

Dalit Literary Horizon

Manohar Mouli Biswas



Editor: Dr Asit Biswas

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EDITOR'S WORDS OF GRATITUDE

I feel elated to express my heartfelt gratitude to Manohar Mouli Biswas, the doyen of Bengali Dalit literature, for allowing me to edit the English translation of his book of articles, *Dalit Sahityer Digboloy*. Mr Biswas has delved deep into the history and subject-matter of Dalit literature in some Indian languages, *i.e.*, Marathi, Kannada and Bengali. The author has delineated the history and background of Dalit literature by referring to many litterateurs and some historical incidents like formation of the Dalit Panther group, the self-immolation of Chuni Kotal etc. He has shown how Dalit literature ceased to exist as mere “art for art’s sake”, but exists for sake of protest, of dignity, of proper human rights, of self-respect. The rich literary and cultural heritage of the Dalit people is also discovered by Mr Biswas as found in the chapter on the *Charya* poet, Sabaripad. The protestant nature of Dalit literature, especially poetic literature is evaluated in a separate chapter. That the end of literature is not only to please but to move as well is interpreted in the book. A chapter on the Dalit literary activities in the post-seventies Bengal is also included in the translated version of the book.

I am also indebted to all the translators as well as my friend, Dr Shubh Brat Sarkar who enthuses me always. Miss Sampreeti Sarkar has designed the cover of the book. I express my heartfelt gratitude to her.

Asit Biswas

FROM THE AUTHOR'S DESK

Indian Dalit literature is almost a new domain of literature. It is nothing but the own voices of the suffering, marginal people in the society, expressed in their own language and passion, inborn beauties and vocabularies. It bears the ground reality of the Dalit life, and therefore, is full of beauties, concerns and enormous curiosities and responses. About three decades ago, while this book of mine, *Dalit Sahityer Digboloy* was published it received a very wide response from the teachers and the taught, from the scholars and the researchers and very particularly, from the general readers of the book as a whole. This time the book in English version with new title is going to be published by AMAZON publishing house under the editorship of Dr Asit Biswas.

I herewith express my love and respect, gratitude and indebtedness to both the editor and the publisher of the book.

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INTRODUCTION

Translated by Asit Biswas

Now-a-days the technologists enjoy an envious position in the society. In the ancient Indian social stratification, the scenario was just the contrary. Those who enriched the society by rendering their sweating physical labour by supplying it with newer art-pieces and goods and, thereby, enhanced the luxury of the upper class were kept subjugated and kept in the worst pit by the social leaders. By branding them as ‘Sudra’, ‘marginal’, ‘untouchable’ etc. they had kept them at the bottom of the society. They Brahmins reserved a kind of rage towards them. The religious texts testify to the fact of existence of that rage. When a Brahmin groom got married to a Sudra bride their child(ren) would be given a place just below the rank of the Brahmins. And when a Sudra groom got married to a Brahmin bride their child(ren) would be thrown down into the lowest position of the society, by branding it/them as ‘chandal’. But both of them were carrying the Brahmin blood in their veins; rather, the ‘chandal’ being the son/daughter of the Brahmin mother carried comparatively much more Brahmin blood.

The structure of the society was such that the people who were more helpful had been oppressed and exploited for ages. They were the ‘Dalits’ of the society— the ignored, homeless, poverty-stricken, suffering and helpless masses. The orthodox society was always cruel and indifferent to them. But in spite of the existence of this serious crime and injustice the sinful orthodox society was engaged in hailing the Indian tradition.

Of course, in the past, Lord Buddha, the *Charya* poets, Sri Chaitanya and the saint poets created instances of showing mercy and love to this oppressed class of people, but it was like a single drop of sweet water added to the salty ocean of injustice. Once the marginalized Kaivartya people of Bengal raised

themselves and declared a revolt against the royal power, but it was a political and temporal issue.

There is an English moral saying, “God helps those who help themselves”. The same thing happened in this case as well. Only when this Dalit class strengthened with their self-confidence took up pen and began ventilating their own miseries, disgrace, oppression, and the facts of their stained life and, thereby, established a tradition of protestant literature, the people of the world began to throw their merciful glance at their melancholic life. The name of that very protestant literature is “Dalit literature”. And the author of this book, Manohar Mouli Biswas has given us the identity, history and interpretation of that literature, as a gift.

The place of origin of Dalit literature is Maharashtra and it was fathered by Bhimrao. He shouted aloud, “I have been born a Hindu, but to return, never to follow this path.” By unveiling this wound of the Hindu society, the remark arising out of bitter experiences, later on, much more influenced the sensitive writers to participate in the victory parade of the abolition of oppression from the society. As a result, in Marathi language there grew an extraordinary literature whose creators were Madhab Kondalbikar, Sankar Rao Kharat, Uttam Bandhutupe, Keshab Misram, Nanasaheb Jhogde, Rustom Achal Kham, Sada Karhade, Sarat Nimle *et al*; all of them wrote in prose. But soon poetry as a vital organ of Dalit literature flourished. Those who wrote on the Dalit people were Yashowanta Manohar, Daya Power (who invited by the govt. attended the Frankfurt Book Fair and established the Dalit literature on the global platform), Namdeb Dashal, Baman Nimbalkar, Keshab Misram, Prakash Yadav, Arjun Dangle, Prahlad Chendbandkar, Harish Bansode, Arun Kamble, Jyotirao Phule, Suresh Kadam *et al*. Among the women there were poets like Hira Bansode, Jyoti Lanjeyar *et al*.

The Dalit literature influenced the Kannada and other Indian languages as well. Dalit literature sprouted up all over the country. Soon Dalit literature assumed the shape of a movement. The women also did not lag behind. Although compared to the men the women were less in number, they, through various organizations were engaged in weaving the texture of various movements. The author has argued, “The women movements are catalysing the Dalit literary movements. And needless to say, the more the women movements progress more will the Dalit literature be rising.” Today in theatre and in films the stories of Dalit literature are seen presented.

The writer in a very sensitive heart has delineated the literary efforts of the Dalit society. The book titled “Dalit Sahityer Digboloy” (“Dalit Literary Horizon”) is one of superior quality. I have been enlightened to read the book. I hope, the book will win wide acclamation in the yard of the readers.

Atul Sur
Professor and Former Researcher
University of Calcutta.

CHAPTER-I

MARATHI DALIT LITERATURE

Translated by Niladri Tikadar

The innumerable dark waves of the coast of Konkan reflect the beauty of the stars of the sleepless night. They keep on twinkling. What time of the night is it now? The dark-skinned people have gazed at its beauty for two thousand years. These crawling people can never sit up; where do they gather the courage from? Remaining seated they endure the hit of the baton of the mighty. It is the time again for going on crawling. Those who have watched for long the dark water of the Malabar know that it has a ravaging power. A long time ago, the *sant* poets unitedly composed the love *Dohas*, on the theme of rebirth and freedom from the cycle of birth. Compared to the *sant* poets like Gyaneneswar, Ekanath, Tukaram and Ramdas, the Sudra poet, Chokhamela was by no way a timid poet. His poem, “Bhutralache Abhang” which may be translated as “Songs from the Soul of the Soil” provided the Sudra writers of the 13th Century with some courage.

The term, “Dalit Literature” has come into being around 1954. The *sant* poets nourished no tendency of discrimination. Who is one’s own, who is other?’— it did not become a matter of much discussion. The aim was unidirectional— that is achieving *moksha* or peace of soul. The tide of consciousness of the dark water brought about a change in the mind of the people. The successive writers, Gopal Baba Bhankat, Pundit Kondaram (1890-) had a protestant tendency in their writings. The writers of the later period, namely Kisan Faguji Bansode and Shivram Jamba Kamble openly denounced the Varna system, stating explicitly— “Down with this enemy of man”. Kalappa Raja Dhale has given us a literary gem. He maintained a long diary from 1911 to 1928. It has been published recently. It played a

new orchestra in the tumultuous sea (of Dalit literature). The diary vividly documents the destruction of Dalit life in the direst poverty and bitter family feuds. It is also a testimony to the struggle that the Dalits have to undergo in order to get education.

Tides arrive in the sea through ages, from the Arabian Sea in the West to the Bay of Bengal in the East. This article is on Dalit literature which has permeated the roots of life arriving from the tide of the Western Malabar Coast.

Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is the father of Dalit literature. He gathered bitter experiences. He remarked, "I was born a Hindu but I shall not die a Hindu". But why? Why did he have to make such a remark? The rich elitism of Hinduism burnt him. He had to begin his school-life with a bell tied round his neck. He had to taste the bitterness of the poison tree of casteism all over his life. He launched a long struggle in order to sever this inhuman shackle but failed. Therefore, at the last stage of his life he had to make this kind of comment of dissatisfaction. It was a natural revelation of the heart— a threat against the refusal to open the closed door for the Sudras. It is seldom hyperbolic and it is better not to seek any political flavour in it. It was his attempt and the final attempt to change the mindset of the upholders and bearers of the caste-elitism. From the first stage of his childhood, he had to endure the burning agony of Sudrahood. Overcoming the tremendous obstacles, pains and sufferings, and walking a long way and thereby completing his education from America he reached the pinnacle of the higher life. He could be a never-returning traveller. But he did not do so. There are some merciful hearts which are penetrated deep by pain; how would he forget those wounds?

The heart then became a hard rock, in steadiness as strong as iron— the great hero of pioneering awakening. Keeping him at the central point, the Dalit Panthers sang out their songs of freedom from exploitation, in Marathi language. Gradually the

Dalits started dreaming of breaking the fetter of injustice. One by one the innumerable people took up their pens and thus began a victory journey of creation of Dalit literature in Marathi. It assumed the shape of a movement. In the history of literature Marathi Dalit literary movement signifies an especial chapter. In quality also, it has reached a level of excellence. It may be believed that Dalit literature has reached the peak of excellence hitherto reached by the literature of the other languages. This belief is strengthened with the bestowal of the Sahitya Academy Award on Laxman Mane for his autobiographical work, *Upara*.

Dalit literature represents the victorious journey of the homeless people. The types of homeless people are innumerable— the Gon Gwaris, Murias, Kharias, Ojhas and Nagbansis etc. Their poverty is beyond description and their professions are strange— snake charmers, jugglers, magicians, professional disguisers and so on. They live in shacks in jungles outside the villages. The Gon Gwaris graze in the grazing grounds; they are dependent on others— that means, they are ‘Upara’. Laxman Mani wrote his *Upara* on his beloved ones. It is a book ornamented with creative beauty— that has made the Dalit literature feel proud.

P.E. Sonkamble’s *Athwa Ninche Pakshi (Birds of Memory)* and Daya Pawar’s *Baluta (Untouchable)* are the recent well-known prose works. Another prose-writer preceding them is Gangadhar Pantawane. A few days back, a list of one hundred and fifty most important works in Marathi literature has been compiled with the help of the specialists— which is considered as the best collection of Marathi literature. The above-mentioned three works have found their place in it. One more word deserves mention here. In a special issue of *Asmitadarsh*, a quarterly journal edited by Gangadhar Pantawane, the term “Dalit Literature” first caught the attention of the readers. Thereafter

there was much controversy regarding the term “Dalit Literature”. Now, it may be said, it is beyond controversy.

No clear outline of Dalit literature existed before 1967 despite the rebellious voices of Anna Bhau Sathe, Shankar Rao Kharat, Uttam Bandhu Tupe and Madhav Kondvilkar. From the next decade onwards, the conception began to change. The Dalit writers were able to infuse a new ‘insight’ into literature, by shattering the old sense of morality.

The literature created by the communities like the Dhors, Mangs, Mahars, Malas, Muchis, etc. is Dalit literature. There is no encroachment of elite culture here. So, we notice the writers’ uniqueness of sights, as well as of the forms of expression. There exists an inner bonding between the writers and the characters. This makes the characters bright and lively. Notable works of Dalit literature that deserve mention include Madhav Kondvilkar’s *Mukam Post Devache Gothane*, meaning “House Is Yon Pasture”, Shankar Rao Kharat’s *Taraarh-Antaraarh (The Sky Has Merged in Space)*, Uttam Bandhu Tupe’s *Kat Ayavaarchi Port (The Stomach of the Labouring Class)*, Keshav Meshram’s *Haqiqat Ani Jatayu (Truth and the Saint)*, Nanasaheb Jhogde’s *Fanzar*, Rustam Achalkham’s *Gaonky* and Partha Polke’s *Abaran (Clothing)*.

It may be mentioned here that Sada Karhade, a non-Dalit, has recently written *The Diary of An Untouchable*. She has seen the Dalit life from very close and she has penetrated into it and sketched the innermost region. Her work has reached the second edition in a very short span of time. Dalit literature has undergone a change in its shape. The inward journey has become deeper and deeper. The autobiographical writings have altered the form of novel. Another Dalit writer, Sarat Nimle has written his autobiography of a different taste. He describes how his Sudra mother became a victim of physical lust of three landlords, for a

morsel of food. He explores her relation with her brothers and sisters in her autobiographical novel, *Bejanma (The Bastard)*.

In Dalit literature poetic compositions are more numerous than prose-writings and so, there are more poets than prose writers. It is the poets who have given it the shape of a movement. “The poets are the mirrors of revolution”, it was the statement of a world-famous hero of revolution. Even if they are not the mirrors of revolution, they are the face of an organized movement— it can seldom be denied. The poets in their own sense never instigate any separatist movement; they are quite conscious. Their motto is to awaken the consciousness of the masses. This is why their writings are mass-oriented.

The Dalit poet, Yashwant Manohar published a collection of poems, *Utthan Gumpha*. In his career as a poet, spanning fifteen years, he was in deep love for the entire humanity. Due to the experiences of time his heart was troubled by the poison of casteism. He wrote— “I shall go/ Certainly I must/ But before going/ I’ll put my curse on you.”... “Earth, be divided/ Let in your infinite abyss/ The tolls of old temple bells/ May have a soft silent sleep/”... “In which sea shall I drown/ How to find peace?/ I’ve hot lava behind my lips/ Now is the time to emit it/ Dying every moment/ How shall I be alive?”

Daya Pawar is a major poet of Dalit literature and Marathi Literature as a whole. He has won fame as a prose writer as well. His *Baluta* has been translated into four languages. In Hindi it has been translated as ‘Achchhut’. The book already has reached the fourth edition. Some days back eighteen selected regional writers of India, on government invitation, participated in the World Book Fair at Frankfurt. From West Bengal Mahasweta Devi and Sunil Gangopadhyay were in the list. Daya Pawar was one of the invitees. In that world literary conference, the discussion on Indian Dalit literature won significance. Mahasweta Devi and Daya Pawar as Dalit litterateurs were

interviewed separately by the mass media. I came to hear this from Mahasweta Devi's lips. As a poet and a Dalit poet, Daya Pawar's name is most widely known. His poetic collection is *Kondwada (Stable)*. His power of observation is sharp, interpretation skilful and language lucid. The following poem vividly narrates the cruel truth about the suicide of the Dalit mind—

Sabha

No two men are united

The Chairman's post or a grain of rice

The people crawl down

The leaning mass

See its face by candlelight.

The poet has portrayed the picture of the perished Dalit people.

Namdeo Dhasal is another Dalit poet. His well-known collection is *Golpitha*. 'Golpitha' is the name of a red-light area. Victimized by poverty the hellish insects (people) live there. The poet has used the same slang language of those people, in the poems. The poet is a man of robust consciousness and brave proponent. He has sung the song of freedom of the hell-dwellers.

Waman Nimbalkar is another poet who has established the temple of Dalit poetry by composing his collection, *Gao Kusha Baher Cha Kavita (Poetry of People Living Outside Villages)*. The poet has established bondage of love with the homeless. He entered deep into their hearts and observed, thereby. The poet has sympathy for their pains and miseries. Although unlike these, there are some other notable Dalit poets, namely Keshav Meshram (*Utkhanan*), Prakash Jadhav (*Darkhast*), Arjun Dangle (*Shaoni Hilte Aay*), Prahlad

Chendvankar (*Audit*), Harish Bansode, Ashok Patil, Arun Kamle, Suresh Kadam *et al.* Among women, Hira Bansode (*Firyaad*) and Jyoti Lanjewar (*Disha*) are well known poets.

The theatre and dramatic art also influenced Dalit literature. Aurangabad, Pune and Nagpur are the sacred centres of Dalit theatre. Premanand Gajvi's *Ratbhar Pani (Whole Night Rain)* has the record of thousand-night shows. His other presentation, *Tan Manjari* is also famous. Datta Bhagat's name also deserves mention. The stage performances of his *Sakshipuram* and *Desachi Mare Kari* are memorable ones.

I shall conclude my article with the mention of Jyotirao Phule whose name among the Dalit litterateurs comes first to our mind. *Gulamgiri* is his famous work. Mahatma Phule is the ideal and inspiration to the Dalit litterateurs. His writings brought forth new life from the tides of consciousness.

(The author has received help from H.P. Gedam by way of information, in composing this article).

Word-notes

Sant poets: The saints of the Bhakti Movement who also composed religious verse and songs.

CHAPTER-II

KANNADA DALIT LITERATURE

Translated by Niladri Tikadar

Resistance against casteism is noticed in Marathi and Kannada languages among the Indian languages and consequently a stream of Dalit literature flows brightly through the literary courtyard of these languages. This stream is the wealth created by the Dalits— it is impregnated with various creative ingredients. The specialty of this literature is the conflict with Brahminism or *Chaturvarna* and the conflict of Untouchability. Dalit literature is committed to unveiling the curtain. Dalit literature has struck a severe blow on the *varna* system. Its revelation sometimes becomes violent— gets furious.

Later on, the upper castes have also assembled in the courtyard of Dalit literature. Now Dalit literature has become something like a fashion.

Actually, the voice against casteism, as noticed in Kannada Dalit literature, was a part of the Bandaiya Movement of Karnataka. The writers like Chandrashekhar Patil, P. Lankesh, Devanoor Mahadevan and B. Kumarappa started writing with a movement-oriented mentality. They were the first to found an organization of the writers and artists.

Any critical analysis of modern Kannada literature reveals that like other Indian languages it has become change-oriented, after undergoing much progress and decline. The period from 1900 to 1940 was the one of new rise of the Kannada literature. The Progressive Age was from the forties to the late fifties. The period from the sixties to the mid-seventies was the neo-literary period. From the mid-seventies onwards there began the epochal change-oriented “Bandaiya Movement” in the Kannada Literature.

The conflict resulting from the caste division and social inequality is nothing new in Kannada literature. The writers of the period of the new rise sowed its seeds. Thereafter it entered into the successive streams of the modern Kannada literature and subsequently paved the ground for the movement.

The writers of the new flow did not pay their attention to the socially neglected. They were busy in the way to acceptance, by using their intellectually luxurious and self-centred pens. The writers of this period also became victims of alienation just like the post-World War II European writers. However, the later also came out of it by penning works about post-War social, economic and political conditions; but the readers turned away from the Kannada writers of the new form, as they were the victims of alienation.

After this, those who were with the masses and believed in social equality and liberalism, took to writing— which was the “Bandaiya Movement”. Dalit literature was a part and parcel of this movement. Only that part of literature is considered Dalit literature, in which the Dalit writers themselves ventilated their own voice.

Bandaiya literature is the wake-up call against social wrongs and injustice, torture and exploitation. It is vocal against the exploitation of the poor, the Dalits and the women. The writers of this movement were enthused by the earnest endeavour of Lohia and Ambedkar to bring in social equality. The music of their pen had the murmuring voices of those fighting for social justice.

Traditionally, the Dalit writers hail from the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other backward classes. In the post-Independent India, the Dalits have had some facilities for getting education because of the contribution of Ambedkar and the movement organized by the Dalit Panthers. A significant

event in the history of Kannada Dalit literature is the creation of “Dalit Sangharsh Samiti”, an organization of the socially aware Dalit writers.

Committed to the mission of the development of the Dalits the Dalit writers began to compose songs. These, performed at various functions, have inspired the Dalits to bloom as flowers.

The poems of Siddha Lingaiah are the words of mouth of the Dalits, and they paint a lively picture of the society. Like the poems of Siddha Lingaiah, the poems of the other Dalit poets bear the influence of folk songs and folk tunes.

The language of these poems and songs constitutes a staunch stand against exploitation— they have been exploiting us from times immemorial, because of our lower caste identity; “Come on, brethren, let’s get united, bash them, kick them on the chest and belly, peel their skin from their back”. Those songs are rebellion embodied, against exploitation, torture, insults and hatred. They play the noble role in the mission of development and unification of the Dalits.

Even in the seventies no such Dalit writer was noticed. The Movement still had not taken its own shape. Since the aim of the Bandaiya writers and the Dalit writers was the same— raising voice against caste exploitation, later on, the Dalit writers got united with the Bandaiyas in the same bracket.

On the other hand, it may also be said that the Dalit writers like Devanoor Mahadeva, Siddha Lingaiah, B. Krishnappa, Ramchandra Reck *et al* were the foundation ground of the “Bandaiya Movement”.

All of them were in favour of a fundamental change in the society, and voiced aloud against all forms of exploitation. The pen of the Dalit writers was chiefly limited to the *varna*

system. This may have a kind of mean localism but it expressed the anger and hatred against the oppression by the *savarnas*. The role of the anti-caste literature, therefore, is a noble one— it is a social reformer. It deserves evaluation. It is a new addition to literature. Their love and affection, hope and aspiration, manners and customs exist in it. In Kannada literature the Dalits were portrayed not as heroes but maids and servants. Now there came those people as narrators, with the words from their own mouths— the rural and the marginal dialects. This may not be favourite or acceptable to others but still valuable in its own right. It appears mean and pale to the elitist culture but it deserves warm welcome, in its own magnificence.

The poet Siddha Lingaiah's two acclaimed collections of poems, *Saaviraru Na Digalu (Tale of Thousands of Rivers)* and *Kappu Kaadina Haadu (The Song of the Black Forest)* are considered to be the best compositions of Dalit literature. The poet writes, "Beloved in the moonlit night/ On silent hills/ Wander not alone/ Your body is delicate as jasmine/ Under the full moon/ Someone may set on fire."

In another poem the poet writes, "I'm suffering from the pangs of empty stomach/ I shall throw burning coal/ To the face of the *savarna* tyrant."

Again, in another poem we find, "They take that dog inside their kitchen/ Not the Dalits/ Though the dog feeds on Dalit shit/ The shadow of the Dalits/ Must not fall even on the courtyard."

The prose-writer, Devanoor Mahadevan's two short novels, *Odalala (The Peacock and the Pet Cock)* and *Kusumbale (The Flowerlike Girl)* are the stories of anti-casteism and hatred of the Dalits towards the upper castes. The books are written in the marginal dialect of a remote village of Mysore. They are the proofs of successful use of regional Kannada dialect.

Now the attitude of the upper castes towards the Dalits has undergone a change. Some educated members of the upper castes have developed a liberal attitude towards the Dalits. They, together with the Dalit writers, are making an effort to uproot the poison-tree of caste system.

(The original article by G. Kumarappa was translated into Bengali by Manohar Mouli Biswas)

Word Notes

Brahminism: Complex sacrificial religion that emerged in post-Vedic India (circa 900 BC) under the influence of the dominant priesthood (Brahmans).

Chaturvarna: Social classes in Brahminical books like the *Manusmriti*. Brahmins: priests and teachers; Kshatriyas: Rulers and warriors; Vaishyas: agriculturalists and merchants; the Sudras: Labourers and servants.

Untouchability: The practice of ostracizing a group from the mainstream by social custom.

Savarnas: In the present-day context it means the forward castes.

CHAPTER-III

DALIT LITERATURE: A MOVEMENT

Translated by Iman Mondal

Dalit Literature is itself a movement. Today in our country there lies a mountainous difference between the stream of literature and culture of the dominating people and that of the literature, culture and philosophy of life of the exploited, that is, of the majority. This movement springs from a vigorous conflict between the anti-revolutionary and the revolution-seekers. Both the parties attempt at perennializing their own judgment and feeling grounded on their own strong ideologies. Consequently, a dark shadow of crisis is looming large.

This crisis concerns unity, concerns literature. This kind of crisis of culture-literature has never been reflected before. On one hand there is a strong dashing pressure of the dominating ruling hands, and on the other hand, there is the gradual, blooming sense of consciousness of the majority. The other name of inequality is injustice. Dalit Literature is another name of the protest against injustice. It is revolutionary, it is movement-oriented; the revolution was not only inevitable— it was very much natural as well. No single person can be identified as a Dalit Panther Literary Group; it is a whole entity, a collective endeavour of a group of people. Its whole entity, whole soul is formed with drop-by-drop contribution of each and every single individual person.

Dalit Literature has a unified concentration at one point. And that is voicing against domination. Everywhere whether be it in education and service, or in wealth-distribution, or in social and political background, domination exists. This Dalit literature is the spokesperson of people, conformer of human values and is rooted in determination. Dalit Literature is the inspiration point

for future rebellion; it is the utmost point of Dalit consciousness in India. It is the sacred spell of uprooting inequality, the destroyer of pretentious love, the destructive weapon against the intriguing exploitation system, and above all, the invocation for Dalit awakening. It is the annihilating document of the inhuman and unscientific system of discrimination. The root cause of discrimination system was in *Manusanhita*, in the huge part of one-eyed Vedic literature, and this juvenile literature has emanated therefrom.

The supremacy of dominating class is rooted deep. There is a colloquial proverb in North India— the domination of upper caste is spread up to the ‘money, wife and land’ of the Untouchables’. Their argument is religiously grounded. The question of the value of human or of humanity both is negligible to them. The Untouchables’ role of silent spectators or their dumbness has been overcome through the creation of this young Dalit literature. It is a rebellious voice against exploitation and torture by caste system.

Dalit writer and Professor, Purushottam Satyapremi pointed at the exploitation cycle of the Dalits and said, “Everyday there are new intriguing tricks to keep the Dalits weaker in intellectual, economic or social status; atma-daha, sadhu-sangathan, *Ramcharitmanas* or *Bhagavat Purana*; new construction of temples and bhajan-kirtan everyday are nothing but the tricks to project and persist caste division and untouchability, and to torture the Dalits in financial and social fields.”

The piercing pen of the Dalit literature unveils every deceiving act. It attempts to reveal every conspiracy. They are a group to rescue the oppressed from the tyrannous hand of the oppressor. They are the fighters— spokesperson of ‘Satyam Sundaram’— no rage, no violence, only beauty. The style of speaking is not without protest, rather it is centred on protest. In

emotional outburst, the writings tend to be exaggerated— so, the sense of measurement is not only necessary, but a must. The conversational style prevails here. S/he is even accused of rudeness. Very often pun is also noticed in case of oratory style. In its expression of sensitivity Dalit literature becomes resistant, rebellious. Dalit literature is the voice of those who are exploited, tortured, looked down upon, neglected in eternal tradition; it is the ventilation of the embodiment of their heart's feelings and their voice. It underwent its journey through the substitution of love for hatred, fraternity for violence, tolerance for negligence. It takes the pain of defeat to the dream-peak of development; it gets ground on the black stone of pain and rises up to be a self-fulfilled ideal. In the sacred purification process of self-realization an essence of oath blooms, and very often a sense of conflict is noticed in the tune of promise; and the other name of this conflict is called revolution.

The system of this literature pierces deep into the social structure and gives birth to a new stream of literature, a sense of identity; which is nothing but the philosophy of life of India's majority. It brings forth the high tide of a new and unique thinking, and advocates in favour of the true democratic administrative system and the rights and existence of the deprived people. Repeated bantering thereby renders the tricks and cunning of feudalism loose. A new sun emerges out of that destruction, vigorous and bright— with the sweetness of the Dalits' own identity. It is a kind of great challenge of self-establishment. Doctor Sohan Pal Suvnakshar, the Principal of Indian Dalit Literature Academy said, "Dalit literature or literature of Dalit upliftment is the literature that manifests itself for the awakening or development of the Dalits who are tortured, exploited, neglected, or the helpless people; it makes them know their prestigious history, and also makes them feel their own humanity. It is that literature which all over the earth makes the people aware of their own problems or misery; it also talks of the

prevention or solution.” It is an oath to annihilate Varna system, to annihilate caste system, to abolish the system of upper-lower discrimination. It is not limited to any particular boundary or location but throughout whole India. To express there is no need of rhyme-rhythm or dry grammar in the language; the language of expression rises from pain of torture or cry of torture. The agony of neglect and humiliation gives birth to the strong words of robust protest. This literary movement is hostile with fear and shame. This literature builds a bridge of relationship with its own people through the process of inculcation of self-esteem and self-pride. This literature spreads its beautiful leafy and floral branches to the hearth of the lower-caste villagers. They are the readers, the receiver and the central point. Its body has the smell of those very people centring whom this plant has sprouted up. The pure unconsumed essence of this sudden arrival, no matter how neglected or ignored it is, is receiving its due cordiality and recognition day by day all over the world.

