

Zelliot, Eleanor. *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*. Manohar: Delhi, 1992.

The Narration of Identity, Misery and New Hope in the Autobiography of Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan*: A Dalit Life

Vijay Jondhley

It has always been the aim of literature to assess and reflect the important problems of society in a meaningful way. Revolutionary literature not only addresses millions of people across the globe but also move their hearts because it narrates the angst of their personal lives. Readers also feel one with their problems and share the suffering. I strongly believe that autobiographies play an important role to portray the true obnoxious face of humiliation, after centuries of silence, when the Dalit writers felt the need to express themselves; they could only turn inward and talk about their own experiences. Autobiography, thus, have become a fitting vehicle for this expression. Portrayal of the life of a Dalit individual is representative of the entire community. A public rather a private gesture 'me-ism' gives way to 'our-ism' and superficial concerns about 'individual subject' usually give way to the 'collective subjection' of the group. Dalit autobiography has claimed little scholarly attention for its own sake. Dalit autobiography at present is no more neglected branch of biography. It is considered as a distinct branch of creative literature. The psychological and philosophical implication of this genre is now being studied very carefully. Scholars have realized that all creative writing is the result of the chemistry of the individual's body and mental creation.

Joothan is a story of a new generation Dalit who finds himself in the dilemma of alienation from his people and being discriminated by the middle class upper caste society in the post independent India. It was generally assumed that after getting independence and with the establishment of democracy, all Indians would enjoy civil rights irrespective of caste, class and creed. As the development process gets under way, the causes of a poverty, unemployment and the human misery will eliminate and there will be no need for 'parochial' structure of caste, community, tribe and various feudal vestige and that people will enter into a new relationship of a more secular and political kind. The life condition of Dalits as portrayed in Dalit literature came as a challenge to this assumption. The independence of India from the British colonialism was seen as a magical bond that would automatically solve the inner contradictions and conflicts of the nation. It is believed that as class-consciousness grows, caste consciousness will decline and with the 'equality' of access and opportunity, people will be drawn out of their castes.

Joothan opens with an inverse tableau of the village pastoral, a dominant theme in the mainstream Hindi literature and a model of wholesome living in the Gandhian ideology. The narrative begins in 1955 with the writer's recollection of his childhood in the Chuhra basti, the scavengers' settlement, divided from the 'purer' high castes homes by a pond where filth and ignorance rule day in and day out. The very title of the autobiography strikes at the existence of caste discrimination in an independent India. The term '*Joothan*', which is translated roughly as "leftover" from another's plate becomes a metaphor for the sub-human status of the scavengers. In Valmiki's narrative, soiled food from upper castes homes, destined for the garbage bin, makes its way into the kitchens of the Chuhras. The humiliation and degradation of relishing this leftover food as a child haunts the writer for the rest of his life. In his childhood, the writer witnesses the humiliation of his mother at the hands of Sukhdev Sing Tyagi, a high caste person of his village. At the wedding of Tyagi's daughter, the writer's mother labours hard as a cleaner and demands more than just leftover from the wedding feast for her children. This infuriates Sukhdev Tyagi and he insults her, "You are taking a basket of *Joothan* and on top of that you

want food for your children. Don't forget your place chuhri. Pick up your basket and get going't?" (*J* 11). Here caste name 'Chuhri' is used as an abusive word, a way of reducing the Scavenger's sense of self to her destined caste. Joothan or leftover food carries the connotation of ritual pollution, when used in relation to anyone other than the original eater. It is this association with ritual pollution and stigma resulting thereof, that sets apart the Dalits from the other deprive groups or 'have-nots' in the Indian society and it is this association with the ritual pollution that is invoked to explain and justify the sub-human status assigned to the Dalits by the caste system. The issue of power is hidden within this ideology of pollution. I shall argue that too much attention on the ritual aspect of pollution conceals the power aspect of it. Valmiki's life narrative successfully reveals this aspect of power politics. In the very act of giving *joothan* to Dalits lies an exercise of power by the upper castes. Giving of joothan is a process, which ensures that the Chuhras do not forget their 'place' in the caste hierarchy so that the corresponding power structure is maintained. Giving away joothan is not an act of charity toward an impoverished, but is a means of robbing Dalits of their sense of worth and binding them into perpetual subordination. The term '*Joothan*' carries a lot of historical baggage. Dr. Ambedkar advised the untouchables to stop accepting leftover food from Hindus for their self-respect. Dr. Ambedkar, an indefatigable documenter of atrocities against Dalits, shows how the high caste villagers could not tolerate the fact that the untouchables did not want to accept their joothan anymore and threaten them with violence (*Joothan*, Introduction, 2003). Therefore, one of the most powerful moments in the autobiography is Valmiki's mother's overturning of the basketful of joothan after Sukhdev Sing Tyagi humiliates her. Her act of defiance shows the seed of rebellion in the child Valmiki. This incident makes the start of the narrator's transformation from a little Chuhra boy, reconcile to assuaging his hunger from upper castes' leftover food to a Dalit, a battler of Dalit movement.

Omprakash Valmiki's autobiography is an exercise for understanding the power structure prevalent in our society. The experiences of Valmiki while studying in school and college expose

the narrow-mindedness of our society. The government school although officially is open for all, Valmiki was refused admission for fear of pollution. It was a generous Sevak Ram Masihi, a Christian who took Valmiki into his open school. After a tiff with Sevak Ram, Valmiki's father took him to the Basic primary school. After a prolonged period of begging and cajoling, Master Harphool Sing allowed Valmiki into a school. It is important to note that this was happening in 1955 when India had got freedom and became a democratic, federal state. The untouchability was practiced in the school as well. Valmiki writes, "Gandhiji's uplifting of the untouchables was resounding everywhere. Although the doors of the government school had begun to open for untouchables the mentality of an ordinary people had not changed?" (*Joothan* 2). Mahatma Gandhi had his own way of solving the problem of untouchability which he viewed basically a religious one and appealed people to change their conscience regarding the untouchables. Nevertheless his appeal suffered decline and erosion knowingly or unknowingly. Dalits' challenge to the Gandhian legacy is a part of a new stirring of consciousnesses among the subjugated that rejects patronizing and insists on their rights. The change in Hindu's conscience would not take place so easily as Gandhi thought to be. The writer and other Dalit students faced humiliation not only by their fellow students but also by their teachers and often were beaten up severely for no fault of theirs.

As caste became the "other" of the modern, the modem secular Indian came to be imagined as one who publicly disowns caste. This nationalist project of modernity was contested by Mahatma Phule, Ambedkar, Periyar and others. Mahatma Phule in his letter to the conference of Marathi writers criticizes the superficial modernity of the Indian society. He writes, "They, (high castes people) pretend to be modernists as long as they are in the service of the British government. The moment they retire and claim their pension, they get into their Brahmanical 'touch-me-not' attire" (Qtd Deshpande 145). This duel face of modernist was equally challenged by Dr. Ambedkar. In his modernist agenda for Dalits he advised them "to move to urban arena where they had chances of better employment and education as compared to village

life," but he was equally aware of caste discrimination in city life. He observed that "untouchability as a touch-me-not ism might be gradually vanishing in towns, but untouchability as a propensity on the part of the Hindus to discriminate against untouchables would not vanish either in towns or in village within imaginable distance of time" (339). The writer soon experiences the subtle form of untouchability in city life. During his training in Ordnance factory Bombay, his friend Mr. Kulkarni severed his friendship with Valmiki once he came to know of his caste. Dalits who experience the caste discrimination in their lives know the depth of it in society, but for others it appears as a biased opinion of Dalits of the world. Mr. Kureshi, a sub-inspector in Maharashtra Police and friend of the writer wants to introduce him to a new Commandant friend. The writer shows hesitation to meet a new DSC because he knew that even after becoming a high official, for high caste people he is only a Chuhra, a low caste person who cannot get equal status with them. However, for Mr. Kureshi it is narrow-mindedness of the writer. The new Commandant gives them warm welcome, but as he learns that Valmiki is a Chuhra, he feels uneasy. In our society, most of the times the status of a person is decided by one's caste. In this context, Dr. Ambedkar says that in the matter of status of a person, it is fixed and hereditary because a person's status is determined by the status of his caste in the caste hierarchy, and it is hereditary because a Hindu is stamped with the caste to which his parents belong; a Hindu cannot change his caste. Valmiki's identity as a middle class man or a writer is challenged by invoking his caste. When he starts to write for the cause of Dalits, people around him get suspicious of him and find out his caste. Once they come to know of his caste, their behaviours change towards him. When it comes to the publication of his writings, his friends advise him not to use his last name Valmiki but only as Omprakash or his gotra name Khairwal in order to hide his caste. And also faces opposition to his use of the last name not only from outsiders but also from his family members and relatives. Dalits who are settled in urban arena as the middle class people start to use their Gotra name to hide their caste. The writer's niece, Seema, on being asked in a classroom of her uncle Valmiki, who is

a writer, refuses to recognize him because she fears if she acknowledges in front of everybody that the writer is her uncle, her classmates will come to know of her caste as 'Chuhra'. Seema's fear of accepting her own caste identity proves the stronghold of caste hierarchy over our social life and inferiority complex of Dalits as 'low caste' beings. To avoid the discrimination they face in their lives, most Dalits find it easier to run away from the problem by hiding caste than asserting the dignity of the self. The writer points out that the changes will not come running away, it will come through a struggle and engagement. One of the reasons for the middle class Dalits of hiding caste may be as M.S.S. Pandian argues, "the pressure exerted by the modernity that forces the subordinated castes into silence and self-hate."

Joothan: Assertion of Dalit Identity

The assertion of one's own identity as a Dalit is not an easy task; Dalits have to struggle within and without to assert Dalit identity as a mark of self-respect. Valmiki was widely adopted as a caste name by the Chuhra, scavengers of Punjab and Uttar Pradesh under the influence of Arya Samaj in the colonial India. Arya Samajists were alarmed by the conversion of larger number of Chuhras to Christianity and Sikhism in the 1920s and the 1930s. They started eliminating the Christian Missionaries by opening schools and hospitals for the untouchables and performing Shuddhi, a ceremony to reconvert the Christian converts. Arya Samajists told Chuhras that they are the descendant of Valmiki, the creator of Hindu epic Ramayana. This new name could not disassociate the untouchables from their humiliating identity because in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab Valmiki name signifies scavengers.

Valmiki, who escapes poverty, superstitions and ignorance of rural life and joins the educated, economically stable urban middle class life, at first, feels that he has overcome the caste discrimination he faced in his village. The urban life is viewed as a space of modernity. The emergence of modernity in India is coincided with an emerging middle class. The origin of middle class in India can be traced back to the introduction of Western education

during the colonial rule. Those who got colonial education early took advantage of posts in law, education, bureaucracy and other professional job opportunities provided by the government of British India and the middle class came up. Most of the beneficiaries of colonial English education came from the traditional upper castes. As Sharmila Rege summarizes it, modernity in India is a "stitching together Brahmanical and new ideas" (32). The Indian society has changed a lot in a material life but at the core, it still clings to the traditional beliefs and customs and especially in the matter of caste. It is believed that the best way to be modern is to erase all thoughts of caste and religion from public.

Joothan: Critical Appreciation and New Hope

Omprakash Valmiki's autobiography delineates the challenges faced by Dalits in the present. Today, untouchability may not exist in a very aggressive form as it used to be, but the subtle form of caste discrimination does exist in urban life. In the case of village life, an increasing numbers of atrocities against Dalits speak in itself. The identity crisis faced by the educated middle class Dalits is expressed in this autobiography. In spite of being the middle class people, respect and humiliation mete out to them based on their caste identity. In such situation, articulation of the problem is important one to confront it and to solve it. *Joothan* has achieved that task by unfolding the various reasons for hiding Dalit identity by the educated middle-class Dalits and criticizing the escapism on their part. It is argued that households within a single caste have not only been greatly differentiated in terms of their occupation, education and income level but these differences have led them to align outside the caste, with different socio-economic network and grouping in the social categories which cannot be identified in terms of the caste system. An individual's education, occupation within any caste changes his/her social stratum in term of his socio-economic network but in the case of most Dalits, it does not alienate them from their community. It is not to argue that no Dalit detach himself from his community, as Kumud Pawade in her autobiography, *Aanthasphot,* is very skeptical of the raising middle class consciousness among educated Dalits who disown their own community for the sake of convenience.

Omprakash Valmiki too exhibits a deep undercurrent of the feeling of alienation from his community. Though born in a rural *Dalit basti*, the writer has left his community and entered the urban middle class. There is not only a sense of physical separation but also division due to education and socio-economic status as well. As Valmiki writes, "Jabalpur changed me. My speech pattern changed. My manners also changed. I made many friends who were deeply interested in contemporary issues. I took part in seminars and cultural functions" (*Joothan* 85). There are changes in his life but his autobiography can be viewed as a means for him to re-establish a link between himself and the community. Through the process of narrating his life story with a focus on his Dalit identity, he shows that he is a part of the community. It is important to note that although the writer's socio-economic status is better than the majority of Dalit masses, he is aware of the problems faced by Dalits in urban and rural India. Though Valmiki is self-conscious of his position as a middle class man now, Dalit consciousness in him is very much alive that connects him to Dalit masses. Hence, writing on the contemporary problems of Dalits, is one of the powerful means to re-link with his community. *Joothan* also exhibits the changes that have been taking place in Dalit autobiography. It gives more complex picture of an individualistic self where the protagonist's 'I' and 'We' of Dalit community are inextricably linked to the complex web of meaning. Without the loss of either an individual or the community, for instance, the narration of Valmiki establishes him as an individual in term of his struggle, his career success, his popularity in a literary circle; his individuality is often stifled by those who see him only as a faceless member of his community; to them he is nothing more than a Chuhra, Scavenger. In other words, he continually faces a clash between the negative identity imposed upon him from the outsiders and his own positive, self-ascribed Dalit identity. Valmiki asserts his Dalit identity as a resistance to the imposed negative identity. His own subjective autonomy is bound up in a close relationship with his community.

Conclusion

Joothan makes a powerful statement against caste discrimination that is prevalent in all walks of life. The autobiography gives him a vantage subject position from which he presents Dalit life experiences. The true to life format of the autobiography helps him to lay bare the brutality inherent in caste system, which consequently becomes a powerful argument in favour of dismantling this exploitative form of social organization. *Joothan* symbolizes the struggle for dignity and human rights and demonstrates that a revolutionary transformation of a society is not merely desirable but possible as well.

Dalit autobiography serves as a dissident space within the literary world where Dalit writers voice their marginalization and aspirations. In *Joothan,* pain is transformed into a uniting experience in which an assertive Dalit identity is realized. Since Valmiki does not experience his pain 'lying down' rather pain incites him to unite with his community in a fight against caste discrimination. It is a way of solidifying an individual's connection with the larger imagined Dalit community and at the same time contributing to the political assertion by presenting facts of one's life to contest casteism. Towards this effort of strengthening the unity of the Dalit community, Valmiki's autobiography has made its contribution to the Dalit movement. While the indictment of the unjust social system and its benefactors is one thrust of the autobiography, another important preoccupation is to examine Dalit lives substantively. *Joothan* presents a struggle of Dalits against the external enemy and against the enemy within. The internalization of upper castes values by Dalits, the suppression of rural Dalits, attempts by Dalits who have attained the middle class economic status to 'pose as high castes' and the attendant denial of their roots, their inferiority complex which makes them ashamed of Dalit masses are examples of the struggle within and without. Valmiki's life narrative partakes the legacy of Dr. Ambedkar's fight for Dalit empowerment during the critical years of the 1930s and 1940s when the Indian nation was being imagined by its other dynamic and well-known leaders from high castes/class, and the problems of the untouchables were marginalized under the rhetoric of 'nation's freedom'. Valmiki in *Joothan* questions the promises made by Indian independence and its fulfillment in the present time.