Dalit literature is not trapped in the mirage-illusion of imagination. The cruel truth of reality, no matter how crude it is, is the lively form of Dalit literature. Reality is the soul of this body of literature. It is rooted in the life-struggle of the working class. The working class is the majority of the country. The vein of the country flows fully alive by the rendering of their labour. Dalit literature is simply the manuscript of the realization of the truth of their life. It is real, true, autobiographical, and a sufferer’s narrative.

Dalit literature is structured on the extensive field of the wretched. It is in a perennial encounter with inhumanity. Mental determination is a great weapon for those who expect to change the existing situation. Through the perusal of the Dalit literature the exclusive class gets determined to break the tradition. A united effort is needed and the urge of the need forms the platform for revolt. Voicing political propaganda or an

evaluation of loss-and-gain is not necessary there. Necessary is Dalit awakening—the awakening of their consciousness. Dalit literature is only a concrete form of a much greater social movement, determined to resist torture and injustice.

Dalit literature is the conveyor of its own perception. The power of resistance lies in the unity of the writers. A successful creativity is the main asset of everything. Not concentration on creation, but the negligence of successful creation is sure to petrify Dalits' movement for upliftment. To win the hearts of the wretched their mental needs have to be fulfilled with an orchard of creation as the ornamented food for their mind. The Dalit literary activists keep that in mind. They also believe in the core of their hearts that they should shoulder the responsibility of uprooting exploitation. Not negligence, sympathy or kindness; the essence of the pollen of the heart-blossom is born out of the very flower of Dalit tears. Readers get a novel sense of construction if touched with proper accordance; music blooms from veena. Its name is awakening. "Writing should create such a mentality, which will make them differentiate between right and wrong." Dalit literature critically gives the right direction to good and evil, right and wrong. It proceeds for the whole human welfare— such is its convergence; such is its oath. Its dream is the flourishing of the Dalits. Not beggary, not affliction, not inferiority complex; but Dalit literature is bathed, delighted and enlightened in the glorious light of the past. It is firmly impregnated with the spells of awakening. The name of this awakening is Dalit Literary Movement.

Dalit literature is related to the working people. It is the mirror of their happiness and sorrow, pain and tears, love and affection; it is the spokesperson of protest against injustice and inequality. Each and every medium like painting, art and craft, theatre performance, film etc. is equally active there. They are the weapons of the movement of Dalit upliftment. Dalit theatre

artists' revolt of Nagpur especially deserves to be recollected here. That face-to-face challenge to unfetter is famous in history. In removing the dark mask of the old tradition, the role of stage performance is prominent and direct. The appeal of direct live perception is always great. The Dalit writers realize the profound seriousness of that meditation. In the way of fulfilling the desire the theatre gets tied up with literary movement. To encourage the theatre movement along with literature is also another face of Dalit Literary Movement.

Dalit saint-poet, Ravidas and his associate saints too believed that even prior to the Vedic religion and literature the aboriginal people of this country had a foundation of their own culture which was rather quite glorious, and not at all dull. It is the glorious ballads of the aboriginals of this country. Their literature, intrinsically linked with their religion and culture has been shattered and erased through the continuous and conscious efforts of the Vedic attempts. Dalit literature is involved in retracing those primeval roots and tradition. Doctor Ambedkar is the godfather of Dalit literature which is the stream of protest against inequality, subservience and injustice. The Dalit writers perceive and create through the consumers. The extent of their perception is wide and piercing. According to Kaul Bharati, "The Dalit writer is totally supportive of revolution. To live with self-respect, to die with dignity, to fight injustice, to support justice, a steady job and the creation being bound to the earth instead of alluding to the vast unknown is the parameter of Dalit literature."

The tradition of insurgence in Dalit literature is prominent in the following five lines of the Marathi poet, Ayambak Satyakal—

Oh God, you are nothing but a name.

Like the impotent husband of Sindur

I, as the gang man hand you a notice

You have neglected your duties

Therefore, your service is not required.

One thing is very clear for Dalit writers. “The authors of Dalit literature, who do not conform to Dr Ambedkar or his views, will not be able to create a revolutionary writing.” A loyal devotion to the racist gods like Ram and Krishna and Dalit literature cannot go together. So, all the writers of the Dalit communities are not necessarily the creators of Dalit literature. Through the internal agony of sufferings, the Dalit writers rise up to the position of the observer and creator. His creation is the intense reflection of the marginal circumstances of the outcasts. That creation is conflicting and insurgent; a tone of rebellion lies latent in its soul. “Who has not been burnt in fire of pain, his creation is mundane.” Dalit literature is not of that kind. It is different.

To calculate the percentage, Dalit literature is the spokesperson of the majority. The flow of this literature is for “The welfare of the majority, for the sake of the majority”. It is the gracious idol welfare of its descendants. This future-liable literature’s claim to appreciation, instead of neglect is justifiable and desirable. Although it is still at the nascent stage in enriching Bengali literature, it may be said that the major participation of lower castes in the *Charya* of ancient Bengali literature definitely indicates a probability and an optimistic future and so, encourages the Dalit writers.

Attempts have been made to say one thing from the beginning to the end of this article: “Dalit literature is a literature of revolution and the tradition of revolution is very old in Indian thoughts.” Starting from the saint-poet, Ruidash, Rupchand, the stream of consciousness was flowing through Panchanan Barma, Harichand Thakur, Balaram Hadi *et al.* From the Aaul-Baul of the rural Bengal to the modern folk poet singers, Bengal’s major folk-tradition is enriched by the Dalits and is gradually coming

to light. Through the life-struggle and philosophy of these people the Dalit literature becomes unique in its own dignity.

One of the important founders of Dalit literature in North India is Achyut Ananda Gosain who is known by the name, “Swami Achyut Ananda”. He was the founder of Adi Hindu Andolan (Ancient Hindu Movement). He received his recognition for his Hindi magazine, *Adi Hindu* even outside Hindi belt. With the publication of *Adi Bangsh ka Dangka*, *Adi Khand Kavya*, *Mayananda Balidaan* the glorious saga and ancient history of the Dalits got recognition. The following two lines are taken from the poet’s sense-awakening poems (“Dawn Song”)—

Hey, old descendants wake up all

Now shake off sleep as dawn does fall.

Achyut Ananda reminds us of many lines of the poems of the *Jatiya Jagaran*, an anthology of poems by the untouchable poet of the early twentieth century, Raicharan Biswas. It also reminds us of Medi Andolan (Medi Movement). In 1917 Konka Mahato, Kalia Majhi, Rameswar Singh, the Mundas of Jhargram-Keshiari started singing, “Go, get ready and dress up for battle” for their land, occupation and respect.

To conclude, I must mention an incident of Namdev Dhasal of Maharashtra, the most powerful poet in respect of all India movement for eradication of Dalit misery. In the beginning of the seventies, (9th of June, 1972) he founded the Dalit Panther Group, under a roof of earthen tiles in a slum in Mumbai. He declared a crusade— a war of emancipation from Dalit exploitation. Addressing the educated youths of the untouchables, he exhorted, “Come, let us fight, fight for emancipation against exploitation; not with sword of slaughter, but with sword of ink. Our fight is not against any individual people. Our struggle is for emancipation from Dalits’ misery.”

Dalit literature is the name of a literary movement. It is the dream of the backward people to come forward. It is an oath to be optimistic. It is a record of their own creative voice. And in the literary history this literature is the latest literary face in the national level, by far.

Word-notes:

Manusanhita: The earliest metrical work of the textual tradition of Hinduism, 'Laws of Manu', written in Sanskrit.

Ramcharitmanas: An epic poem in the language Awadhi composed by the 16th century Indian bhakti poet, Goswami Tulsidas.

Satyam Sundaram: Truth is beauty. (Written in Sanskrit).

Ragini: A composition of Indian classical music.

Veena: A stringed instrument mainly used in Indian classical music.

Sindur: Vermillion, but here used as the proper name of a woman.

Rama: The hero of the *Ramayana*.

Krishna: The leading character in the *Mahabharata*.

Thod-badi-khada: A colloquial proverb in Bengal to indicate mundane or common or repetition of the same thing.

Charya: A collection of mystical poems of Buddhism.

Aaul-Baul: A group of mystic minstrels from Bengal.

Andolan: Movement or protest or revolt.

Jatiya Jagoran: National awakening.

CHAPTER-IV

THE KAIIVARTYA REBELLION IN BENGAL AND THE
CONTEMPORARY LOWER-CASTES POETS

Translated by Samrat Laskar

“Poets are the mirrors of revolution”, so said Comrade Lenin. The sayings of great people are truth-oriented, truth-bearer— that eternal truth revolves in a cyclic order. The truism of the sayings from Lenin’s lips can undoubtedly be analysed through many kinds of proofs. An attempt has been made here to substantiate this truth by discussing an important rebellious incident that took place in Bengal.

Once upon a time there took place a people’s revolution in this Bengal, long time ago. Now it is almost like a forgotten chapter of history. The episode gets mentioned and also discussed but not with so much importance. This historical incident has surprise in it, has a taste of a different colour— it scarcely looks believable. But these are nothing but truths— the supreme truth that history entails. The peasants, the porters and labourers organized the rebellion. It was a rebellion of the lower class. The collective willpower of the untouchable and marginalized populace vanquished the royalty. The oppressive ruler was killed by the angry mob. Power was transferred to the untouchable and marginalized populace. The lower-class people became the controlling authority. The administration of Varendra Bengal went to the hands of the Sudras; Divya¹ became the monarch. Divya and two of his family members, Rudok and Bhima— these three held sways of Varendra Bengal for the next six years.

What I have been trying to say is already clear. It was Bengal’s Kaivartya Rebellion, an incident of 1070 A.D. The oppressed people hailed primarily from the lower-caste background; fishermen, laundrymen, cowherds, hunters,

blacksmiths, potters, oil-manufacturers, weavers, Sudra peasants, Chandals— all these people raged against the tyranny of royalty. When people are pushed back repeatedly, when their backs touch the wall, they have no other option but to strike back. The weaker section gathers energy. There is no way to retreat through. That wall of indomitability provides them with enormous energy. Its other name is resistance. This led to a mass revolution. In history, it is known as the Kaivartya Rebellion. The lower-caste people who belong to the marginalized class, who lived in alehouses, burning ghats, riversides, jungles or under the trees; people who were almost illiterate, whose daily companion was poverty embodied and who in social hierarchy were largely ignored and relegated— all these people organizing a mass rebellion captured the throne; it seems scarcely believable, almost as surreal as dreams. But it is a historical incident, historical truth. In Nihar Ranjan Roy's *Bangalir Itihas (Adi Parba)* (*The History of the Bengalis*, 1st part) the historical incident is referred to as follows:

Not only during the reign of Divya but also probably even during the times of Rudok, Rampala couldn't do anything to prevent them. When Rudok's brother Bhima became the Varendra king, the well-established Kaivartya power reappeared as an indomitable one afresh. Bhima was a popular ruler; his memory is still alive. (p. 415)

When this Kaivartya rebellion was organized in Bengal, it coincided with the dawn of Bengali literature. Bengali prose literature was yet to be born; poetry was just emerging through the *Charyapadas*. The composers of *Charyapadas* had multifarious voices. We know of the eighty-four *Siddhacharyas*. Most of the *Charyapada* composers came from the lower castes. However, in general these composers were Sahajjiya Buddhists. To put it simply, they were indoctrinated in Buddhist ideology.

It was a time, when casteism inherent in Hindu religion had given birth to a poison tree. The ever-expanding shadow of that poison tree was turning the lives of the lower-caste people into veritable hell. The composers of the *Charyapadas* were able to traverse across the divisive borders. These people were Mahayani Buddhists. They wanted to overcome the vicious circle of birth-senility-death and thereby achieving nirvana.

The *Charyapada* composers came from all four major castes— Brahmana, Kshatriya, Baishya and Sudra. If they aimed at *nirvana* on one hand, they also strived to shake the foundation of the social order on the other. In order to keep their caste identities secret, they used to take resort to aliases. That was the only way known to them to escape caste discrimination. We get names of writers like Luipada, Bhusukpada, Kanhapada, Sarahapada, Shantipada, Sabaripad and others. We are not really concerned with the caste identity of these poets. But it can easily be inferred that Sabaripada hailed from the Shabar (hunter) community. Researchers have excavated their identities out of some Tibetan texts. Most of these writers came from Bengal, Mithila, Orissa or Kamrup; thus, naturally, their works reflected the lives of the people of eastern India. Their language of poetry was known as *Sandhya bhasa* or the evening/twilight language. It is also known as the language of Light and Darkness. This language is quite obscure but modern researchers have been successful to decipher it.

There are many theories regarding the obscurity of the language used in the *Charyapadas*. One was that the composers deliberately used obscure *Sandhya bhasa* in order to protect themselves from the opponent forces. In order to protect the secret of their mystic Buddhist rites from the watchful eyes of the rival orthodox Brahmin community, the Buddhist *siddhas* took recourse to the obscurity of language. If this be true, there is also another truth. As the composers primarily came from the rural

areas and belonged to the lower castes of the society, their use of diction was surely inspired by the everyday spoken language of the commonplace people. This spoken language of the lower-caste people was designated as *Sandhya Bahasa* by the researchers of the later period.

Not only the *Charyagiti* composers came from the lower castes like Dombi, Kamli, Sabar etc; the characters of the songs also included these people from the untouchable lower castes like Domni, Chandali, Gundini, Sabari, Sabar, Jeley etc. The upper-caste elites of the society maintained a supercilious disdain for the lower-caste people and in one of his composition, Kanhapada gives a clear suggestion:

“Outside city there’s, Dombi, your hut to live in,

You go on touching the shaven-headed Brahmin.”

The lower-caste people like Doms, Charals or Sabars had to live outside the main city; they had to take shelter either in jungles, mountain caves or atop the hillocks, far from the heart of the city, as the Brahmins didn’t want them to pollute the surrounding by their presence. However, it must be remembered that the female characters in the *Charyapadas*, the Domnis, Chandalis or Sabaris, were meant to be allegorical characters, as they represented the great ecstasy or *Sahajananda*. But the way these allegories were used indicates that untouchability was a major part of the contemporary social system. The males of the Dom caste wearing anklets and earrings often used to wander in the guise of a *kapalik*. Taking the guise of a *kapalik* was one of the occupations of lower-caste people of that time. Their other occupations included wine distillation, hunting, carpentry, weaving etc. From this information, it is evident that the lower-caste people of the society were all involved in works that demanded physical labour; their main interest was not in cultivation of knowledge but rather in hard labour. The

Charyagitis give a vivid portrayal of the lives of the lower-class people of the times. As the writers come from the lower-class background, the allegory is often borrowed from that stratum of society.²

For a long time, the caste identities of these composers were in dark; things have though changed in the recent times. The Bengali rendition *Churashi Siddhar Kahini (The Tale of the Eighty-Four Siddhas)* translated from the Tibetan original *Chaturshiti-Siddha-Prabritti* enlists the names of some of the composers. From that we come to know that the poet, Sabaripada belonged to the hunter caste; Kankaripada, Kharagapada, Shalipada, Rahula, Chelukapada, Naguni, Vikshanpada, Kalakala, Dhahuli, Kapala, Sarbabhaksya, Anangya— all were Sudras; Minapada was fisherman; Tantipada came from the weavers; Chamaripada and Panaha cobblers or tanners; Naropada was a distiller; Kotalipada and Kamparipada were blacksmiths, Dhokari and Sotalipada beggars; Medini ploughman; Yogipada Chandal; Gorur a bird-hunter; Pacharipada an ordinary vendor; Kumoripada potter; Chaparipada yogi; Kantali sweeper; and Samuda a professional diver. All these poets had been active between tenth to twelfth centuries— a time which coincided with the reign of the Pala dynasty. The Kaivartya Rebellion of 1070 during Mahipala II's reign coincided with the presence of these writers. However, the *Charyapadas* don't really mirror the political reality of the time; instead, it gave emphasis to contemporary social reality.

The anthology of Tengur/Tenjur gives a list of the works of some of the poets belonging to the eighty-four *siddhas*. The list is given below³:

Composer	Title of the work
Mahashabar	<i>Shri Sahaj-Upadesha-Swadhisthan,</i> <i>Shri Sahaj Sambara-Swadhisthan</i>
Shabareswar	<i>Rakta Bajrayogini Sadhan,</i>

	<i>Shri Bajrayogini Sadhan</i>
Kankaripada/Kankaripa/Kankalipa	<i>Shorasha Bindu Bhavana</i>
Minapada/Mina/Jinopa	<i>Bajhya-Antar Bodhichitto Bondho Updesha</i>
Tantipada/Tantipa	<i>Chaturyoga Vabana Nam</i>
Chamaripada/Chamari	<i>Progna-Upaya Binischaya Samudaya,</i>
Kharapada/Kharagpa	<i>Kharagpadagitika</i>
Naro	<i>Paramartha Samgraha Nama Sekoddesha-Tika,</i>
Naropa	<i>Ekbir Heruk Sadhan, Bajrayogini Sadhan, Bajrapada Saar Samgraha Panjika, Shri Hebraja Sadhan, Ratnaprabha, Dharma-Abhisheka Marga Samhati, Shri Devi Mahakali Sadhan Upayika, Naropandito Gitika, Bajragiti Shata-akshara- Vattarkasya Sattatraya Vabana, Shri Gujhyaratna Chintamani, Shrichakrasambara Bikurbana- Chaturbingshatidesha Pramana, Shri Bajrayogini Gujhya Sadhan</i>
Naropa of Kashmir	<i>Shri Gujhyasamaja Updesha Panchakrama, Panchakrama Sangraha Provaba, Shrimati Devi Mahakali Gujhyasadhana, Gurubidhi,</i>
Shalipada/Shalipa	<i>Ratnamala, Vairaba Mahakala Sadhana</i>
Dukhandi/Dukhandipa	<i>Mahayana-avatara, Chaturakshara Updesha</i>

Ku(n)chipada/ Ku(n)chipa/ Ku(n)jiipa/Ku(n)bjipa	<i>Shraba Parichhedana,</i>
Achintya/Achinta/ Achinha	<i>Tirthik Chandalika,</i>
Kotalipada/Kotali/ Kuddali/Kodalipa	<i>Chitta Tattwa Upadesha, Achintyakram Upadesha, Atmayoga,</i>
Kamparipada/Karm arpa	<i>Som-Surya Bandhana Upaya,</i>
Rahula	<i>Achintya Parivabana, Charya-Aparadha-Swayammukti Bajrakhechara Sadhana, Natha Samaya Stotra, Utpadanam Samapinam Noiratmo Ekbira Sadhana,</i>
Dhokaripada/Dhok ari/Dhokaripa	<i>Prakriti Siddhi</i>
Medinipada/Medhi ni/Medinipa	<i>Sahaja Amlaya</i>
Yogipada/Yogipa/ Ayoki/Ayogi	<i>Bayusthana Rogaparikshan</i>
Chelukpada/Cheluk a/Chelukpa	<i>Shawranga Yoga Upadesha, Ratna Briksha Nama Rahasya Samajabritti</i>
Gorura/Bagudi	<i>Khechara Rakta Bajrayogini Sadhana</i>
Naguni	<i>Sarira Nadika Bindu Samata Amlaya</i>
Pacharipada/Pachar ipa	<i>Chaturbhuta Bhaba Abhibhasana, Amogha Pasha Panchadeva Stotra, Sarbasiddhikara,</i>

	<i>Lokeswara Stotra</i>
Bhikkhanap/Bhikhanapa/Sonipa	<i>Kalachakra Upadesha</i>
Dwidwanti	<i>Surya Chandra Sadhana</i>
Kumaripada/Kumari	<i>Pradip-Uddipa Tippana</i>
ipa	<i>Hridaya Darpana</i>
Kala Kala	No works survived
Chaparipada/Jabari	<i>Mahayaksha Kalapa</i>
pa/Chaparipa	<i>Nilambaradhara Bajrapani</i>
	<i>Sadhana Mahachakra,</i>
	<i>Mahayaksha Kalapa</i>
	<i>Nilambaradhara Bajrapani</i>
	<i>Sadhana Amritabindu,</i>
	<i>Nilambaradhara Bajrapani</i>
	<i>Pindikrita Sadhana Upayika,</i>
	<i>Nagakula Chatura Sadhana,</i>
	<i>Yaksha Senapati Bishodhanahara</i>
	<i>Nama Sadhana, Preta Pisacha</i>
	<i>Kushmanda Putana-Bishodhana</i>
	<i>Hara Sadhana, Nilambaradhara</i>
	<i>Bajrapani Dharani Bolibidhi,</i>
	<i>Karmashatak-Swapna Karma</i>
	<i>Shatak, Maranmari Amrita,</i>
	<i>Dughdha Amrita Puja, Krodh Naga</i>
	<i>Marana Karman, Nagkula Chatura</i>
	<i>Sadhana, Nilambaradhara</i>
	<i>Bajrapani Homobidhi, Mahayaksha</i>
	<i>Senapati Nilambaradhara</i>
	<i>Bajrapani Mahachakrya Mandala,</i>
	<i>Devagana Stotra, Prititya-</i>
	<i>Samutpada Rakshyaa, Adhishthana</i>
	<i>Mahakala Sadhana,</i>
Kantali/Kantalin	<i>Sahaja Ananta Swavaba</i>
Dhahuli	<i>Shokadrishti</i>

Kapala	No works survived
Sarbabhakhya	<i>Karuna Charshakapala Drishti</i>
Putalipada/Putalipa	<i>Bodhichitta Bayu Charanvabana,</i> <i>Upaya</i>
Panaha	<i>Charyadrishti</i> <i>Onutpanna</i> <i>Tattavabana</i>
Ananga	<i>Bish Nirbahana Vabnakrama</i>
Samuda/Samudra	<i>Sukshma Yoga</i>

Bengali as a language is revered worldwide. We are thankful to Rabindranath Tagore for that to a large extent:

Playing the lyre of your language

Rabi brought the laurel home from the world.

Considering the number of the people speaking this language the position of Bengali is quite praiseworthy; eighth rank in the world. “Of the eleven great languages of the world, which are now current among people numbering more than 50 million, the position of Bengali is the eighth.”⁴ The geographical expanse of this language is not at all small; almost the entire eastern India falls under it. According to Dr Nihar Ranjan Roy, “The Himalayas at the north and from the Himalayas to Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan; at the north-east Brahmaputra and its valley; at the north-west till Darbhanga which was the northern border plain of the river, Bhagirathi; at the east it traverses the hills of Garo-Khasiya-Jayantiya-Tripura-Chittagong and reaches the ocean in the south; at the west the rocky plateau region of Rajmahal-Santhal Paragana-Chhoto Nagpur-Manbhumi-Dhalbhum-Keonjhar-Mayurbhanj; at the south, the Bay of Bengal.”⁵ This was the domain of the development of Bengali language and culture— this was “the geographical region which was the main part of cultural and similar activities of the Bengalese”.⁶

The kings of the Pala dynasty were the rulers of Varendra Bengal. “Rather loosely calculated, the duration of the Pala

dynasty may be considered as the time when the *Charyagitis* were composed. Considering that fact, these poems were composed somewhat between the eighth century (the first Pala king Gopala around 750 A.D) and the twelfth century (the last Pala King Madanpala around 1150 A.D).⁷ A great turmoil arose in Bengal around thirty years after the demise of Mahipala I (988-1038). Different parts of the state rose in revolt against oppression. The zenith of the revolt reached in the form of the Kaivartya Rebellion during the reign of Mahipala II. The king lost his life in that uprising. This was the pale side of a waning moon. The moon though was certainly bright on the other side. Both Dharmapala and Devapala were remarkable kings. It was a golden chapter in Bengal's culture and civilization. Ramapala's court-poet Sandhyakar Nandi, the great scholar of philosophy, Shridhara Bhatta, the learned scholar of ayurvedic medicine, Charaka, the interpreter of Sushruta's (renowned physician) text, Chakrapani Dutta, physician, Madhava, sculptors, Dhimana and Bitapala— all belonged to this age. Although Sanskrit was widely used, the *Charyapadas* were composed in Bengali. The *siddhas* composed many songs and hymns which may be considered as the earliest specimens of Bengali literature. "The regularization of Bengali language across the times was based on the dialects of the western part of Bengal. The *Charyapadas* show us that this process of regularization had begun from the very inception of Bengali language".⁸

Charyapadas were the production of Bengal and the Bengalis. "The abundant presence of dialects of the western part of the Ganges in the *Charyas* often gives the impression that the language is closer to Hindi as Hindi developed from the dialects of this part of the Ganges. But despite the presence of these dialects, the structure of the language remained unchanged. And that structure was quite unlike Hindi, but very similar to Bengali".⁹ Hindi scholars like Rahul Sankrityayan or Kashi Prasad Jayaswal argued that *Charyas* were written in archaic

Hindi. But in reality, “all the poets of *Charyas* didn’t hail from Bihar and those who were considered to be residents of Bihar, were actually residents of Greater Bengal.”¹⁰

Not unlike the researchers from the Hindi belt who try to establish that the *Charyapada* composers were actually Hindi poets, similar attempts have also been noticed in part of the Maithili and Oriya scholars. “Actually, these claims originate from regional bias, not from any concrete linguistic analysis”.¹¹ Thus, it is difficult to admit that *Charayapadas* were composed either in Hindi or Maithili. “The words used in *Charyapadas* which were supposed to be taken from Maithili also belonged to Bengali lexicon”.¹² The presence of pure Bengali elements in the *Charyapadas* is so evident that other elements may be considered as extraneous. Historically speaking, Bengali couldn’t help using those extraneous elements at a time when it was at a nascent stage and it was yet to be standardized. The composers, despite using Bengali as the primary language, had to borrow elements from languages which have already been standardized. “... but in spite of these interpolations, the basic features of *Charyapadas* remained unchanged. Phonetical and other kinds of linguistic analyses have proved that the language of *Charyas*, minus the façade of the *apabhransha*, might be considered as the earliest specimens of Bengali language.”¹³ Despite the regional influences, the language of the *Charyas* is primarily the language of the western half of Bengal. Though it must be admitted that there are opposite views too which try to prove that the *Charya* language is rather related to east Bengali dialect.

Without giving much importance to the difference between west and east, what should be highlighted is the way this language has disregarded the march of time. This continuity is a matter of pride for us. “That this race has not been relegated to oblivion, the credit must go to the Middle-Age Bengali literature preserved in manuscripts. Our ancient art and culture, which used

to be the source of pride, are now in ruins; the annals of our bravery are now only recorded in the tattered pages of history. Only the great poet, Kalidasa (*Raghuvansham*) can say whether our army really met the mighty king Raghu in the battlefield. But there is no denying the fact that it is the Bengali literature—ancient and modern, which has captured the entire thought flow of the Bengali race”.¹⁴ The existence of the *Charyapadas* is a certain proof that along with Sanskrit, literary works were composed in the newly-emerged Bengali language also.

The Pal era was the age of the birth and emergence of Bengali literature. And most of the writers came from the lower castes. It is difficult to believe this fact if we consider the subsequent history of Bengali literature. Great scholars like Haraprasad Shastri, Prabodh Chandra Bagchi, Sukumar Sen, Shashibhusan Dasgupta, Janhabi Kumar Chakraborty dived deep into the ocean of the old Bengali literature and came out with pearl-like knowledge. Commenting on the literature of the Pala dynasty, the great linguist, Acharya Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay advanced, “By the middle of the 10th Century, to which period the earliest extant specimens of Bengali can be referred, the Bengali language may be said to have become distinctive, as the expression of the life and religious aspirations of the people of Bengal, with the nucleus of a literature uniting the various dialectical areas. A new speech entered into being, in order to give expression, later in its life, to some of the highest flights of the human spirit in the religions of poetic imagination and perception”¹⁵. As for the composers of the *Charyapadas*, he said that “[t]he subject matter is highly mystic, especially in the *Caryas*.”¹⁶

The *Charya* composers were Sahajiya Buddhists who believed in *nirvana*. They were either mystics in general sense or they were emotional mystics. Instead of intellect, they gave much more importance to emotions. The emotional mysticism that

characterizes the Sufis could be traced back to these *Charya* composers. What is the meaning of mysticism? It can be said that though material things can be experienced by the sense organs and rational faculty, spiritual aspects cannot be comprehended by those. Mysticism is associated with this concept. Now, if the divine cannot be comprehended by reason, how else it can be understood? There are two theories regarding this. The first theory says that realization of the divine is not totally cut off from intellectual faculties. Humans possess a better faculty than reason and that is intuition. It is this intuition that leads us to the realization of transcendental truth. It must be remembered here that intuition though different from intellect, is not in contravention to the idea of intellect itself but rather a state of excellence of knowledge. The second theory, on the other hand, holds that divine realization has nothing to do with intellectual faculty; it is rather associated with emotion. It can be felt by heart, not to be understood by brain. The divine can be realized only after (not before) the intellectual faculties are erased totally and forever. Thus, in the two theories the common point of convergence is that the divine cannot be realized by intellect; but they differ in the process of that divine realization. The use of the term, ‘mysticism’, for both the theories, might be misleading. It will be better if the first theory which gives valence to intuition is termed as “Intellectual Mysticism” and the second one which highlights the role of emotion can be termed as “Emotional Mysticism”.¹⁷

The religious practice which was suggested in the *Charyas* was mainly associated with that of Sahajyani Buddhism. This religious practice was known as *sahaj* (‘simple’) for two reasons— the practitioners were seeking for the simple and the mode of religious practice was also simple. On one hand, they were looking for the *Sahajananda*; on the other, their rites emanate from not crooked, but simple, natural human body. The other practitioners, while seeking emancipation, attempt to

suppress the natural human desires. The *Charyas* vehemently protest against this unnatural path of emancipation.¹⁸ The *siddhas* were believers in the cult of gurus. Even the *siddhas* coming from the lower caste had a strong belief in the gurus. Abalokiteswar was the guru of Sabaripada, Kankaripada's guru was Yogi, Minapada's guru was Mahadeva, Bhikshayogi was the guru of Chamariyada, Tiloppa was the guru of Naropada, Nagarjuna was the guru of Ku(n)chipada— almost every composer had a guru like these. The guidance of the gurus made the spiritual journey towards enlightenment and fulfilment smooth.