Works Cited

Ambedkar, B.R. "Essays on Untouchables and Untouchability Socio-Political Religion." Ed. Vasant Moon. Dr. *Babasaheb Ambedkar Writing and Speeches.* Vol. 5. Bombay: Education Department Govt. Of Maharashtra, 1989.

Deshpande, G.P. Ed. *Selected Writings of Jyotirao Phule.* New Delhi: Left word, 2002.

Kesvan, Mukul. *Secular Commonsense.* New Delhi: Penguin, 200l. 12-24.

Kothari, Rajani. "Rise of the Dalits and the Renewed Debate on Caste." EPW29.26 (1994): 1589-1594

Mandai, Saptarshi. *Dalit Lives Narratives as Ethnographies of Justice*. n. d. Web. Jan 15, 2010.

Rege, Sharmila. *Writing Caste and Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonios*. New Delhi: Zubaan, 2006.

Tejani, Shabnum. *Indian Secularism:* A *Social and Intellectual History.* Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007.

Valmiki, Omprakash. *Joothan:* A *Dalit's Life.* Trans. Arun Prabha Mukharjee. Kolkata: Samya, 2003.

Writers' Words and Experiences

Gujarati Dalit Literature and Commitment

Harish Mangalam

'Commitment**'** means dedicated and committed to a particular policy-ideology. Karl Marx and Lenin's ideologies have given us the term "Commitment". Unbridgeable monitory gulf between rich and poor class has developed. Due to Economic imbalance, class divisions have come into existence. One class remains struggling in poverty, another enjoys luxury because of improper distribution of the products and little wages in comparison to their works; one class enjoys magnificence, another faces miseries of poverty. Issues of inequality have created various situations for the working class. Because of exploitation, poverty has become intense. Revolt has taken place against inequality, poverty and exploitation. Considering equality, human rights, humanity and inhumanity the writers have used their pens. This literary output is the result of a particular ideology. The writers are committed to the particular ideology. Their writing are target-oriented. Thus, the writer who is writing with aims and following particular ideology is known as the 'committed' author.

Following unjustifiable and irrational laws of *Manu Smriti*, *Bharatiya Varnavyavastha* has turned untouchables into animals**.** Prof. Tulasiram, a Dalit academician, in his interview has remarked on the emergence of Dalit writings:

> In Buddhist writings first time the protest against the *Varnavyavastha* is noticed. It means, it is assumed, from that era Dalit Literature has come into existence. Buddha's thoughts on protest against the *Varnavyavastha* are available in the Buddhist writings. In this connect

Tripitaka (Abhidhamma, Vinaya, Suta) *Therigatha, Asalaya, Basatha Esokaya* and others can be mentioned. Here caste, class, thoughts on highbrow, lowbrow and purity of lineage are considered as unsociable. In the *Therigatha*, the consequences of caste-system are presented as it is presented in modern media. As far as it concerns to the Dalit writings, Dr. Ambedkar's social reform movement has remained the core of the writings. So, largely he is accepted as the father of modern Dalit writings. Dr. Ambedkar's thoughts are based on Buddhism. He was greatly influenced by Buddhism so at the evening of his life, with many he embraced Buddhism. The source of Dalit writing is the Buddhism. (92)

After that era, during the Middle Age, saints had strengthened the voice for social reform. Though in this *Bhakti Movement, Bhakti* was at the centre, not revolution. Due to *Varnavyavastha* even saints had also suffered. Saints of depressed class were not allowed to enter the temples; they had to sit out of the temples. Om Prakash Valmiki, the leading Hindi Ambedkarite writer notes: "It was not enough, Rohidas was an untouchable, so he was not allowed to bathe in the Ganges. Helplessly he had to sing thus 'if mind thinks, then there is the Ganges in the big-bowl'" (15).

In the modern era**,** Achhutanand, Jotiba Phule, E. V. Ramaswami Periyar, Narayan Guru, and Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's ideologies have given a new life to literature of expelled people. For the emancipation of ostracized people, along with tribal, minority and women, the movement has started. Revolt started against established *Brahminical*, patriarchal, fascist and capitalist social structure and humanity becomes stronger and stronger. Considering Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's ideologies as the main source, the seeds of people's socialist movement started. The challenging task of breaking the barriers of *Varnavyavastha* is started. This mission is accepted by the committed writers through their committed writings. In the writings of committed writers' strong protest and revolt take place. To protest against the *Sanatani* ideology, the protest ideology becomes stronger. In the songs of

the saints such as Kabir, Rohidas, Tukaram and Chokhamela, there is a protest against the *Varna-Dharma* and caste system but due to faith in *Karma* theory, existence of God and surrounding situation, the songs of these saints cease to be the voice of revolt. Those who surrender before the established system cannot liberate exterminated people, minority, tribal and women from their misery. To criticize bitterly has never been the aim of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. But he shows various ways to bring changes. Evaluation of human beings should not be on the basis of his caste but on his caliber. Then and only then, the ideal society can be created. To treat human beings as untouchables, and to have belief that the things touched by *ati-shudra* are defiled and even their shadow are polluting, are inhumane. These inhumanities are still followed as the blood in Hindu society. Unacceptability of fellow citizen is horribly worse than treachery. So Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar is the source for liberty, equality and fraternity. As a matter of fact Dr. Ambedkar is the first whistle-blower to bring reforms to Indian society. He believes that the untouchables' welfare lies in their education and education is the only medicine of emancipation of the downtrodden people from all miseries. By education, enlightenment will take place among depressed. With enlightenment among them, self-respect and pride for their existence would develop. They remain away from the hierarchy of high and low. Slavery to upper caste will end.

Human being is at the centre of Dr. Ambedkar's ideology. His ideology does not remain restricted to any particular caste or *Varna*. Oppressed of the entire world should get human dignity has been his aim. Thus, against the century old decayed orthodox social structure, Dr. Ambedkar's great ideology is the source of creating modern society. His philosophy is for the oppressed humanity of the world. Every human being has to honour other human being, he believes. To respect other human being is included in his ideology. Dr. Ambedkar has given prime importance to humanism. Ambedkarite writings have human being at the centre. He has declared human democracy. The writing, which supports liberty and is human centred, strongly condemns lineage, caste and *Varna* that is voice of Ambedkarite literature. Humanity is the

religion of such writings. So, in this world nothing, imaginative or worldly thing is greater than humanity. Culture, society or literature which depicts human being as inferior, Ambedkarite writings revolt against them. This revolt is the unique, inseparable aspect of Ambedkarite ideology. Interpretation of Ambedkarite writings should be the basis of Ambedkarite ideology because this ideology is the source of these writings (Limbale 25).

First *Mahatma* of India, Jotiba Phule, has asked many times a question to *Brahmans*, "Has any Brahman gone in the farm and cultivated it with manure and grew the crops?" Have the people from upper castes produced anything by their hands? We trust, the answer would be 'No'. It means, the so- called upper caste people have produced nothing by their labour, by their hands. (Mental exercise cannot be considered as labour). So, in their writing there is nothing but imagination; the lesson of truth and reality is not there or may be very little. In spite of that the depressed people have faced insults, hate, untouchability, cruelty and injustice. Even today in India more than 80% SC people are landless labours. Social structure based on *Varnavyavastha* motivated by Manu has totally destroyed existence of the depressed people by every means. This *Varnavyavastha* of India should be more appropriately called as the reservation for Hindus, because in this society rights to education, property, land, business were distributed among the Brahmans, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. But Shudras and Ati-Shudras were marginalized from that structure. Ancient texts have strengthened the *Varnavyavastha* based social structure, due to which God, *Brahmans*, *Vedas*, *Puranas* are at the centre. Removing them all from their places and considering the depressed, exploited, marginalized, new centre must be created. We know that in 1873, Jyotiba Phule has started *Satya Shodhak Samaj*. To expose *Brahmans*' tricks Jotiba Phule has written *Third Eye, Brahman's, Tricks, Issues of Farmers and Other Works*. *Slavery* is considered as the document written humanity. After that Sahu Maharaj had opposed the *Brahminical Varnavyavastha* based practices. On 26/07/1902, in the public notice, he published job opportunity for *non-Brahminical* communities and declared Rs. 2500/- contribution to Dr. Ambedkar's first edition of *Mook Nayak*

(1920). Jotiba Phule and Sahu Maharaja's ideology was implemented on the large scale. He organized many literary meets in Maharashtra. In 1954, in Nagpur literary meet, he addressed the writers:

> Human values and cultural values recreate through own literary creation. Do not keep own aims limited or conventional. Keep them vast and let them expand. Do not restrict your pens up to only your issues. Use your pens in such a way so that can bring light to darkness of rural India. There is the vast world of depressed people and marginalized in this nation; this fact should not be forgotten. Their misery and pains must be properly felt and by your writing try to make their life excellent; this is the genuine service to humanity.

For the freedom of depressed, Dr. Ambedkar has edited and published the periodical *Bahiskrit Bharat* (1927), *Janata* (1930). His life was full of struggle. Untouchables' Organization Nagpur (1918), *Bahiskrut Hitakarini Sabha* (1942), *Maha Jal Satyagraha* (1930), establishment of *Republic Labour Party* (1936), *All India Scheduled Caste Federation* (1945), *Bharatiya Buddha Mahasabha* (1955) etc remained his major contributions. Before Southern Baro Commission in 1917 and Simon Commission in 1928 he raised Dalit issues and first time in the Round Table Talk presented the issues. After that he remained on the key posts and for the freedom of Dalits he followed the particular ideology. For Dalits' liberty, equality and brotherhood, he was dedicated lifelong and struggled very hard. Considering this ideology, keeping human being and humanity at the centre literary writings are coming up with direct-action-commitment which is known as Ambedkarite literature. So, the literature doesn't exist without ideology. Author always remains present as a link between society and the literature; he understands and interprets the complex relationship of society and literature; he represents that according to his ideology. Thus, in comparison to the average person, writer's responsibility to society is twice or thrice more; this can be called the writer's thinking commitment, which is reflected ever in his/her writing consciously

or unconsciously. In a creative process, the writer's committed thought is transformed into the social commitment and becomes a powerful weapon. But it is also true that in the caste and class divided community, intellectual class rarely remains away from its influences. Especially the upper caste writers and people to prove them the best on the base of caste, directly or indirectly, do not merely favour the caste system but they strongly support (Singh 3). Dr. Ambedkar has experienced cruelty and hatred committed on depressed people. He roared so: "Realize the slave his slavery then he will revolt." His painful appeal has brought enlightenment among the downtrodden; a new life came into them. *Ati Shudras* roared for their rights. By using the powerful language he said:

> I am extremely shaken by looking at your miserable faces and dispersed-pitiable voices. Since how many centuries you are crushed in cruelty, in spite of that why do not you think to give up unadventurous and little confidence? Why don't you die before your birth? Why do you increase burden on the earth by your miserable and marginalized life? If you can't change your life or the condition, better is to die. As a matter of fact to get food and clothes is your basic right. If you want to live respectful life, you have to trust on, self-reliance is the best help.

By adopting fake name Edalji Sorabji, Dr. Ambedkar started to live with *Parasi* family. But as he was identified as untouchable, he was removed from the house with his baggage. Dr. Babasaheb was extremely hurt. After that incident a firm, dedicated and fighter Ambedkar born in him. The *Himalayan* range may be shaken but not Ambedkar, thus he decided firmly: "The caste, in which I am born, that Dalit community faced inhumanity, injustice, hatred and injustice connected with slavery, If I fail to do so, I'll end my life with bullet" *(Visionary Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, by Dr. P. G. Jyotikar, 5*). One can observe here how he was resolute and confident of his very strong words.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's commitment to the depressed people is clearly visible at the time of Poona Pact. On the issue of separate electoral he had clearly mentioned: "I am ready to talk on

any issue, any positive solution. But I am not ready to cut my depressed brothers' any rights" (Qtd Jyotikar 39). he warned them who spread rumour about his favour to the Dalits:

> When there was a struggle to select one, either an individual matter or the concern of nation, I gave always priority to nation. When there will be critical condition to select Dalits' good/welfare, I will give priority to Dalits' concern. If there is a temptation to appoint me as High Court Judge of Mumbai, even the offer to become the Viceroy of Hind, but I would reject. Before my eyes, not my individual but the future of my Depressed community is and will remain. (Qtd Jyotikar 79)

Because of the rejection of Hindu Code Bill, Dr. Ambedkar was extremely disturbed. The contemporary political leaders, for the sake of getting power, they go to the lowest level but Dr. Ambedkar had resigned as the Minister from the Ministry on 27/09/1951. Thousands of salutes to his commitment!

On 19/20 March of 1927, Dr. Babasaheb had started *Chavadar* Lake *Satyagrah*. There was no drinking water facility for Dalits. For drinking water the Dalits gave forty rupees to the so-called Hindus! Dr. Babasaheb led 10,000 Dalits to *Chavadar* Lake. From the lake water Dr. Ambedkar took water first. Later on Dalits sipped the water from the lake. Because of this *Satyagrah*, many revolutionary revolts started in the nation. Dalits got a new spirit. The traditional *Brahmans* had removed 108 metal pots of water from the lake and purified the lake by adding milk, curd, cow-dung and cow-urine. After 27th March, Dr. Ambedkar had to start agitation again to take water from the same lake. This agitation succeeded in December 1927. He firmly believed that human existence is possible only if there is no exploitation, cruelty, injustice, inequality, gender discrimination and untouchability or change in the attitudes. So, Dr. Ambedkar remarked, "The philosophy that divides society into subdivisions, separates tastes and work, prevents essential and useful research, which are essential at critical time, how these all can be the measures for social importance?'' (Parmar 34). Dr. Ambedkar's actions has influenced

the ideology reflected in the committed literature. From the *Mook Nayak* (1920) till *Maha Niravan* (1956), the era became the era of renaissance.

E.V. Ramaswamy Periyar had dedicated his whole life to unite divided Indian society on the basis of castes and sub-castes; thus he contributed uniquely. *Vaikom* agitation is the example of this. In 1924, the queen of *Travancore* had withdrawn the ban on *Shudras* and *Ati-Shudras* passing near the streets of the temple. South India's news had not taken more notice of this. But Periyar's contribution was highlighted in the news paper *Nava Bhakti*. Because of the partial attitudes of news papers, Periyar had stared weekly news paper named *Kudich Basu* from *Erode* on 2/5/1925.

In the same way, Narayan Guru, born in *Ezhava* Dalit caste in 1854 had started a mission with the slogan: "Don't ask caste, don't create caste and don't think about the caste" to abolish the caste system. In the north India, Achhutanand (1879-1933) was the leader of *Adi* Agitation. He started periodical *Chand* and after establishing *Adi Hindu* Printing Press published news papers *Adi Hindu* and *Achhut*. In Madhya Pradesh, Guru Ghansiram (1756) had started agitation against caste system. Chand Guru (1850-1930) was born in *Thaknan* (Yan amah) caste of *Bengal*. He opened a school for Dalits. Dalits were addressed as *Chandalas*. He started strong movement against using the term *Chandalas* for Dalits. To challenge *Brahminical* social structure he established *Matua Sect*. And in 1872, 'Nama Shudra Movement' started in Bengal. In 1912, he had started a periodical *Nama Shudra*. After getting inspiration from that, his disciple, Mukund Malik had started a periodical, *Pataka* and new name, *Nama Shudra* was given to Dalits by him.