An excerpt of one of Shabaripada's songs is given below:

High up on the hill top the Sabari girl graced,
Gunja chain round her neck, peacock plume on head placed.
O wild, Sabar, mad Sabar, leave not me in cave,
I'm 'Sahaj beauty' of your home for whom you crave.

Here, the livelihood of the Sabars has been depicted; their abodes, their dresses, their nature— all are shown. Whatever may be the hidden meaning of this poem, it is also a portrayal of the lives led by these lower-caste people, as well as an expression of their inner feelings. According to Dr Sashibhusan Dasgupta, "Among the Aryans who came to Bengal and also among the indigenous people who had been living before that, it was the Kols who have got utmost importance in the eyes of the historians. Even today, the impact of the influence of the Kol elements among our race and culture is huge. Among these Kols, castes like Sabar, Pulinda, Dom, Chandal etc. had a major role during the times of the *Charyas*. Naturally, in the *Charyas* they appear to have predominant roles. In the social structure of the time, these tribal races were removed far from the mainstream urban life; thereafter, they thronged the lower strata of society and there is ample proof regarding this."¹⁹

In this essay, we have referred to two major episodes in the Bengalis' land of Chaitanya. The first one is the Kaivartya Rebellion which saw the spontaneous outburst of the lower-caste people. The other is the literary movement of the *Charyas* during the same time. It was a movement which was in direct contravention to Vedic literature. It was also led by people from the lower caste. Thus, we can see that the lower-caste people were involved in both. We cannot declare with any degree of finality that there is any hidden connection between the two. But overall, it can be stated that "literature is always the mirror of social life— not only now but it was even thousand years ago. All the *dohas* and *Charyas* composed thousand years ago reflect the lives of the Bengali race and society; the composers of these *dohas* and *Charyas* wrote about religion but they had real talents. ...They craftily presented the subtle, metaphysical ideas in imagery culled from prosaic, homely things." ²⁰

I shall draw the conclusion to my discussion with the following quotation:

The *siddhas* were primarily from the lower castes— blacksmiths, potters, tanners, washermen, oil-makers etc. They lived in the periphery of the society— at the alehouses, burning ghats etc; Charyas were composed in the colloquial languages so that the common people could appreciate those. How could they even write about deep philosophical musings in the sophisticated Sanskrit language? ... The upper-class elites might have ignored them but the larger section of the society couldn't neglect them for long; their contribution to literature was recognized irrespective of their belonging to the lower castes".²¹

This recognition of these lower-caste poets is indeed a matter of pride for us.

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Word Notes

Apabhransha: Literally “corrupt”, it refers to the dialects spoken around the Ganges before the standardization of the modern languages.

Doha: It is a type of self-containing rhyming couplet. This type of poetry was initiated in *apabransha*.

Doms/Charals: Lower-caste people who functions in various process related to the burning of dead bodies in the crematorium and/or handling the dead bodies in morgues.

Gunjar: A kind of seeds, red and black in colour.

Guru: Spiritual guide.

Kaivartya: Lower-caste people. Aboriginal in origin but later on incorporated into Hinduism.

Kol: Aboriginal tribal group usually found in eastern and north-eastern India.

Mahayani: One of the major Buddhist practices, which professes that enlightenment can be achieved in a single lifetime.

Nirvana: A transcendent state in Buddhism which is free from the cycle of life and death, happiness and suffering and so on.

Kapalik: A practitioner of tantra; often associated with Shaivism.

Varendra: A geographical region in North Bengal in historical times. This part is now in north Bangladesh.

Sahajiya: A type of practices which became popular among the Buddhist yogis of Bengal.

Siddhacharya: A great master of Buddhism who has gone through all the eight stages of yogic practices and contemplations and attained siddhi (emancipation) and perfection.

Sabar: Hunter class people.

Sudra: The lowest varna or caste according to Rig Veda and other Hindu texts. It includes the slaves, servants and other labour class people.

CHAPTER-V

PROTESTANCY OF DALIT LITERATURE

Translated by Asit Biswas

Protestancy pervades the literature of all countries and all languages. It is an ornament of literature. Protestancy exists in Dalit literature as well. It is the chief wealth of Dalit literature. Dalit literature is said to be the literature of protest. The form of oppression in a country of such a socio-economic structure, like India, is very much varied. Here oppression is done in the name of religion, oppression in the name of hateful caste system, and the root of the Varna system has gone deep into earth. Such a system exists in no other country of the world.

In all countries the shackle-breaking lyrics are sung by protestant literature. The Dalits have been relegated through the Varna system, in the name of religion. The right to access to the pleasure store of education and art was to them a faraway incident. Gradually the light of education illumined their sphere, a little bit—the awareness of the Dalit people increased. With the expansion of learning some Dalit people got themselves engaged in arts and literature. Their creation is chiefly protestant in nature. Whether in literary prose or articles, everywhere there runs the stream of realization of their own life that means voice against hatred; that means ventilation of voice against untouchability; that means counter-argument against inhuman treatment of the people. Based on the realization of life the protestancy of Dalit literature has set sail as a firmamental guide. It resembles the creeping advances of a new-born babe. It is breaking the rocks and stones of the uneven path of the harsh world, with the new-grown tender palms and feet. It is not perfect with the tight binding of the art of expression, rather much loosely done. The naked revelation of emotion is noticed in the Adamite's journey to the horizon. Emotionality blunts the

sharpness of the bite of the protestant teeth of Dalit literature. Instead of disapproving of the new-born babe's journey one may accept its existence, as good or bad.

The protestant Dalit literature does not have the sharpness, as noticed in Nazrul or Sukanta. But the revelation of the pain of the deep wounds in the Dalit hearts is not insufficient. The Dalit literature is the repository of the Dalit people's own realization and the protestant Dalit literature is the volcanic ventilation of that realization. It is as lifeless as the withered, fallen flowers, but it fills the air with the odour of the burnt hearts of the Dalits. It resembles the water of the canals and rotten ditches, which is inconsumable but very much useful to the fish living therein, in a word, the habitat for living. There may be limitation of thoughts here, and so does it, but the fictional words of the Dalits should not be considered an ostracized one.

Who can say, the literature that seems to be ostracized today would not be endearingly accepted in due course of the passage of time! So, the manner of gait of the new-born baby is usual— it is spontaneous and bears the hints of the unexplored future. The protestant Dalit literature contains the shackle-breaking songs, the desire for freedom. Its creation continues, out of necessity. It wants to be indomitable in its victorious, moody journey to the world of eternity. The protestant Dalit literature reverberates a special tune— an exhortation for unity. It tends to be straightforward against injustice, by general unity, by eradicating the inner conflicts. As a result, in the sphere of protestant Dalit literature some slogan-like words like political slogans are noticed to be used.

Palms are clutched

Attacks to be launched

Rights to be snatched

To see these corpses

Revolt rises

They finish yours and mine

*The last marks of existence— All look alike in
procession*

Upholding the flag

The passengers move on—

These types of phrases are incorporated into the poems of the poets like certain Manoj Kumar Bain, or Anil Krishna Mullick, or Sukumar Majumder.

The poetic stream of the Dalit poets is a counter-current against current. These Dalit litterateurs do not become the victims of dialectical realization. Dialectical realization is the expression of doubtfulness, *i.e.*, a mixed reaction. The progressiveness of this mixed reaction and the age-old decrepitude cohabit. Modernity and traditional policy exist together. All the litterateurs get affected with dialectics. The litterateurs of the present age, on one hand accepts the scientific logic and on the other, believe in *taga* (sacred thread-armlet) and talisman. They denounce religion but feel elated to accept the post of the President of the puja committee of their locality. Probably their chief endeavour is to establish a relationship with the readers. The greater number of readers a litterateur has the more is his reputation. The Dalit litterateurs have no readers and so, no dialectics. They are theists but the caste sentiment of Hinduism enrages them. Their task is to unbuild the palace of caste pride of Hinduism.

The protestant Dalit literature is as if like the tasks of rearing up an obstinate dashing child—the child who refuses to be controlled, or by chance gets controlled a little bit. He holds the sword of creativity; he is a soldier in the literary front. As an architect of the chain of discourses or a regular creator of protestant Dalit literature, none of them permanently holds the chisel or knife. Yet they write, create something— it is a real incident. In the intervals of his tasks of Professorship the poet, Achintya Biswas composes poems of protestant mood—

Remember, the elites

The Sun in the sky does not forget

The earth's not static at one place, it moves

Throwing hatred, mercy and oppression, you remain carefree,

To the ones who supplied you with food

You hate them bitterly

Those who've kept everything neat

even the drains and roads clear

You've hated them so long

So, day of revenge is impending

The day for pie-to-pie audit is coming.

Similarly, another poet exists in our recollection. Siddha Lingaiah, a university Professor of Kanadi language and literature wrote in his poem “The Dalits are Approaching”—

The Dalits are coming, give way

Give them royal baton

*With thousands of dreams
 Flaming their soul
 They declare thunderously
 Their voice trembles the earth
 There comes the Dalits' procession
 They write with feet on the ground.*

The poet, Siddha Lingaiah does not remain unmoving. He makes his speech clearer,

*The Dalits approach, leave passage
 Give the Dalits the state
 By throwing the Thakurs and gurus into dung pit,
 The ministers and administrators into drain-water
 They're coming, by making their own way
 With thunder-flare in hands
 The sparks of transition
 The flaming coal pieces are scattered all around
 The Dalits come, leave the passage
 Give them the royal power.*

The nature of some of the Dalit poets is as follows—

The poet, Mohan Tanu Mondal says,

*Old Godadhar of the Bagdipara
 Bent but with stick still walking*

The black Dom woman covers her shame with torn clothing

The day is coming

The day is itself awakening

Around them the Bahujan with blue flag exhort.

A senior poet, Nishikanta Majumder says,

O India, the India of the twentieth century

What makes you proudly swell?

Still now the majority of your children

Are termed slum dogs, wild, aboriginals!

They're rustic, wild, uneducated, half educated

Still, they're afraid of ghosts, witches and demons!

... Anthropology, sociology all are to you

Mere information, a theory you yourself don't accept,

You don't believe, but pretend to do.

As you don't accept

Caste division and untouchability exist in your heart.

Fie, you, hundred times, fie.

Gurudas Biswas, a poet from Koraput district ventilates in his poem,

There's a storm in the sky

Doomsday fire kindles, thunderous roars fly

Slogans are heard all around

The sky and air vent martial sound
Sudra has Rudra shape, terrific guy.
The Dalits are united by severing hundred knots
Almighty's boon's democracy, sharp weapon's votes
We'll seize today the royal seat
Accept the fake ruling not a bit
Millions of soldiers united, no more fear in eye.
Today soul's thirst, all quench
Build up your own palace
Friend, use own power, be own lord thereby.

The aged poet, Narendranath Das:

Those neglected, oppressed and got forever injustice
You've trodden, killed and thought it your rightful practice.
Oppression, domination, your conscience's sharpness stole
Where will they find the generosity of a human soul
Those who human but break at human's door their poll
Those who're in this world beneath all behind all
I'll prosecute for them in the humans' court hall.

A world-known poet is the scholarly Anil Biswas. By proper utilization of his sheer knowledge in English and Bengali he made the Bengali poems reach the people of the whole world. The poet recently translated 282 poems by 200 poets from the period of *Charyapada* to the modern period, in his book titled "A

Book of Bengali Verses” (“A Comprehensive Anthology”). A poem in this book is as follows—

*I recollect, in Madad city that day's fiesta of fires
The Manusmriti, superstitions are burnt in pyres
On the heart of India, the Gutenberg of Germany
showers
The world people see the new human shapes of Luther
King
There're the pundits and many Shankaracharyas
escaping
From maths and temples. They break into pieces idol-
institution
The breaker is Ambedkar: sounds in interest of majority
population
Bugle, and martial music he composed the Constitution.*

...

*But the justice of law is abolished
In the year of Justice of law where's the promised
aesthetic!*

In a one-line poem the poet, Binoy Majumder says—

*The king of the world has the fear; let me not be a
beggar.*

The Marathi Dalit poet, Atmaram Koniram Rathore says,

*Say, how long more you'll call us 'Dalits',
How long more
We'll have to study
This same chapter
For how long you'll shower
Mercy upon us
Say, how long more
We'll have to practise
The hounds' manners
You people who are
Teaching us this lesson*

*Should know
This remedy will no more
Be effective and bear fruits.
All this is for your ownership,
To keep it under your control.*

Jangalram Hella sings of the first phase Dalit poet, Raicharan's poetic brilliance and says—

*Your one hundred-nineteenth death anniversary is
coming shortly
At a sad moment you undertook the transition
Nobody knows what happened exactly
You originated in a Sudra race— only this I
know,
You are a Dalit, an oppressed panther...
The revelation of that burning heart
Is the merit of your poetry.
Why did you write "National Awakening"
Why, o ancient Dalit poet
Whoever listened to others,
If not hit with hammer?
Sanjoy Bairagi says,
I'm poverty, the replica of ruin, the garbage of the
century
I hate myself, only consolation—
I am the creation of you people.*

Panchu Gopal Roy says,

*Where am I going, where to go, how long more
Degradation is all around, the signals of thunder.*

Parimal Baidya says,

*Signal to the sojourner with mistaken path
Due to pride of supplying the wretched earth
With showers of cooling rain of rainy season
Hist'ry takes up plate of flower-sandal.*

Asim Kumar Biswas says,

*Dalit community is awakened
 To annihilate caste, they expect
 The auspicious time is coming
 Forcibly snatch away due respect.*

We lost an aged protestant poet a few years ago. Sudhir Kumar Roy, at Chetar in Bihar said in a poem (on 9th May, 1974),

*What a deep sympathy, how much your affection
 O scoundrel! You have kept both-sided relation
 O you, cunning one
 Incomparable is your pretension
 This wrathful roar of the hungry ones
 Listen you with your own ears
 No pardon, no reprieves
 The people are sharpening the knives.*

Marathi Dalit poet Waman Nimbalkar says,

*I knew nothing, since then we learnt
 We are lower caste
 The headman kicks my father
 Utters abuses to my mother,
 Yet they don't look up.
 Only my heart
 Bears the marks of wounds.*

Rahul Purakayastha says,

*Your quiet heart bleeds
 All your country bleeds
 Now and then it bleeds
 At Kansara and Arwall.*

Sarada Prasad Kisku says,

*Let's get tied with imperishable thread
 And hold the ladder in the same boat.*

Hajari Rajowar says,

*In Orissa not Oriya
 In the west we're not natives
 In Bengal, not Baangali*

Are we mere burdens?
You people enjoy all.

Haradhan Majumder says,

*How long more shall we remain in world without voice?
Depriving us others are deriving pleasure and joys.*

Jatindra Mohan Majumder says,

*The skin is fair or dark complexioned, but
The blood has red colour
Who says, caste Hindus are upper castes
The Chandals are lower?*

Pasupati Mahato says,

*Have you heard the weeps of Amazon
Have you heard the agony of Mississippi
Pretoria weeps still now
Sabarnekha weeps still now
Alas! It smoulders and vents.*

Kshirod Biswas,

*The back bleeds, that's torn with whip,
You've seen no fire in his heart deep?*

Anil Chandra Poddar,

*The volcano that was dormant
Has today opened its crater
It erupts fast to finish
The caste and racial matter.*

Bhubaneswar Nath,

*O you, it's blue flag's exhortation
You Dalits, all at once come on
To bring oppression and injustice to an end.*

Chira Prasanta Bagdi,

*It's deep dark, in light of light-flies
In wild flowers' fragrance, in nocturnal cold
I'll walk towards the unknown— far away
It has loved me, man
Has hated me, man.*

*Hatred-poison mingled with love
Has made me Nilkantha.
O Sun, hide your face under fire.*

Sukumar Majumder,

*Grow in the garden of literature
Missile, grenade, patriot, scat,
So many words else
Perforate with the words and sounds
The black curtain of the naked civilization ...*

Sukumar Das,

*On the bank of Alakananda
There're wild grasses
Deeper gauze scarf of peace
The domestic house of God
On the walls of the strangled temple
On all sides
Sculpted with stones of deprivation
Men as mummies.*

Sudhangsu Sekhar Mondal,

*Brahmanism, the architect of caste division,
Let it be extinct
From world history forever.*

Raicharan Siddha,

*Your torture has made us today desperate
So, there are flames of fire at various places—
Fire of protest.*

Ashoke Arinda,

*The thrilling history of the deprived voice
Will exist in every family.*

Madhurima Mondal,

*Deconstructing the touch of your happy society
We'll construct a new society
With bower of blue blossoms.*

Bimal Kanti Biswas says,

*A summer storm from the north-west rose
Thence in this part of the world
Only the north wind blows.*

Manoj Kumar Bain,

*Still now naked is his wintry night
Still empty stomach, unarmed he'll travel like virus.*

Chinmoy Roy,

*The hard-earned fruit brings about severe revolt
Children of Sambuka rise up, with death in hand
The sun-burnt dry blood of the knowledge aspirant
Life beats on earth surface with awakening words.....*

Asish Baran Sarkar,

*In all ages to the deprived people
There comes revolution
It comes to history
To sever the shackle of oppression
Of the struggling lives
To redden the road with abir.*

Sushama Maitra,

*In this way I lose my existence
Considering myself helpless every moment
I have finished my own existence.*

Shyamal Biswas,

*Wanna unbuild the fort of Bastille?
Charge then newly formulated
Dynamite.*

Shyamal Pramanik,

*Who were unconscious so long in snake-sleep
Almost dead, now get awakened,
Awakened are the queues of starving people.*

Hira Sadhak,

*Hands hold placards, banners, caps of various colours
On the road of capital, demanding release of Mandela
Indian agitation.*

Basanta Kumar Mondal,

*Wherever, whenever anything invented
The subalterns played chief role,
The elites came and enlisted names
Got seated, swelled, took the whole.*

Mohitosh Biswas,

*High ambition, money, fame
Here, in saffron dust, sticky mud of trodden path
Seem to be a meaningless smile of delirium.
Yet banished is the sinless Pandava's life.
Launched lifelong struggle on the last path of exit.*

In memoriam of the folk poet, Bijoy Adhikary (popularly known as "Bijoy Sarkar") Harendranath Samaddar says,

*Pleasurable music ballads full of joyous waves
On open air theatre, showering nectar, swayed
The happy plights and curious hearts satisfied
Acclaims from all sides sounded from hundred voice.*

Hrishikesh Halder says,

*Sometimes I wish, in rage and sorrow
Burn down manuscripts and weep aloud.*

Kiranchandra Brahma,

*Philanthropy was your sole concern
This is why I rush towards you.*

Chuniram Mahato says,

*You pointed at me and showed
O, lo, you my dear,
Another mama of yours.
The love is ruined.*

Badal Krishna Sarkar,

*It's the auspicious moment of creation-pleasure
No more time-killing in lethargy,
At once sending down the thought-robot
Lift up precious gems from the hidden caves.*

Monoranjan Modal,

*You polish others' shoes
 You are barefooted
 Endure you silently
 Kicks of them, muted?*

Kapil Krishna Thakur,

*Who is barbarous, who suffers from primitivism
 From whose heart still now civilization
 Cannot erase out the marks of barbarity
 Who still cunningly, craftily suck human blood?*

In the beginning of the twentieth century a literary journal titled, 'Pataka' ('Flag') used to be published. In memory of the Editor, Mukunda Mullick the protestant poet, Anil Krishna Mullick argued in protestant manner,

*You wanted to free from slavery the ever-fallen ones
 Compromise with unjust and untrue— by no chance.*

In the parts of the poems of the above poets, in general, the protestant nature is noticed. The protest is sometimes launched against the temples and its traditional tolls of bells, sometimes against the worshippers of Brahmanism and Shankaracharya, sometimes against casteism and Varna system, sometimes against oppression and domination, sometimes against the ruler who gave birth to poverty and starvation, and sometimes illiteracy and superstitions. The protestant Dalit literature attempts to wipe off the destined fate of the ages, of a group of people. The protestant Dalit literature through its protestancy gives the hints of a future yet to come. All the protestant voices get awakened by consciousness. Love lies in the outburst of sorrow. That love establishes confidence in man. The people get united against ever-existing deprivation and raise slogans, and the chief role behind this slogan is played by protestant Dalit literature.

Word-Notes:

Bagdi: A 'lower' caste in Hinduism.

Para: Locality (part of a village).

Dom: A 'lower' caste in Hinduism, whose profession was/is handling dead bodies (in morgue or/and burning ghats).

Bahujan: Literally majority of people, but now-a-days it refers to the untouchable Hindus and religious minorities who are the majority in Indian population.

Sudra: The 'lowest' caste in Hindu religious hierarchy.

Rudra: Lord Shiva, the non-Aryan God who is thought to be the god of doom.

Poll: The upper part of the head.

Charjapod/Charyapada: The first Bengali poems.

Manusmriti/Manusanhita: An infamous Hindu religious text relegating the Sudras and creating religious status quo.

Shankaracharya: Hindu religious guru.

Moth/Math: Hindu religious and residential place.

Nilkantha: 'Nil' means blue, 'Kantha' means throat; 'Nilkantha' refers to the non-Aryan god Shiva who kept the poison into his throat, at the request of the Aryan gods. As result his throat was blue. Now-a-days 'Nilkantha' mean any person who gladly agrees to suffer for others' sake.

Alakananda: A river believed sacred in Hinduism.

Sambuka/Shambuk: A Hindu 'lower'-caste character in the *Ramayana*, whom Ram killed because he had read the *Geeta*. Now-a-days the Dalits deprived of elite-class facilities identify themselves with Sambuka.

Abir: A kind of red or pink powder sprinkled in the Hindu religious ceremonies.

Pandava: The sons of Pandu in the *Mahabharata*, considered honest.

Mama: Maternal uncle.

Varna: The four classes in Hindu religious hierarchy, namely Brahman, Kshatriya, Baishya and Sudra.

CHAPTER-VI

THE BACKGROUND OF DALIT LITERATURE

Translated by Ishita Roy

Dalit literature means a literature of protest. But against whom and why is this protest? The theme of this article revolves round the background of Dalit literature. A huge number of literatures have been created to promote the greatness, generosity and ramifications of Hinduism. This is traditional literature. The purpose or subject-matter of Dalit literature is neither to raise any question about that perpetual and traditional literature, nor to empty its venom against that literature, nor to oppose it, nor to refute its durability, eternity and vastness. Beside this traditional literature, there exists another trend of parallel literature, that is, Dalit literature. It is the literature on the Dalits' philosophy of life, produced by the untouchable people.

It is the literature of ventilation of hearts of the people who have been considered untouchable and unwanted, and the burden of the society, because of the existing division and discrimination fabricated by subterranean stream flowing in the innermost recess of the 'great' Hindu Religion. The writings on the philosophy and livelihood of them are Dalit literature. The inhuman aspects that dwelt in the core of the heart of Hindu Religion play the vital role in the background of Dalit literature.

It is a long history, how inhumanity otherwise known as caste-system existing in the innermost strata of Hindu Religion has created a deep crisis by having branded and segregated a group of people in the society and this history is considered to be the background of Dalit literature. A little bit of attempt has been made in this article in order to trace out the inhuman root of the background. So, the discussion of this background bears no sweetness, no gracefulness, no glory of the loving relationship among the people; rather it bears the pain of breach of trust, anger

out of inferiority complex, troubles and tribulations of being dehumanised, and insult to humanity. As a result, this discourse may be censured as laughable and perverted delirium to a certain kind of people, instead of being appreciated and adored. It may be considered to be frivolous and thus is nugatory. Yet it is the revelation of truth— manifestation of inviolable truth; it is badly necessary to make it public and known to all. The name of this act is “Dalit literature” and the centre of content on which it revolves is its background.

The way torrential drops of rain wets, softens the huge and vast area of hinterland may appear useless to some, but the rain whose drops make its own shower-soaked field green with corns must be beyond argument and thus is glorified with its own magnificence. Dalit literature is the Dalit people’s own treasure, the treasure of their heart and it continues to be created amidst immense love of the Dalits. So, the background of it has gradually been revealed.

Every communist instantly says, humankind is divided into two: the rich and the poor. In the modern terminology, they are called ‘Exploiter’ and ‘Exploited’. The other names of them are bourgeois and labour, and in English, ‘Haves’ and ‘Have-nots’. Whatever names they may have, the root of this was deep-rooted in the ancient manuscripts, *i.e.*, the religious scriptures. This article involves itself with the discussion, chiefly, of *Manusanhita*, which was written in the second century or earlier. Since then, the idea of the exploiter and the exploited has been codified. We, the Sudra people were born under that tree; we still bow our heads before the heartless Manu’s feet smeared with the dirt of his step-motherly attitude. Where is religion, there is probably our weakness. It seems, the hungry and poverty-stricken people have weakness for religion and are excessively devout. So, unlike the Charvaka, they are unable to launch a revolt as atheist. The Sudras having their deep reverence to the

religion spend their time in the religious dungeon where the burden of inhuman curse erodes their lives.

At the outset of the article, I might have been a little bit sentimental or unrestrained or pain-stricken. In fact, what I managed to say was the narration of the exploiter and the exploited classes, or the parasite and the labouring classes who, according to *Manusmriti*, are known as ‘*Dwija*’ (twice born) and ‘*Sudras*’ respectively. Manu has said in verse (hymn) (*Manusmriti*: 10/40):

“Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya are twice born,

The fourth is the Sudras, fifth is none.”

It means, the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya— these three classes are twice-born people, the fourth is known as Sudras. There is no existence of fifth class.

Here, now, how the Sudras are victimised by inhumanity may be discussed in respect of Manu. What division the scripture writer has made among the people, as *Dwija* and *Sudra* is, in fact, the classification into the rich and the poor, socially upper-caste people and the untouchable people who are outside the society, the division of bourgeois and labourer. There is a specific dictation in the religious scripture to make the rich richer and the poor poorer, and in support of this discriminatory dictum, rules and regulation are sanctified by the *Manusanhita*. Our society and its stratification have been built up on the basis of such dictum and so has been its economic base of the haves and the have-nots. The anthropologists may cudgel their brains to find out the actual meaning of ‘*Dwija*’ and its history. The authors of religious scriptures have stated that who hold the right of the sacred thread rituals are known as ‘*Dwija*’ and all others are *Sudras*.

Manu's law has been composed through the religious ideology— "The people belonging to the Dwija class are absolutely absolved of direct menial work unless they fall in the situation of danger. They are free from the liabilities of menial labour. The liability of hard menial labour must be burdened by the Sudras." According to Manu's dictum, the Sudras are the only labouring class; *i.e.*, the proletariats of this country are none other than the Sudras. It is, of course, a well-known fact to all that compared to the total population the number of the Dwijas is very poor, a meagre one. In short, on the one hand there are the minority class of the parasites and the huge number of the labourer class; they are the majority since they have the liability of providing the whole society with food, clothes and other luxuries, pleasures. What a pity Manu had for these working people! Manu has left the sample of such pity in the holy scriptures in which he has laid down the instructions how the working people or the Sudras should maintain their lives and what will be their bounden duty. This is an ironical phenomenon. The verse of Manu (10/121) says, "The Sudras shall serve the Brahmins and if they are unable to earn their livelihood by rendering their services only to the Brahmins, they will nurse the Kshatriyas and then will serve the wealthy Vaishyas."

Manu's writing in this stage has got its own dynamic force. Manu's hymn (10/122,123) created a fear of hell in the mind of the Sudras. Manu dictates, "Serve the Brahmins for Heaven, or your livelihood or both." Be gratified to say, "I am the servant of the Brahmins". The actual duty of the Sudras is to serve the Brahmins, nothing but to serve the Brahmins; otherwise, whatever else they do will be futile."

Dalit literature means a literature of protest. Herein lies the subject-matter of protest— the humiliation imposed upon its own people inside Hinduism and it is the background of Dalit literature. Now-a-days we see everywhere the labour

movements. The labouring classes are organised to protest against exploitation, demand their legitimate wages. Likewise, Dalit literature is a literature of protest. The focal point of this literature is to provide the deaf and dumb, meek people, with words. It is the magic word for awakening the untouchables. It is the call for radiance in a dark room.

The working classes are demanding their due wages, the proletariats are agitating, and the Sudras are organising literary movements. Every one of them belongs to a different position of a periphery. Every one, whether the labour or the Proletariat or the Sudra, is, from a single line, shooting the sharp weapons aiming at the central point. Manu's dominant authority is the main disease of the society in this country. It is inevitably essential to cure this disease. The very smell of Manu's verse testifies to the fact that he is the sole creator and preacher of Brahmanism. In his verse (10/124), Manu says, "The Brahmin will fix a Sudra's wage by considering his ability and capacity of nursing service, labour-skill, and the number of the dependent members of his family. The verse takes us to the conclusion that the Sudras and the labours are the same. So, who is a Sudra is the worker, the proletariat. The hymn 10/125 makes us easily feel how cruel the Brahminist Manu was to the Sudras, in which it is said that the Brahman will offer the Sudras for their service to them, the orts to eat, torn clothes to wear, torn bed to lie in and husk of paddy. It is clear from this verse that the Dwijas (it is already mentioned that Dwijas are not only the Brahmins) were very ungenerous, unkind to the Sudras and it is dictated that the Sudras will have to live, depending on the pity and mercy of the Dwijas.

Since that primitive age, the labourers or the Proletariats or the Sudras have been exploited and suffering from the burden of poverty. It has been almost impossible for them to survive by lessening the burden of poverty. The poor became poorer day by

day. Manu has strongly given instruction in his verse to see that the exploited class or the Dalits cannot accumulate or save more wealth. In his verse (10/129), Manu says that the Sudras are not entitled to the accumulation of wealth at any cost, even if they are able to do so, because the accumulation of wealth by the Sudras torments the Brahmins. The Sudras, devoid of religious knowledge, may dishonour the Brahmins.” The masters’ bourgeois-attitude is conspicuously noticed here— and it also reveals the authoritative instruction for oppressing the exploited eternally in the grinding machine of oppression.

Therefore, though terminologically different, religion has given birth to an economic discrimination in a society extremely stratified on basis of caste. The Marxists of this country never acknowledge this truth. They only propagate that the only factor of discrimination prevailed in the society is economical. Religion has produced caste-colour system in its magnitude and afterwards the economic discrimination has been created in Indian society. So, it is not difficult to realize that the Marxists’ endeavour to launch an economic struggle, without criticizing the caste system, and thereby keeping the caste system alive is a mere trick and it is a cunning trick to eternalize the caste system. Religion has produced the bourgeois or exploiters. The working class only get the subsistence level of the produce they create by their toil and labour— their share is so meagre that they can somehow survive— on the other hand the lion share of produce— the surplus value— has been consumed by those people who are always absolved of menial labour and destined to enjoy elegant life. In this way the poisonous tree of exploiter-exploited had been planted in the ground of our ancient India and since then its obnoxious effect has been flowing through our social, economic and educational system. How many people of India are below poverty line, how many villages of Bengal are still devoid of education facilities, or in how many lower-caste slums-dwellers in Bihar have been burnt to death— the statistics

is no matter of significance; significant is to awaken the consciousness of the people, to point out the problems and to find out the cure for the problems. Where inhumanity has been given indulgence for long, there it is necessary to get strongly determined to chop down the log of inhumanity. Dalit literature is committed to that mission and it has been sharpening the consciousness of the Dalits. The gradual revelation and interpretation of its background has strengthened the caste-struggle and so, the probability of annihilation of castes in near future has been brighter.

Let me try more, in order to explore the background of Dalit literature and to discover the cause of the backwardness of the Dalits in the fields of education and art and culture. The facility of education does not reach all the places and all the people. The cause of the backwardness of the people of the remote villages and of the slums can be traced out in the manuscripts. In this context Manu argues in his hymn (10/1), “Twice born *varnas* are three in number, e.g., “Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya; all these three *varnas* respectful to their own religion will study the Vedas; but among them only the Brahmins will preach the Vedas. Kshatriya or Vaishya will never preach the Vedas. Sudras will never read or listen to the Vedas.” Manu prescribed to cut off the tongue of a Sudra if he reads the Vedas and pour hot oil into ear if he listens to the Vedas. So, the right to education is not equal for all and for the Sudras no right at all. Some will be scholars by studying and some will remain illiterate. Some will be superior, some inferior. Its reference is found in the second verse of the tenth chapter of *Manusmriti*. In his verse (10/2) Manu says, “Superior in caste identity, studying and interpreting the Vedas, eligible by following the prescribed rules and having the specialty of reformation the Brahmin is superior to all else— the Kshatriya, the Vaishya and the Sudra.” In fact, Manu was no individual man. Manu known as the son of Lord Brahma had the endeavour to keep Brahminism surviving.

He in his verse (11/236) says, “To achieve perfection in knowledge is the goal of Brahmin, to save him is the Kshatriya’s duty; agriculture, business and animal farming are the Vaishya’s sacred mission; and the profession of the Sudra is to render services to these Dwijas.” So, the interpretation of the ancient religious text, *Manusmriti* makes it clear that the Sudras have been relegated under the wheel of religion in the journey of oppression for ages. Dalit literature dreams of their upliftment, and has followed the path of creativity for sake of their rehabilitation.

Let me discuss Manu, advancing one step more. Manu was very cautious that the Dwijas might have no soft corner for the Sudras. In other words, Manu was very much cautious that the bourgeois might not join the class of the proletariats. Manu in his verse (2/168) says, “The Brahmin who renders menial labour instead of studying the Vedas will be transformed into Sudra, in his lifetime, with his whole clan-members.” So, his whole endeavour was for securing a permanent position for the Dwija, and Sudra was a permanent Sudra in all his births and rebirths. This is why Manu sowed the seed of hatred and humiliation for the Sudras, in his *Sanhita* (abbreviated form of *Manusanhita*). In verse No. 2/126 Manu says, “The Brahmin who does not know how to greet in return of a greetings, does not deserve greetings from a learned man. He is as undeserving for greetings as a Sudra is.” Here Manu conspicuously preached not to consider the Sudras as human beings. Proletariat means mean animals— Sudra means the same— no respect for them, rather hate them as much as you can. In this article ‘bourgeois’ means the wealthy exploiters and ‘proletariat’ means the poor lower-caste people deprived of the light of education. So, the terms ‘Dwija’ and ‘bourgeois’ have become synonymous, and ‘Sudra’ and ‘proletariat’ have become synonymous. In this context it must be admitted that there are a few Sudras who have a bourgeois mentality; in spite of being Sudra they do not belong

to the proletariat class. Similarly, it is also not right that all the Dwijas are bourgeois. It must be remembered that all the Brahmins are not Brahminist.

So far, I have discussed some known and unknown facts of Manu. It is also a known fact that since times immemorial man is habituated to live in groups. The people formed groups and established their dwelling at various places. And the hatred-stricken untouchable people bearing their utter poverty built up their habitats at remote villages or on hills or in jungles and sometimes in the wretched slums beside the cities. The light of education did not reach them, even after forty years of Independence. How will it reach? The people in dark remain dark still now. In Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamilnadu two to ten slums were bunt to ashes at the same time. It is no coincidence. The cause and effect if properly investigated gives the trace of the causes in the ancient manuscripts. Manu in the verse of his *Sanhita* (11/132) says, "If one knowingly kills cat, mongoose, bird, frog, dog, ass, owl or crow, one should undergo the purification ceremony as one should in case of killing a Sudra." The heirs of Manu have inherited the provocation of killing the Sudras from Manu. As per Manu's law the killing of a Sudra is equivalent to that of a frog. So far as the value is concerned there is no difference between the two. Keeping this inhumanity at the forefront, the Dalit literature tries to find out the way to creativity, and sharpens the weapon of protest.

We desire for emancipation from this. Let inhumanity no longer be given indulgence. Why don't the strong voices of the formal institutional newspapers shout aloud in protest when any incidents of burning or inhumanity, cruelty and violence are seen? A small quarterly magazine named, "Sarasandhan" ("Shooting the Arrow") published from south Kolkata does that. It is also done by a monthly magazine titled, "Adol Badol"

(“Change and Exchange”) published from Salt Lake City. But their power is limited.

In context of the background of Dalit literature let me refer to two more incidents in the religious texts. These incidents are seen to be referred to again and again in Dalit literature. First, I recollect the incident of the murder of Sambuka in the *Ramayana*.

Sambuka, the son of a Sudra was absorbed in deep austerity in topsy-turvy posture in order to physically reach heaven. One day a Brahmin with a dead son in his lap came to Lord Ram’s court and angrily asked, “O king, please answer, which crime brought about the premature death of the Brahmin son. You are God Ramchandra. What is the cause of this mishap in God’s kingdom?”

In order to find out the cause the king accompanied by his courtiers went out and entered the jungle and discovered Sambuka in deep austerity, in topsy-turvy posture. The king asked him, “Who are you and what are you doing?” Sambuka fearlessly replied that he was Sambuka, the son of a Sudra and he was desirous of meeting god by asceticism. The king instantly beheaded him, with his naked sword. The gods applauded him, the Brahmin did the same and the dead son also resurrected.

The incident of Ekalavya in the *Mahabharata* also agitates the Dalit litterateurs. Ekalavya, the son of Hiranyadhanu wanted to have martial education from Guru Dranacharya. As Ekalavya belonged to the fowler community, Dranacharya refused to accept him as a student. Refused due to his Sudra identity Ekalavya entered a jungle, built up a timber statue of Dranacharya and attentively engaged himself in deep practices, and by virtue of his yoga and austere practices he became a specialist in archery. One day Dranacharya along with Arjun and other students entered the jungle of Ekalavya, for hunting deer.

A dog of theirs was roaming about the jungle and seeing the leafy clad, jotted-haired Sambuka began barking aloud. Disturbed by the barking of the dog breaking his concentration Ekalavya shot seven sound-sensing arrows into the mouth of the dog. The dog got mute and, in that condition, returned to Arjun and his companions, and all got astonished and began to appreciate the archer. Then they, in search of the archer, reached Ekalavya and asked his identity. Ekalavya identified himself as the son of a Sudra and the student of Dranacharya.

Then the disheartened Arjun informed Dranacharya of all the incident and said, “You’ve been telling me that you’ve no student more favourite than me; then how the fowler’s son got proper education? You’ve not taught me this kind of sound-sensing tricks. Now I feel there exists more heroic person than me in this world.”

When Arjun thus ventilated his sorrow Drana along with Arjun went to Ekalavya and asked his identity; Ekalavya replied as earlier. Then Dranacharya deceitfully demanded Ekalavya’s finger as his tuition fees.

Dranacharya did not appreciate the fowler’s son. Rather he took necessary step in order to make his quality ineffective. The interpretation of the two incidents show that as Sambuka achieved expertise in the Brahmins’ activities and Ekalavya in the Kshatriyas’ they deviated from their paths. At these incidents, in order to discover the truth of the inner selves, the Dalit literature spontaneously assumes protestancy. In strong language Dalit literature serves the cruel truth of the background to all and that is the task of Dalit literature.

Mahasweta Debi saw the aboriginal people of West Bengal very closely. A few days back I read the article “Lodha Sabar in West Bengal” written by her. It is an incident of a remote village. She said, “I got hurt to go to Lengamara village. The poor

parents there no longer send their children to schools. Because going to school for four years they could not learn the alphabet. It is a bitter and detestable fact that, in this state also, especially in the tribal localities, when the tribal children come for education, the teacher, if not himself/herself a tribal person, does not welcome the incident. In West Bengal it is also a fact that many tribal youths are unemployed but the primary school teachers belong to other communities. In Bandyon and other blocks mostly tribe-populated, in West Bengal there are many schools, but in name only. Neither the teachers come nor the schools run.” The writer has focussed on the economic condition of the tribes, as well as education.

She said, “The name of the village is ‘Madhabpur.’” The name of Police Station and Block is ‘Narayangorh’ where there are 32 Lodha families having 99 people. The number of totally landless families is 12. Seventeen families were allotted vested land. Twenty-three boys and girls go to school. They get nothing from the school, no books, no tiffin, no clothes, no slates. Seventeen families earn Rupees thirty per month each; twelve families Rupees sixty; one family Rupees twenty; another family Rupees one hundred twenty-five. One family has two members, both workless. They have no income. When a family of six members earns Rupees sixty per month, it is very natural that the Lodha child at the age of seven would graze cattle or do something else, but would not go to school. When a Lodha child goes to school the teachers of other castes misbehave with and ridicule him/her. So many times, the Lodha mothers told me, “Please send the Santhal or Lodha teachers to our village. The teachers belonging to higher castes hate us. They make our children perform their domestic works and carry water.” Even after forty years of Independence this is the real picture of the Dalits. The plight of these people is the background of Dalit literature— they are the dramatis personae of Dalit literature.

Another astonishing fact is noticed in West Bengal. Some religious leaders emanated from the Sudras. In a Zamindar family at village of Meherpur in Murshidabad district there was a gate-keeper named 'Balaram Harhi', Sudra in caste; he was a trustworthy gate-keeper. Once on a festive day there gathered a large number of relatives and incidentally the precious gold-necklace was found missing from the idol of the mother goddess in the temple. It was taken for granted that no relatives could steal the necklace and Balaram Harhi was the suspected thief and so, he was severely beaten up. In utter rage and sorrow Balaram gave up his job and went to jungle and began devotional austerities and in a short period he got divinely empowered. The words of his mouth were proved to be true. He gathered a large number of disciples in almost no time.

On the bank of the river Karotoya in north Bengal there was the hermitage of Thakur Panchanan. He was also a Sudra and he had a large number of followers all over north Bengal. Harichand Thakur of Orakandi in Faridpur district (now in Bangladesh) was also a superman with divine power. He has also a huge number of disciples in both West Bengal and Bangladesh. He was the founder of the Matua philosophy. The 'Bhoja Community' of Balaram Harhi of Meherpur, the 'Matua Community' of Harichand of Orakandi, the followers of Panchanan of Cooch Behar are not poor in number. Although their religious consciousness exists in the periphery of generosity none other than the Sudras becomes their disciple. It is as if a cottage of a separate yard of the Sudras. The incident of life and death of the Chuyarh poet, Bondyoghoti Gangi, of jungle, is a pathetic one. These incidents are incorporated in the background of Dalit literature.

In this country the people who are socially and economically backward are the majority; they are the

proletariats, and they have been carrying the burden of curses since times immemorial.

The mass awareness of the proletariat surely comes one day. Then the ruling class is jeopardized; the probability of making over the power comes there. But in the socio-economic and religious obstacles, as in India, that probability is far away. The religious ideals of our country are dominated by stoicism of Vaishnavism. It is a unanimous ideology. The other name of this consciousness is idealism or vacuumism, because it makes one free from any fascination for domestic life. Who is your wife, who is son? None is yours. All are maya. Only substantial one is the supreme Lord.

What is the path of reaching that supreme Lord? Manu said, "One who has met the Lord by meditation, does not confine himself by committing sins (6/74)." Manu in his verse (6/75) added, "By non-violence, by suppressing the power of the senses, by performing the daily duties as per the Vedas, by performing austerities like Chandrayan one may reach the feet of the supreme Lord, in earthly life." So, the summary is that negligence of earthly things may bring one moksha. The greed for this moksha makes the people idealistic. Even the Sudras who were created by God, for mere slavery, as per the scripture of Manu, also remains strictly faithful to Manu's religions and scripture. Any deviation from this faith means atheism leading to eternal hell. The fear of falling into hell prevails in the minds of all; its roots have gone deep even into the hearts of the Dalits. The 'Santiparba' (chapter of peace) of the *Mahabharata* describes the ultimate condition of the atheists. So, who dares tread the path of atheism? This is why Dalit literature never reverberate the tune of atheism. There exists the protest against the inhumanity of religion, the overture of war, but the logic in favour of atheism seldom prevails.

So far as the varied subject-matter is concerned Dalit literature is a new face of literary endeavour. It looks into and interprets the traditional things from a new viewpoint. It is evident that Sri Chaitanyadeb who was the godfather of Vaishnavism and lovingly embraced all the lower castes and the upper castes had deep love for the castes below the position of the Brahmins. Sribas, Jogai, Madhai, Mukunda Dutta, Yavan Haridas etc.— the Brahmins and non-Brahmins were his disciples, but nowhere we find the trace of the name of any Sudra disciple of Sri Chaitanya.

Dr Debiprasad Chattopadhyay in his article, “Philosophy and Politics” (in Bengali) attempted to prove that the ancient Indian idealistic philosophy was complementary to the ongoing system of oppression. The revolution that may be an offshoot of the system of oppression has no room there. He argued, “An aeroplane of philosophical theory took up the merciful heart of Arjun to so high a world of idealism that the existence of the real world is obscure there; the claim of its existence is evaporated in the eternal vacuum; as per the philosophers’ version, idealism exists in that high world. Who kills from there, who are killed? Who are they who by consuming the meagre amount of the waste grains somehow continue living? And who are they who relish the delicious dish of diet with numerous items? Who are the ones destined to lie on ragged cloth? And who are the people who are entitled to snow-white soft quilt? All are illusion, falsity, water in mirage, palace in dreams, rope mistaken for snake. It is the illusion arising out of dark of mind. To raise question on this issue, to create turmoil for due payment— all these are the symptoms of foolishness.” In fact, by the touch of the magic stick of gold and of silver the protestancy of Dalit literature gets blunted. And it appears to be true that the tradition of oppressor-oppressed— in Indian social system the hierarchical positions of Brahmin-Sudra will go on unchanged. As a result, the footpath

dwellers have been permanently living on footpath, generation after generation.

The point of view that the discussion on Dwija-Sudra matter involves may hurt some people. Because the discussion gives birth to a conviction that the Brahmins and the bourgeois are the one and the same. Any Brahmin is a bourgeois. But is it really so? Before answering I wish to remind the learned readers once again of the fact that, as told at the very beginning of this article, the discussion chiefly concerns the Brahministic religious texts. The Brahmin of the *Manusanhita* and the bourgeois are the same. Both are exploiters. They may be interpreted from historical as well as from sociological point of view. Religiously seen Manu was the son of Lord Brahma— that means, seen from religious standpoint he was an extremely revered god. The existence of Manu is not historically grounded. *Manusmriti* mentions castes. In fact, there was no individual man named 'Manu'. A group Brahmins together composed the *Manusmriti* or *Manusanhita*. Dr Anil Biswas in his authentic book, *From Justice to Welfare* (page-9) refers to it and confirms it by referring to O' Malley. In his book, *Indian Caste and Customs* L.S.S. O'Malley said, "It must not be assumed that the Laws of Manu described the working of an actual system, for research has shown that they were compiled by Brahmins, who drew an ideal as real." So, the remark testifies to the fact that *Manusmriti* is the compilation by the collective efforts of some Brahmins.

Who are the fourteen Brahmins who by their collective efforts composed the *Manusanhita*? They are Swayamboob, Swarochish, Uttam, Taamosh, Roibot, Chakshush, Boibaswat, Saborni, Daksha Saborni, Brahma Saborni, Rudra Saborni, Dharma Saborni, Deb Saborni and Indra Saborni. No individual self of any of them is noticed. They were united into singularity. The name is 'Manu'— the offspring of Brahma, the desired son. From historical illustration it too come to our knowledge that

there are more or less eight religions in the world— Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity, Jewish, Islam, Zoroastrianism and Confucianism. Six of them emanated from the mystic philosophy of the founders. They are Lord Buddha, Mahavir, Jesus Christ, Mohammed, Zoroaster (also known as ‘Zarathustra’) and Confucius. Jewish religion is a bit of this kind. The founder, Moses received divine message from their god Yahweh (Jehovah in English). Hinduism is quite based on the message of God. The real form of that message is the Vedas. Being delivered by God himself it is beyond human composition. The great saint, Krishna Doipayyan divided the Vedas and, thereby, was famously known as ‘Bedbyas’. Needless to say, that he was the son of a fisherman’s foster daughter, Satyavati— he was born at the Yamuna island. This chief religious text of Hinduism does not mention any caste. The mention of caste came in *Manusanhita* composed much later, in the second century of the Christian era.

Manusanhita is the text that is responsible for divisions in people which did not exist in the original *Vedas*. Later on, the same thing is noticed in it. Referring to this interpolation of the divisions, Dr Dinesh Chandra Biswas said of the *Rig-Veda*, “In Hinduism the *Vedas* are the oracles of God and so beyond any judgment. The Brahmin scripture-writers later on intentionally interpolated the 90th verses in the tenth part, in order to eternalize their own interest and facilities. These verses establish the divisions and the inequality arising out of it. In order to prove that the verses in the tenth part were interpolated by the Brahmins later on, he quotes from Ramesh Chandra Dutta, “Undoubtedly long after the composition of the *Rig-Veda* this part was composed and was interpolated into the *Rig-Veda*. No part of the *Rig-Veda* mentions the four varnas namely Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. The grammarians have proved that the language of this part is modern Sanskrit.” So, it may be guessed that some selfish people made this arrangement for sake of the

vested interest of their own community. It exists in the *Vedas* and so, all these are God's words and unchangeable. Later on, the words became a must to obey for all the people.

Any Brahmin may or may not believe in the Brahmin-composed *Manusmriti*. If for sake of logic it is taken for granted that the number of the believers is higher, not lower, then the Brahminists are the majority. It is not that only the Brahmins are Brahminists; a man of any caste may be a Brahminist. Because it is the role of the Brahmins that helped the political power of the Kshatriya and the traditional economic interest of the Baishya communities continue. It is the Brahmin-formulated rules that enabled the Kshatriya and the Baishya communities to eternalize their exploitation of and domination over the masses. The Brahmins are not bourgeois, the Brahminists are bourgeois—and it is true. Behind the exterior of the Brahmins, there is another obnoxious and dormant self that nourishes an utter hatred for the lower-caste people. When it awakes up it assumes a more ferocious shape of economic exploitation than that of the bourgeois.

Then, in fact, there exists no border-line between social exploitation and economic exploitation. On the Indian soil many such incidents can frequently be witnessed. Again, it can also be seen that some people from the Sudra communities (very few in numbers) have so much advanced in education and culture and economic solvency that they can hardly be thought as Sudras; they cannot be categorized at least in the proletariat class, as mentioned in this article. Now there may arise a question, “Have the people who have advanced become Brahmins?” and “Have the poor Brahmins joined the Sudra community?” No, that does not happen. The economic structure is based upon a peculiar tradition. There is noticed a parity and coordination between the social structure of the religion-based division and the economic structure. The people of the higher castes are economically

stronger and the lower-caste people are weak. In profession the Brahmins are intellectuals and dependent on others. They have to receive their fees from the ruling class or the merchant class. In most of the countries it is the economic structure that determines the social status. In this country the situation is different. After the unveiling of the statue of Madanmohan Malabya by the financially affluent Jagjiban Ram it was necessary to wash the statue with Gangajol. And then again, the inauguration worship was done by the topmost caste (the Brahmins). So, a Sudra in spite of being financially rich remains a Sudra in social status. A Brahmin even reaching the gallows of poverty cannot forget that he is a Brahmin. The article titled, "The Poverty of Nations" by Professor and social scientist, Jayantanuj Bandyopadhyay testifies to the fact. Referring to Ambedkar the author says, "Untouchability is such a system that is a gold mine to the Hindus (Dwijas). One may receive from it, but nothing is to be paid in exchange. Six crores of people engaged in serving 24 crores are exploited in a system more abhorrent than the slave system. In the slave system the slaves were to be provided with food and clothes by the masters, but here the masters have to do nothing. The Dwijas, as per Manu, that means, the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas had grown an inner bondage of heart, along with the economic solvency. The Sudras are outside this system and so, they have to accept their stay in the separate yard. It is better to say, they are compelled to accept this— "It is a matter not only of the inequality and exploitation in the contemporary Indian society, but also of the extent of the combined class-caste dominance of the national structure as a whole."

Now we may suppose, there is a circular land all over which there is strewn a homogeneous sleeping power. The source of power is fixed at the centre. Its name is religion— the Hindu religion, as discussed, which has in its grip a huge number of human beings, in a special way on the earth surface. In the land

of power in India there are four balls of different sizes, that is made with steel or some other metals; at least they are such that however efforts are rendered in order to crush them down, as at least some people are trying to mould them into one piece and thereby eradicate the grinding machine of caste discrimination, the balls can, by no way, be broken. By the force applied by the other majority group of people the unwanted thing has been rolling on from times immemorial. It evolves on its own orbit by the influence of the power at its centre. The first ball is small in size but great in power. It can travel all over the circle and is capable of regulating all the power in the circle. The second and the third balls also evolve by their own power. Their power is comparatively less. The fourth is merely large but has vacuum in it and so, light in weight. In order to regulate the power of the circle it is used as an input. It is not directly productive and so begets only by-products. It is huge in physical size, but powerless due to lack of solidarity. In the three thousand years some have touched it, some have not. It is Sudra, untouchable, kept distant. It is neither acceptable nor unacceptable in the society. Even Pundit Nehru did not instruct to accept it fully. The 'father' of the nation in his book, *Hind Swaraj* said, "If the Sudras leave their ancestral profession and take up others, ambition will rise in them and their peace of mind will be spoiled. Even their family sense will be disturbed." Neither acceptable nor disposable as the root of Indian soul it was telecast on TV a few days back. After this who will ventilate voice? Yours? Mine? No, nobody's. As the bearer of the ancient tradition of the country we keep our limbs motionless and keep silent. Sticking to our own position we think of the suffocating probability of unity.

How will unity come forth? Unity demands transgression of boundary and stepping out from the circle. We cross the boundary orally, but in time of work we are attracted by the centre and turn our face inward. We feel comfortable to have bath in the stream flowing since times immemorial. The same

instinct is found working in the three balls and so in the fourth. The three balls abstain from touching the fourth, out of hatred, and the fourth ball has distrust for the three balls; because of the injustice for long and the distrust arising out of that, the caste refuses to enter the others. Even those who are engaged in communist movement in this country, who keeping themselves connected with the main stream of the country want to establish the imported humanistic system, are also the victims of the grinding machine of caste discrimination. When their inner selves are exposed it is found that they are fixed in the traditional circle, due to the influence of the introspective gravity, and is incapable of stepping out.

The handling of the fourth shows that, its desire for crossing the boundary is defeated. It is not the fact that its antipathy has brought forth the defeat. He has fear. Economic and educational backwardness has crushed him down, from head; along with it there is social humiliation. Religion begot social humiliation, humiliation begot economic weakness, and economic weakness caused lack of education. These three are the criteria for detecting the fourth ball. Victimized by these one cannot raise one's head and express unwillingness; rather one can bow down and accept the defeat.

So, because of wearing the garland of defeat in desire for crossing the border one cannot be held responsible. Acceptance of mercy from the higher ones means dishonour of humanity. The people of simplistic nature exist in a different hierarchical potion and refuse to accept mercy and thereby pay their respect to humanity. They have no crookedness, no pretention in mind. They want to live with simplicity— but are hurt in the complex path again and again. The poison of the ferocious hooded snake has smeared their bodies blue. Protestancy is gown inside— and the Dalit literature is rich in the nectar of their hearts.

No longer should you show hatred to them; you have been hating for ages; now love is required. That necessity made the bereaved poet, Sankha Ghosh stay erect and refer to the extreme point of of hatred and negligence,

“Let the Dooms pinak of Maheswar have instigation
Let it be if all are finished at border of devastation.”

Sibnarayan Roy, an idealist of the present age wrote a letter to me and informed, “In this country the religious scriptures are synonymous with exploitation system. Let the exploited be awakened and the system will not disappear until they become news and play proper role in establishing their rights.” The statement of this scholarly man is very much a truth. On walking on the narrow path of this truth a Kannada poet sang out a song of establishment of rights,

“Making a lump with fat of the rich,
There will be a football match,
What was in Ram’s and Krishna’ era,
Gandhi in Gandhi’s era,
At which Dalits join palms. Who bowed down head,
Now are struggling”.