M. K. Gandhi considered untouchability as the disgrace on *Hinduism*, and established 'Harijan Sevak Sangh' in 1932. He talked to remove untouchability without any harm to *Varnavyavastha* but alleged to follow the *Varna- based* profession. To remove the social evil from the roots he had no solid actions. The name, *Harijans,* given by him to untouchables segregated them. For the welfare of *Harijans*, he started *Bardoli Movement* with an aim to create separate temples and wells for Dalits. He declared that if Dalits were not allowed to enter the temple, he would go on fasts.

The priest of the temple had not opened the gate of the temples but Gandhi did not go on fast rather placed the reason that the Bill is under consideration of the Madra*s* Legislative Assembly so up to that he would not go on fast. Gandhi Ji stayed in Delhi among the untouchables. His contemporary, Madhavrao Bagal had observed Gandhi stayed with *Harijans* but he did not involve with the life and expectations of untouchables.

While interpreting Dalit literature and commitment in historical background, social commitment is strongly visible in the ideology of Jotiba Phule and Dr. Ambedkar. Jotiba was also speaking to set fire to *Hindu scriptures*. Dr. Ambedkar also after serious study had come to the conclusion the *Hindu* scriptures allow *Hindu* neighbours of Dalits to cause cruelty on them. As the roots of cruelty were Hindu Scriptures so he declared to set fire to *Manu Smriti* on 25/12/1927. In removing the scriptures which created *Varnavyavastha* based social structure where Dalits suffer a lot, we find unique and firm commitment in Jotiba Phule and Dr. Ambedkar. On 24th May 1885, *Marathi Granthkar Sabha* had organized one gathering. To join the event, Rande had written a letter to Jotiba Phule. But Jotiba had clearly refused to join the event. And he wrote a letter to explain why he did not join the event:

> If we think, it is very clear that all human beings including exploited are given their rights and even today (the established) by the behavior, it is visible that they are not ready to give any right to them, so there is no coordination between their meetings then what is the use of attending the *Sammelan*? Because to take revenge on us, make us slaves their forefather had artfully included in the religious texts. Puranas are their proofs. Because of that we Shudras, Ati-Shudras have to face misery and misfortune…..In short we do not find any our good in future with these people. (Qtd. A. Pradeep, *Ambedkarvadi Sahitaki Aavashyakta* 1)

The same way Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy is based on

Buddha's philosophy which rejects all irrational *Hindu* faith in God, rebirth, *Karma* theory, *Atma* and *Parmatma*, fate etc. Commitment is clearly visible in these revolutionary thinkers.

1

Social reform and revolutionary actions of Mahatma Jotiba Phule and Dr. Ambedkar have brought change in Maharashtra and also in Gujarat. Consequences were found thus, in Kavihta, a village near to Ahmedabad where the Hindus declared ban on Dalit students' admission and learning in government public school. In Janu village, when Dalit women were going to fetch water with their copper metal pots, the upper castes attacked them. When through Public bus travelling issue of Sardhava village and Dalits' temple entry, they come in direct conflict with *Hindu,* Dalits had to suffer a lot. Commitment emerged during these sort of social movement transformed into Ambedkarite literature. In *Gujarat*, first Ambedkarite poem published in 1912 in the compilation of folksong book by Ranjeetram Vavabhai Mehta who died in1917:

> In one hand there is a *Hukka* and his silver anklet,
>
> Uncle *Chunilal Mojanivala* thus has gone to Dalits' ghettos,
>
> Dalits ask what we can do for you brother,
>
> Dalits reply what we can do for you brother,
>
> Our wages are not paid,
>
> Our money he has taken,
>
> We do not have clothe to cover our bodies,
>
> And how he would give us clothe?
>
> If he dies, ends our all misery,
>
> You *Chunilal Mojanivala*, have false plenty reasons. (Mehta *100, 101, 112, 113*)

The second Ambdekarite poem booklet is *Antyaja Strotra* by Amrutlal Sundarji Padhiyar published in 1918. He wrote in it: "Oh miserable Antyaj Stotra, you face poverty because of cruelty, in spite of that you follow our Hindu religion, so we respect you." Thus Padhiyar has tried to recreate the past about 2000 years back. The preface to the edited book is written by Gandhiji under the title *Antyaja Strotra*. He wrote:

> Exact and unpleasant aspects of Hindu religion are our behavior towards Dalits. How degraded, how much shameful that is, this fact is appropriately highlighted by Amrutlal Padhiyar in the Antyaja *Strotra*. There is subjectivity, but a little. But the picture presented by Padhiyar is heartfelt and touchy…….
>
> Until we become free from the shackles of untouchability are we able to achieve Swaraj that would remain big issue…Our public dealing with untouchables and this issue itself as big as the Himalayas so it can become hurdle in our progress.

He further said:

> The discussion started after the *Godhara Antyaja Parishad* that I have closely observed. I haven't seen any strong argument to follow untouchability. If we fail to behave with commonsense and honestly then it is meaningless to get support from the scriptures. The scriptures cannot be above the wisdom or ethics. If wisdom and ethics are given up, then anything can be protected in the name of religion.
>
> To come out from the severe sin we have to collectively work for progress as Bhai Padhiyar said, our progress is in that. That effort we will do as our ancient traditional way so the religion can also be considered and improved too. If we follow the western way, it would widen the gap among us. ..

Antarvedana by Manor Jivaram Gangera is the unique Gujarati Ambedkarite poem published in 1928.

> Oh Mother in your lap, I am the unhappy now.
>
> I am pained as I am known as Antyaja, untouchable.
>
> I worship Ram and Krishna, perform rituals, recite the *slokas* of *Bhagawat Geeta*, I take care of cows but still misery of mine does not end.
>
> I become happy to be born as a human being,
>
> But felt pain as insulted and live life like an animal. (Jyotikar 138)

Thereafter, in 1930 Lalubhai Dudhabhai Makwana had started a periodical named *Navayuvak* from Gulam Husein's Chalee, Rajpur, Ahmedabad. It was the first event to publish Dalit magazine in Gujarat. After that many Dalit periodicals were started. Leading are *Dalit Gujarat* by Nagjeebhai Arya, *Antyajbandhu* by Meethabhai Ramjeebhai Chauhan, *Tanka*r by Khenchand Chavada, *Sudharaka* by Nagjee Valji Sharma, *Tamanna* by Jayanti Subodh, *Jyoti* by L. G. Parmar, *Dalit Unnati* by Chimanlala Modi, *Jagruti* by Madhavjee Parmar, *Vijay* by Kachara Bhagat, *Harijan Samachar* by Khimjee Rathod, *Antyaj Patrika* by Mathurdas Virola, *Savadhan* by Durlabhjee Pithwala, *Manavata, Antyaj Sevak*, *Bherubandh*, *Adhikar* by Dhanjee Jogadiya, *Dalit Adhikar* by Nagjee Arya, *Challenge* by Hirjee Patel and Khimjee Rathod.

Other periodicals of Dalit works were *Jai Bhai* by S. G. Rebela and Karshan Leuva, *Tulasi Kyaro* by Mithadas-Shivabhai Parmar, *Antyaj Bandhu* by Mithabhai Chauhan, *Mangal Prabhat* by Madhavjee Parmar, *Hathsala* by Soman Makwana, *Samanta* by B.V. Parmar and Solemn Macwan, *Parimal* by Nagjeebhai Arya, *Inquilab* by Sunderbhai Patel, *Dalit Bandhu* by Rohitkuman Macwan and etc. In these literary works the writers' commitment to society and protest against injustice is visible. Many cotton mill workers were also creating this sort of work. Leading writers of that era were Vishram Solanki, Kasturbhai Shah, Jivram Becharbhai Maheriya, Purushotam Vaghela, Mafatlal S. Parmar, Bandhu

Madhav, Babaldas Chavda and Himatsinh Vaghela.

Dr. Ambedkar's embracing of *Buddhism* and his death had made tremendous influence on the heart and minds of Dalits. Special place was given in the periodicals for Dalit poems and the work presents Phule-Ambedkarite ideology. In February 1957, L. G. Parmar had published *Jyoti* magazine. Later on *Masik Jyoti* (Ganapatbhai Rupala 1960-61), *Rohit Vikas* (Nathalal Parmar 1962), *Mukti Sangram* (Karshanbhai Parmar 1958), *Harijan Sandesh* (Devajibhai Khuman 1958), *Jagruti* **(**Kalidas Parghi 1962), *Aartnad* (Ambalal Vora 1962), *Deenbandhu* (Dhanjee Jogadiya 1957), *Mayavanshi* (Mansingh Parmar 1959), *Samaj Bandhu* (Naranbhai Chandubhai Solanki 1962), *Deshabandhav* (Dhanjee Parmar & Bipinkumar Shah 1963), *Jai Harijan* (Jeevraj Charaniya 1965), *Samanta* (Samant Vinzuda 1972), *Garud* (Dalapat Shrimali 1972), *Dalit Bandhu & Sevadeep* (Rupasinh Tejabhai 1974), *Jung* (Dr. Lodha-Revandas Macwan 1973), *Hamari Manavta* (Parmanand Khuman 1970), *Mashalchee* (Dolatbhai Parmar 1975), *Dharmachakra* (Bakul Vakil- Mahendra Parmar 1975), *Dalit Panther* (Naran Vora 1975), *Matru Chhaya* (Khemchand Solanki 1979), *Rashtra Azad* (Bajurao Dhamel 1975), *Mukti Nayak* (Sunit Sutariya-R. P. Parmar), *Kalo Suraj* (Dalapat Chauhan**,** 1979 irregularly published) etc. remain the carriers to the chariot of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's dream for social revolution in Gujarat.

Thus, in Gujarat, Ambedkarite literature has neither emerged in 1975 nor in 1978 but has emerged in 1912 with the publication of Ranjeetram Vavabhai's above cited folksong compilation and Amrutlal Sundarjee Padhiyar's *Antyaja Strotra* in 1918. These various periodicals published during this era along with Ambedkarite writings are the source of emergence and development of Ambedkarite literature, the sound platform for the fulfillment of Phule-Ambedkarite ideology in Gujarat. The poems published during this era have the remarkable elements, the expression of liberty in comparison to artistic aspects of poems. Thus, the poets and the editors of the periodical as mentioned are the pioneer poets and pioneer thinkers of Gujarati Ambedkarite literature.

In 1981 Anti-Reservation agitation was started in Gujarat**.** In

my view it was not at all agitation but well planned communal attacks on Dalits. Later on it had spread throughout the nation; individually and collectively organized attacks were committed on Dalits; houses were burnt, plenty died, and chaos created in the country. Partiality practiced by the media. As a result educated Dalit youth became furious and revolutionary. Anger and revolt flow through the large number of literary creation such as poems, stories, novels, plays, life-sketches, autobiographies and wallpapers. The Dalit writers have presented their centuries old sufferings, injustice, untouchability, *Varnavyavastha*, exploitation, irrational issues-based on *Puranas* and scriptures. It was indeed a thinking revolution against them who prevent Dalits' constitutional fundamental rights. As a result in 1981, a compilation of *Gujarati Dalit Kavita* was published. Manishi Jani and Ganpat Parmar were the editors of the collection. After that publication, large numbers of poems were published. In *Gujarat,* Dalit Panther Movement was started and Narayanbhai Vora was the editor of *Panther* magazine. Under the leadership of Rameshchandra Parmar *Akrosh* periodical was started. Thus, by this social movement, Dalit writers' social commitment was transformed into their writings. After poems, the writers have contributed to the different forms like short stories, novels, life-sketches and criticism etc. The doors of Dalits' emancipation are opened. The marginalized social sections became stronger and moved towards the centre.

There are plenty *Guajarati* Dalit writers who didn't study completely the writings of Phule and Ambedkar. They did not know the history of social revolution and some of them read their writings but failed to study them deeply and properly; so a few Dalit writers simply believe to depict Dalits' pains and sufferings and that is the Ambedkarite writing. Depiction of events and reporting can create writing but not creation. Without Phuley-Ambedkarite ideology writers' social commitments would not emerge in them. Social responsibility and commitment are not achieved. Ambedkarite writings are created with aims and objectives. They are as under:

1. Protest against untouchability, *Varnavyavastha* and sectarianism.
2. Favour to equality, liberty, fraternity and justice.
3. Committed to social revolution.
4. Boycott of blind-faith, dogmatic practice.
5. Acceptance of *Buddhist* ideology which believes in "No Existence of God" and scientific thinking.
6. Protest against hero worshipping and capitalism.
7. Protest against traditional aesthetics.
8. Protest against language and gender-based discriminative practice.
9. Protest against irrational scriptures and *Puranas.*

There are a few timid writers who suffer from inferiority complex. They have fear that if they follow above cited aims of the committed writers, the mainstream writers will go far away from them and they would not get honours and awards. So they skillfully follow the compromising attitude at the place of commitments. They remain always conscious that the mainstream writers should not be displeased! It is like the *Gujarati* saying 'Dog either barks or roll down,' both works can't be done at a time. Thus these opportunists do not remain with any. Such attitude harms Ambedkarite writings. It slows down the movement. This sort of attitude is the great cheating of the depressed communities. Many times, for individual benefits, Ambedkarite writers make silly statements, "I am not a committed Dalit writer" forgetting the statement is adverse to Phule and Ambedkar's ideology. And other group of Dalit writers writes are attracted towards *Lalit Sahitya* (romantic mainstream writing). Dr. Suman Shah emphasized: "Dalit writing begins with the protest against *Lalit Sahitya*." These sorts of writers' writings will remain harmful and have no meaning at all; so they must be suppressed. Other Ambedkarite writers have to keep distance from these sorts of writers. By giving up individual benefits they must be kept aside. Knowingly or unknowingly giving support to writers, this sort of Ambedkarite writers are considered as opportunists in the list of Ambedkarite writers. History of Ambedkarite literature would never forget these sorts of writers.

I will discuss now the commitment among the Guajarati

Ambedkarite writings. Hiren Gandhi and Sarup Dhruv in Sabarmati Sanskruti Manch has explained the conflict in the Dalits themselves:

> Still we have to fight with the elements that challenge the contemporary values and the whole structure of Gujarati Literature. But to challenge the great fight, committed now we are on the battlefield. . . . Do you remember the proverb of boiling Birbal's hotchpotch? These people so called writers, the agents of government and the rich class, they do not understand but laugh at our genuine writings of Dalits-oppressed.

When the issue of commitment comes, a few bourgeois writers, who shout that they are neutral, they frown their faces at the event and with commitment they write in their periodicals that keep alive the liberty of expression, keep the literary work as the aesthetic piece etc. More than this they advise that the committed writers should join the political party. It is like that the commitment is only concern with political party! It is like that the commitment is a political slogan! Thus there was partiality with the committed writings. Now they have started to spread new sort of untouchability. Commitment is like an evil entered in their minds.

As a matter of fact commitment has direct concern with writer's love for literature. Is any writer away from commitment? Some are committed to imaginations and some are committed to existentialism. Some of them follow more than one ideology together and according to their interpretation they are committed to humanity. Some follow Neitchze, Freud, Kafka, Camus or Sartre. It means without commitment it wouldn't work. But when the issue of social commitment comes, they misguide the whole matter. They knowingly prefer wrong path and try to justify it as the only right one. So the writers' commitment ends and their advice emerge to join the political party.