The great man, Ambedkar said, in Hinduism we notice an extreme disparity. On one hand the Brahma of the *Vedanta* philosophy exists in all the creatures, in form of Shiva. The Hindu philosophy, thereby, hails equality. The heart is abloom in hearty mysticism of the all-equals (Shiva in creatures). On the other hand, as per Manu’s law social inequality is strictly framed out. In the words of Ambedkar, “The Hindu philosophers had both their philosophy and their Manu held apart in two hands, the right not knowing what the left had”. In this chapter it has been

discussed with importance that Manu's inequality is an extreme matter and is the background of Dalit literature. But some people see but pretend not to see. As if it is no matter— it frequently happens, the situation is such. The economist, Bhabotosh Dutta said, "The age-old cohabitation of the extreme philosophical inequality and the social inequality has made us so much habituated to it that the disparity seldom bothers us, even we have forgotten to notice it." Herein lies truth. But the real fact is that the victims of disparity have no power of ventilation of views, as a result the law of Manu has grown its roots deep into many people and has been working unimpeded in them and has brought the society into this utter economic and social inequality. Dalit literature is the literature of erasing out that inequality— it is the literature that provides the vocal bankrupt with a voice.

Social scientist, Dr Jayantanuj Bandyopadhyay in his article, "Bhatate Ganatantra" ("Democracy in India") argues, "Casteism, untouchability etc. have colonized the flesh and blood of the people of this country and stratified the society into various upper and lower segments." In this article he also said, "Congress did not pay proper attention to this matter, and the leftist parties could not realize that the class division of this country is based on the caste division and the class struggle without protest against casteism is the fruit as begotten by mistaken awareness." But the projects for eradication of poverty of the poor are continually going on all around. Jatin Bagchi in "Jati, Dharma O Samaj Bibartan" ("Caste, Religion and Social Evolution") says, "The caste received by birth, the profession inherited from father gave birth to poverty as the kabachkundal; likewise, hatred, untouchability, social exploitation, dishonour of humanity, though unbearable, had to be accepted till death". As a result, the abuses such as 'borbor' (barbarous), jongli (as uncivilized as jungle creatures), 'chuarh', 'charal', 'buno' (as 'jongli'). Uncivilized, 'chhotolok' (mean person) remain permanently as 'necklace' (!) for three thousand years. Who can say, how many

years more we will have to receive the award (!) allotted from the time of Manu? In a country that does not approve of equality by birth, one need to walk for one thousand years more for economic, social and educational equality.

I recollect an incident of the vocal artist Debabrata Biswas. This genius did not suffer less in life because of his low origin. A few days before his death the artist had written a book titled, “Bratyajoner Ruddha Sangeet” (“The Suppressed Songs the Outcast”). The artist’s original home was at the village of Itna in Kishorganj subdivision, in Maimonsing district (now in Bangladesh):

“I was born a ‘mlechchha’ and in life transformed into ‘Harijan’; why ‘mlechchha’ and how ‘Harijan’— many may feel curious to know. However, humbleness I show, the spontaneous love of innumerable Rabindrasangeet lovers has made me elated. ...My childhood days were spent at the city of Kishorganj. To the Hindu of the city of Kishorganj I was a ‘mlechchha’. Admitted in school in my childhood I used to be addressed by the term, ‘mlechchha’, by the Hindu boys. Even none of the Hindu boys shared the bench I sat on.”

This autobiographical information exists in “Bratyajoner Ruddha Sangeet”. All people know how he was again and again accused, while singing Rabindrasangeet.

In an article published in the *Desh* Pasupati Prasad Mahato said, “The rules/clauses as exist in the Constitution of India for the facilities of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes are the safeguard for protection and emancipation of the people oppressed for thousands of years. But it can be unhesitatingly said that even after forty years of Independence, in spite of the constitutional safeguards and provision of reservation for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled

Tribes they have been deprived of their due rights. It is also the fact that if there were no constitutional safeguards it would not be possible for them to reach the point of progress that they have. They have achieved and so are in joy of achievement; likewise, they were deprived for long and so, there is the pain of deprivation. As they have the agony, they cannot fully amalgamate themselves into the mainstream society. A separatist tendency grows in heart. They remain aloof from the main programme of works and suffer from displeasure and inferiority complex. Endeavour to bring them to the mainstream, as per constitutional rules, goes on. Many kinds of mechanical advantages are applied in order to uplift the backward people, as in the case of lifting up a heavy thing with the help of mechanical devices. It is no unscientific matter. It is the practical application of economics and social sciences. It is the endeavour to uplift the socially, economically and educationally backward people through the system of reservation.

Again, the judgment of the people who look at it from different angle is different. The fact that some people with worse eligibility, but “enjoying various facilities”, are employed in higher posts, causes their chest pain, grows agony, accumulates wrath. But in any project in a tribal area the half-educated tribal youth does not get even the job of the gate-keeper, rather some other occupy the position; it is also the fact that the post of the sweeper in a hospital is not filled up with the son of a sweeper always but often with some other people. The mainstream and the stream of the life of the scheduled castes and tribes seem to flow towards different directions. Deprivation brings the words of judgment a secret weep. In between there lies a borderline. The upholders and bearers of the kaulinya system as introduced by Ballal Sen prevent the two streams from getting united. Dalit literature is the sharp weapon of breaking the kaulinya— a weapon for dilapidation of the wall of division and discrimination. The misfortunes predestined for the Dalits for

ages have formed its background. An extreme truth regarding the predestined misfortune was revealed in a statement of a civilian in the British period. He accepted that the causes of the misfortune lie in the yard of Hinduism. Towards the last part of 1927 the report of Sir Alexander Cardew revealed:

Many people in the world have fallen low by circumstances. But having fallen they are free to rise. The Depressed classes on the other hand form a solitary case of the people who have remained fallen because their rise is opposed to the religious notions of the majority of their countrymen.

It is the fact that one has to be a victim of hatred and humiliation here because of birth in a lower caste. Scoring 100 out of 100 Jagjiban Ram went to a college in Varanasi in order to undergo a science course. He had no place in the hostel because of his coming of an untouchable family. Instigated by some men the barber of the city refused to clip his hair. Taking no humiliation seriously he continued his studies.

Dr Meghnad Saha was a scientist of rare genius. Passing out from a local school he got admitted in Presidency College in order to study science. The cook of the college hostel refused to prepare food for and serve to him. And arrangement was made for his taking meals, at a distance from the upper-caste students. Although he was able to take food there, he had no right to offer his offerings to the goddess, Saraswati.

In Santi Niketan there was the world-famous sculptor, Ramkinkar Baize, in Tagore's place. He was born in a barber family in Bankura. Out of poverty in childhood he had to go to different families with his father in order to learn the salon activities. One day he was utterly humiliated for sitting on a chair in the drawing room of a Brahmin family. He is the man who later on became world-famous. It is a history. By his sheer genius

this artist (1908-80) rose up. He created sculptor with easily available ingredients, especially concrete-cement. ‘Sujata’ (1935), ‘Santhal Family’ (1938), ‘Light-post’ (1941), ‘Mill’ (1956), ‘Yaksha-Yakshi’ (1966) as found in Reserve Bank in Delhi are the famous sculptures. The ‘Santhal Family’ preserved in Santi Niketan is the expansion of his own feelings. In interval of his works, he used to go to the potters’ houses in order to witness the pottery. He got pleased to see the art. In his mental state there began the unveiling of the arts one by one. He got absorbed to see this. On returning home he began making sculptor with lump of clay. His artistic sense got fully expanded when he came to Santi Niketan. The “Santhal Family” is eternally immortal because his blood contained the reverberation of the expressionistic artistic sense of the aboriginal communities.

So far, I have elaborated various aspects which are the background of Dalit literature. To conclude let me comment in short: the inequality in the core of Hinduism, division between man and man, the circle of oppression behind the camouflage of progressive policy, hatred of the upper castes towards the untouchables, varna system, caste-division and as a result the apathy of the others to evaluate the Dalit’s own heritage etc.— these causes open up a horizon of creation of Dalit literature. All these collectively are the background of Dalit literature.

Word-notes:

Charvaka: A quasi-philosophical Indian school of materialists who rejected the notion of an after world.

Vaishnavism: The religious path of the followers of Lord Bishnu/Vishnu.

Manusmriti or *Manusanhita*: The notorious Hindu religious text responsible for creation of status quo.

Sanhita: Abbreviated form of *Manusanhita*.

Sambuka: A Sudra character whom Ram killed because he had read the religious text forbidden for the Sudras.

Chuyarh: Name of a 'lower' caste.

Maya: Infatuation.

Moksha: The supreme state of divine pleasure.

Gangajol: Water of the Ganges ('jol' means water). The water is considered holy and is used in every sacred rites of Hinduism, and in purification ceremony.

Maheswar: Another name of Lord Shiva.

Pinak: The bow-shaped musical instrument of Lord Shiva.

Kabachkundal: Literally means a talisman. But it alludes to Karna, the great hero in the *Mahabharata*, who was born with a talisman (as his biological father, Lord Surjya had predicted) which, so far remained with him, would protect him.

Mlechchha: An abusive term for the non-Hindus.

Harijan: Name given by M. K. Gandhi to the lower-castes.

Rabindrasangeet: Tagore's songs.

Kaulinya: Abstract noun form of 'kulin' meaning Hindu religious elites.

Saraswati: The Hindu goddess of knowledge.

CHAPTER-VII
SABARIPAD: THE POET DEDICATED TO

Translated by Asit Biswas

The dawning phase of Bengali literature is enriched with much information and materials. That was our glorious period. The pains and sufferings, joys and sorrows, love and affections of the majority of the people captured brightly were flowing in the literary streams. The heart's songs of the sons of the soil got embodied in the mellifluous tunes of the whole day and night. The flow of the social life of the marginal people, especially of the lower-caste people of the rural Bengal found expression and existence in the *dohas* and songs. Many of the poets of the dawning period belonged to the lower castes. Kankaripad, Meenpad, Chomripad. Sabaripad *et al* sprang up from the people close to nature and they sang songs of the sons of the soil. The source book, *Dalit Sahityer Digboloy* was dedicated to Sabaripad and this article deals with that poet.

These poets of the *Charya* belonged to the type of the poets Tagore was eager to listen to. The poet Sabaripad was born in a fowler family. The environment or the surrounding a man is born in is his birth right. The influence of nature and atmosphere can seldom be lost into the world of oblivion. The childhood feelings flow in the stream of literary creativity. Sabaripad testifies to the fact that it existed among the poets of the early period. The poet sang out: "There are high hills, where the Sabar girl lives." In the next stanza he said, "She has embellished herself with peacock feather, Garland of *gunjar* round neck". The poet's description is quite flawless, the creation from his own perception. "Various trees grew blossoms and spread up their boughs in the sky"; "With earrings in ear and *bajra* around neck the fowler girl alone roams about the jungle." This description, as of the inseparable reality, undoubtedly is true to the fowlers' life.

The Sabars (fowlers) roam about the jungles and hills in order to eke out a livelihood. They live outside the culture-locality of the gentry; mountainous poverty always keeps on haunting them. They have neither living houses nor luxury. Another poem captures, “When the Chinese *kongu* is ripe, the Sabars get exhilarated. For many days the Sabars and Sabaris lose consciousness and spend the days in great mirth. They build their huts with thatch of bamboo splits.” He was himself a Sabar and this is why his poems capture the Sabar life lucidly, with no flaws in it. Sabaripad was a fowler and behaved as a fowler did. The serious researcher, Dr Janhabi Kumar Chakraborty also argues the same; it is clear from his Introduction to *Charyapada* (Page-276). He said, “Nagarjun ordered him to go to Sriparbat. There also he led the life of a Sabar. Consequently, he was known by the name ‘Sabariswar’ or ‘Siddha Sabari’”. The title ‘Acharya’ (meaning usually teacher) or ‘Mahacharya’ (meaning great teacher) was also conferred on him. So, he was a Sabar by birth and also led the life, as of a Sabar, in the Sriparbat.

Dr Sukumar Sen also thinks, the term ‘Sabar’ as noticed in the *Charya*, should not be considered insignificant; that means, whatever subtlety there may be in the *Charya*— the description is intensely related to the lives of the Sabars and it reflects the real philosophy of life. Dhirendranath Baske in his book, *Paschimbange Adibasi Samaj (The Tribes in West Bengal)* said, “In the districts of Purulia and Dinajpur in West Bengal, there are the Sabar tribes. Regarding many information of their life, we are still in dark, but there is no denying the fact that they are a neglected and backward community. There is no division of caste or clan in the Sabars. The Sabars once upon a time used to eke out their livelihood by collecting the jungle wealth and hunting in the jungle. Hunting in groups is the characteristic of their life.”

The Sabars, however backward and however underdeveloped they may be, have an ancient tradition and

culture of their own not less glorious. Dr Nihar Ranjan Roy says, “In various parts of our life there is clearly noticed the existence of the remnants of the ancient and wide culture of the Sabars of the eastern India. The way the daily life of the Sabar men and women engraved on the numerous earthen tiles of the temple at Paharpur testifies to the fact that they (the poets) had intimate relations with the life of the masses. From the Tengur anthology, as referred to in the chapter titled, “The Kaivartya Revolt in Bengal and the Contemporary Lower-Caste Poets”, we come to know that the *guru* was Mahasiddha Sabari. And he himself was a disciple of Abalokiteswar. He composed about ten *bajrayani* books. Sabaripad and Sabariswar are considered to be one and the same. He, as heard of, composed some more books on *bajra yogini sadhan*. *Sri Sahaj Upadesh Swadhisthan*, *Sri Sahaj Sambar Swadhisthan*, *Rakta bajra Yogini Sadhan*, *Sri Bajra Yogini Sadhan* etc. are his remarkable books.

In the *Charyacharyo Binischoy* by Hara Prasad Sastry there we find the trace of fifty songs by twenty-three poets; two of them were composed by Sabaripad. Some lines from the two songs have been quoted in this article. The lines from the creation of the poet reveal that he has delineated his own realization of life, in his literary exercises. In this context we may refer to the judgment as noticed in the article, “Dalit Sahiya” (“Dalit Literature”) by Dhirendranath Kirtaniya. Let it be seen in the light of that judgement whether Sabaripad can be considered a Dalit poet or not.

- i) The Dalits have no inheritable rights in the glorious traditional Sanskrit literature of India, it is not likely to be so. The probability generated in the Buddhist literature was destroyed by the Brahminists. In order to revive Hinduism and abolish Buddhism from India and to establish Manu afresh they ushered in the rich age of mythological literature in which they had the

right of mere listeners. The right of being the creators was still a day dream to them.

- ii) In spite of being deprived of formal institutional education in the Dalits families there were born thousands of poets by nature, humanists and vocal artists. They composed oral formulaic poetry on master-disciple tradition, songs and rhymes and performed them to their own communities. For centuries the mythological stories, rhymes on the gods and goddesses and of human pleasure found expressions in their spontaneous poetic language. Unfortunately, the major portion of this unwritten literature has been lost into the world of oblivion and a very little portion has been revived as unnamed folk literature.
- iii) Of the cultivated, polished and written literature it may be said that it is based on practice. And there must be coordination between practice and education. And naturally it could not be born in the adverse atmosphere of the uneducated, poor Dalit society.
- iv) As *Charya-geetika* is considered as the oldest example of the written Bengali literature, by referring to it, it may be said that if the Buddhist Siddhacharyas are the representatives of the Dalit communities, the Dalit people, in spite of thousands of obstacles inherit a great literary tradition.
- v) By the term, “Dalit literature” we understand the literature based on Dalit (oppressed) life and Dalit communities. Literature may sometimes be composed by somebody who is not a Dalit but sensitive to the Dalits, and so, it may of course be composed by the Dalits. We want to attach much more importance to the literature mentioned at last.

In the light of the above sense of judgment it may be said that Sabaripad was a Dalit poet and the greatest of all the Dalit poets of the dawning period of Bengali literature. The poets of

this period were the aspirants of love and affections, worshippers of non-violence, universal figure of fraternity, above cruelty and meanness, free from the poison of casteism. And they were the champions of humanism. Their way of religious pursuit bloomed through their creativity. And the stream of their thoughts carried on throughout ages left its influence on Bengali literature and culture. University Professor Dr Janhabi Kumar Chakraborty said in his Introduction to *Charyageeti*, “The teachings of *Charyageeti* in the postgraduate classes in the University of Calcutta aroused in my mind a new curiosity about these songs. I realized, the *Charya* songs are the own property of the Gour Banga. The language of the songs, settings, description of nature, and the way of internal worship, as noticed in the songs, and the legacy carried forward to the Bengali literature of the later period clearly show the main theme of this very country. Apart from having the literary value, the songs have great values as social history of the ancient Bengal. Not only as devotional songs or theoretical literature, but in building the base of superstition-free, perfect human life the ideals of heart’s feeling of “all’s vacuum without mercy” theory appealed to me. I have realized, mercy mixed with enlightenment is the best ideals of philanthropy—there is no caste discrimination, no Varna division, no discrimination between the self and the other. The commitment of the free soul to life and the message of philanthropy beneath the surface texture of *Charya* have come down as the classics of songs in various forms.”

Enriched with the pleasure of mercy Siddhacharya Sabaripad, in order to meet the ultimate destination through his creation, has ventilated his feelings in ‘Janartha’ or ‘Lokartha’. From his own realization of life, he adopted the union of Sabar and Sabari as allegory. He interpreted the flow of exercise of the easy way of worship, pleasure of sport, the glory of Bajraguru and the appropriate form of the soul. In his poems the pleasure of the debut nuptial bed and the sensual exhilaration of the flower-

loving jungle girl found expression through the poet's own sense of measurement. In the description of the ingredients of enjoyment of the lower-caste people, the consumption of betel and camphor appears wonderfully beautiful. Sabar male lover and the Noiramni, the female beloved spend their love-night in extreme pleasure. However wild a man may be, in love-pleasure and conjugal union, all possess a uniform self.

Sabar set three metals as bed, for easeful rest,
Relished love with her hugged, for nocturnal love best,
Laid his heart like betel-leaf, chewed camphor like joy,
Spent nocturnal moments with easeful love enjoy.

Both the songs of Sabaripad are the lively description of the life of the earthly Sabar and Sabari. In the poems we find the trace of agrarian base of the aboriginal, hill-dwelling Sabar community. For livelihood they grow Kongu fruits in the farming land. They undergo travel on the hills and enter the caves, with bow and arrow— for hunting. They eke out their livelihood by hunting. The angry Sabar used to go far away, to the caves, and the lonely Sabari used to search for him.

These types of incidents took place in the life of the Sabars, as if as festivals. The festival of victory, joy of festival— in these incidents the life was controlled. The Sabars used to cover their bodies with leaves and creepers or branches of trees, dance with the doodung doodung musical rhythm, in the festive days. “Guru’s words be used as bow, mind’s arrow then shot, / Miss not just hit the Nirvana mark with one shot./ Crazed with great rage Sabar climbed up high hilly frills,/ Where can one find Sabar in those caves and high hills?— whatever its subtle meaning may be, in ordinary meaning the picture of the daily life of the Sabars is captured in the lines of this poem.

The subject-matter of his poems includes women’s freedom in the agrarian hilly life, the Bhujanga hero’s fondness for extramarital relationship, and knowledge of sexology in the

portrayal of conjugal union. In the beauty of life and nature, the colour of the just-bloomed cotton flower resembles the sweetness of the moonlit houses. Here the aspirant with an artistic insight enjoys absolute freedom. Far away from the stream of the elite life, living thousand miles away from the luxury of wealth, they are also poets; they are also creative writers. It is a matter of pride, matter of immense elation. Antipathetic towards enjoying the five bodily pleasures and involved in the greatest pleasure of Sahajiya love this Dalit poet has in himself his own feelings of life which is about to express itself in a great shape. By the gift of his sheer creative genius, he bloomed the flowers of Sabari language, bunch after bunch. He used the local synonyms of the words like “own soul”, ‘betel’ ‘prick’, ‘peacock’, “cotton plant”, ‘camphor’ etc. and thereby the expression got accelerated. The philosophical views inherent in the *Charyapada* are not its last words; its great poetic values lie in the appropriate uses of similes, allegories and poetic sign-language in the expressions of the religious opinions. Dilapidating the high wall of the aristocratic Sanskrit, the lower-caste Sahajiya poets were the first to establish a source of creation in local language, and getting to the commonplace people they won their hearts.

The poems of the poets had no protestancy; it was quite a quiet expression. There was the subtlety hidden underneath the exterior. The poetry of the *Charya* means songs. The tune of the songs was ‘Baladdi’ or ‘Ramakri’. Explaining the prosody Dr Janhabi Kumar Chakraborty remarked, “In rhyme, rhymed stanza, and in arrangement of statements also the songs of Sabaripad had a specialty. The rhyme of the free mind is free; its flow is natural. The *Charya* songs are frequently of pentameter (of ten lines), but both the songs of Sabaripad are of heptameter. It has variation in employing mixed rhymes, as well.

‘Sabar’ means aboriginals. The aboriginals are the successors of the ancient Indians. Skilled in various ways of

leading life they still now spend their days by collecting their prey or food in ancient process. It is noteworthy, at present all the geographical areas in West Bengal are inhabited by the aboriginals (tribes). They live in the marginal places of the rocky, uneven, reducing, wild areas of West Bengal— West Midnapore, Purulia, Bankura and West Burdwan. Many of them have left their original places and come out, in search of livelihood. They came sometimes in search of a hunting or nomadic profession; they came first temporarily, and then established permanent habitats, as the agrarian labourers in the eastern region of the soft alluvial soil, or as depressed labourers. They are existent as the labourers in clearing the jungles in the Sunderban, or as supplied as the labourers of indigo cultivation in the districts of 24 Parganas and Nadia, as the helpers in the acts of cutting timber from the jungles or as the coolies for carrying loads. The anthropologist, Prabodh Kumar Bhowmick says, “The hints of their new life, as evident in it, naturally attract any man. So, they are not merely the aboriginals, but our neighbours as well— our intimate friends— related to our life and professions— strengthening the economic foundation of the Bengali society, and by giving life to the Bengali society and the mobility of the Bengali culture it has made it fast. This collective human force should not be judged with mercy or sympathy; it is the time for acknowledging their cooperation, with gratefulness.”

To conclude I would like to quote from Sir Jadunath Sarkar. In another occasion he said, “The ‘hero’ of this poetry is not the royal dynasty, not the rich communities, not the pundits, not the schools of the learned ones of the national thoughts; those who are called the masses, who are outside the high-caste localities, outside the mythological and Smriti-ruled Brahminical religions, who are the landless inhabitants of the country or have very negligible area of land are the ‘heroes’ of this history.” The poet dealt with contributed much to the Bengali literature of the dawning period. His contribution made Bengali literature

beautiful and wealthy. This poet deserves such remarks. To say at last, Sabaripad is a strong poet among the poets of the beginning period and the greatest Dalit poet.

Word-notes:

Doha: A kind of devotional songs.

Charya: It is considered to be the first piece of Bengali literature, though its language has very little similarities with modern Bengali.

Gunjar: Red and black seed of a small shrub.

Kongu: A kind of wild fruits.

Sriparbat: 'Parbat' means hill; 'Sriparbat' is the proper name of a hill.

Guru: Teacher, especially religious teacher.

Manu: Believed to be an ancient Indian saint who composed *Manusmriti* which is notorious for introducing the Varna system.

Geetika: Songs.

Siddhacharya: 'Siddha' means accomplished, 'acharya' means teacher.

Gour: A state in ancient India, in the eastern part, including Bengal.

Banga: Former name of undivided Bengal.

Varna: One of the four groups (Brahman, Kshatriya, Baishya, Sudra) in Hindu religious hierarchy, as propounded by Manu in his notorious book, *Manusmriti*.

'Janartha' or 'Lokartha': For humanity.

Sahajiya: "Sahaj" means 'easy'. "Sahajiya" refers to the philosophical and religious school that made the devotional path easy.

Smriti: 'Smriti' means memory. The *Vedas* are believed to have been first oral, which had to be memorized, and so 'Smriti' is the other name of the *Vedas*.

Bhujanga Noiramoni: 'Bhujanga' means snake, sometimes harmful people; Noiramoni is the shapeless spirituality which the Sahajiya worshippers desired to reach.

Nirvana: In Buddhism the supreme state of mind desired by the Sahajiya and Buddhists.

CHAPTER-VIII

THE DALIT WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND LITERARY
ACTIVITIES

Translated by Bidisha Pal

Dalit Literature is the writings of the Dalit writers, based on their own values of life. The creator and the creation are one and down to earth here. However, women are far, far behind in the field of literary activities. Compared to the male ones the female writers are very, very poor in number. The writers among the Dalits are very few in number. It is almost next to none. Hence, the Dalit women are further Dalits among the Dalits. The few names we hear of are Indudhara Honapuri, Sushma Maitra, Jyoti Lanjewar, Hira Bansode etc. In this connection we can recollect Nadine Gordimer who has received the Nobel Prize this year (1991). She is a writer from South Africa. She was not born among the Dalits but she thought for the Dalits throughout her life and rendered her service to the Dalits and wrote about them. The subject-matter of her writing is the Black people of Africa.

The aim of the article is to discuss the movement of the Dalit women and their literary activities. This thematic discussion lends its remembrance to Babasaheb Ambedkar again and again—the discussion cannot be complete without reference to him and his thoughts.

Ambedkar used to say, “I can measure the actual progress of a society, with the progression of the women of the society.” According to Babasaheb’s judgment, the upliftment of any society is determined by the progression of the women, not by that of the men of the society. “The progression of the women is a thing to be taken care of”, he used to say it time and again. He believed heart and soul, the women community has to be awakened, for the sake of the country, for the sake of the nation. He watched closely the darkness of the untouchable women of

his community to whom he was born, and realized it fully. The women of the Dalit community are unboundedly Dalits; they are the Dalits among the Dalits. Unlike the men, the women lack respect and rights in this country. They are paralyzed between the duality of the development of personality and the execution of responsibilities. There is a limitless lack of rights for them and that is the impediment for progression.

Before Babasaheb, Jyotirao Phule took care of women's education. Specially, the picture of the inexplicable and deplorable condition of the women in the society was reflected on his mind. He set up a school for the girls. His wife, Savitribai Phule was the pioneering figure in this project. She played an important role by standing by her husband.

Dr Ambedkar started his activity of wiping out untouchability by setting up 'Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha' (The Welfare Community for the Outcast) on 20th July, 1924 in Mumbai (then Bombay). The Movement of erasing untouchability was the first step to freedom. The path of freedom needs education at first. He visited the Dalit slum areas and set up schools and boys' hostels there. School for the girls and girls' hostel were included in the project as well. It was considered with special importance. The activities of 'Hitakarini Sabha' got spread in various places of Maharashtra. The women also took part in the project. From then onwards, the women started to narrate the stories of the miseries of their lives, from the platform of that meeting. This drew attention of the sovereign power. The Dalit people, especially the Dalit women and their lives got universalized forms. People like Bonubhai Matukar, Rangubhai Savarkar played important roles in the movement of the untouchable women. With a full-throated welcome song, they empowered and brought forward the activities of Babasaheb Ambedkar.

On 13th of November of 1927 a convention was held, regarding the right of entry to Amarabati temple near Nagpur. A sufficient number of women took part in it. Another notable incident of this year is the movement for the untouchables' right of taking water from a pond. The pond which is used by the *Savarnas* or the Upper castes must also be allowed to be used by the untouchables, if required. Babasaheb conducted *Satyagraha*. His 'Talab March' (March to the pond) is an important historical and social event. A number of women, far beyond expectation congregated in the 'Talab March'. This unexpected participation raised the conscious souls of the Dalit women.

That women should stand upon their own feet independently was the purpose of Babasaheb. Not to depend on anyone— he made a healthy number of efforts for this. He founded girls' schools, girls' hostels, to make them practically independent. The curriculum was also designed accordingly, so that the girls could be self-reliant. He tried to eradicate the problems of the women working in the factories. On 28th of July, 1928, he recommended for the maternity leave for the women who worked in the factories. During a lecture in the Mumbai Legislative Assembly, Babasaheb said, "Providing the advantage of maternity leaves to women is a welfare step of the state. This is a matter of great importance to the female community. Although I admit that it would put immense pressure on the administration, still I am not in favour of salary deduction of women during pregnancy; rather I stand up for the rights of the women. This is a woman's right and this has to be provided to them anyhow." Babasaheb's logic influenced the assembly that day and the bill was accepted unanimously.

'Mahila Mandal' was established in Mumbai in January, 1928. The women were at the helm of this. Babasaheb's wife, Ramabai Ambedkar was its President. In 1930, a convention of 'The Depressed Classes' was held in Nagpur. A separate

women's convention was also held. Babasaheb returned from the 1932 Round Table Conference and delivered a lecture in a great assembly. A healthy number of girls assembled in that congress. Many of the women in the congress were sex-workers. Due to utter poverty, they had to make business over their bodies in order to earn a livelihood. Babasaheb invoked them to give up the insulting and undesired profession, and inspired them to make livelihood by honest means. He formed an association consisting of the sex-workers. The purpose of the association was to redirect the women from the path of prostitution and to show them the way towards honest livelihood. This institution is still alive and working in Mumbai.

The 'Akhil Bharatiya Dalit Mahila Sommelan' (All India Dalit Women's Conference) took place under the umbrella of All India Scheduled Caste Federation founded in July, 1942. The assembly of the women won unexpected success. Ten thousand women assembled there. Sulochona Dogde was the Secretary, Kirti Patel was the Convener and Indira Patel was the Chief Secretary of this assembly. The success of the assembly elated Babasaheb a great deal.

On 6th of January, 1945 a conference of the untouchable women was held at the city of Bombay (now Mumbai). Nearly one thousand women got assembled there. The Tamil woman, Miss Minambal Shivraj performed the role of the anchor person in the conference. Her husband was also a social worker. Both husband and wife dedicated their souls to the activities of Babasaheb.

A hue and cry was raised among the Dalit women, with the call of emancipation, by Ambedkar. Many women participated in the call of emancipation, by standing by their husbands. They faced excruciating poverty and social adversities but they marched on. Ramabai was the best of the many women

who stood by their husbands, in the upliftment of the women. She was an incarnation of utter feelings and sacrifice.

Chokhamela Balika Vidyalaya (Chokhamela Girls' School) was established in 1924 at Nagpur. Smt. Jaibai Chaudhury was its founder. Initially, only four students were available. The number gradually increased. Later on, the school was renamed 'Jaibai Chaudhury Gyanpith'. One thing needs to be said in this connection, Chokhamela, in spite of being a member of the untouchable community, was one of the saint poets who came to light as the luminous stars in the 13th century Marathi literary firmament.

Smt. Tulsibai Bansode was another woman like Jaibai Chaudhury. With her husband she took the responsibility of publishing the journal titled, 'Chokhamela'.

Kobigan is one of the greatest treasures of the Dalit community of Bengal. Since, the Dalit literature of Bengal did not attain so much popularity as that of the Marathi Dalit literature; it is included in the folk literature. Practically, it is a part of Dalit literature. Anantabala Baishnabi has served the literature throughout her life by practice and dedication. Some researchers are trying to discover her contributions.

The Dalit women's movement did not get weak even after the demise of Babasaheb. Overcoming the despondency of despair, it has remained alive. Sushma Maitra is a teacher and writer by profession. She is trying to make a free society of people in West Bengal. This was an attempt to make effective in West Bengal, the casteless, colourless society that Babasaheb longed for. Indudhara Honapuri is a writer of Kannad literature and the editor of a literary journal.

Many movements of the Marathi women were noticed taking place. Ambedkar's contemporary, Radhabai was a combative social activist. She was an illiterate person. She

worked in the garment factories—that means, she was a female factory-labourer by profession. She was conscious about the society. Her lack of education was not an impediment on her activities. She formed the women's organizations; she used to organize road-march programmes with the women labourers. She participated in the assemblies, *satyagraha* and empowered the helpless women.

The Dalit Panther Movement and the Land Distribution Movement of the Republican Party are the live examples of the mass awareness existing after the death of Babasaheb Ambedkar. Many women took part in the Land Distribution Movement of the Republican Party of 1964. Many women with infants in laps courted arrest. They fought with the males in order to establish a fair and equal society.

The women did not let the movement get timid, and acted as the inspired successors of Babasaheb's. They enlisted the eradication of the *Devadasi* system, along with many of their activities. *Devadasi* system was an utter evil custom and a matter of dishonour for the women. They attempted to break the tradition of their ancestors by eradicating the illiteracy and the *Devadasi* system.

Babasaheb Ambedkar was a pioneer of the women's movement undoubtedly. He was the principal voice in favour of the women's rights in India. The implementation of Hindu Code Bill was a great contribution of his, which he did as the Minister of Law. Prior to this, the girl children had no right to their fathers' property; nor did the wives have rights to their husbands' property. If a wife was not in good terms with her husband, still she could not obtain a divorce from him. He was a great figure to eradicate inequality and revive the selfness and honour of the women.

In the Marathi Dalit literary movement, the names like 'Jyoti Lanjewar' or 'Hira Bansode' are notable ones. *Disha* by Jyoti Lanjewar and *Firhiyad* by Hira Bansode were notable books of poems. *Biswa Mahamondole Matua Dharma*, the book by Kiran Talukdar is a notable research work. In this connection it may be said that *Matua* philosophy is a treasure of Bengal. A great number of people of East Bengal and West Bengal have by heart assimilated themselves with this philosophy. It is a store of the themes incorporated in the Dalit literature— a storehouse of new awakening. Smt. Binapani Devi— who was also known as *Baroma* was inseparably connected with this movement. Every year in the Bengali months of *Falgun* and *Chaitra*, the *Baruni* mela is held in her home town, Thakurnagar in the district of North 24 Paraganas. Lakhs of *Matua* devotees (who are all from the lower castes) from Bengal and outside Bengal get congregated in this fair and celebrate the festival with great spirits. The presence of Dalit women in this fair is noteworthy. Among the Dalit people who are actively engaged for the upliftment of the Dalit women are Hiranyaprabha Samaddar, Mayarani Mandi, Sandhya Mondal, Savitri Soren etc.

They are unfamiliar or rather a little familiar to all. Now I name another familiar woman who got famous by the writing of the young journalist Tarun Kumar Bhaduri. She is Phoolan Devi, the bandit-queen. She was born in a poor, untouchable family. At the time of her full-bloomed youth, she was a victim of utter misfortune. At the stroke of midnight, some goons with guns abducted her from the side of her husband and took her to an abandoned house and gang-raped her, perhaps for 24 times. The *thakurs* were all from the aristocratic background. The poverty-stricken husband had no other option but to shed tears silently. Later on, this Phoolan became the bandit queen of the Chambal dacoits and took revenge of her insult. Notably, she left robbery and got back to the mainstream society.

Today, many women among the Dalits are spinning the threads of Dalit movement in various places through many institutions. Wherever there is a movement, it serves the literature. The creation of literature is a source of the inspiration of the movement. The sharper the movement is, the brighter the creation becomes. Needless to say, Dalit literature is progressing with the progression of Dalit women and the way the Dalit women are progressing will heighten the pace of the Dalit movement.

Word Notes:

Kobigan: 'Kobi' means poet; 'gan' means 'song'. 'Kobigan' is a form of Bengali folk performance wherein folk poets sing and perform impromptu singing war.

Devadasi: In South India and parts of Western India, a 'devadasi' or 'female servant of *deva* (god)' or *jogini* is a girl "dedicated" to worship and service of a deity.

Falgun: The eleventh month in the Bengali calendar.

Chaitra: Chaitra is the last month of Bengali Hindu calendar.

Thakur: 'Thakur' is a feudal title and it later became a surname used by a class of South Asian communities.

CHAPTER-IX

PURPOSEFULNESS OF DALIT LITERATURE

Translated by Kaushik Mandal

The commitment of Dalit literature is same as that of the mainstream literature. In other words, Dalit literature is essentially target-oriented. The theory of an artist's works, only for sake of joy of creation, cannot be applied here. 'Arts for art's sake', though true, is a faint idea here. The goal, *i.e.*, the goal of creation is at force here. Beauty is essential to any form of art. Dalit literature also attempts to assimilate beauty and radiate the glory of aesthetics and it does so. But, beauty, arguably, is not the primary feature or precondition of Dalit literature. Objective orientation is its first condition. It is primarily overwhelmed with this principle of orientation. A Dalit writer thus prepares himself by plunging deep into his purpose first and then begins his work of creation.

In front of him there lies a vast field of opulent resources for his creation. Endless are the problems of life and livelihood of the Dalits under the Indian socio-economic backdrop. The Dalit writers are the reformers. So, 'goal' is an undeniable precondition to him. It is in a way impossible for him to write, to create, avoiding this condition consciously. Fortunately, they do not do it, neither should they. The Dalit writers are committed. Their commitment is to their society, to the people belonging to it and to the Dalits, the untouchables.

Exploitation of the Dalits is an eternal burden in the Indian social system. "Break, break down the jail, / hit and hit hard"— it is the mindset of the Dalit writers. With the urge for living like others, the mainstream people, they take up pens: "Much desire makes me demand, you deprived and thus saved me." Creation of their unpractised hands might lack the lustre but

it contains diligent effort for making it radiant. It shows unmistakable signs of deliberate efforts, to fulfil its 'purpose'.

Who is captured by illusion in form of religion?

That blind only attacks and leaves earth-region.

Even one who is atheist gets boon of Almighty

He has no ceremonious pretext of religiosity

In reverence he lights lamp of intelligence

He respects no scripture but benevolence.

Thus, Rabindranath Tagore, the poet revered all over the world, considered that man should be upheld above religion that churns the mind of the Dalits, inundates his heart and gives words to the dumb by creating Dalit literature. The pomp of rituals is an instrument of the caste-Hindus or the upper castes to establish the glory of their superiority. The Dalit writers are avowed to break it. Here he is a relentless warrior to live up to his commitment. To be at par with the standard is their target.

It is not the mere meditative intuition of the poet, nor the sensitive understanding of a prose-writer, but an ordinary economist can easily comprehend that the root of India's poor economic status is the social system based on discrimination. It would be fair to take it granted that given the mutually exclusive existence of the different strata through religious institutions and discrimination, inequality will increase and development would be of minimal pace, if not quite nil. It is a proven fact from the past years. The economists, however, avoid that truth and consciously argue otherwise. An internationally famous Indian Marxist economist says, "Economists are well aware of what begets what. (But) they would be the last man to call a spade a spade. Their present stand can readily be presumed. The Brahmins have traditionally made fool of the people. It is their

‘sacred’ duty. In this way they have successfully pacified the clashes between the Hindu kings and their subjects. Their duty was also the innovation of explanations as to why Laxmi, the goddess of wealth is not showering her bliss continually in the kingdom and why the poor are to do eternal slavery. In this country the same system has been evolved and structured with good care for the last 25 years. Substituting the Brahmins today the economists are performing that duty of eluding people and they have been bounteously paid.” This Marxist economist speaks the truth. He was associated with the works of the Ministry of Finance under the Government of India for long.

This discussion testifies to the fact that with its root deep into Indian social system the exploitation of the Dalits thrives into fame. The reverse cycle of this fame is Dalit literature—committed to uproot it. But it is a herculean task, of oceanic volume. “Reasons are not very difficult to investigate. Once, those who were the forerunners of the leftist movements were also the participants of the national movement. They belonged to the bourgeois class. After Independence when national movement got split into two, they gradually drifted towards the leftist’s politics. Their thoughts and beliefs underwent a change. But it was not easy to change the inheritance. Inheritance of class and caste is insurmountable. No matter whether you mock or laugh at them, they are determining the future of politics of West Bengal. Though, as exceptions, one or two from the working class might have made their entry to the party frontline today, the list of the left leaders bears a singularity— starting from ‘Dasgupta’, ‘Lahiri’, to ‘Majumder’, ‘Chatterjee’, almost everyone was holding an untainted upper-caste surname—consisting only of Brahmins, Baidya, and Kayasthas. These so-called upper-caste names have an old integral connection with the feudal system. We need not go a very long back. The fathers or the grandfathers of most of the Bengali leftist leaders were likely to be rich Zamindars of North Bengal or East Bengal

merely fifty years back. Are the mindset and way of life that were interwoven with their upbringing gone off completely? Even from their memories? Is the transformation complete? Leaving no residue at all? Feudalism was primarily dependent on inner clashes. The self-glorification of the master or the lord was its source. The exploitation of the poor, helpless peasants or encroachment of lands owned by others, with the help of either legal duel or by riots— all of these were basically the outcome of this self-glorification. Conflict, contest and rioting were the principles of their existence. Intolerance was the motto— it's me first, nobody else, to exist, and to gain money is my sole right. Kill others who refuse to bow down. The other side of the coin is jealousy— all-pervading jealousy. Whoever tries to climb upward must be dragged down by hook or by crook.

In a discriminative system like this, the growth and development of the Dalit literature created by the Dalits is a mere daydream, not to mention of the efforts made to destroy it at the very inception. Dalit literature is pledged to surmount through the odds. The aspiring Dalit literature tries to break the shackle of injustice, defeat exploitation and oppression, put the Dalits on equality.

“The altar of worship that is in bloody state
Break, it down, instantly today, dilapidate
Hit the captive wall of religion with shell
Let in this wretched country knowledge twinkle.”

Rabindranath called for a blow to shatter the walls that surrounds religions. To bear this dream is very much essential to the Dalit authors. The heart of this religious guard walls is the source of discrimination and inequality— the primordial cause behind their bereaved heart. Removal of this source is a tough job. The task of explaining and defeating the toughness is the objective of Dalit literature. “The seed of beguilement exists in the efforts made to keep alive the medieval concept of heaven

and hell, of sin and virtue. Those were there and are there even today.” The Dalit writers are to take their rightful stand after rigorous experimentation and evaluation with all these. Otherwise, the shattering of shackles turns impossible.

One of the greatest flaws of the Aryan civilization and culture is that it was never a tolerant one. This intolerance led them to a state of superiority complex which, in turn, culminated into arrogant naming of ‘Dasyu’, ‘Mlechchha’, ‘paap’ and ‘Asura’ to all those tribes and clans that were different in behaviour, customs, conventions and language. These ‘names’ trouble the mind, pain the heart of the people of those big clans. And literature that sprang up from this arrogant superiority could never be accepted to the Dalits. Dalit literature is a stark protest against this mightier, irresistible mainstream literature. It is determined and focused to self-preservation and self-establishment.

An incident of the Aryan superiority can well be traced in *Bharat e Adibashi (The Tribes in India)* by Subodh Ghosh—

India is the land of cohesion of various cultures. Many different clans— the Sakas and the Hunas got assimilated into a unified body in this country. That is true. But it is true to a certain extent. Perhaps we are vociferous to announce this partial truth as a pleasant theory, soothing to our ears. For, there are 25 billion of the ‘Adivasis’ (aboriginals) in front of our eyes, as opposing witness of this theory. In spite of living for thousands of years within a common geographical territory, the Aryan-India and the ancient India failed to get mixed up. Neither is there a blood connection nor a cultural connection. In the Mahabharata, the mighty Partha or Bhim took the tribal women as their temporary mistresses. Ulupi or Hidimba were neglected and forgotten by them in their happy days. Being proud of

their aristocracy the Aryan-India pushed aside the ancient India and the difference is not eradicated even today.

Today, the world is in upheavals by the national, social and humanistic problems. It is in a tremendous flux. In India the root of this problem lies in religion— the standpoint of Hinduism. The problem is, in fact, a complex one, challenges are equally demanding. Advancement will take place by accepting these challenges, not by avoiding it. This is not a search for some transcendental truth through an uncertain path; rather it is to progress with the help of the true nature of religion of human relationships. Rabindranath would provide us with enthusiasm—

Religion rescues man from this turmoil of conflicts to elevate him in love with ecstatic, eternal bliss. Those who think that avoiding the tumult is the way to cross the shore, alas! How would they achieve it! This is the very reason why man prays, "Asatomasagamayo, tamosomayotirgamaya, mriyormamritangamaya"- 'gamaya' means the road is to be trotted— no way to avoid it. Not only Hindus, but also others who follow an institutional religion have to undergo test for their religiosity in every struggle of life for cohesion and wellbeing.

The Dalit litterateurs fight to express their self-realization, to establish their identity. They try to win human-respect and from the human beings. Not with a separatist mentality but it is with ideals of integrity and welfare that they advance towards their goal.

Passing through various changes and reforms Hinduism is at a complex position. Amalesh Tripathy says, "On one hand there are the internal Proletariats, and on the other the external Barbarians. In order to provide theses intruders/immigrants with a place in the Aryan society devotion has helped a great deal. ...Now in order to save the Brahminical religion the

Shankaracharyas were called for. By founding four *dhamas*, forming the *dashanami* communities, making *Smriti* stricter he became a bit successful. But though it was readily accepted by socialism, it was thrust upon the commonplace people. One of its reactions was following the tortoise nature— self-defence by entering into the cell of *Smriti*, and other reaction was counter-attack. The result of the existence crisis of Hinduism was Hindu fundamentalism ... Hinduism is a loose confederation of views and ways. Ramkrishna was chiefly an adwaitabadi, *i.e.*, believer of a single God, but as enthused to combine all the religions Vivekananda did not get entrapped by this revivalism; rather he wanted to make Hinduism more scientific, more work-based and to serve humans, considering man as god.

Arabinda Poddar argues, “Man has another soul, greater than the physical one— that is his humanity. The creative power inside this soul is his nature. As a result, in our language ‘nature’ is a very meaningful term. ‘The waterness of water is its nature, the fireness of fire is its nature. Likewise, man’s nature is his innermost truth.’...The common interpretation of the theory of nature is that it contains the animal concerned. So, that protects the animals is their nature. What is that quality? Love. Love, affection, compassion— these heart’s instincts expanded to the horizon may protect the animals. ... The self-ruling and self-development achieved through the study of the characteristics of these instincts may be called humanity. Judged from this point of view humanity and nature have the same connotation. When the so-called lower-caste people who have been the victims of torture for centuries are murdered in barbarous exhilaration, now government falls/ is depowered, no Member of State Legislature or Parliament resigns, no road is blocked, no Bharat Bandh programme is declared. Is it the symptom of religiosity? God exists everywhere and so, in every man as well; and if the union of soul and the Supreme Soul be the must, the oneness/solidarity of men is also urgently necessary. In implementation of the ideals

the human society should be considered to be a single, and indivisible entity. But did the Hindu society undergo the evolution that way? Never.”

Romakanta Chakraborty says, “In Hindu society there exists an idea in vogue. “The Hindu society is the society of the Hindus”— if it is interpreted this way it is noticed that due to caste division and *varna* division there is no fundamental unity in the Hindu society. The theory of the social solidarity of the Hindus was disseminated by the upper-caste Hindus in the second half of the nineteenth century.”

From the few excerpts quoted above a truth is established. The multi-divided Hindu society is ruled by the upper-caste people, and the lower-caste people are the victims of their exploitation and torture. Sometimes some movements are formed against exploitation and torture. Those who lead the movements come from the upper castes. So, there lies a wide gap between their movements and Dalit literature.

Nirmal Kumar Basu was once invited by the government, to work as the Commissioner of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes. In spite of his obedience to his party he was heard delivering a statement. That was the truth begotten by his experience. “Under the pretext of showing mercy to them the Government in most of the cases has become a great enemy to them. Or the exercise of protecting the interest of these Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has become the office of a self-centred, careerist, and professional opportunist one.” Dr Ashoke Mitra said, “The May Day is a full-pay holiday in Kolkata and whole West Bengal. Towards the evening the processions of innumerable working people assemble at Maidan. The leaders deliver emotional speeches. The universal fraternity of the working-class people is ventilated at high pitch. Yet something irritating is felt to exist, at least a mood of dissatisfaction. The leaders delivering the speeches belong to a

certain periphery. Please look at the list of the names; the flag of whatever leftist party they may carry, all belong to the high-caste, high-race Hindus. Probably almost thirty varieties of the leftist politics can be found in West Bengal; none of them can survive without the counsel of the higher-caste Hindu leaders.” These remarks clearly show the position of the Dalits in India.

The subject-matter of the discussion is the purposefulness of Dalit literature. It is grounded on the personality of the Dalit people, self-consciousness of the Dalit people. These lower-caste people are endeavouring to come to limelight, through their creation. They want to come forward by eradicating their age-old curses, sweeping off the exhaustion of the darkness. The enthusiasm for coming up provides the Dalit literature with infallible spells and thereby unlimited energy. The seed of the huge granary of the unlimited power sowed has assumed a new shape and its leafy and floral beauty has expanded itself under the blue sky. It seems to be giving a hint of new social division.

Word-notes:

Dham: Religious place.

Dashanami: Having ten names.

Smriti: Literally memory but here the proper name, the *Vedas*.

Adwaitabadi: One who believes that there is only a single God.

Bandh: Mass strike.

CHAPTER-X

DALIT LITERATURE IN VARIOUS INDIAN LANGUAGES

Translated by Dipak Barman

Hyderabad, the capital of Andhra Pradesh, is a famous metropolis. There took place, at the Exhibition Ground, a conference for three days from 8th to 10th of October, of thousands of Dalit writers and representatives from various parts of the country. In such a great and vast country as India, the Dalit writers of various languages from the distant corners can meet under a single roof, discuss literature—this is really an incredible matter! When in man's internal veins of the heart there reverberates a music, language cannot make a wall of obstructions in the yard of realization; at a single moment all the voices meet and sound, come closer to each other— they exchange their feelings with one another. This is proved in this conference of the Dalit writers.

From the distant land of the USA the writers Runoko Rashidi and Mrs Injeri Khan of the Black American Literature were invited to inaugurate the conference on Indian soil. He said in his inaugural speech, "Marcus Garvey is the pioneer of Afro-American Black Literature. Based on the ground of its own concepts and ideologies the Black literature has been able to get assimilated to its self-directed way. In India the literature of the Dalits can establish itself in the directed way of their messiah, Babasaheb."

He also said, 'Martin Luther King is a great man in America. Although he was a black man, he was accepted by all, in a word, an undisputed leader and politician. But to the hearts of the Black writers Marcus Garvey is closer than Martin Luther King is. Similarly, in India, Dr Ambedkar is very close to the Dalit writers, touching the very core of their hearts. It is because of this influence that Dalit literature is finding its own self. At a

time, the Black literature too grazed in the fields of the White literature; they had to look at things through the white eyes and had to write accordingly. Now-a-days, because of the globalized appeal of the Pan-Americanism they have found their own self— finally to get assimilated to that. The Indian Dalit literature is also going to uncover that horizon.

From his comment it is clear— “There is an umbilical bond between the Black literature and Dalit literature— a consanguineous tie”. Their outline and the direction are much similar. The ambition of the journey is to discover the root and to move on swiftly. Thirty-three years before this day, this kind of conference of the Black literary personalities took place in America. Although a little bit late, this kind of conference took place in Indian land too. This is as if searching light from the same Sun. He enumerates, “It is not that there are so many limitations in the creation of the Black men, rather the Black men’s creations are the victims of the rejection of the White. By travelling miles America has been able to efface that rejection. For this, thanks go to Marcus Garvey. This will happen here one day. And it is coming very soon.

Literature means the discovery of truth. Literature involves the desire for dilapidation of orthodoxy. With the progress of knowledge there takes birth the sense of revolt which stays and spreads wide. In a mighty voice he declared— “Writer is fighter. His pen always fights against injustice and hatred.”

She said, “White literature is now a distant dot in the horizon of revolt— its language of reformation is almost empty. With hard efforts it is going on, playing the mere old tunes. In respect of that, Black literature is awakened in new consciousness. The Dalit literature is also that in terms of form and character.” By delivering his confident lecture Runoko Rashidi imbued all the Dalit writers to be determined to roam

about the meadow of literature, to create the self-artistic consciousness.

This conference is memorable and worth remembering. This is memorable because in the history of Dalit literature, in future, that will surely be recorded, this would be a land mark—the milestone of time. The journey has started from the new consciousness of the tree of realization.

From Kolkata eight representatives started by train. Then two more were from Kharagpur— Rupchand Hansda and Gomosta Prasad Soren. They were the uprising young writers of Santali literature. Ten representatives from West Bengal were travelling together. On the day before the Conference, we reached Hyderabad station at eight in the evening. For paying us a warm welcome a group of youths with festoons were there at the station. We came to know that they were the Dalit students of Hyderabad and Osmania Universities. Their voce cheered— Dalit writers Jindabad! The voice was re-sounding in the station to enliven perpetually. They guided us to the guest house where we were supposed to stay and take rest. Their hospitability and care impressed us. After travelling a long distance when we were about to have a sip of tea with snacks, a gentleman accompanied with some people entered into the room. His long stature, slim physique, black countenance, long back-brushed hair, and his smile showing the white teeth added beauty to his personality. His articulation of English was quite well. Through conversation we came to know that he was Mr Vojya Tharakam. He was the Convenor and the chief personality of the conference.

From him we got the programme schedule of the three-day literature conference. He informed that the representatives from the Punjab, Gujarat, Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh had already arrived there. And they were staying in the rooms next to ours. Representatives from Tamil Nadu and Kerala also came. From Maharashtra an ample number

of representatives came the day before— they were more than fifty in number. We heard that among them there were Daya Pawar, Arun Kamble, Yashwant Manohar and Waman Nimbalkar.

The poet, Siddha Lingaiah of the neighbouring state Karnataka could not come for some reasons though a few members were present from there. We were pleased to know that Devanoor Mahadev had come with them.

The conference commenced the next day. This conference seldom resembled any other literary conference. Spontaneous overflow in nine or ten languages was noticed there. The audience possessed indomitable interest. All were desirous of getting acquainted with each other, to know others, to listen to each other's readings, and to make out in English or Hindi whenever there was a new-coined idea, though the instant translation of the thought lessened the very flavour thereof.

The session on the second day was long and more important. In this session the Dalit writers from various linguistic backgrounds discussed the problems and prospects of the Dalit literature in their respective languages. One thing that was clear from the speeches of the speakers was the obstacles of Dalit literature. Difficulty existed there but there was no clear way to surpass it and that was the tragedy of Dalit literature. The Chairperson of the session added garland of rhetoric to each of the speakers' speeches.

Before coming to that point, it is worth remembering the words of Daya Pawar, the President of the main conference. Introducing the Marathi Dalit literature, the Marathi poet said, the Marathi Dalit literature encountered countless obstacles but yet has progressed a lot. Many of the writers have secured their place by dint of their talent. A list of 150 books selected out of all the books written in the last 800 years in Marathi literature has

been prepared with the help of the specialized scholars. In that list *Baluta* of Daya Pawar, *Upara* of Laxman Mani and *Atwaya Ninche Pakshi* of Pralhad Sonkamble ensured their places.

Literature is created on the basis of the essence of realization. It is the mirror of the society. In the root of the Marathi Dalit literature there lies the conscious awakening brought about by Babasaheb. Dalit literature deals with the life and life-style of the Dalit people, and it started first in Maharashtra. He wanted to raise this country above the painful caste system. Dalit literature lies at the centre. That was the oath to break the caste system.

That sense of realization which gives birth to literary flows was similar to the one fathered by Ambedkar himself. And the literature emanating from that sense was Dalit literature. The great men of literature *i.e.*, the great exponents who have captured the domain of literature of various Indian languages and have been contributing, generation after generation, to the literary fields, and enriching it, thereby, do not know that in recent times a new literary cult namely the Dalit literature has been added there. It is to be rather said, even if they know, they do not admit it openly. The things acclaimed by the great exponents are published in the morning pamphlets and dailies— and they within a blink reach all the drawing rooms— ensure its perpetual place in the minds of all by means of the essence of its own self. Whatever reason there may be, the Dalit Literature with its beautiful self and aesthetics was never seen in the pages of any esteemed daily— this is why its identity is unknown to so many— its ground of sojourn includes only a few Dalit hands— that is its grazing ground and it restricts itself within that.

Dalit literature is the succeeding flow of the thoughts of Ambedkar. He is the indomitable revolting voice against the hatred on and deprivation of the lower-caste Hindus done by the upper castes— a fearless lion— and in a word, an incomparable

personality. Suffused with knowledge and standing firm in a large gathering, only he could declare, “Anyone attending this conference would say, touching your chest, that you did not take pride in having belonged to the upper caste; you did it, even for only one day, and that is the truth. He who would stand and say, ‘I didn’t’, would be deceitfully trying to establish it as truth and that would be a fake truth in the place of the natural truth.” Many Varna Hindus standing in that conference protested against Ambedkar. And Ambedkar said, “I’m glad today. My friends have said that there is no caste in this country. I would be glad if there were not any.” This revolting voice is the resource of the Dalit writers— a resource of heredity. Ambedkar has given the resource of that comprehensive consciousness.

Untouchability is a crime in accordance with the rules of the Constitution. Even then the upper-caste people of India cannot drive that sin away from their minds. The Dalit people are subjected to physical tortures in the villages and mental tortures in the cities. Daya Pawar said that the Marxists and socialist can identify their enemies. The enemies of Dalit literature are invisible. They exist in the books, languages, thoughts and minds. They deepen their root in the fathomless eternity. The educated Dalit youths of Maharashtra have vowed to fight against this omnipresent massive demon, with no guns, no non-cooperation movement, but literary creativity. They are against the age-old religious, caste-based moral values. There are two classes in the eyes of the Marxists— the rich and the poor. But here in this country the Marxists do not dare to shoot even a single arrow at the venomous tree of the four varnas. On the Indian soil the poor and the Dalit are synonymous— they are the same. In the world they (Marxists) are the experts, never-second and unchallenged in perpetuating their political power just by the habit of remaining blind to the caste disparity. Pondering over all grounds the Dalit writers must come forward in order to awaken their self-consciousness. There are vast differences between the

values produced by the upper castes and that derived by them. Dalit literature is not merely a socio-economic struggle— it is a crusade against the age-old religious, oppressive sense of culture as well.