It is not fair to oppose this as now it has become day-to-day practice. At present whatever matter is concerned to commitment for that we have the strong evidences. To wipe out the fact, individual ideology also works. Because of individualistic attitude they think each person in the society is different forgetting that each person

is the base of society. It reflects that their ideology is narrow. They fail to accept the basic matter. Writers' liberty or liberty of work should not be mechanically evaluated. As a matter of fact when reality and evidences are at hands, the writers avoid them; it is also lack of writer's commitment.

So the question arises what is the commitment; why it is necessary? Centre of literary work is human being but who they are? It is the important question. Little land owner farmers are human beings; money lenders who lend money they are also human beings; landlords who exploit labourers are also human beings. Those who create atrocities on Dalits are also human beings. The distinction among the people we consider is very important. Clash takes place because of distinctions of the society. We have to be very clear to which category we remain committed, exploiters or exploited? To reply to this some argue that no one is exploited, but as a matter of fact exploitation is going on; exploiter and exploited both are here! So is it not necessary to oppose the exploiters? To take the side of exploited isn't essential? Only representation of exploitation is also a favour of the exploiters; it is not mere escapism but a silent support to the exploiters.

One section of the writers says that the commitment is not a cup of our tea; we present our own experiences; thus they end their arguments. Whether they present individual experience or truth, their presentation draw us to the hollow vivid world. To stop it, commitment is essential.

It means commitment does not kill aesthetic aspect of the literary work. But commitment and artistic skill create unique work. It is a challenge which contemporary and future generations of writers have to consider this. To keep a balance between exploiters and exploited is the literary cowardliness of the writers. What else can be expected from them? Expectations are from them who take people's side, knowingly or unknowingly who remain with oppressed and exploited. Barin Mehta has observed:

> Those who do not accept life of oppressed at the centre of literary works, they do not feel the pains and sufferings of the oppressed, their so called commitment may God

keep with them. What we have achieved from the community we return to them that commitment we follow. Those who want to shoot at us with words let them do. And whose commitment is to be with the struggling humanity and their real life, what would happen to them! They would turn barren land into fertile one.

I would like to cite a little incident of Abraham Lincon's life. He was a lawyer. Like other lawyers of his time he was not after money. He was not taking his practice fee from poor and pleaded in the court without taking any money. He was firm; no temptation shook him. A freedom fighter's widow had complained him that Right, the pension agent, took half of my husband's 400 dollars pension from the government as his commission and gave me only 200 dollars. Hearing this Lincoln became angry. He told his friend to get this money back. I'll split Right's skin. Lincoln won the case in the court and he did not take any penny from the widow as his fee, and addition to that he paid the money for the railway ticket of the widow (Desai 3). Lincon's commitment to be with the oppressed and oppose the oppressor is indeed worthy to salute.

Dr. Jaydeep Sarangi, a celebrated critic, writes:

> Working on Dalit literature is always activism which involves a social commitment leading to social change. The Dalit body of writings portrays the under-dogs and through them the writers expose social hypocrisy and taboos, class exploitation and class struggle, social and economic injustice. Its implied value is human freedom and primary concern is the liberation of Dalits.

Praveen Gadhavi, a committed *Gujarati* Ambedkarite writer, right from his writing career has remained dedicated to Phule-Ambedkarite ideologies. He expresses protest and anger against injustice and cruelty committed to the oppressed in his poem "Brain Wash". In Indian society, Varnavyavastha has created graded inequality. *Manu Smriti* has given the laws according to which one is the best being and another is the lowest among the low. Irrational and inhuman laws laid down by *Manu Smriti* and *Varnashram*

based *Brahminical* culture emerged from this text has made Dalits slaves. The poet strongly condemned *Manu Smriti*:

> Please give me little water from the Ganges, and add waters of six sacred rivers.
>
> I want to wash thoroughly the brain hanging from the broken skull of this *Chitta pavan*.....
>
> Please give me cake of detergent.
>
> I want to wash each cell of his brain……..
>
> Dear *Bhudev*, you are allowed to chant *Upanishads* on the bank of the *Ganges* in the early morning,
>
> But, there is no need of venomous curses of *Manusmriti*....
>
> Dear *Bhudev*, if we would have fought together united against the intruders,
>
> We would have not become slaves in history……..
>
> Here is disgust against me. Here is arrogant.
>
> Please give me one more cake of detergent.
>
> I want to wash each and every cell of your brain thoroughly. (*Dalit Vani* 3-5)

According to Hindu belief anything can be purified with holy water of Ganges. *Varnavyavastha* based *Brahminical* culture has created the discriminative social structure and put the *Shudras* and *Ati-Shudras* into pitiable condition. Here the poet has given example of *Chitpavan Brahman* to clean orthodoxy of his mind with a detergent cake. The poet has also presented the issue of Shakuntala and the Brahman, and further remarks that you feel romance with Shakuntala but are defiled even by the shadows of Dalits. The poet has strongly criticized *Manu Smriti* with satire. Thus "Brain Wash" strictly follows Phuley-Ambedkarite ideology. The committed poet has hit on the bull in his another poem, "Friends

Do not Enter the Temple". The poet has presented orthodox belief, Dalit's sacrifice connected to the temples:

Friends do not enter the temple

Our forefathers bodies buried under the heavy stone plates.

Stop friends; do not enter the slaughter house.

Sahil Parmar in his poem "In Search of Optional Images", presents poet's love for his beloved but in a modern poetic style. The images he used are totally fresh and original challenging to the traditional aesthetics. The poet has presented his beloved's daily life and his feelings–

As to boil hotchpotch you clean *Dal* and *chawal*,

With that much hurry I sit to write a poem about you. ..

About writing poem on you, about your tooth I'll not

Use smile of pomegranate seed but I'll use seed of maize,

Irregularly arranged in small and big in size. About your eyes,

I'll not use eyes of *Mrignayani* ……

After giving the birth of my five babies withered your body….

In a poem "Shambhuda's Mother", the poet presents irrational belief of *Hindu* society. The poet writes if a cow gives birth to a male calf, the calf would be starved without milk, because the calf would not give milk; if a female calf is there, it is fed properly because it is believed that it would give milk when she would be mother of calf. Her urine and dung are used for medical purpose too. For the economic purpose cow is considered a holy mother. The poet has used abuses also. About the use of this type of language Ramanika Gupta remarks that since thousands years you have caused injustice to Dalits, now when they have got education,

and are awakened, instead of using abuses what would else they do; do they play flute for you? A few lines from "Shambhuda's Mother" I wish to cite:

There are plenty who drink plenty urine of cow,

Plenty are they who eat cows dung……

This is the medium to cross the river *Vaitarani*,

You fools don't think anything else, she is the cow,

Shambhuda's Mother.

I say the fact, cent percent fact, listen it,

it is a frying pan to fry poor,

Don't believe anything about her, she is Shambhuda's Mother.

To focus on present reality (the cruel atrocity caused on Dalits of Mota Samdhiyala, Una Taluka, Gujarat) and oppose to it reminds us of Himmat Khanksuriya's poem "Gai Mari Gai Bai Mari Gai" (Cow died, Woman died).

Dr. Ambedkar has told Dalits to give up traditional unclean jobs. Dalits had to drag body of dead animals, and clean the village, due to which they suffered injustice, and treated as untouchables which were regarded as inhuman practices. Sahil Parmar, totally committed to Ambedkarite ideology, writes thus, in his poem, "We will not Come to Drag the Dead Animal":

Ghee and butter you enjoy,

You sucking them, make useless,

Then you ask us to drag them,

Useless only to tan….

You tell us to make dry up dead animal's meat,

Tell us to earn something from leather of dead animals

You tell to drag it now, to drag it now…..

How long we have to hear…

We will not come to drag the dead..

Cut off the mango plantations as much as you can,

Do the damage as much as you can….

Get the scythe and be ready…attack on them….

If you cannot do anything, then die but do not

Go to drag the dead animal, do not go to drag the useless.

Poet's strong protest is visible here. Because the poet says when the animal gives milk, you suck it by every means and when it dies, it becomes useless and you tell us to drag. At the end of the poem, the poet says: "If you cannot do anything, then die but do not follow slavery."

Dr. Pathik Parmar's *Bahiskrut* is a collection of Gazals, including sixty poems whcih express his commitment. In the poem, "Chapati is not acquired", the poet suggests to come out of the decaying culture and dogmatic practices. He says if you want to come up, do not depend on only irrational practices like *Mantras*, vows etc.;

By following *Karmakands, chapati* cannot be acquired,

Chapati cannot be acquired by mere chanting the *Mantras*.

God is truth or truth is God only wise discussing thus,

Chapati cannot be acquired.

Hardly I can manage everything,

at that time mere worshipping the *Sadhus,*

*Chapat*i cannot be acquired.

How can I explain myself when fire provoked in belly,

By following the discrimination *Chapati* cannot be acquired.

In his another poem Pathik writes:

When I start to write, something happens to them,

I write on my misery and something happens to them.

How cruelty is committed by dividing on the name of religion,

Now I change the religion and something happens to them. (49)

Joshep Macwan in the "Preface" to *Bahishkrut* has rightly observed that satire like a wipe is wonderfully presented in the poem. Since centuries Dalits suffered silently, that was not a problem but now the oppressed has started to write about their suffering that causes problems to the exploiters. Their wrong deeds are declared openly; in the name of religion their exploitations are exposed, at that time something happens, this is the real expression.

Arvind Vegada in his poem "Push Aside" writes to fight against God, temple, belief and dogmatic practices;

White heads mysterious mystery,

Fluttering the temple flags and

The cries crushed under the romances,

Get up and awake the dead body of the God.

Begin the battle,

The light of untouchability before defiling each village,

Hoping the white wolves to swallow up the huts of Dalit,

Blunt the sharp teeth with scythes.

They are human beings.

We are not human beings

Because we have carried the corpuses of shadows on

our shoulders and we have learnt push aside the air.

Here God does not exist; He is died since long. His corpus is only in the temple and all devotees offer something and worship. The poet has presented orthodoxy and dogmatic practices in the name of God. Dr. Ambedkar has remarked: "O poor, Dalits of this nation, do the work which can protect your rights . . . your religious vows, worshipping and fasts would not save you" (qtd Mangalam, *Panachh*1-2). Here the poet's commitment to fight against blind-faith is expressed. Brahma Chamar satirically writes about God:

Yesterday God pleased on me and asked my name,

I replied "Brahma"

Steadily He was looking at me and asked how?

With sense of worth I said "*Chamar*"

And God disappeared,

Since then I stopped to enter the temple.

The poet has presented *Hindus*' God also involved in practising untouchability. After meeting an untouchable He disappears. The poet has presented Dalits' centuries old pain in the poem, which has made not only caste-based community, Varna-based community stunned, but their God too.

Nirava Patel satirically writes about the incident which took place in *Jetalpur*. Angrily he expresses his feelings:

Like the pasture burnt with the cries?

But until the authentic information fact doesn't be declared!

The cries echoed on each tree

But not heard by the people of *Jetalpur*.

Shakara has stolen water melon.

Wherever a drop of *Shakara's* blood lied

At each place many *Shakaras* sprouted.

Dalit Shakar's cries set fire in the pasture; it reaches to the sky and bottom of the earth. Thus the span of the cries is expanding and shaking all who has heard it. Poet's pain turmoils him. Wherever revolutionary Shakara's drop of blood falls, new Shakaras are born to fight against injustice and cruelty. Jetalpur incident became the event of Dalits' protest for existence. By the words poet has presented his commitment.

In Harish Mangalam's poem "Meaning" there is a challenge to the mainstream literature:

Oh divine muse of poetry!

I want to have you dance on screen of reality.

……

The fingers so far busy making mud huts,

Have been waiting at the roof-tops bobbing up from

Below the tiles.

(To pick up pens and slates)

It is easier to wander about in the fairy land.

The wings to fly may naturally come to you there.

But

Come alone with me to tread the thorny path.

Stop mounting the horses of clouds.

Here the children wanting slates and pens are staring you in the face.

Can you realize a voice for them through the patterns of your words?

Considering all the literary forms of Ambedkarite writings these criteria can be applied. Core of the poem is the important characteristic of Ambedkarite writing. We can understand commitments expressed in *Gujarati* Ambedkarite poems. Except a few exceptional poets, many Ambedkarite poets are committed poets. Plenty examples can be quoted to present the arguments.

After *Gujarati* Ambedkarite poems, there is depiction of full commitment in short stories as well as in novels. But I conclude here mentioning the names of such writers only, i.e**.** Joseph Mecwan, B. Kesharshivam, Harish Mangalam, Anil Vaghela, Chandraben Shrimali, Kantilal Parmar, Dinu Bhadresariya, Pragjibhai Bhambhi, Madhukant Kalpit. Arvind Vegda,Pathik Parmar, Daksha Damodara, Dalpat Chauhan, Maheshchandra Pandya, Tushar Parmar, Hari Par, Manilal Ranveriya etc. Other writers are also there, but they are either **'**Wavering Writers' or 'Fallen Writers,' so I do not prefer to mention such names of the writers because such writers are not committed and hence they divert, dilute the 'path' of Ambedkarite ideology and Ambedkarite Literary Movement too.

Works Cited

Desai, Manibhai B. *Ajat Shatroo Lincoln.* Ahmadabad*:* Navajivan Trust, 2011.

Gadhavi, Pravin. *Dalit Vanee.* Ed. Harish Mangalam. Gujarati Dalit Sahitya Akademi, Ahmedabad, 2006.

Gandhi, Hiren and Sarup Dhruv. Sabarmati Asks*, Editorial,* Pub. *Samvedan Sanskruti Manch.* Ahmedabad, 1987.

Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand. *Gandhijino Akshardeh*. Vol. 14, 1974, 299-300.

Jyotikar, P. G. (coll.). *Gujarati Ambedkari Chalvalno Itihas: 1920 to 1970.*

Limbale, Sharankumar. *Dalit Aesthetics*. Trans. in Gujarati by Harish Mangalam, Dr. Kanti Malsatar. Gujarati Dalit Sahitya Akademi, Ahmedabad, 2010.

Macwan, Joshep. "Preface." *Bahishkrut.* Gujarati Dalit Sahitya Akademi, Ahmedabad, 2003.

Mangalam, Harish. *Panachh*. Gujarati Dalit Sahitya Akademi, Ahmedabad.

Mehta, Bari. "Pratibaddhata Sha Mate ? " Editorial*, Pratibaddhata.*

Mehta, Makarand. *Hindu Varnavyavastha, Samaj Parivartana Ane Gujarat*. Ahmedabad: Ami, 1995.

Parmar, Pathik. *Bahishkrut.* Gujarati Dalit Sahitya Akademi, Ahmedabad, 2003.

Parmar, Tara. "Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar Aur Samajik Kranti." *Apeksha,* July-Sept, 2004, p.34

Pradeep, A. "Ambedkarvadi Sahitaya ki Aavashyakta." *Phule Samagravangmaya.* Mumbai: Maharashtra Rajya Sahitya aur Sanskruti Mandal, 4th ed. 1991, 344.

Sarangi, Jaydeep. *Hayati*. Gujarati Dalit Sahitya Akademi: Ahmedabad, March, 2014.

Singh, Tej. "Ambedkarvadi Sahityani Avdharana." Editorial*, Apeksha.* July-Sept. 2004.

Tulsiram. "Dalit Sahitya ka Mool Swaroop, Bauddh Sahitya se Uttapam Hai." *Dalit Asmita.* Oct. Dec. Vol. 1.