It is not the entertainment or *Baiji* literature— it is the literatures of crushing down the greatness and inferiority complex of both the haters and the hated and dragging them to the same plane by forceful hammering— Dalit literature. The abolition of greatness and meanness and the respectful attitude towards life and labour would naturally supply them with the raw materials to be equal.

The term, “Dalit literature” has been in vogue since 1954. But in the Marathi language and literature it took birth in the time of the thirteenth-century poet, Chokhamela. It has a history of evolution in Marathi literature. Its habit is to break the long tradition. The cultural awakening is the main flow of this tradition. From an essay of Dr Chandra Kumar Barat, it is known that Dalit literature flourished itself in the 60s. From that time the Marathi Dalit writers became familiar. In mid-November, 1967 a debate on the topic, “In Maharashtra the present and future cultural conflicts and the problems of literature” was organized in Aurangabad. The details of all these were published in the quarterly literary journal, *Ashmitadarsha*, (December Issue), by the Professor and writer Gangadhar Pontavane. From that time Dalit literature got the recognition of its own self. Of course, the name gave birth to much controversy. So many other terms were also discussed— ‘Dalit’, ‘Padadalit’, “Dalit Writers”, “Neo-Buddhist Writers” etc., but none of them was accepted. At last, the writers more or less unanimously accepted the phrase “Dalit Sahitya” which had already been published in the weekly *Janata*, on December 12, 1953, a few years before the debate. And that phrase being accepted started its victorious journey.

Essayist, Chandrakumar Barate argued that Dalit literature began at the time of publication of the *Mook-Nayak* edited by Dr Ambedkar on 31st of January, 1920. He said that the motivation behind publishing this kind of pamphlet swayed away the courtyard of Dalit literature. But after three years, the publication of *Mook-Nayak* stopped all of a sudden.

The protestant voice, as in Black literature, is inherent in Dalit literature as well. Poetry is the main body of Dalit literature. Sufficient number of short stories, novels and dramas are also there. During the last two decades the contribution of the Dalit poets to the field of poetry is noteworthy. Among them remarkable are— Namdeo Dhasal's *Golpitha*, Waman Nimbalkar's *Gao Kusha Baher Cha Kabita*, Daya Pawar's *Kondwada* and Yashwant Manohar's *Utthan Gumpha* etc. The Dalit women were also much advanced in the field of creativity. Hira Bansode's *Firyad* and Jyoti Lanjewar's *Disha* are memorable. The Dalit poets keep themselves aloof from the traditional subject-matters. Although the moon, the sun, river, mountain, flower and star find their place in their poems their inner sense of consciousness is different. They look at love, affection, religion and culture from a different point of judgment. Their imaginative instinct is different and their linguistic employment is also different. Their plunging into deep thought is noticed excessively present. Harsh criticism kills their creation. But some creations get new lifespan coping up with the infinite rules of creation.

Autobiographical novel is a new resource in the Dalit literature. Theatres and theatrical performances are also of similar importance. Aurangabad, Pune and Nagpur are considered as the cities of theatre pilgrimages.

Bejanma (Bastard), an autobiographical novel by Sharat Kumar Nimble, is an elucidation of complex subject. He wrote this novel when he was only 26.

The second-day conference, about which we had attempted to tell but could not, was presided over by Bimal Biswas. He was the Editor of the monthly journal, *Adol Bodol*. Invited by the President of the conference, Neerav Patel, the revolting poet of the Gujarati language recounted the whereabouts of the Gujarati Dalit poets, their obstacles and obstructions and their development. He also recounted the history behind the publication of his 1975 volume of poetry, *Akrosh*.

K.K.S. Das, the poet and critic of Malayalam literature, narrated the stories about the writers of their language. He told about the novelists, T.K.C., Vadutata and Paul Chirakaro. Eventually, he mentioned his book of poems, *Malanadinte Mattoli (Echo of the Hilly Lands)* and the book of essays, *Charitram Thimthiya Charitram* featured on Babasaheb Ambedkar.

From Aligarh there came Dr Premsankar, a literary critic. To his credit he had his critical books in Hindi. Hindi has a vast grazing ground. There are so many writers too. Some of them are established. The popular poet, Biharilal Harit won the 1986 Dalit Sahitya Academy Award. There are so many popular writers—Mohanpal Sumanakshar, Shyam Singh Sashi, Baidyamata Prasad, Mangaldev Bishrad, D.R. Jatab, Chandrika Prasad Jijnasu, Chandrakanta Borate, Purosottom Satyapremi, Kusum Meghwal, Meera Kishore, Ajit Yogi, Debendra Deepak, Om Prakash Mehra, Koul Bharati *et al.* Shantaram, Bishwanath, the Editor of the monthly pamphlet, 'Sarita' and Prakash Joshi, the Editor of 'Janasatwa' are also known as writers and have won similar awards. Prakash Jha has earned acclaim as a director of the Hindi films— he won award from His Excellency, President of the Republic of India, for directing the film, *Damul'*. Joyram Singh, the Editor of the journal, *Soshit* published from Bihar, won the 1987 Dr Ambedkar National Award. From this

information of Awards, we came to know that in the middle of 1985 (6th August) in Delhi The United Indian Dalit Sahitya Academy was established by the endeavour of Babu Jagjivan Ram. A branch of this academy exists in West Bengal also. But it is not so active. By the time, on behalf of the academy and under the toilsome editorship of Chinmay Roy a collection of poems named, 'Muktir Shanito Shapoth' was published.

Modern sociology accepts that there is no division in human beings. It is a crime to create discrimination on basis of caste and religion. But the age-old discrimination is noticed in the Indian social system. The Dalit writers are working with the aim of dissolving this discrimination. Noel Biyogi, the Dalit writer has written a historical book by exploring into the roots of the Dalits. His book, *Sindhughati Ki Savyatake Srijan Aur Banik* is an inscription of the glaring works of the Sudras in the past.

Devanoor Mahadeva, the writer of Kannada language is an introspective man of poetic nature and a self-forgetting man. He does not want to utter a single word. In a very short span of time, he has become a renowned personality in the field of Dalit literature. The first novella of this writer, *Odalaala* has won the Indian Bhasa Parisad Award. His second novel, *Kusuma Baale*, written a few days after the publication of the first one won the 1989 Sahitya Academy Award. This novel is better termed as novelette or short novel. The writer has portrayed the philosophy of life of the indigenous people of the distant villages of Mysore District, in their own language. Literally there is no linearity of incidents in the novel. While narrating an incident the novelist has inserted so many small incidents into the narrative. In a word, it is the portrayal of the small things of the life of the Dalit people. It is imbued with the writer's loud and clear voice. The mighty pen of the poet has rendered the rustic language of the rural people poetic. The Dalit poet of Kannada language is Siddha Lingaiah. K. Ramaiya, a young class friend of his has told us

about his contribution to the Kannada Dalit literature. He was brought up in the city of Bangalore. As he himself has affinities with the Dalit literature for so long he keeps himself updated regarding Dalit literature, and he highly appreciated the Kannada Dalit poet, Siddha Lingaiah.

H. Govindaiah is known as an activist in Kannada Dalit literary movement. In the mid-70s the Kannada Dalit writers founded a separate platform for themselves. “Siddhi Saanghati” is a popular weekly pamphlet of the Kannada Dalit literature. Indudhara Honnapura, a Dalit writer conducted and edited the pamphlet. The subject-matter of the pamphlet was mostly related to Dalit literature. Another Dalit writer was Ma Na Javaraiya. His novel, *Magi (Woman)* is well-known. The journalist, V.T. Rajshekar edited and ran the “Dalit Voice”, a monthly pamphlet. Mulluru Nagaraj is a Dalit writer; another Dalit poet is Gangaram Chanda, the son of a fisherman.

Kannada Dalit literature is movement-oriented. Sudra Srinivas has been publishing his monthly pamphlet, ‘Sudra’ for the last fifteen years. For conducting ‘Sudra’ Srinivas is better known as ‘Sudra Srinivas’. The literary personalities of Karnataka think that they are the indigenous inhabitants of this country. This is why the untouchables take pride in adding ‘A.K’ *i.e.*, “Adi Karnataki” to their proper names.

The old poet, Narayan Rao came from Warangal of Andhra Pradesh. He is a non-Dalit poet. He writes about the sorrow and suffering of the Dalit people as done by Mahasweta Devi of Kolkata. The poet has uttered a peculiar thought— “One who is dead cannot be looted, so the looters don’t let the Dalits die— they loot them perpetually.”

The Telegu poet, Padma Rao, the Tamil poet and essayist, Mohan, Sitaram Maurya from Rajasthan and C.L. Choomber, the Punjabi Editor of the trilingual (Hindi-Punjabi-

English) monthly pamphlet, 'Koumi Udariya' informed of the obstacles faced by the Dalit literatures of their respective languages.

Gomosta Prasad Soren delivered his speech on Santali literature. At the request of the Chairperson, he had to deliver his plenary address in his mother tongue for two minutes. All of the representatives from India listened to the lecture delivered in Santali by Mr. Soren. His speech included a discussion on Pundit Raghunath Murmu. His contribution to Santali language and literature ought to be remembered forever. Sri Soren referred to Sadhu Ramchand Murmu and remarked him to be a great social reformer and the personality who brought about consciousness among the lower-caste people. The poet, Ramchand was born in the last decades of the nineteenth century (Bengali 1304, 16 Baishak) at Kamar Bandi, a remote village in the district of Midnapore. He had struggled throughout his whole life, against illiteracy and superstitions existing in the lower-caste people. "Debon Ti(n)gun Adivasi Veer" ("Oh the braves of the Adivasi, you, rise up")— that was his lifelong holy efforts.

Lahouri Ram Bale, the Hariyanvi writer, Bhagwan Das, the Supreme Court advocate, and V.T. Rajsekhar from Bangalore *et al* usually write in English. The subject-matter of their writings is politically sharp. They mentioned the subtle deceit in the political jargons and also of the disguised nature of some of the writers and political leaders.

Jatin Bagchi delivered his lecture in Bengali, on the problems and progress of the Dalit writers in Bengal. His lecture was translated into English for all by Professor Naresh Chandra Das. It was a concise and coherent heart-touching lecture. The Bengali Dalit literature is also moving on the way to prosperity.

Many of the renowned Bengali Dalit litterateurs could not attend the conference. The lecture delivered on the Bengali

Dalit literature attempted to elucidate that— like the other oppressed literature Bengali Dalit literature has also three phases of development. According to Frantz Fanon, the eminent philosopher of Krishna-life, these three stages are assimilation, ethnic discovery and revolution.

Educated in white culture and literary structure, one accepts and digests, with the white eyes the blackness of the Black and sees nothing with one's own eyes— neither the culture nor any characterization. Then comes the age of awakening which is the search for the self. There follows evaluation and then the endeavour for the establishment of the oppressed and exploited. Harichand Thakur (born in 1812) can be called the pioneer of the Dalit philosophy of life. Breaking the age-old structure of the Hinduism he lit up the first lamp of Dalit consciousness, in the light of education.

The search for the self by the Bengali Dalit writers and the mass awakening started in the beginning of the 20th century. *Pataka*, a monthly journal was published in 1917 under the Editorship of Kumudbihari Mallik. It published a poem titled, 'Musalman' composed by Raicharan Biswas. That is history. In search of truth there are a lot of affinities between the Bengali lower-caste people and the Bengali Muslims. Touched by the Muslims as well as by the Sudras water becomes impure. This poem written by the Sudra poet was drenched with a note of identification with the Muslims. Invited to a Muslim assembly a youth from Beteda village of Jessore recited this poem, exhilarating the audiences, thereby. Raicharan Biswas's *Jatiya Jagoron* is a book of poems for awakening the soul. This Dalit poet said, — "The high tide is air-friendly, Free the boat in mood jolly".

The Partition of Bengal, varied populace and a little bit of influence of Marxism have made the caste discrimination much passive in West Bengal. Its venomous teeth are hidden. The

system of it is very subtle. It cannot be perceived. In literature disparity and inequality are very loose here. It can seldom be noticed. Here, ordinary writings do not bring one reputation. For the Sudra, a writer's reputation is much hard to achieve. Only the all-acknowledged writings can bring reputation— and it happens only if connected with some esteemed dailies. Then in spite of being a Sudra one can secure a place in the acclaimed circle. Although probable, achievement of fame by writing Dalit literature is a rare probability. Among the poets of the 50s Binoy Majumder got acclaimed— but not as a Dalit writer, and having no connection with any esteemed literary journal. The foothold secured by this Sudra poet is of enormous elation. Binoy Majumder is our pride though he is not a Dalit poet. In familial atmosphere I discussed the Dalit matters with the poet several times. He is very conscious about the Dalit literature and ventures in Marathi and Kannada Dalit literature. The published books of poem of the poet are— *Nakshatrer Aloy (In the Light of the Stars)*, *Gayatrike (To Gayatri)*, *Firey Eso Chaka (Come Back, Wheel)*, *Iswarir Kabitabali (The Poems of Iswari)*, *Adhikantu (Moreover)*, *Aghraner Anuvutimala (The Autumnal Feelings)*, *Valmikir Kabita (The Poems of Valmiki)*, *Shresta Kabita (The Best Poems)*, *Amader Bagane (In Our Garden)*, *Ei Sabhay Ami (I am in this Conference)*, *Ek Pongti Kabita (A Line of Poem)* etc. In the 1950s even becoming an engineer from Shibpur Engineering College, this self-forgetting bachelor poet wrote poems throughout his whole life.

The poet-scholar, Anil Biswas is the pioneer of the Dalit writers. He has been in this endeavour for the last fifty years. His published books of poems are— *Jharna (The Stream)*, *Biday-Godhuli (Farewell, Twilight)*, *Goirik (Saffron)*, *Padadhvani (Footfall)*, *Bakajol (The Bent Water)*, *Ghonta Baje Ghondhe Jar (Whose Smell Bells the Ring)*, *Kali-Koli-Kolikata*, *Udbeg Upokule (Tension in the Coast)*, *Poru Jomi (The Barren Land)* etc. Anil Biswas is a renowned scholar in Bengali and English

literature. *Bish Shotoker Bangla Sahitya (Bengali Literature of the Twentieth Century)* is the book of the history of Bengali literature written by him. A few days ago, when Nelson Mandela visited India, this poet and philosopher presented the reputed guest a copy of *History of India's Freedom Movement* written by him. Nelson termed it as one of the noble gifts.

The poets form a vast body in Dalit literature— many of them have been named in the chapter, “The Protestancy of Dalit Literature”. Comparatively the number of the novelists is very poor. The first name of a novelist that must be mentioned is of Adwaita Malla Barman. The narrative poet was born in an untouchable lower-caste Malo family. The life and livelihood of the Malos are associated with water and tumults of the *river*. Placing the imaginary river, Titas at the centre, the narrative poet has drawn a picture of the life and livelihood of the Malos in his novel, *Titas Ekti Nodir Naam (Titas is the Name of a River)*. Securing a permanent place in the history of Bengali literature, by writing only a single famous novel is a rare instance— better to say, nil. Yet for certain reason Adwaita Malla Barman remains unexplored. No attempt has been made to explore his life and literary achievement; the real self, as in his autobiographical novel, is not less interesting. Immediately after his death, Narendra Nath Mitra wrote a story, ‘Yatrapath’ (“The Travelling Road”) that shows the shadow of Adwaita’s life; he named his hero also as ‘Ananta’. A few days ago, a biography of Adwaita has been published in Bangladesh— besides there are short mentions of his name in the books on history of Bengali literature and he has not been ever marked as the Dalit poet anywhere even now— though we remember him as a pure Dalit writer. No writing of Adwaita other than *Titas Ekti Nodir Naam* is commonly available now. This Dalit writer, narrative poet, journalist and Editor was engaged only in the profession of writings. So, it is not astonishing that a large number of his writings may lie scattered, unpublished.

The name of another Dalit novelist is “Mahitosh Biswas”. He came of a Sudra farmer’s family of Jessore. He had his small houses amid the low, flood-prone land. The inhabitants whose crops cultivated with the utmost toil are devastated every year by the flood, whom the nature chases with her cruel, red claws, cling to that land for their affection for it. The writer has seen the yearlong activities of these people in light of his own experiences casketed since his childhood days. His first novel is *Mati Ek Maya Jane (The Soil Knows Infatuation)*. The local language of Jessore has been aptly infused in this book. Along with him, Sukumar Das can be named as a novelist. The first novel of this poet engulfed with Dalit consciousness is *Kamtapurer Paton (The Fall of Kamtapur)* and after few days of the publication of this novel his *Uttarbanger Itihas (History of North Bengal)* was published. He stirred up the Dalit writers by publishing two succeeding volumes of the monthly pamphlet, “Dalit Samaj” (“Dalit Society”) in January-February, 1984. The next novelist, Professor Mani Mandal is known to many for his sober attitude. He was engaged in editing and publishing the monthly ‘Pon’ (‘Oath’) for a long time. His novel, *Murmu*, the life-narratives of the Adivasi (aboriginal) society moved the readers. As novelists Saratchandra Mallik, Guru Biswas, Kartik Chandra Mallik, Amulya Majumder and Brajendra Nath Mallik also deserve mention. In the field of farcical genre, the single remarkable name is ‘Surendra Nath Sikdar’. He is successful in presenting the comic essence.

The short story writer and essayist, Nakul Mallik has written the biography of Mahatma Jyotirao Phule and, thereby, introduced the Marathi Dalit writer to the Bengali readers. Similarly, Smt. Kiran Talukdar wrote the biography of the people’s hero, Mukunda Behari Mallik and justifiably evaluated a person from the Sudra community and, thereby, made his name memorable. This type of works plays a pivotal role in placing the Dalit literature on its own ground.

Unlike the Marathi and Kannada Dalit writers, the Dalit writers of West Bengal have not got any proclaimed award of literature. But the Dalit writers seldom care whether they are given any award of literature. They create without keeping the readers in mind. This creation is for awakening— to awaken the oblivious, simple people. Their works serve a social responsibility. It is not arts for art's sake— shouldering responsibility is the main purpose of creation. Ambedkar was the forerunner in performing that responsibility— the other Dalit writers are his succeeding current. This is why amid the Dalit writers the revolting tune of Ambedkar reverberates.

The writers such as Ranjit Kumar Sikdar, Nani Gopal Biswas, Nani Gopal Das, Shyamal Kumar Biswas, Naresh Chandra Sarkar have been toiling for long in order to make the Bengali readers grasp the Ambedkarite thoughts. Ranjit Kumar Sikdar's noteworthy books are *Banchito Janatar Muktiyoddha Dr Ambedkar (Dr Ambedkar, the Saviour of the Deprived Masses)*, *Dr B.R. Ambedkarer Sangkhipto Jiboni (The Short Biography of Dr Ambedkar)*, *Samaj Somporke Ambedkarer Chintadhara (Dr Ambedkar's Thoughts about Society)* and *Jat Byabosthar Bilupti* (translation of Dr Ambedkar's *Annihilation of Caste*). As the acknowledgement of his contribution, he has been conferred with the Dalit Sahitya Academy Award.

The well-written and recently published essays, such as Harendra Nath Bhakta's "Banglar Dalit Sahitya O Tar Goti Prokriti" ("The Dalit Literature in Bengal and its Nature of Development"), Jogen Halder's "Bouddha Motobad O Marxbad: Dr Ambedkar" (Buddhism and Marxism: Dr Ambedkar), Binoy Mahato's "Manuser Sopokshe" ("In Favour of Man"), Tulsi Charan Mandal's "Chai Samajer Chalchitra" ("The Conditions of the Chai Community"), Gomostha Prasad Soren's "Dashay Daran", Nitai Chand Mandal's "Taposili O Adivasider Sangorokhito Chakri" ("The Reserved Posts of the Scheduled

Castes and Tribes”), Dharendra Nath Kirtaniya’s “Hindu Musolman Samprodayikota O Bharatborsho” (“The Hindu-Muslim Communalism and India”), Pashupati Prasad Mahato’s “Bharater Paschadpad Samproday” (“The Backward Castes in India”), Sunil Roy Choudhury’s “Cha Bagan: Bharatbasi Bonam Hindu” (“Tea Garden: the Indians versus the Hindus”), Niranjan Haldar’s “Dandakaronyer Udbastu” (“The Refugees of Dandakaranya”) and Charu Mandal’s “Boichitre Somonnoye Kirat Janajati” (“The Hunter people in Diversity and Unity”) have drawn the attention of the readers.

In the field of literary essay, the mature and familiar names are Dhirendranath Bakshe, Gunodhar Barman, Jatin Bagchi, Khagendranath Bhowmik, Bankim Mahato, Swapan Kumar Biswas, Gyan Prakash Mandal and Jogesh Sarkar.

Promod Baran Biswas, the Sanskrit pundit of the Ramkrishna Mission, Purulia had traced out the inhuman tendencies and aspects of the Hinduism as found in the Sanskrit manuscripts, and presented them before the readers. As short story writers there are Kalipada Sardar, Kapil Krshna Thakur, Adhir Biswas *et al.* The Kobiyal (folk poets) and Kobigan (impromptu folk songs) in Bengal are the parts of pride in the folk literature. It is a word of pride that all the Kobiyals belong to Dalit communities. Among them the most notable are Rajen Sarkar, Bijoy Krishna Adhikari (Bijoy Sarkar), Nishi Sarkar, Suren Sarkar, Nakul Sarkar, Anadi Sarkar, and so many other names can also be traced out, who contributed much and, thereby, enriched the Dalit literature. All these Kobiyals have a special intellect. They seldom enter into the boundary of written literature. They compose rhymed poems orally— and present them in front of the audience.

The religious reformers, such as Harichand Thakur, Balaram Hari, Thakur Panchanan, Sadhu Ramchand Murmu *et al* are known to all. Through religious reformations they

performed a vital role in breaking the shackles of superstitions and casteism. Debendralal Biswas and Upen Barman have written poems on Harichand Thakur and Thakur Panchanan respectively. After the death of the romantic folk poet, Bijoy Krishna Adhikari, Upen Biswas has done a brilliant work for Dalit literature by publishing posthumously the folk poet's unpublished songs.

The speaker said in his lecture that it is not right to think that Dalit literature does not have a rich heritage. *Charyacharyobinischoy* (precisely *Charyapada*) is the oldest literary asset of Bengali literature. *Charyapada* was written in between 10th and 12th centuries. Many of the *Charyapada* poets namely Luipad, Vusukupad, Kanhapad, Shantipad, Sabaripad *et al* were the inhabitants of Bangla, Mithila, Orissa and Kamrup. All these names are pseudonyms; being converted to *Sahajiya* Buddhism they gave up their own names and family identities. It cannot be uttered without doubt that among the poets there were none of Dalit origin. Another asset in the old Bengali literature is *Mangal Kavya*. *Chandimangal*, *Manasamangal*, *Dharmathakurer Gajon*, *Bonobibir Pujo*, *Dakshin Rayer Murti Pujo*, etc. bear the pre-Aryan, jungle-living Dalit people's religious beliefs, life style and cultural heritage.

Bengali Baul artists and Baul songs are invaluable assets of our literature and culture. The contribution of the lower-caste people also deserves wide acclaims. The creator of *Charya*, the bearers of Aul-Baul tradition and the tuners of *Mangal Kavya*, are the innersole of folk culture. So, the Bengali Dalit literature had its origin, movement, progress and maturity from the 10th century to the modern era.

So many sessions were there in this three-day Conference— from morning to evening. In a conference of thousands of people silence is a virtue. It enriches the beauty of the conference. Many of them wanted to remain mere listeners,

sitting among the audience. This is why the Conference was very beautiful and quiet. They all joined a walking rally around the city, to pay their homage to the statue of Babasaheb. Readings of essays, recitations and discussions were intermingled. The invited writers, poets and well-wishers attended their respective sessions, to make the discussion alive and carolling. The future agenda of Dalit literature were drafted in all the symposiums.

It was a brilliant conference. Its memory will remain unabated. Outside the Conference hall (Gandhi Smriti Hall) there was an arrangement of breakfast and lunch for almost one thousand people. The catering was going on in buffet system. Twenty-five to thirty youths were serving. The writer Runuko Rashidi and Mrs. Injeri Khan shouldering a video camera, were joyfully eating Idli Sambar not with spoon but with their hands, leaving the omelettes. The Conference followed a tight schedule— from nine to four, with a recess of two hours for the lunch. The menu included rice, sambar, rasam, mata etc. which were served at the same place. Then in the evening there was singing and cultural ceremony.

It is to be said that Black literature and Dalit literature are intertwined. It is the word not from any political platform, not even a word of idealism; rather the word of Dalit consciousness. The history of literature would be lame if they are not aptly referred to here. That kind of history would be harmful, and bear a sign of bad omen. In the villages the riches of the Dalit literature are moving orally. All of these must be included in the written literary form. This way Dalit literature will be enriched and flourished— gradually it will lead to perfection.

CHAPTER-XI

OBSTACLES BEFORE DALIT LITERATURE

Translated by Abhisek Das

This discussion is being initiated keeping in mind, as discussed in the previous essay, “Dalit Literature in Various Indian Languages”, what the Dalit litterateurs belonging to different regions of India talked about the hindrances in the path of germination and growth of Dalit literature in their own regional languages. The way there is a well-known definition of democracy— “Government of the people by the people for the people”— Dalit literature can also be defined as “works of the Dalit by the Dalit for the Dalit.” However, a work meant for only Dalits denotes narrowness. Any successful and aesthetic piece of work has universality; it goes beyond the self, in order to achieve dissemination. If any piece of Dalit literature is successful and effective, it is so because it is not confined to a group of people and it does not cater to the Dalits only. It is for all. Of late in the field of literature, especially because of the establishment of a different platform of the Marathi, Kannada and Hindi speaking people of Dalit literature, the new definition of Dalit literature which has emerged out can be in a clearer and more detailed way expressed— “Dalit literature is the introspection of the Dalits focused by the Dalits themselves in the perspective of their retrospective misfortunes under the casteism of Hinduism.”

Important here is, such attitude in literature is compelled to be a victim of isolation. Such mentality, that is why, does not find support from all Dalit literary personalities. Anyone moved by Dalit consciousness can contribute to Dalit literature. Many of the Bengali writers of Dalit literature opine the same. It is true and very much true, all artists are creators. Their power of observation is much greater. Artists’ vision exists above religion and caste. So, it is the very interrogative statement— how can an

artist have a caste identity? In the second Annual Conference of Bengal's Dalit literature Harendranath Bhakta in his essay, *Bānglār Dalit Sāhitya O Tār Gatiprakriti* ("Bengal's Dalit Literature and its Course of Action") said, "Here writers by birth may belong to different strata— it should be taken care of whether s/he has come closer to Dalit thought process or their philosophy of life. In this regard we can mention the name of the *kathashilpi* (the yarn-artist), Sarat Chandra. If we do not make room for his works on Dalit life within the circumference of Dalit literature— it will, by no way, harm Sarat *babu*— the loss will be of Dalit literature only."

Having mentioned Mahashweta Devi in his article *Sarbahāratiya Dalit Samāj Ebong Bānglā Dalit Sāhityer Udbhab O Bikāsher Dhārā* ("All India Dalit Society and the Course of the Advent and Growth of Bengali Dalit Literature") published in *Adal-Badal*, Dr Charu Mondal said, "As the aesthetic architect of the stories of the real lives of the forest-dependent scheduled castes and tribes of Jhargram-Singbhum-Manbhum-Bastar-Orissa, this writer is envied by many well-established story-tellers. The foresters, people living in hilly areas and in mining ranges of India, as if, have got the chance of expressing their selves through her pen." In essayist, Dhirendranath Kirtaniya's article, "Dalit Sāhitya" ("Dalit Literature") a different taste of this subject within the continuous flow of Bengali literature can be felt in a very remarkable way. None of them perhaps is ready to be the victim of loneliness.

But because of the division-structure in the Hindu religion, Dalit writers are already alone. "Even if they (the Untouchables) are the followers of Hinduism, they have not been allowed to attach themselves to the mainstream Hindu religious festivals. They have been even shut out from Hindu gods and religious places. In various religious festivals such as performing prayer before the altar of gods or in social occasions such as

marriage ceremony or funeral rites, everywhere there are different rules and regulations for them.