Valmiki, Om Prakash. "Hindi Dalit Kavita Aur Saint Sahitya." *Dalit Asmita.* Quarterly, Oct.Dec.2010 Vol.1.

A History of Four Dalit Women in Reminiscence Eighteenth Century: Four Marginal Caste Women of Bengal

Manohar Mouli Biswas

A Shift to Regional History

A shift to regional history has happened to work from the beginning of the last decade of twentieth century. Dalit literature and culture is stated to work in postcolonial India as an emerging new identity to rebuild society and is working as a most creative Marxism (Zelliot v). It talks about the innovation of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar who wanted to see the change in religious, social, political, economic and educational areas. He wanted the socialism in all these fields through 'State Socialism' (Ambedkar 411). This article presents regional history of four Dalit women of eighteenth century Bengal. They have been chosen to examine in the first case their political consciousness to revolt against the East India Company rule which happened to commence in Bengal in the middle of the eighteenth century, in the second case to examine their thirst for education due to their birth in an uneducated low caste family of that time, in the third case to examine their holy love for equality through the exercise of the Bhakti-cult movement of Vaishnavism in anyone's personal life and in the fourth case to examine their religious mental oneness with gods and goddesses particularly in someone's devotion with Hindu goddess Kali. They all four were born in the lower strata of society. They all are mentioned here in chronological order, serially, 1. Rani Siromani[1] (-1816) of Jangalmahal of Medinipur district, 2. Sulochana[2] (1776-1866) of village Thakurkona of Mymensingh district, 3. Rami Dhopani[3] (-) of village Saltora near Gangajalghati police station of Bankura district and 4. Rani Rasmoni[4] (1793-1861) of Kona village near Halishahar of 24 Parganas district.

1. **Rani Siromani**: From the records, her date of birth is not available but what is available is that she was born in the Chuar caste (lower strata of society) in the middle of the eighteenth century. What the British Gazetteer records say, "The most persistent disturbers of the peace, however, were the 'Chuars'. The term signifies in Bengal 'an outlandish fellow' and was applied in Midnapore to the wild tribes who inhabited the Jungle Mahals and tracts beyond them" (O'Malley 47). This is the time here started to dig out something of history about Siromani who in her life became Rani and fought against the British sepoys and their covetous and avaricious dominations. It is further added there to note: "The jungle chiefs or zamindars, moreover, a turbulent and independent class, were described as follows in 1778:

> These zamindars are mere freebooters who plunder their neighbours and one another; and their tenants were banditti, whom they chiefly employ in their outrages. These depredations keep the zamindars and their servants continually in arms; for after the harvest is gathered, there is scarcely one of them who does not call his tenants together, either to defend his own property or attack his neighbour. (O'Malley 47)

The British people were not happy with the Jungle Mahal zamindars, a section of whom were disagreeing to pay a huge amount of revenues to The East India Company as they demanded and naturally, they were being treated with animosity. This kind of zamindars spread all over the west and north-west of the district in the areas such as Brahmanbhum, Bagri, Bhanjabhum, Bahadurpur, Dharinda, Diparoi, Chiara, Nayabasan, Baliabera, Jhargram, Jambani, Kalyanpur, Silda or Jhatibani, Rohini-Mabhandar, Dipa Kirachand, Lalgarh or Sankakulia and Ramgarh (O'Malley 47).

The question now arises who was Rani Siromani? It is told: " Ajit Singh of Karnagarh, the descendant of the Diwan, died without issue in 1753 A. D. , and his two wives, Rani Bhawani and Rani Siromani, succeeded to the Midnapore Raj" (O'Malley 257). Rani Bhawani died in 1760 and Siromani became Rani though born in the lower strata of caste hierarchies. In March 1766, an expedition was made to collect exorbitant amount of revenue from the zamindars and Rani joined her hands with the fellow rebellious brethren against the government. Lieutenant Fergusson, who set out with three or four companies of sepoys and a European sergeant or two reached Kalyanpur on the 4th of February where the zamindars acknowledged his dependence and agreed to pay a higher revenue.

The zamindars were surrendering one after another. An exception happened in case of Rani Siromani. What happened with her? "At length, the authorities moved to action. Ausgarh and Karnagarh were taken, and the Rani, who was suspected to be in league with the Chuars, was brought to Midnapore as a prisoner on the 6th April 1799" (O'Malley 51-52). At random the British people were being murdered here and there. The ordinary police and the military stationed at Midnapore were utterly unable to cope with banditti as they were called, and a reinforcement of troops had to be dispatched to Midnapore. After a period of great anxiety and suspense, after innumerable and most brutal murders after the death of the Judge-Magistrate himself (previously collector), it was suspected that the disturbances were fomented by the servants of Rani and others. In view of the security reason Rani was seized and shifted to Fort William, Calcutta. She is said to be the first Indian woman as a captive in British jail (Gharai 88). After a couple of years she was released on the condition that she will not go back to Karnagarh again. She had been forced to agree to live in her parents' home till her death in 1816.

2. **Sulochana**: Now is the time to talk about the history of Sulochana, a Dalit woman, born in the Namashudra caste of the eighteenth century, Bengal. She was born in 1776, just two years after Raja Rammohan Roy was born (Biswas Renuka and Upendra

6). The village where she was born was Thakur kona in the Sub-Division of Netrakona in the district of Mymensingh. Her father's name was Ram Dev, a Namashudra, one of the depressed castes of Bengal. Her mother's name was Jaytara. She had two brothers, named Raba and Dukhia. Her nickname was Sula, an abbreviation of 'Sulakhana' literally meaning one born with lucky signs (Sen 313). At that time there was no scope of education for the women, particularly the women born in the downtrodden community. Naturally she didn't have any scope to go to school in her childhood. No formal education she had. Her family had been also completely illiterate. At the age of eleven, she had got married with a boy bit senior to him by age. His name was Jay Hari about eighteen years old, a good looking boy of nearby village and of the same caste. It was a plan in the mind of Ram Dev to keep Jay Hari as ghar-jamai of the family. "Ram Dev had desired to keep Jay Hari as a 'ghar-jamai' giving him a share of his property equally with his sons. But young Jay Hari got himself disgusted with the world and fled away one night, and nobody could trace where he had gone" (Sen 314-315). What happened is something unusual in life. Jay Hari who was indifferent to family life was spiritually advanced more and as a nature of fact he didn't pay attention to the conjugality with his wife. One day he left home forever in search of getting unbounded eternal joy in the life beyond the family life. After his departing from the family life he remained untraceable for the rest of life. On the other hand what Sula Devi did?

She started growing up and while she was in full bloom of youth she was in a firm belief in mind that her husband was alive living somewhere else and would come back home. Every Bengali Hindu married woman, as it happens to be, wears conch-bangle on both hands and wears vermilion on forehead. "She met her fate with a calm fortitude but never in her life gave up the shell-bracelets and red sign of luck (sindur) or the practice of taking fish which forbidden for widows" (Sen 315). In this time she felt the necessity of becoming literate and started to get formal education from a village pedagogue, Channu Nath, to express her own mind of alienation and estrangement from husband. She had imagined herself as Radha and her husband, Joy Hari as Krishna. He had

composed the book of verse 'Shri Shri Gopini Kirtan' popularly known as 'gopini-pala-kirtan'. She was a good singer of the pala-kirtan what she had composed of her own. She would perform the same in the various places of the district and sometimes in the open space ceremony. While she would perform this pala in any zamindar's house she would get many good rewards and even gold medals.

Chandra Kumar Dey of the eighteenth century Bengal became a man of reputation for his collecting palas from village to village. It happened to be that he had collected the pala of Shri Shri Gopini Kirtan and the same was documented in a form of book by Dineshchandra Sen. In sometimes of the later stage that pala written by Sulochana was published by the authority of department of Calcutta university in their publications in Bengali under the title 'Mymenshigha Gitika'. Naturally while we talk of Sulochana's contribution to the field of Bengali literature we shall have to become thankful to both Chandra Kumar Dey and Dineshchandra Sen. These Gitikas or ballads ultimately very popular and in view of its huge popularity Dineshchandra Sen translated all the ballads of the eastern Bengal including Sula's into English in three volumes.

In a series of lectures in English arranged by Calcutta University Shri Sen told about the excellencies of 'music' and 'dance' by the Hindu women as follows :

> Music was once a favourite subject with the Hindu women in India. No woman was considered accomplished without a high proficiency in that science. Saraswati, the goddess of learning in the Hindu mythology, is represented as carrying a book in one hand and the musical instrument, the *bina*, in the other. Sanskrit poetics, enumerating the qualification of a woman of the highest type, the Padmini, lay stress on 'music' and 'dance' as the two essential qualities that she should possess. (Sen 313)

Padmini is a noble character in Indian history, known to all for sacrificing her life through the observance of *Jauhar-brata* in the fort of Chitor in 1303.What is here intended to keep in mind is that

Sula had been junior to her by about five hundred years or it may be more than that. Padmini having had her education in Sanskrit at that time, while Sula, born in an uneducated family of the lower strata of society had got the elementary education only and that too on self initiative into own mother-tongue alone. Both are remembered here for their passion for music. Sula is specially remembered for her hunger for getting education. "She has paid her tribute of gratitude to Channu Nath in her preliminary verse. She could now read for herself the Bhagavat and the other scriptures in Bengali, and as she read them, her mind found a solace which spirituality brings into distressed mind" (Sen 316). Sula or Sulochana died in 1866 in the old age while residing at her nephew's house in some other village named 'Chatrashal' of Netrakona.

3. Rami Dhopani: Now the story of a Dalit women coming from the dhopa (washer-man) community in the early second half of the eighteenth century is being told hereunder. Neither of her exact date of birth nor date of death is available from history. There is no doubt to know about her that her name is popularly available in the post-medieval period of Bengali literature, very particularly in the time after Chaitanya Deva (1486- 1533) had revitalized and spread the doctrine of love and devotion of the *Bhakti-cult* in Bengal as well as in Indian society as a whole. He might have ushered a new era through bridging the 'gulf not only between the high castes and low castes but also between the Hindus and the Muhamaddans' (Bhattacharya 213). Through the advent of this great human lover, people belonging to the lower strata of society started to get and enjoy respect in life. Lots of people coming from the different sections of society were getting the mantras of love through embracing Vaishnavism.

A good number of depressed people embraced it. Rami's life is one of great examples who embraced the Vaishnavism coming from the neglected caste and class of people such as one untouchable dhopa caste and became a popular Vaishnava poetess. The womenfolk, particularly those of lower strata of society, had started, in defiance of old religious restrictions imposed on them, to enjoy some liberalism in life since long past. It is said:

> In spite of the restrictions imposed on the ladies of the upper grades, the lower classes have always enjoyed full liberty in respect of music and dance. The Vaishnava women publicly singing songs——nay, earn their livelihood by following this as their avocation. Half century ago in the old *kavi* parties we found men and women of the depressed castes singing and dancing together on festive occasion. (Sen 314)

Professor Kshudiram Das, known as Ramtanu Lahiri, teacher of Calcutta University once had been out to the village, Saltora, of Bankura district in order to get field information about Rami Dhopani and her worshipping companion Chandidas, known as Sahajiya Chandidas in the history of literature. He has given the vivid description of the village Saltora where Rami was born. In one essay he describes :

> Saltora village a bit ahead of Gangajalghati police station on the northern side of Bankura district. At that time the village was under the zamindar of Sikharbhumi. About a mile away on the south of the metal road this Saltora village stands. The village was populated by Brahmins, Washer-men, Potters and Farmers. A small canal has run through the village from the north to the south. Population on both the sides of this canal…..The Saltora village has some Dhopa (washer-men) families. (Das, "Krishnakirtan Kabeyar ke Rup O Swaroop" 82)

And Rami had been one of them. She considered herself as Radha as in case the sahajiyas would always imagine in their way of living. It was she who knew the life of Radha best, a milkmaid in life and an ordinary woman or milkmaid without any sophistication. "She is a married woman who looks after household duties and when occasion demands goes to Mathura, the nearest town, to sell milk and curds" (Das, *The Mad Lover: The Essays on Medieval Indian Poetry* 76). The Bhakti movement has its independent growth in medieval age. Here in this movement the Hinduism and the Buddhism find a meeting point disowning caste

discrimination in humankind. Rami had got Sahajiya Chandidas, the famous Vaishnava poet of the eighteenth century hailing from one Namasudra sub-caste of Jessore district as her *sadhan-sangi* or worshiping companion. There are the traces of four names of Chandidas available. Baru Chandidas had been in the fifteenth century while Chaitanya Deva was alive and very favourite poet of Chaitanya Deva in his time and Sahajiya Chandidas might have been in the eighteenth century having the Sahajiya Buddhist legacy with him. One interesting phase in the history of the development of Radha is the Sahajiya Vaishnavism, a later transfiguration of the Buddhist Sahajiya" (Das, *The Mad Lover: The Essays on Medieval Indian Poetry* 77).

Rami Dhopani or Ramtara had been a good poetess in her time who had seen the sad death of Chandidas with her own eyes. Chandidas had been trampled or trodden under the feet of a running elephant. Rami has given a vivid description of his death scene in one of her poetic verses. It stands as follows:

> I'm one helpless woman
>
> Caught in hand a 'madhabi'[5] branch
>
> With loud voice called his name of my heart's king
>
> An elephant running fast mad
>
> In a twinkle of moment he was not found
>
> His death had thundered a bolt cruelly on my head.

The sahajiya's influence has radically changed the existing framework of Radha-Krishna. The sahajiyas are seen to believe that:

> the eternal concrete spiritual type manifested itself not only in the historical personages of Radha and Krishna, but that it reveals also in actual men and women. Every man has within him the spiritual essence of Krishna which is his svarupa (real nature) associated with his lower existence, which is his physical form or rupa, and exactly in the same way every woman possesses within her a

> lower self associated with her physical existence, which is her rupa—but within this rupa resides the svarupa of the woman, which is her ultimate nature as Radha. It is none but Krishna and Radha who reside within men and women, and it is this Krishna and this Radha that are making dalliances as man and women. (Dasgupta 127-28)

Rami, though born in the lower strata of society, might have dallied herself as embodiment of Radha.

4. **Rani Rasmoni**: Historically, she is a very popular and well-known woman coming from the lower strata of society. She was born in 1793, the year Lord Cornwallis had introduced the Permanent Settlement Act in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to earn more revenues from the zamindars. Rani Rasmoni was a pious lady and very kind to the poor people to help them in a number of ways as far as possible. And many a time she had to quarrel with the British people for their cruel and merciless action they had taken against her subjects. Once, the British government had imposed taxes on the fishermen for fishing in the river, the Ganges. Rani fought against it in the court and won the case. This is one side and the other side is also there to be told hereunder.

Once Professor E Max Muller wrote: "He (Ramakrishna) could draw and make images of gods himself. One of the broken stone images of Sri Krishna, which he repaired in later days, is still to be seen in the temple of Dakshinesvara of Rani Rasmoni, about four miles to the north of Calcutta" (Maxmuller 33). When the Kali Temple of Dakshinesvara was set up Ramakrishna had not as free mind as he developed in the later days. Max Muller, the biographer of Ramkrishna further said about her:

> The temple of goddess Kali at Dakshinesvara, about five miles to the north of Calcutta, was established in 1853 A.D. It stands on the side of the Ganges, and is one of the finest temples in India. The temple deeds were drawn in the name of the Guru, or spiritual director of Rani Rasmoni, for she being of a lower caste, none of the higher castes would come to the temple and take food there if she drew the deeds in her name. The eldest brother of Sri Ramakrishna was appointed as priest to the temple. The two brothers came on the day when the temple was first opened and established, but such were the caste prejudices of Ramakrishna at that time that he protested vehemently against his brother's taking service under a shudra woman, or one of the lower caste, and would not take any cooked food in the temple precincts, because it was forbidden in the *Sastras*. (Muller 35-36)

It is undoubtedly a sad occurrence that in the name of *Sastras* this happened. And such things are perhaps still taking place continuously.

Romain Rolland, the great litterateur of France and biographer of Ramakrishna had expressed almost similar thing. He mentions:

> At that time there was a rich woman Rani Rasmoni, belonging to an inferior caste. At Dakshinesvara, on the eastern bank of the Ganges, some four miles from Calcutta she founded a temple to the Great Goddess, the Divine Mother, Kali. She had considerable difficulty in finding a Brahmin to serve as its priest. Strangely enough religious India with its veneration for monks, Sadhus, and seers, has little respect for the paid office of priest. The temples are not, as in Europe, the body and the heart of God, the shrines of His daily renewed sacrifice. They are the praiseworthy foundations of the rich, who hope thereby to gain credit with the Divinity. True religion is a private affair; its temple is each individual soul. In this case, moreover, the founder of the temple was a shudra, an additional disqualification for any Brahmin who undertook the charge. Ramkumar resigned himself to it in 1855; but his young brother, who was very strict in all questions relating to caste, was only reconciled to the idea with great difficulty. Little by little, however, his repugnance was overcome, and when in the following

year his eldest brother died, Ramkrishna decided to take his place. (Rolland 10)

In the later days of his life he started to become liberal to the other religious sects such as Muslims etc. but not so much lovingly and respectfully he had accepted the shudras of the Hindu society. Rani Rasmoni died in the year 1861 and in the same year, Rabindranath Tagore, the pride of Bengal, was born in Kolkata.

Notes

1. Sunil Kumar Das. Rarher Aitihasik Chuar Vidroha (1753-1816), *Charturtha Dunia*, Stall 22 Bhabani Dutta Lane, Kolkata-73, 2010.
2. Renuka Biswas & Upendranath Biswas, Sulochana: Adhunik Juger Pathsalaye Purush Sikshaker Haate Prakashye Shikshita Pratham Banga Nari, N C M B Memorial Trust, GC 22 Sector II, Kolkata-91, 2006.
3. Apu Das, *Bangla Sahityer Madhya Jug, Naribadi Path*, Bani Shilpa, 14 A Tamer Lane, Kolkata-9, 2006.
4. Subal Chandra Mitra (edited), *Saral Bangla Abhidhan*, New Bengal Press, Kolkata-73, 1984.
5. Madhabi: a flower plant.

Works Cited

Ambedkar, Dr. Babasaheb. *Writings And Speeches*. Education Department, Government of Maharastra, Volume 1, 1989.

Bhattacharya, Sachchidananda. *A Dictionary of Indian History*. University of Calcutta, 2nd ed. 1972.

Biswas, Renuka & Upendranath Biswas. *Sulochona: Adhunik Juger Pathsalaye Purush Sikshaker Haate Prakashye Shikshita Pratham Banga Nari*. N C M B Memorial Trust, GC 22 Sector II, Kolkata-91, 2006.

Das, Kasudiram. "Krishnakirtan Kabyer Rup O Swarup." *Bachai Prabhand*. Pustak Bipani, Kolkata.

Das, Sisirkumar. *The Mad Lover: Essays on Medieval Indian Poetries*. Papyrus, 2 Ganendra Mitra Lane, Kol-4, 1st ed. 1984.

Gharai, Santosh Kumar. "Chuarera Jakhan Vodraha Kare." *Banglar Dalit Andolaner Itibritta*. Ed by Dr. Chitta Mandal and Dr. Prathama Roy-Mandal, Annapurna Prakashani, Kolkata, 2003.

Muller, E Max. *Ramkrishna: His Life and Sayings*. Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata-14, 10th impression, 2011.

O'Malley, L.S.S. *Bengal District Gazetteers* (Midnapore), Appendix II The Chuar Rebellion.

Rolland, Romain. *The Life of Ramakrishna*. Advaita Ashram, Kolkata-14, Twenty-second impression, 2010.

Sen, Dineshchandra. *Eastern Bengal Ballads: Mymensing* Vol. III, part I. University of Calcutta, 1928.

Zelliot, Eleanor. *From Untouchable to Dalit*. Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1998.

Dalit Literature: A Glance

P. Sivakami

The word 'Dalit' is a political construct coined by the Dalits themselves in their struggle against caste system and the quest for social justice. The term also includes similar such categories who have been oppressed and denied opportunities as an ethnic group or community. It encompasses women, third gender or transgendered, tribal communities and religious minorities. However, in practical terms, the identity of Dalit is claimed solely by the Scheduled Castes.

Literature as a study or discipline depends practically on all other disciplines and its primary resources are society, social institutions and social psychology. Hence in a caste-ridden society, the emergence of Dalit and Tribal identities in society and literature is inevitable.

The phenomenal struggle by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar marked a new era in the Indian society. With the provision of reservation in the Constitution for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and the 5th schedule in the Constitution for the exclusive rights of the Tribes, a new set of educated and employed youth emerged from both these sections. Untouchability and the evils of caste system still persist rampantly even after 66 years of the promulgation of the Constitution. There are a number of cruel atrocities committed on them in spite of the stringent Prevention of Atrocities (SC/ST) Act 1989. The Dalit/Tribe victims of atrocities do not get justice under this Act due to various reasons. Only in seven percent of cases, the guilty are punished.

It is noteworthy to mention that the educated and employed few in the government are trapped in the reservation milieu namely proper implementation of reservation and promotion in reservation

and they are not resourceful to fight against injustice done to the illiterate rural Dalit. Other than reservation, the entire Dalit question revolving around the landless peasants and the urban poor is left to spontaneous local leadership of the unemployed poor. These local identities are not networked under a common political leadership. However, there is no denial of the fact that the constant attempts are made to organize them in the name of Ambedkar and Dalit ideology. Poverty and illiteracy being the two big challenges which are capable of thwarting any lofty ideals, that the Dalit leaders find them difficult to overcome.

With the technology development and globalization, the Dalits and Tribes are further marginalized. However, mobilizations of opinions on various issues concerning the Dalit and other marginalized sections of the society have been made easy through information technology. At the same time, the same space is utilized by dominant forces for evolving strategies to augment their strength.

Given both the favourable and adverse conditions, the new Dalit and Tribe identities continue to deliberate the democratic process with the hope that modern education with a deep sense of social justice among the younger generation would bring about political consolidation and change in the society.

Literature as a torch bearer and a change agent has almost synonym for politics especially in the case of Dalits. The writings of Ambedkar coupled with the preaching of Buddha form the Dalit ideology. Except the article by Ambedkar titled as 'Waiting for Visa' which is autobiographical in nature, rest of his writings consist of intellectual discourses with an aim to achieve a castless society. The Dalit writings, mostly autobiographical, talk at length about the sufferings of the Dalits at the hands of the dominant communities and register a deep rooted desire for their emancipation and equality.

There are about hundred writers / poets in Tamil language alone among the Dalits who contribute regularly in more than twenty five Dalit magazines which are largely circulated among the Dalits in the pattern set by *Mooknayak* started by Ambedkar. The same may be applicable in varying degrees in other vernacular languages. Many of their writings are translated into English and published by the local and global publishers such as Sahitya Academy, Oxford

University Press, Orient Black Swan, Penguin and HarperCollins. Some works have been prescribed as texts under comparative literature and in translation studies in prestigious universities. The Sahitya Academy honoured the Dalit writers by awarding them with Academy Awards. Several workshops / seminars have been organized by them in their effort to exhibit their enthusiasm for the deliberative democratic process. The universities are conducting national and international seminars on the subject with the UGC grant. But it is also to be acknowledged that these changes in the attitude of social/academic institutions have been brought out mainly because of the efforts of the Dalit writers.

In the year 2001, during the Anti-apartheid conference at Durban which aimed against the system of institutionalised racial segregation, the Dalit activists from India wanted to represent and argued that the caste-social segregation in India was the same as apartheid. But the Government of India did not allow the issue to erupt and succeeded in internalizing the caste question in India. However, after a decade, it was ironical to find that Ambedkar and Dalit writings have occupied the shelves of foreign university libraries. In almost all international literary festivals organized in India and abroad, at least one panel is dedicated to discuss the subaltern and Dalit literature. Dalit literature has become an inevitable segment in all languages as well as Indian English literature.

In the area of politics and governance, the semblance of subaltern / Dalitism is no longer restricted to the debate on reservation alone, but has expanded to the theory of multi-parties, pluralism, allocation of resources, land reforms and gender discrimination or reservation for women. Though there could be none when compared to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the new emerging Dalit political leaders from different parts of the country use all the available spaces in Parliament / Assembly and in local Panchayat. Any decision by the Centre and State Governments is immediately analysed with the subaltern and gender perspective and its adverse effect on Dalits, Women and Adivasi are duly represented in social media.

Similarly in Dalit literature, the new form of oppressions in the rural and urban India are captured then and there and published almost immediately. Thus the reader of the Dalit literature and the onlooker of political developments in India get sensitized to the issues. In the wake of increasing complexities and concrete conditions, much needed critical analysis of the contexts we live in, is the need of the hour. Whether Dalit or Tribal or Non-Dalit, if the reasonable human being is the starting point we need to critically and wholeheartedly reflect ourselves and the aim in doing so should be clear. The aim is to be filled with content and not with just some words, it must have value. In other words, our identities and the philosophical reflections revolving around us should lead us to praxis. The political and literary identities among the Dalits need to bear this in mind.

My Dalit Experience – My Literature

Balbir Madhopuri

My Social Background and Childhood

First of all I want to make it clear that I was born on 24th July, 1955 in an ex-untouchable caste, *Ad-Dharmi* in village Madhopur, district Jalandhar in Punjab. It would be pertinent to inform that my date of birth does not tally with the birth date as told by my mother. My community had never made a *Janam Patri* or a *Teva.* It had also never believed that giving alms can improve their lives. What I want to say is that my caste does not come under *Varna - Dharma* or religion in the societal order. It had no social, religious, political or economic rights during pre- independence but non-Dalits had.

According to societal classification, the cluster belonging to my caste people is in the western side of the village where the entire filthy water of the village passes for disposal. My house is situated at the beginning of the main street of the village and on the opposite side of the street is Gurudwara of the Jats which was once upon a time considered a Sikh fort. Even though Sikh religion recognizes all human beings at par but in Punjab almost all the Gurudwaras in its twelve thousand five hundred villages are constructed on caste lines. In about ten thousand villages, Dalits have their own Gurudwaras/religious places. Most of them are connected with Guru Ravidas ji. One can easily conclude from the existence of separate Gurudwaras as to why such a Gurudwaras were constructed.

For example, my community people were not allowed to go inside the Gurudwara and pay their obeisance before the Sri Guru Granth Sahib. One can easily understand as up to what extent

untouchability was prevalent in the Gurudwaras from the daily happenings with me and those of my age group which are referred to in brief hereunder. For example, every month when *Sangrand* or a Gurpurab was celebrated in the Gurudwara, we used to go for getting *Parsad* or having food from the free community kitchen. The organizers used to call us bad names because of our caste and uttered such words which should have no place in any religion. We used to be pushed like cats and dogs to a place where the people sitting inside take off their shoes. Bhai ji used to throw *Parsad* upward towards us so that his hand does not touch our hands. Many a time *Parsad* would not fall into our tiny hands folded in a bowl shape to get it but used to fall on the ground. The dogs standing nearby in expectation used to eat it losing no time. When the people used to leave, the dogs would get inside and search the *Parsad* which had fallen down by smelling here and there and eat it. If somebody tried to hit them, the other would easily and instantly say that 'a dog is a recluse; it would go out just with a minor threat.' Undergoing such a treatment, I stopped visiting the Gurudwara in my childhood itself. At that time, I was perhaps studying in 2nd and 3rd standards. Our ancestors never visited that place as we were never a social part of the Hindus or Sikhs.

The fellow students, boys and girls used to behave in the same manner and kept a distance from us when we used to take water from the school well. They used to wash away with water our pollution and then only take water. When hand-pump came and was fixed for drinking water, they used to wash the tap first and then only take water.

While at school, I and my classmates belonging to my caste used to walk more than three kilometers to village Sohalpur to wash and feed the animals of our Khatri teacher. We were not allowed to drink water from the hand-pump in his house even if it was extreme hot and we were dam thirsty. Our teacher's wife used to give water to us from a distance above and we would drink it by accepting it in our hands folded in a bowl shape.

There was a post office in the village. I and my classmates used to go to the nearby villages to deliver letters. These villages were situated at a distance of one kilometer to five kilometers.

Walking bare footed in extreme hot or cold, weather was no wonder to us. But the thought that why only we are drafted for the upkeep of teacher's animals or delivery of dak while the sons of the Jats, who were well built, wore good clothes and were available, used to haunt us.

During these days, many a time I had to take off from my school to work for driving the animals of the neighburing Jat family yoked to drain water from the well so that their son could go to school for study. This was a sort of a forced labour. After feeding her husband Taro aunty would ask me 'Gud, get off the drive as your uncle has to drink water.' I used to be astonished as to how the defilement reaches such a distance to the water buckets and then to the water in the well. My mind would appear to go into deep anxiety like the water buckets going into the water in the well. Such incidents have left deep imprints on my mind which are not forgotten despite the efforts to do so.

In winter, I and other boys of my caste would stand near the jaggery machines with buckets in our hand for collecting juice dirt. The dogs used to hover around us in the expectation of eating the juice dirt being thrown there. We used to drink the juice dirt as there was an acute shortage of food during these days. I used to be daily busy in collecting the juice dirt. If I was unable to go, my elder brother would collect the juice dirt. Many a time, the hot juice dirt would fall on the feet and burn these. During these days, small cattle and old oxen and cows would die and my father, sons of my uncles and other male members in the neighbourhood would carry and remove them. Heavy animals were carried in hand carts. I also used to help them in pushing the cart. I always used to feel ashamed of doing the above mentioned two menial jobs and was often compelled to think why only we people are compelled to do such jobs? Our funeral places are also separate from the Jats – what sort of links we have with them?

Despite all this, I used to go for child labour in the fields of the Jat farmers. The Jat women would throw loaves of bread at my hands from a distance. They would give me tea or water in the glass or the small bowl which I would carry from my home. I used to visit the houses of the Jat farmers at noon or in the evening with my aunties or brothers' wives to collect food which used to be part of the meager wages which my uncles earned as daily wages. We used to sit on the ground and many a time the hot curry or vegetable would splash over my naked feet. This would cause small burns. Amidst all this, my mind would be continuously bogged down like the blood running in the veins. A thought would bother why we do not have lands? We labour hard in the fields but still we are helpless in getting enough food. Why there is always tension in our community cluster due to poverty? Can we also have pucca houses like the Jats one day? Secondly, why my age group Jat boys who are my classmates call my father and other elderly persons from my community by their name? We call their young ones and elderly persons and their women folk with respect. My mind was filled with this type of thinking.

During my childhood this type of thinking gave rise to poetic compositions in my mind. I used to remember these by heart which I used to recite before fellow students. I used to compose lyrics and recite them. Later, I and my elder brother used to write these lyrics in note-books. This happened when I was studying in 5th to 8th standard. Many a time, when I used to be in extreme raze, I would stealthily piss in the well of the Jats. I used to feel happy at my foolish act.

The daily social and religious segregation and acute poverty led me to deep desperation. The result was that my method of resentment by composing lyrics got blunt. In my adolescent age, I got busy in tackling the demon of poverty by labouring in the fields. I used to go with my father and brother to shake off paddy, harvesting and thrashing of wheat and harvesting maize in the wee hours and used to work till darkness fell in the late evening. When we used to thrash wheat with naked feet, snakes used to come under the feet. During the work, we often used to kill snakes in daytime or the night.

Reason for My Writing Literature

I joined government college, Tanda, district Hoshiarpur for higher studies after passing out my tenth standard examination in 1972. There I met Prof. Didar Singh. He was a well known Punjabi

author and poet. He set up a Literary Forum in the college which I used to frequent. The college published an annual issue "Tarika Mandal". In the context of my literary writings, one important happening need to be narrated which rekindled my literary bent. It happened when eight boys from my community were travelling in a bus to the college for the annual examination of 12th standard. One of us put his feet over the feet of the beautiful girl sitting there and teased her by pushing three to four time with his arm. Not tolerating it, the girl started speaking loudly in English and Punjabi. She asked the conductor to take the bus to the police station. The fellow passengers tried to pacify the girl. Her face became more red in raze. By that time, the bus reached the Tanda bus stop and we fled from the scene. I could not get sleep for a long time during the night due to this incident. The helplessness of that girl came to my mind time and again. This was perhaps the turning point in my literature writing and I got engrossed in it consciously. In about three day's time, I wrote a lengthy poem in praise of that girl despite the annual examination. This was perhaps the first simple step in my sub conscious mind for Feminist thinking. My poetry got the base in it.

Me and the Progressive Literature

During my college days, my torn undergarment used to peep out of my only worn out shirt. My thinking was centered round poverty which dominated the seriousness in my poetry writing. Truly speaking, this feeling was given rise by the Soviet literature which was being sold in our college by the Communist Party of India through the Punjab Book Centre. The frenzy to purchase and read literature rose to such an extent that I used to buy books even by earnings through daily labour. I never thought of purchasing clothes or shoes but always thought of creating literary works like that of Maxim Gorky, Nikolai Ostrovsky, Dostoevsky, Rasul Ghamzatov, Chinghiz Aitmatov, Chekhov, Sholokhov, Turgenev, Gogol, Alexander Ruskin etc. I used to read books on Lenin, Marx, Leninism and Marxism. I felt that the conditions of the Soviet people under the Czars and that of the scheduled tribes were similar from many aspects. I never liked the Indian mainstream literature.

That appeared to me full of forgery, totally imaginary and prone to spreading hatred, casteism and untouchability. The faces of former untouchables i.e. natives were nowhere to be seen in it. Thus, the Soviet literature gave inspiration to me to write poetry. The purposeful humanism in my mind had shaken me that in India also literary works should be written to create a new man. I wished to make wordy attacks at rocket speed on the social behaviour of hypocrisy, pretentions, pomposity, superstitions and injustice.The entire world may value human dignity and labour and peace must prevail. In those days i.e. about 35 years ago, I wrote poems against fascism, capitalism and in favour of world peace.

In 1975, I became a member of the Communist Party to bring in revolution. I used to raise slogans like 'workers of the world, unite' and *Kisan-Mazdoor* Unity Zindabad. I along with other comrades used to inspire my community workers and carry them in trucks and trolleys for rallies demanding increase in the support prices of food grain, increase in subsidy on fertilizers and diesel and for round the clock availability of electricity for agriculture. In recognition of my work, I was appointed Secretary of the village branch. In protest, a Jat comrade proud of his caste left the party and joined Panthak party (a Sikh political party). During the discussion on the demand for raising the daily wages by one rupee a day, all Jat comrades sided with their community.

When I was working in Food Corporation of India from 1978 to 1983, I found that the non-Dalit employees used to cut docile jokes on Dalit women working in the godowns for the upkeep of food grain. Such incidents also happened which cannot be penned down by a good natured person. Our Union comrades also used to indulge in such shameful activities.

I lost my faith in the traditional approach of Party because of the above mentioned different types of incidents. I had now no faith in the traditional methods of the Indian communists for bringing revolution. I felt that they were not much serious about the socio-economic change. I also felt that they were using the Dalits for keeping intact the religious, social and economic interests of their people. In this way, any number of incidents of inhuman treatment, partiality and injustice went on piling up in my mind. I thought that

I must pen these down. I read some biographies during this period. I started thinking against the concept of 'Ram Raj'. I started thinking about presenting rationale for the *Adi* (original) people's guide, Guru Ravidas's Begumpura recognized as an ideal of radical change. I was already aware of the struggle for the cause of the untouchables by the *Adi Dharam Mandal, Punjab.*

By 1998, my two poetic collections, four prose books and a number of translated books were published. In the Punjabi literary field, my writings were discussed at length. Many writer friends said on phone and others wrote that Balbir used to be a progressive writer earlier but have now turned purely a Dalit poet. What will be the fate of his Dalit literature in future is not known. In short, everybody had his own views about my Dalit literature.

Why I Wrote an Autobiography?

By now my understanding of the literature and the capacity to analyze it had gained much strength. I already had a store-house of social experiences from the Dalit point of view. After looking at the literary and cultural tendencies and deeply analyzing them, I decided to write my autobiography as I felt that it was not possible to portray in detail 'in poetry', the cruel realities prevalent in the society. The main topic of the autobiography – 'I and my community, a prey of the societal order' went on developing in my mind. A humanistic and scientific approach went on inspiring me to pen down my tale of woes without any sentimentalism.

In 1996, I wrote one chapter of my autobiography and got it published. I started receiving phone calls from famous Punjabi writers after about a week's time. How far my writings can go? To evaluate it, I got published two more chapters in the next two years. The result was that 'this field is lying vacant in Punjabi literature– complete your autobiography immediately.' Alongside, I started getting invitations from national and international forums to read paper. I felt that the right time to publish the autobiography has come.

After this, in about 4-5 months, I completed the autobiography in which my life span up to 45 years of age is briefly portrayed. It was published under the name '*Changiya Rukh* in Punjabi in 2002.

It came to be known as a corner stone in Punjabi literature. All my writings got a boost. Its scope widened after the publication of its Hindi translation in 2007. When it was published in Pakistan in 2010, the major newspapers and magazines there raised questions on the social set up in India like their approach towards India. The same year, when it was published by the Oxford University Press, I started getting phone calls from the world over. Today, '*Changyiya Rukh* (*Against the Night*)' has joined the world classic literature. Much of it could be found surfing on the internet. It would be pertinent to mention that in the last ten years its six editions have been published in Punjabi. Some magazines are publishing it in a serial format even now. Within the country and abroad, many magazines and newspapers are publishing it in a serial format. It is available in Punjabi/ Hindi on two websites/blogs.

It gives me an immense pleasure to say that the UGC (University Grant Commission) has included *Changyia Rukh* in the curriculum for the classes of B.A. for all Central and Private Universities. I feel, there is now a perceptible change in the social attitude. Those who had no access to education earlier, the books written by them have now found a place in the syllabus. One translated book namely " Mitti Boldi Hai (Short stories from regional languages of India), has also been included in the syllabus of UGC.

Reactions

The reaction of the Progressive writers faced by my poetry is being raised against '*Changiya Rukh* (Against the Night)' also. No Jat writer/critic has contributed even a book review to the approximately 200 pages book , *Literary and Social Evaluation of 'Changiya Rukh (Against the Night)* edited by Dr. S.S. Noor (former Head and Prof. Department of Punjabi, Delhi University. Their (Jats) view is that why they should write about an opponent book? I got some phone calls from abroad and complaining against this book. Secondly, in my family my elder brother and younger sister got annoyed. The sister said why I wrote about the worms in her head. Her in-laws laughed at her. Warm relations with brother and Mama Family were broken. But, I pacified my brother in 2-3 years. A bosom friend became angry and left my friendship because

of this autobiography. He is an advocate and has threatened on several occasions to file a case in the court despite the fact that his name appears nowhere in the book directly. He feels connected to an incident in the book like the thief always living under the fear of being caught.

Anyway, I am satisfied that whatever little contribution I have made to the Punjabi literature from the progressive Dalit point of view, has been taken a deep note of by serious readers and selected scholars. Nowadays, Dalit literature is becoming a mainstream literature of India and had demand at international level. And, I now feel, I represent that human being in a conscious form who was deprived of land, wealth and religion centuries ago. This recognition is apparent in the centre of all my literary works. Its future appears brighter like Soviet literature, Black literature and Feminist literature. Therefore, I have translated 32 books from Hindi and English into Punjabi and most of them are related with the Dalit issue. I have authored 14 books including three poetry books and a biography of Babu Mangu Ram, a Ghadrite and Founder of Adi-Dharam Mandal Punjab, a movement of untouchables in the north India and edited 40 books into my mother toangue.

Dalit Literature in India

Manu Baligar

Dalit literature, though the word 'Dalit' is of recent origin (1960), has been there since 12th C. Under the leadership of saint poet Basaveshwara (popularly known as Basavanna) in Northern part of Karnataka, a revolutionary movement took place to eradicate untouchability, casteism, inequality and superstitions in the society. Among the three hundred and odd Vachanakaras (as those writers were called) many belonged to the lowest strata of the caste system in Hinduism. The British also had used this word Dalit in 1930's as a translation of Hindi and Marathi word to denote the "Oppressed Classes".

Dalit Literature is writings about Dalits and also can be extended in its scope to include the literature created by other caste Hindus who wrote about Dalits and with Dalit consciousness. The 12th Century Kannada Literature as narrated in the beginning is one such good and rare example.

Dalits wrote to vent their genuine feelings and concern about the downtrodden particularly the scheduled castes and scheduled Tribes. Many writers themselves had undergone / experienced the pain of caste turmoil and cruelty. Social, political, educational, economic and other privileges were denied to them only on the basis of their caste. They wrote to protest against this order in the society. Their aim was to liberate the Dalits from the clutches of erstwhile casteist tradition. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's three important principles– educate, organize and agitate– were the basis of many such writers. Dr. Ambedkar's writings were a great source of inspiration to many such writers as lot of his books and writings were translated into almost all the languages of India.

Marathi, Kannada and Gujarati Languages experienced the Dalit movement and writings from 1960s and 70s. Marathi writers played an important role a little before others. They had Mahatma Phule, B.R. Ambedkar in the back drop. A novel type of "Autobiographic" writing / narration was adopted by a few of them to record their protest against the caste - hit tradition. It was nothing but a genuine demand for their just place in society and literature as well. To name a few, such autobiographies are by : Sharan Kumar Limbale, Laxman Gaikwad, R.B. Agawane, Laxman Mane, Uttam Kumble, Balachandra Mulgekar, Daya Pawar, Mallika Amarsekha, Bhimarao Ghasti etc. But before them such writers as Shankar Rao Kharat, Baburao Bagul, Bandhu Madhav were already writing.

Kannada and Gujarati Dalit writers were the next in this path. But Kannada had a few Dalit writers as long back as in 11th C. (Madara Chennayya - a cobler) and 12th C. (Samagar Haralayya, Dhoolayya, Dohara Kakkayya etc.). See how Kalavve, a Dalit writer, records her protests against the upper castes in the following Vachana (these 12th Century Verses were called so) :

"Those who eat goats and tiny fish :

Such, they call caste people.

Those who eat the Sacred cow

That showers frothing milk for Shiva:

Such, they call out–castes."

As the Hindu social and religious order denied them the right places and opportunities, the Dalit literary folk attacked and questioned the prevailing system. A well-known Dalit Kannada poet Siddalingaiah wrote in 1970s to the extent of giving a call to his brethren as "Come on, kick them, hit them". Devanoora Mahadeva's writings with full of insights sparked a great revolution in Karnataka and became a source of inspiration to many Dalit writers. L. Hanumanthaiah, Aravind Malagatti, Arjun Golasangi, Subbu Holeyar, Mudnakudu Chinnaswamy, B.T. Lalitha Naik, B.T. Jahnavi, Anusuya Kamble can be named as other few writers of this sort.

A pro-Dalit thinking–which included issues of other down trodden castes–"Bandaya Movement" (Bandaya meaning rebel, protest etc.) was started during 1970s in Kannada Literature in Karnataka. A few others who led this were Baragooru Ramachandrappa (A Scheduled Tribe Writer), Chandrashekhara Patil (A caste - Hindu) and Sarjoo Katkar. The whole social network was shaken by such revolutionary movement and writings.

The Dalit writing in India has taken inspiration from the American Black literature. The Black Panther movement of North America gave an impetus and those Black Panthers became the role models for these younger Indian writers. The modern Indian Dalit writers rightly explained the "Dalit Identity" by providing deep insights on the issues connected with them. Now the trend is towards unity among the Dalits and the other communities alike or near to them in suffering as a result of which a new perspective "Dalit is Dignified" has emerged. These under–privileged writers have been proving the maltreatment they and their fellow beings had undergone and press that their dignity and self respect be upheld and protected. The upper caste traditional idealogy is totally condemned and rejected by them. They vehemently seek equality on the basis of humanity and just reasoning.

My Literature, My "Self"

Roopnarayan Sonkar

Dalit literature emerged as an aftermath of the efforts made by Dr. B R Ambedkar who fought well against four-fold caste system which has religious sanction and is based on the exploitative mentality. In spite of resistance from the main stream readers and critics, Dalit literature is growing day by day. If one asks the definition of Dalit literature, I would like to say that it is a literature of humanity which preaches to establish the social harmony. It can be categorized as a didactic literature because it presents lessons of human values before the world unveiling the game of power politics. I am sorry to say that India is a country where human beings defined as Dalits by the society are trying to prove through their writings that they are also human beings and need equal treatment in the society. My literature is not a creation of the imagination only, it has dominance of reality. It's a fact that I have an inhuman society around me but a sharp pen to shear it. In this society all efforts are made to dishearten, disappoint and anger Dalits. I have broken the so called barriers of creativity. I do not use the lingual structure or mosaic language but the crude language of that part of the society which I try to bring out layer by layer. If people blame that I have favoured the oppressed and neglected society of Dalits and deserted the traditional expectations, I accept it and want to tell them that it is not enough; something more is required. Hailing from a Dalit community, I have first-hand experiences of cast-tyranny practices by non-Dalits. My experiences as a Dalit after being processed through the heat-oppressed-brain take the shape of ideas which form my literature. I, like other Dalits, have a great reverence for Dr. Ambedkar who is the messiah of Dalits and down-trodden.

Suardaan, *Naagfani, Jahrili Jaden (Poisonous Roots)*, *Dank*, *Gattar Ka Aadmi and ek Dalit Deputy Collector* are my works.

Jahrili Jaden (*Poisonous Roots* in English Translation) contains seven stories out of which four stories are being taught in the Indian and foreign Universities: (1) "Jahrili Jaden" –in Allahabad University, (2) "Samajdrohi" in Lucknow University, (3) "Ambedkar Tample" in Indira Gandhi National University, Amarkantak M.P. in MA English Literature and (4) Khatik ka Ghar in Torino University Torino, Italy. The collection of stories is like a breath of fresh air which is despite the presence of dust particles gives one a feeling of being alive. Each story in this collection tells a radical truth and brings forth the ugliness, intolerance and inequalities of the society. No allegations have been made deliberately rather they have automatically entered in the undercurrent.

My stories are not based on any "ism" or philosophy. They have a true and vivid description of tragedies caused by the perverted order, corrupt system and handicapped democracy in spite of the fact that our Constitution is the best in the world. They analyze the life of the contemporary society. It is not enough to say that I have discarded the traditional expectations and taken side of the oppressed and neglected society of Dalits, common man in true sense of the term, because my stories go beyond this and speak about the uprising of the down-trodden people.

Novel, *Dank,* is my first novel. It is a modern novel. I have described pitiable condition of a SC/ST village in MP. I have depicted the Tribal culture and the bravery of Tribal people. They have to go through the examination of bravery. They have to fight with fierce beers before getting married to a Tribal girl. In Uttarakhand State there are separate fountains for Dalit. A Dalit cannot fetch the water from the fountain of Non-Dalits. The hero of *Dank* with the help of a Non-Dalit girl whom he loves eradicates this disparity. The novel also talks about the danger of increasing impotency in the world. The protagonist who is an educated person moves around the world. He feels that there should be International Sex Competition like cricket, hockey and football. In the competition, according to him, the results will be astonishing. At International level, India will be the first, South India the second and China the

third; at national level means within India, Dalits will get the first position, and OBCs the second and Non-Dalits the third because Dalits do physical labour day and night and are strong. The results can be watched on Computer later on. This will be helpful in removing impotency because to get the position, people will make preparation for the competition and will do rehearsals again and again. The novel discusses the issue of democracy in India with an example of Uttrakhand and explains how the democracy has become a joke. In one village of Uttrakhand there is a Dalit *Gram Pradhan*[1] but all powers of *Gram Pradhan* are being exercised by powerful Non-Dalit. He treats the Dalit *Gram Pradhan* as a servant. At the occasion of the marriage in the house of a powerful Non-Dalit, he uses *Gram Pradhan* to clean the utensils used by the guest during marriage ceremony. It is an insult of democracy. A village VVIP is treated nothing like a servant. All financial and administrative powers have been exercised by a Non-Dalit. The novel depicts another true example about the local bodies of democracy. A new word *Pradhan Pati*[2] is in fashion. A lady is *Gram Pradhan* but her husband rules. All decisions are taken by her husband. He misuses government financial budget. She puts her signature or thumb impression only on the government papers and files. *Pradhan Pati* collects huge amount of money in the name of village head for which she is jailed after an enquiry, set up by the Collector.

A voice against Caste based profession has been raised in my next and the most famous novel, *Suardaan* published in 2010. The Professors, research scholars and prominent writers commented that the *Godaan* was the world famous novel of the 20th century but *Suardaan* is of the 21st century. Professor Omraj and Prof. Pan Singh (HOD Hindi) expressed their views about the novel. Both said that Munshi Premchand established firmly blind myths while Roopnarain Sonkar rooted out all the blind religious myth in *Suardaan. Suardaan* is a science fiction which educates the masses to think scientifically. Old blind customs, traditions spreading in the society from centuries must be removed because they are very harmful to our modern and cultured society. Humanity is dominant in *Suardaan* than *Godaan*. Indian caste system has

given specific profession to a particular caste and Dalits have been given low profession. *Suardaan* challenges this caste based profession system. Brahmin, Yadav, Khatik and Chamar collaboratively open a piggery farm and all become the richest men. Other Brahmins oppose this profession of Râmchandra Trivedy but he refuses to take notice of their advice. The supper villain of this novel Satyanarayan Tripathi is a cruel person; he has committed fifteen murders and he is the centre of corruption. Being a village head, he misuses the MANREGA Funds. He is a symbol of terror. I have also suggested the government how the terrorism may be stopped and peace may be established in the country. We spend a lot of money to suppress the HATASAWADI (the people indulged in anti-social activities). If government had spent some money for their development like education of their children, improvement of their health condition, and shelter for them, and for their employment, HATASAWADI would not have registered their presence in the country.

Suardaan is not only attracting readers, professors and research scholars but it is also attracting the famous film producers of Bollywood. Rakesh Roshan has stolen the story of *Suardaan* and produced super hit film, *Krish-3,* which earned more than Rs-1000 corers. The subject matter of the main chapters of novel, *Suardaan*, has been taken directly and used in the film, *Krish-3*: (1) The incidents of page nos. 144 and 145 of the novel have been stolen and used in the film. MAANWAR hybrid has been created from the semen of man and animal. In the film MAANWAR hybrid has been created from the DNA of man and animal. (2) In the novel Super villain Satynarayan Tripathi is crippled and moves on wheel chair. He is a tyrant and committed 15 murders. In the film super villain Vivek Oberay (Kaal) is also crippled and moves on wheelchair. He is a tyrant and has committed many murders. (3) Heroines of the novel Sunayana has been kidnapped by the villain (Satynarayan Tripathi). She is pregnant. Co-heroine, Mainaa with the help of Kaala Bachcha struggled to get rid of Sunayana from the clutches of the villain. In the film the heroin Priya (Priyanka Chopra) was also kidnapped by the villain Kaal (Vivek Oberay). Priya is also pregnant. Co-heroine, Kaaya (Kagna Ranaut) struggled

against villain (Kaal) with the help of Krish (Hrithik Roshan) to get rid of Priya from the clutches of villain. (4) In the novel a character Dayashankar Pujari is suffering from a deadly disease. To get the solution or curement, a partner of the Pigry Farm, goes Newjersy to meet an Indian born Doctor Sanehilal. In film *Krish-3*, when the deadly disease has spread in Mumbai, the scientist, Rohit Mehra goes to Singapore to meet an Indian born doctor Sidhant Arya (Naseeruddin Shah) to get the solution or treatment of disease (6) In the novel, *Suardaan*, the crash of the airplane has been predicted. In the film, *Krish-3,* there is a scene of airplane which is about to crash (7). In the novel and the film both, the villains are burnt.

Guttar Ka Aadmi is my third novel publishes in 2015. As title suggests, the protagonist hails from a community which sweeps the streets and cleans gutters. Guttar is a big drainage under which the people of depressed classes do work of cleaning the guttars. The poisonous gasses kill numberless lab workers every day in India. In this novel an incident has been described when labourers are doing the work under guttar and one of them faces a poisonous serpent. Struggle begins for survival between a man and a snake. The serpent tries to spray the poison to the labourer. That labor tries to catch the serpent. He puts off his own turban and covers the body of snake and catches the head of snake and comes up and hands over the serpent to the forest rangers. In this way, he saves the life of a serpent after putting his life in danger.

Guttar ka Aadmi describes the reality of Indian society. There are two countries in India: one is the poor India and the other is the rich India. The hero of the novel, who is a Dalit by caste, is tall and handsome; he loves a rich upper class beautiful girl. The girl opposes the hero's relationship with the people of depressed classes. The hero of novel, Saurabh, scarifies his love and makes a promise that he will not get married until he would change the poor India into the rich India. A great massage has been given by the hero of this novel to the youth of India that everybody must do the great efforts to eradicate the poverty. The 45% people of India are living below the poverty line. The economic condition of these people is very pitiable. In this novel some experiments have been done which put it in the category of science fiction. In it a serious concern has

been paid to the disabled person who is unable to see the world because of being blind by birth. After many experiments the hero succeeds to create eyes in the other parts of the body. The novel is not limited to the people who are working under Guttar. Other people like Rikshaw pullers, laborers, poor artist and writers also have been included as the men of gutter. Those writers who guide the Nation through their creative writings must be given the same status and facilities like M. P. and M. L. A.

The novel raises voice for the tender treatment of animals. Some butchers pour boiled water on the whole body of an animal which is going to be butchered. The hero of the novel asks butchers why they do so? As reply he is told that the demand of such meat is very high in Arabian countries. Now-a-days businessmen are crossing any boundary to earn money. They have forgotten morality. Their motto is to become the richest person by hook or by crook. Another problem which has been voiced boldly concerns the education system. The mission of Dr. Ambedkar has been advanced in this novel. Baba Saheb always said be educated, be united and keep struggling. The hero of the novel, Saurabh, becomes the friend of those children who are doing rag begging. "*Daliton aur garibon ke bachche/ gandgi aur kude ke dheron me/ apni jindagi beente honge*."[3] Saurabh teaches them to appear in the test of a noted public school for admission. For the children roaming hither and thither with rotten and dirty clothes, he arranges school uniforms. After passing the test they get admission in the school. Such scenes of novel suggest the people that we can abolish illiteracy through this way.

There is a massage of social revolution in the novel. Some teenagers are sitting on the footpath and engaged in polishing shoes and earning money. An upper caste educated engineer takes service from one of the teenagers for polishing his shoes but he denies to pay proper money to the teenager and utters caste symbolic word like Chamar. Many friend of this teenager gather there. They say "We have passed Intermediate with the first class division. Our parents are poor so we are collecting money through polishing the shoes of others because technical education is very costly." All Dalit boys become fierce. They grab that engineer and press him

to sit down on the same place where that boy was polishing the shoes. That boy puts off his pair of the shoes and orders the engineer to polish his shoes. Engineer has to polish the shoes of that Dalit boy. He pays double money to the engineer for polishing his shoes. The boy uttered "No work is inferior or superior, we have made it."

Naagfani is my autobiography. This book has been published first by Silpayan Shahadara, New Delhi in 2007; second edition 2009; third edition 2012; and fourth edition in 2014. It is a bestselling book of Silpayan. The editor of *Hans*, Shri Rjendra Yadav, has given a space in his editorial to this book and has commented that – *Abhi tak jitney bhi Dalit lekhakon ki Aatmkathayen aayee hain; 'Hay Maar dala ki cheekhein' sunai padati hai; lekin Naagfani pahli Dalit Aatmkatha hai jisme cheekhein sunai nahi padati hain balki sangharsh hai. jisko angreji bhasha me silent revolution kaha jata hain*.[4] One critic and great personality of literature, Prof. Namvarsingh, has observed that *Naagfani* ki bhasha, shaily aur bimb sarahniya hai.[5] *Naagfani* inspires the young Dalit to follow the path of struggle. They should not surrender before the tyrants who are committing atrocities upon Dalits. There are many events and incidents where I have depicted people, who believe in casteism and inequalities, defeated. *Ek Dalit Deputy Collector* is my play. It is taught in Solapur University. This play attacks those officers who have become selfish after getting job. They have forgotten their parents also who worked hard and suffered a lot to educate them. They hesitate to live with parents in well furnished bungalows and do not feel any remorse in quitting their first wives and getting married to another girl.

Thus, my writings try their best to work upon the ideology of Dr. B R Ambedkar. I am sure that they raise consciousness in the Dalit readers and give a new way to them to think upon.

Notes

1. Gram Pradhan: Village head elected by people; it is a local political unit.
2. Pradhan Pati: Husband of female Gram Pradhan
3. *Daliton aur garibon ke bachche/ gandgi aur kude ke dheron me/ apni jindagi beente honge:* Children of Dalits and poor/in the heap of rubbish/ collect their life.
4. *abhi tak jitney bhi Dalit lekhakon ki Aatmkathayen aayee hain; 'Hay Maar dala ki cheekhein' sunai padati hai lekin Naagfani pahli Dalit Aatmkatha hai jisme cheekhein sunai nahi padati hain balki sangharsh hai jisko angreji bhasha me silent revolution kaha jata hain:*The cry– "Killed me! Killed me"– is heard in the autobiographies published till now but *Naagfani* is the only autobiography in which it is not heard instead there is a struggle in it which can be called in English, a silent revolution.

List of Contributors

1. Prof. Alessandra Consolaro, Department of Humanities, University of Torino, Italy. Email: alessandra.consolaro@gmail.com

2. Dr. Santosh Kumar Sonker, Assistant Professor, Department of English and F.L., Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, MP. Email: drsantosh.igntu@gmail.com

3. Prof. Heinz Werner Wessler, Institute for Linguistics and Philology, Box 635, SE-75126, Uppsala. Sweden. Email: heinzwerner.wessler@lingfil.uu.se

4. Prof. M. Dasan, Dean, School of Languages and Comparative Literature, Central University of Kerala, Periya, Kasaragod. Email: nasad2007@gmail.com

5. Mr. Rajashekhar S. Mulimani, Research Scholar, Department of English, Rani Channamma University, BELAGAVI.

   &

   Prof. Vijay F. Nagannavara, Chairman, Department of English, Director School of Languages, Rani Channamma University, BELAGAVI. Email: vijayfn@yahoo.co.uk

6. Dr. Mamta Gupta, Associate Professor, Dept of English, Arya Kanya P G College, University of Allahabad, Allahabad, UP.

7. Dr. Amod Kumar Rai, Assistant Professor, Dept of English, BPG College, Kushinagar, U.P, Email : amod_kumarrai@yahoo.com

8. Dr. Satya Prakash Prasad, Assistant Professor, Department of Applied Sciences and Humanities Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. Email : sprasad@jmi.ac.in

9. Mr. Anand Kattimani, Lecturer in English, SDVS PU College, Sankeshwar, Belgavi, Karnatak. Email: akattimani@gmail.com

10. Dr. Shyam Babu, Assistant Professor, Dept of Indian & World Literatures, The EFL-University, Hyderabad- 500 007, Email: shyambabueflu@gmail.com

    &

    Mr. Samy Victor Marandi**,** Research Scholar**,** Dept of Indian & World Literatures**,** The EFL University, Hyderabad- 500 007**,** Email: vicsamy09@gmail.com

11. Mr. M. R Banjare, Assistant Professor, Dept of English, T.L.C. Govt. P.G. College, Janjgir, C.G. E mail: banjaremr@gmail.com

    &

    Dr. Charu C. Mishra, Associate Professor, Dept of English, K.G, Arts & Science College, Raigarh, C.G.

12. Dr. Mahantesh Hurali, Associate Professor of English KLE's SCP Arts and DDS Commerce College Mahalingpur– 587 312 Dist. Bagalkot (KAR) Email: mantu.hurali@gmail.com

13. Dr. Kaushal Panwar, Assistant Professor, Dept of Sanskrit, College, Delhi University, Delhi. Email: panwar.kaushal@gmail.com

14. Ms. Vishakha Kardam, Assistant Professor, University of Delhi, Delhi. Email: vishakha878@gmail.com

15. Dr. S. B. Biradar, Department of English, SVM Arts, Science and Commerce College, Ilkal, Karnataka, India, Email: biradarsb@gmail.com

16. Ms Marina Rimscha, University of Bonn, Germany, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel. Email: marimscha@googlemail.com

17. Mr.Vijay Jondhley, Research Scholar, Department of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad. Email: vijayj.ou@gmail.com

18. Mr. Harish Mangalam, Gujarati Dalit Writer and Secretary Gujarati Dalit Sahitya Academy, Gandhi Nagar, Ahmedabad, Gujarat. Email: prakamp1979@yahoo.com

19. Mr. Manohar Mouli Biswas, Bengali Dalit Writer, West Bengal. Email: manoharbiswas@yahoo.co.in

20. Mrs. P. Sivakami, Tamil Dalit Writer, Chennai. Email: psivakami@gmail.com

21. Mr. Balbir Madhopuri, Punjabi Dalit Writer, Director, Punjabi Bhawan, Punjabi Sahitya Sabha, New Delhi, 10, Rouse Avenue, Institutional Area,New Delhi-110002 Email: bmadhopuri@yahoo.in

22. Dr. Manu Baligar, Kannad Writer, Bengaluru. Email: kannadaparishattu@gmail.com

23. Mr. Roop Narayan Sonkar, Hindi Dalit Writer, Deharadoon, Uttarakhand. Email: sonkarroopddn@gmail.com