As a result of class-division in Hindu religion, a group of people has become untouchables and outcastes long ago. Like the tune of Ektara in Marathi poet, Waman Nimbalkar's *Gaon Kushā Bāher Chā Kavita* they become "the poetry of the people outside the village." When the people staying outside the village want to return to the village the hindrances faced by them are as huge as a mountain. The obstacles in Dalit Literature are just like that—

I. Regression in Education:

In the discussion of the Background of Dalit literature, we have seen that since Manu's era there had been a strict ban on Dalits' education. The provision of punishment suggested by Manu for the reading of and listening to the *Vedas* by the Sūdras was horrifying. Planted two thousand years ago, this merciless tree has sapped all the fluids from the soil of the Sūdras. As an unavoidable consequence they had to accept the degeneration in education. Education has also a deep internal bonding with literary creation. The decline in Dalit people's education is the prime hurdle in the emergence and manifestation of Dalit literature.

II. Poor Financial Condition:

Those people whose lives end in perpetual struggles with poverty, who have to render their manual labours from dawn to dusk for a single piece of bread, who spend their nights under the open sky, with only a torn piece of small cloth stuck to their waist, or even after all sorts of endeavours and duties, who looking at the faded crimson of the setting sun inevitably swallow only the saliva of their mouths and spend their nights starving and waking on their beds, are hundred miles away from the luxury of imaginary creation. To them any creation is anti-creation; and the gap between life and death having been filled up, they appear to stand on a single hand of clock and rob the

time. Benumbing everything about their senses they become callous. To expect any revolting attitude of pen or something like that from them is merely a madman's delirium. The way at least Dalit literature should have emanated from the lines of poetry, words of prose, characterizations in stories and novels, that is why, is still missing in various dimensions. Behind such scarcity the poor financial condition of the Untouchables has erected a wall of difficulties.

III. Social Untouchability:

Untouchability is a social crime. Not to judge the offence of the criminals is also a crime. But as "in and out, the voice of judgment whimpers secretly in silence"; a group of people who are sacrificed at the scaffold of untouchability do not get justice. A girl named, "Chuni Kotal" belonging to a Lodha family one day commits suicide, suffering from the pain of untouchability. The revolution of lower communities to demolish the social divisions also does not crystallize much. That as the mainstay of Indian society, casteism has tried to survive year after year through different changing scenarios, through various ups and downs, is very much true and something known. Though there are some who question the impact of casteism in the Bengalese social life and draw conclusion with great satisfaction, if the history of the Bengalis is examined it can be perceived that social and political division based on caste system is no less important in the life of the Bengalis.

With the acceptance and acknowledgement of socio-economic ideals in Bengal, the society of the Bengalis begins to get included in the eco-Brahministic *varna* system. That very system has spread its branches after having been deeply rooted in entire Bengalis' life. It is very difficult to understand the entire complexity of Bengali social life. Here *varna*-conflict faction does not function openly, rather acts shrewdly from behind the screen. In order to get themselves free from it, the strong voice the lower-class people should have possessed, is missing here

and that is why here no such powerful literary group like that of Marathi and Kannada speaking Dalit writers can be noticed. Rarely there is any writer with the surname of Mondal, Kayal, Bagdi, Bauri, Bala, Bairagi, Murmu, Kisku etc. And the few who come out through the walkways, arrange merchandise of false creations with their self-disguising dispositions instead of sharing their real-life experience. It is a matter of regret and quite like a hurdle in the particular path of Dalit literature.

IV. Marxist Movement:

In West Bengal, the Marxists by means of progressive movement have slackened the emergence of Dalits and the awakening of the Sūdras. Realizing the main concern of the revolt required for the upliftment of the Dalits which should have been rather led by someone from the Sūdras, the higher *varna* leaders have vocalized time and again in various meetings and processions everywhere the statements of the Dalits, their pains and sufferings, the issue of atrocity and abatement, suppression and barbarity, hunger and poverty and taken the control of it away from the Sūdras. Discerning this insidious intent, the poet Kaniram Rathore in his poem has said in a clear-cut way— “These are all because/ You wanted yourselves to be at the helm.” But it is clear in various ways that these leaders are the preachers supporting the permanence of Brahminism; this has been discussed in the chapter titled, “The Background of Dalit Literature”. By sparing not a single word against *varna* system and by talking about class struggle, the Communists have made their mindset clear. Possession of power by entertaining *varna* system has been used as the primary tool. “The root of untouchability is in *varna*-system, *varna*-system is the result of *varnāshrām*, *varnāshrām* has sprouted from Brahministic religion and the primary motive of Brahministic religion is to command authority or possess political power.”— If correlated with this utterance of a distinguished thinker of India, the primary purpose of Marxist movement gets clear. In the Marxist poet,

Ram Basu's poem it is said in self-chastisement, "I have poured ghee in the ashes, failure is all. Gentlemen's Communism is for bourgeois' coverall."

In fact, the Marxist movement in West Bengal has reduced the consciousness of Dalit literature. This is contrary to Dalit literature—to say in a single sentence, an obstacle to Dalit literature. The Communists of this country have not tried to investigate and practice in their thought and activity the interconnection between *varna* and class. The Communist movement has always adored higher *varna*-ism or Brahminism. Even though spoken a lot, the Dalits' tale told by them is an eyewash, not any heartfelt reflection. According to the Marxists, Dalit literature does not exist and it is confused with Marxist literature.

V. Gandhi's Concept of Harijan:

From the very last phase of colonial rule, Gandhi's thought process and concept started giving the Indian society a new shape. In order to emancipate the untouchable society from the ignominy of untouchability, he hailed them as 'Harijan.' When the mainstream national movement started to challenge the authenticity of the British rule, there was a great predominance of the cause of the higher *varna*, though it was necessary to make the British rulers aware of the strength of national integrity and that is why the leaders of *varna*-based organizations started to go in cahoots with the Congress current, mainly because of Gandhi's appeal and affection for the Harijans. In between Gandhism and love for the Harijans, the birth and rise of Dalit literature etiolated. Whether Gandhi's address of 'Harijan' is of honour or dishonour, has been evaluated again. In a recent news we can see that the Dalit society has appealed to the Uttar Pradesh Government for the abolition of the label of 'Harijan'.

VI. Publisher and Printing Press:

There is a lack of publishers and printing presses for the inception and development of Dalit literature. Because of poor financial

condition, there is hardly any established publisher among the Dalits. Nor there is any personal printing press. One or two publishers from the Dalits though can be found, they are unwilling to print the books of Dalit literature. Their belief is that their business will be affected by it. And it is better not to say anything about the publishers belonging to other communities. Regarding Dalit literature, superciliousness works in them. Often, they question, “What is the thing called ‘Dalit literature’? Nope, I shall not be able to print those books or stuff.”

VII. The Readers’ Rigidity:

Readers turn their backs on Dalit literature hearing the name of it. Moreover, even if being eager, one or the other reader considers reading a little bit, s/he does not consent to buying any book of Dalit writer by spending money. The central thought of the essay, *Sāontāli Sāhitya Āndolane Pratibandhakatā O Pratikār* (“Hindrances and Remedies of Santali Literary Movement”) by the Editor of the magazine *Sili*, Kalendranath Mandi can be remembered in this regard. By analysing the adversities of Dalit literature in Santali language, the essayist has observed that among the Dalit communities, the readers capable of buying magazines can be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Other than this, another important thing can be noticed that the affairs and activities of the Dalits and the misuses of social *varna*-structure do not touch the hearts of others. They remain satisfied if any Dalit does not declare himself or herself as Dalit, but the Dalit writers turn to barbs on that way. For, they fight for ‘identity’ through Dalit literature. This is to them a movement for their ideals and literature. Consequently, others’ indifference has to be complied with. To others, however ridiculous their affairs may appear, it does not matter to them. Someone only slightly chuckles, listening to the stories of the Dalits’ untouchability; learning the incidents of agony and poverty, torture and injustice, speaks out, “This happens often mister,” as if it is Dalits’ usual expectation. Even though any Dalit writer somehow prints a book

by spending his own money or selling his wife's jewellery or taking an office loan, he gets demoralized about writing in future as it does not sell at all. No motive remains for the publication of another book in future.

VIII. Lack of Proper Assessment:

It is the newspaper, radio or high standard literary magazine which reviews any author or his published books. They are much reluctant regarding the reviews or criticisms of the books of Dalit writers. Any book sent to those institutions for review, does not get proper attention. And their books are not selected for criticisms. Moreover, even if ever reviewed, it gets plagued with negative criticism.

IX. Dalit Literature is a Name:

Despite all sorts of adversities, Dalit literature is moving forward in its own path. Dalit literature is the name of a literary movement. Dalit literature brings into focus the sorrows, sufferings, afflictions, pains of the people belonging to the untouchable society. Quoting a little portion of an essay by the Secretary of Sahitya Akademi, I shall bring this essay to an end. In the essay, *Utsa Sandhan* ("In Search of the Origin," *The Statesman*, 29.9.1991), Indranath Choudhuri has said, "With a rage and determination of own kind, the arrival of Dalit literature in Marathi and Kannada language is an incident of eighties. The Dalits' autobiographical writings are the reflections of the grievance and agony of the lower-class people's souls. And those works determine the right direction for future. Lakshan Mani, Lakshan Gaykwad and Siddha Lingaiah wrote highlighting the problems in the lives of the socially deprived people. Even in meetings and gatherings they have raised those issues."

CHAPTER-XII

TRENDS IN EARLY-MEDIEVAL BENGALI LITERATURE
AND THE LOWER CASTES

Translated by Mithun Barman

The life-span of unwritten literature is very short. They live in oral tradition for a while. The unavailability of proper successors surely makes a tradition dry and lifeless. During the Pala dynasty in nearly four hundred years there flourished a rich storehouse of oral literature in the forms of songs and *dohas*, hymns and proverbs etc. which emanated from the religion in the consciousness and explicit religious rituals of the greater Bengalis. The greater portion of it was created by the lower-caste people. They were ignored and neglected by the *Kulins* (the religious elites). But creation does not go futile— it is proved. The lower-caste people got defeated owing to pressure from the Kulin in the Sen and Barman periods. Again, in the later periods, some lower-caste people were converted due to the influence of the Muslim invaders. Their oral tradition of songs and *dohas*, hymns and proverbs gradually became weak, but it was neither extinct, nor erased wholly. What exists now is valuable enough.

In Bangladesh during the post-Independent period, research activities sponsored by the Dhaka University were done on Bengali literature of Early-Medieval and Medieval Period, and those oral works were compiled in books. It is really a matter of pride to the Bengalis. It is also true that our successors in this Bengal will never know of all these due to lack of care and interest. Sufi and Aaul, Fakir and Baul— all grew up under the same tree. They have neither mosque-temple, nor Namaj-Puja. They are human beings. It is their only identity. Their Allah and Hari are the one and the same person. They continue their worship with ‘Ektara’ in search of “Moner Manush” (one’s soul-mate).

These people (Bauls) as beyond the battle of religions, dirt of caste prejudices and clash of interest may be treated without care and interest; still, we remember them. Rabindranath said:

“The history of our nation lies not in necessity, but it carries forward the search for union, from the deepest truth of human beings. In Baul literature, we see the devotion of the Baul community– it belongs to both the Hindus and the Muslims. They have been united but none has attacked each other. Associations or councils were not established in this union; this union gave birth to songs; the tone and language of that song is lively and juicy in the grandeur of illiteracy. The voice of the Hindus and the Muslims gets amalgamated in the tone and words of these songs; there is no conflict between the Koran and the Puran. In this union there lies the true identity of Indian civilization; in quarrels and oppositions there lies barbarism. These Baul songs testify, how the impetus of higher civilization in the deepest heart of the songs of Bangladesh, works automatically outside schools and colleges, and endeavours to create a single platform for the Hindus and the Muslims.”

Coming down throughout the ages the old tradition of ancient literature has influenced the Bengali culture of the later periods. This country is the original land of Poundras, Sundas, Methors, Mahars, Sudras and Sabars etc. It is imbued with the folk rituals of the aboriginal people, which had been popular in Bengali literature-culture-tradition of the Early-Medieval and the Medieval Periods. The influence of the then matriarchal society has been extended up to the deep root of this country. We notice here and there the temples or places for worships of *Burima*, *Chandidevi*, *Manasa*, *Shitala* and *Shasthi* etc. which are centred

round the mother deity. The Bengali Mangal-kavya or the salutation part of the literature of the Middle Age testifies to the fact of the existence of these folk-rituals. Ghar-jamai Shiva, Kopan Chandi, Garamthakur, Bonobibi, Sunda-Nisunda etc. are the characters of the human world. The idea of the imagined gods in stones, trees and animals is also found in folk culture. The old rituals and festivals of religion is the watchword of Bengali literature and culture. Its influence is also noticed in the thoughts of the modern people. Folk rituals mean the philosophy of life and society of lower-caste people. Their philosophy of life has been transmitted through a remote path to the present age. It must be admitted that the influence of ancient literature has coloured the Bengali Literature with beauty and variety. Those people who should not be lost into oblivion, are, in fact, not properly evaluated, as they deserve. The exercises as per the modern social sciences and the western system of criticism have not yet started in this country.

Folk literature is a great asset of Bengali culture. It is the total form of Bengali society and not created by an individual. It reflects the life of the society, as a whole, though something of it may be done by some individuals. Dr Ashutosh Bhattacharya said:

“Folk literature is the creation of a collective endeavour, not of mere individual. But it moves from hand to hand as their own property.”

Folk literature is old but it seems always new. It establishes the link between the old and the new. The life-force of it transmits to the present. Folk literature is the folk culture of rural life. The folk rituals of rural people of Bengal, rhymes, songs, riddles, proverbs and old stories constructed the vast area of folk literature.

Rural songs refer to a large storehouse of various elements. There are hundred kinds of songs in the hearts of the rural people, especially who are genuine and unpolished in their attitude, *e.g.*, Baul, Bhatiyali, Lokdhuni, Bhabgan, Jari, Dhuasong, Dehatatwa, Gazigan, Murshidi, Maiz Bhandari, Tusi gan, River Song, Bhowaiya and Fakiri songs etc. The Bauls of Bengal and their songs are a rich arena of folk literature. It is valuable. The etymological meaning of 'Baul' is 'mad' or 'extremely eager' and 'Aaul' means 'eager' or 'keen'. Both the terms are used quite synonymously. Those who are mad, eager or keen for their 'Moner Manush' (soul-mates) are called 'baul'. It is the single strain of Hindu and Muslim. There is no casteism, no dispute of creed or culture— it is the song of great union.

The Baul is a strange community. They live outside the human habitation. They make 'Aakra' or 'Dera' (place of living and worshipping) beside forests or jungles or on the banks of rivers. Sometimes they make their huts beside 'Dargas'. They wear dress made of patches of clothes of numerous colours. They hold 'Ektara' (a musical instrument) in their hands. There is a canvas bag for begging, hanging from their shoulders. There is suggestiveness in their behaviours, and economy of words is another feature of them. The chief characteristic includes the deep sensational songs in simple words and lucid language. There is no nuisance of limitations and prohibitions prescribed in the scriptures and religions. There is nothing of the exuberance of bookish knowledge. For, almost all of them belong to the lower castes. How can there be a relationship between the lower caste and the elites! Their greatest resource is the realm of mind. There is no caste discrimination. This mighty pride befits them only. Folk literature is considered as the base of mainstream literature in each and every country. How far it is true in our country— it is a matter of judgment. Folk literature has not been revered in this Bengal, as already said. In comparison to this Bengal, the post-Independent Bangladesh stands ahead by a few

steps. The contribution of the lower-caste people with the Muslims is very distinct here and through various activities they have been a resource of literature. How great the contribution of tribes or the lower-caste people is— it deserves proper evaluation.

CHAPTER-XIII

DALIT LITERARY AND CULTURAL MOVEMENTS OF
THE POST-SEVENTIES BENGAL

One

Prior to talking of post-seventies Bengal, we may refer to one salient point of glory that Bengal has very meticulously noticed. The state has got about a two-third dozen of Chief Ministers during the last seven decades of Independence and mostly all of them have come from the confirmed bachelors and spinster categories except two or three. And it is also to be mentioned that though the four-fifth of the total population of the state come from the groups of SCs, STs, OBCs and other religious minorities, all the Chief Ministers, I mean, the administrative tops, are seen to have come from the trio-dominant castes only. If the people who come from the lower strata of the caste hierarchies would get equal helps, opportunities and indiscriminate provisions of education for all, perhaps, literacy among these sections of the people would not have been so poor. The Pratiche Education Report of 2002 has indicated the point clearly.

The report says: “Of the total number of illiterates in West Bengal, 30% belong to the 15-35 age group, that is to say, they came of age during the period of Left Front rule that has continued uninterruptedly in the state from 1977 till date. The rate of literacy among the Scheduled Caste (SC) communities is still as low as 42.21 % and it is painful to note that the Department of School Education of the Government of West Bengal does not provide any data on the literacy rate among the Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities in the annual report.”¹ Similar is the case as it seems to happen in the higher education. It mentions: “In case of West Bengal which is having about 25% Scheduled Caste population like Punjab, Himachal Pradesh etc.

deprivation of SC/ST from their due reserved quota is actually shocking though that Government boasts to be the Govt. of the have-nots/proletariats. In case of quality education in prestigious courses and professional colleges, their deprivation is very high. Professional courses in 2229 colleges like medical, engineering, 600 institutions of management etc., the shares of SC/STs are 7-8%, for SCs 5.5% and for STs 2-3% as per records available. For their 22.5% legal quota, they have been provided with less than 10% seats in professional courses.”² With these types of precarious discriminative treatments with the ‘Dalit’ population of the state they are day by day going aggrieved and protestant to retrieve and break up the days of their long reticence.

Two

India was on a tremendous movement for achieving Independence as early as possible and Simon Commission was formed in 1927 “to report on the working of the Constitution of India” and “the Commission’s recommendations which, however, had some effect on the Government of India Act, 1935”³ had endorsed “reservation policy” for the “Depressed Classes”. Those people who were identified “depressed classes” by the Commission are now termed as ‘Dalits’ in pan-Indian languages since 1956 while Dr B. R. Ambedkar, the unquestionable messiah of their emancipation was alive. They are the people even now seen uncared at this present moment and they undergo deprivation, caste-hatred and marginalization off-and-on in the states in various ways such as educationally, politically, economically, socially and culturally, and all over the various states of Indian dominion/nation wherever a vigilant eye of search is cast on, the deprivation is noticed more or less in a similar fashion. Here the subject of discussion in this disposal is of their literary and cultural movements, particularly, of Bengal.

It was in the year 1976, that an organization named “Nabajug Sahitya O Sanskriti Parishad” was formed in Kolkata,

with an idea in mind to inculcate a new kind of literature by the Dalits of the state of West Bengal. They started to publish a little magazine, 'Atoeb'. It is now running, on an uneven road of 43-year long journey or race of life. Undergoing a long traverse, at present it is being published from Nirala Bhawan, 8/14A, Rabindranath Thakur Road, Kolkata-8. It is, at present, being edited by Noni Gopal Sikder, an octogenarian Dalit writer. In the year 1986, just prior to one year of the First All India Dalit Writers' Conference had held for three days on 8-10th October, 1987 in Hyderabad; Bimal Biswas of Salt Lake, AE- 513, Kolkata 64, started to publish a monthly literary magazine, 'Adal Badal' and it had a run at a stretch without taking any rest, incessantly, for 30 years. And when the Editor became of a nonagenarian age, he had been rather forced to stop publishing the same and that happened in the month of December, 2016.

Here now it is to mention the names of seven Dalit writers who should be called Dalit musketeers in view of their seniority in age and definitely who were empowered with mighty pens also in hands and had fought a nice and enthusiastic social war against the injustices that the socially marginal people of West Bengal suffered from. Why musketeers? They all were at that time senior citizens except two who were below 45. They who were the sexagenarian writers at that moment were the noble souls and by name they were none but Jatin Bagchi, Naresh Chandra Das, Harendra Nath Samaddar, Jatindra Mohan Majumdar, Bimal Biswas, along with two juniors with them, who were nobody except Manohar Mouli Biswas, an essayist and an author of about one and a half dozens of books and Chinmay Roy who was the then Editor of the quarterly little magazine, 'Atoeb'.

Three

The above seven musketeers have got their reservation in the same compartment of East Coast Express. They commenced a journey from Howrah and reached Hyderabad Railway station in

the morning at 8 a.m. of October 8, 1987. About 50 Dalit students of Hyderabad University, under the leadership of Bojja Tharakam and Ganumala Gnaneshwar were present at the railway station to receive the invitees who had boarded the same train from West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and the coastal parts of Andra Pradesh. Fantastically the prominent Dalit writers at national level such as Dr Boyi Bhimanna, Prof. Arun Kamble, Prof. Siddha Lingaiah, Daya Pawar, Namdeo Dhasal, Dr K. Lingaiah, Devanoor Mahadeva, K.C. Srinivas ulu, *et al* were on the reception committee of the Conference. As soon as the train was in, the Hyderabad station was sounding and resounding, and was shaken with loud slogans, “Dalit Writers Zindabad Zindabad, First All India Dalit Writers’ Conference Long Live, Long Live, What We Want We Want Social Justice Social Justice, etc.”

Of the Bengal musketeers, the senior-most was Jatin Bagchi, known for his *Jati-Darma O Samaj Vivartan* published in 1986 and the Preface to the book was written by Dr Tushar Chattopadhyay, Director, Institute of Folklore, University of Kalyani. Two Dalit students such as Nanda Dulal Mohanta and Birat Bairagya have got Ph.D. and D. Lit. respectively under the guidance of Dr Tushar Chattopadhyay. Naresh Chandra Das, a Professor of a college in the department of Political Science, known for his book, *Namasudra Sampradaya O Bangladesh*, first published in 1961 and subsequently reprinted several times, gave perhaps the historical account of the Dalit communities of Bengal. Harendranath Samaddar, founder member of “Nabajug Sahitya O Sanskriti Parishad” is known for his *Kerani Jibaner Katha (Story of a Clerk’s Life)* and Jatindra Mohan Majumdar is known for his book of poems and a novelette named, ‘Shuktara’. None of these writers are alive now.

After long discussions during three days, at the end the manifesto⁴ for national Dalit writings was declared. They were

committed to the assignments to bring into force a topsy-turvy change to the society through the re-forming of the vertical society into a horizontal one. Their commitment was assigned to form a casteless and classless society. They declared that they were against capitalism, communalism, fundamentalism, feudalism, imperialism and fascism. They favoured the egalitarianism. They want to bear the torch of liberation for the oppressed, for the depressed and for the exploited.

Bimal Biswas, Aditya Roy, Anil Krishna Mallick, Manoranjan Sarkar, Santosh Kumar Sarkar, Bibhuti Bhushan Biswas, Gouranga Sarkar, Mahendranath Talukdar, Brajendranath Mallick *et al* all are now living octogenarians and even someone belongs to the nonagenarians. Very recently, while I am writing this essay, in this month May, 2018, we have lost Aditya Roy, a committed social worker, and then lost Mahendranath Talukdar (01.04.1928-18.05.2018), Editor-cum-Circulation Manager of a Dalit political weekly, “Bahujan Nayak”, the mouthpiece of Bahujan Samaj Party, in Bengali.

Of the seven musketeers Chinmay Roy and Manohar Mouli Biswas who were younger by age at that time, are at this moment above seventy. Chinmay Roy is known for his book of poems, *Sambuka Santati*, and the first book of poems of Manohar Mouli Biswas was published in 1967 along with some other five co-poets of different castes and classes, who all were at that time friends to him; and they were Amarendranath Chakraborty, Purabi Bandyopadhyay, Sunil Jana, Chandi Charan Mondal *et al*. Frankly speaking, no such idea of Dalit literature had cropped up in his mind at that time, but whatsoever was written in those days were nothing but the sagas of Dalit life. And the conception of Dalit literature had given a wild jerking at the fag end of sixties while myself entered into service carrier and got its start at Nagpur in 1968.

Four

The evolvement of Dalit literature in West Bengal with this identity mark of 'Dalit' into the domain of literature has got history of persecution behind it and that is to be understood. The Left Front Government came into power at the end of seventies in West Bengal, with massive support from the section of people who may be called the have-nots or Dalits. Soon after their coming into power the mass massacre of the Dalits took place in Marichjhampi, a part of Sunderban area in the district of South 24 Parganas and that brutal assassination of the poor took place happened on 31st of January, 1979. And as a natural discourse a new domain of literature had taken a move against this persecution and it came to the knowledge of others through the writings of the sufferers. This new creativity and its exposure are nothing 'abusive', nothing 'cursive', nothing 'dismissive'. But just to tell of the protection of the people against dislodging them, against persecuting them and against snatching whatsoever meagre and little means of livelihood they do have; and perhaps it may be termed as a journey for the 'negation of the negation' of society.

Furthering this idea of 'negation of the negation' we may also point to the caste-divided society that speaks of the Sudras and untouchables as "people of negation" and the elected rulers whosoever time to time came into power through the democratic process during the post-Independent days of the country, who are also seen not to be keen to promote these deprived classes in the direction of their rapid uplift, and have due lack of sincere efforts on the ground; it had furthered 'deprivation' on them in multinomial ways, and so, stands for this 'negation of the negation'. To enquire into the attitudes of the common people why they are in the denial mood and unkind to 'Dalit' for the centuries past; we may refer to the explanations of Dr Ambedkar. "Dr Ambedkar has in his usual critical style assessed the Indian social system. He is critical of the Indian social system because

it did not foster the spirit of critical inquiry. It is, indeed, a matter of regret that the Indians could not produce a Voltaire or Milton or Victor Hugo because, as a class, they did not approve of it. The spirit of inquiry is the sine-qua-non of progress.”⁵ Who will bell the cat then? Who will show that spirit of inquiry to assure the progress of the marginal class? It is what the spirit and mindset work behind and no benign solution is so far taken into real practice.

Now let me mention the names of two out of the seven musketeers who had contributed to the above-mentioned commemorative volume published from Hyderabad after the First All India Dalit Writers’ Conference. It included one poem of Bimal Biswas, bearing the title, “Will Be Burnt” that shows how the Dalit writers launch protest: “Harvest have all been looted. /Now, with the straws, left over, /Twisted coils are in the making/And striking on the flint stones/ are going on.

“High on the discoloured wall/is the head of a tiger/mouth wide-opened, glamourless. /Above it hangs a faded picture, an oil-painting/gilded frames, entangled/with cobwebs.

“Sparks will drop on the coils/ And they will light up the fire--- /a conflagration.

“It will burn the open-mouthed/ tiger head:/ It will burn the golden framed/picture in oil-paint.”⁶

And in an article titled, “The Contemporary Literature and The Dalit Writers”, Manohar Mouli Biswas mentions, the voice of the people is a powerful instrument just like anything. He said, “The voice of the people is the voice of God. What is the voice of the people? Literature of course is the voice of the people and then voice of God. Plato (427-347 B.C.), the Greek philosopher said, ‘Poets utter great and wise things which they do not themselves understand’, wherefrom does this utterance come? It comes from the origin unknown and the people under existence enjoy it for

the life.”⁷ Thus is the case we find with the Dalit writers who rose to the occasion with irrepressible power of writings.

Five

An incident is to be mentioned of here. About six months prior to the All-India Dalit Writers’ Conference at Hyderabad, Bangiya Dalit Writers arranged a meet-together for two days on April 18-19, 1987 in the ground of Maslandapur Natun Pally Ambedkar Primary School of the district of North 24 Parganas. And the second meet of this organization was again held recently on March 3-4, 2018 at the same venue and place. Nakul Mallick, a story writer and novelist, Kapil Krishna Thakur, a poet, story writer and novelist, Dhurjati Naskar, an essayist, autobiographer and researcher, Shyamal Kumar Pramanik, a story writer and novelist, Chinmay Roy, a poet, Raju Das, a drama performer and scripter, Smriti Kana Howlader, an Ambedkarite vocal singer and rhyme-writer, Manju Bala, a poet and story writer, Harshabardhan Choudhury, a dramatist and performer, Harendranath Bhakta, a story writer, Badal Sarkar, a poet and rhyme writer, Sarajit Mandal, a poet and story writer, Kalyani Thakur, a poet and autobiographer, *et al* were present in the two-day conference.

Dalit literature is the literature of protest and revolt, and of commitment what I have told earlier, and “Commitment in literature in general is also synonymous with an identical idea in the context of Dalit literature. To express this a bit differently, commitment is about purpose or intention of Dalit literature. It is irrelevant to suggest that a creator creates for its own sake. The ‘art for art’s sake’ theory is somewhat inappropriate in this context. Necessity— the necessity of creativity— is a focal theme. Any work of creation needs an aesthetic orientation. Dalit literature incorporates the aesthetics.”⁸ The explicit exposure that the Bengal Dalit writers might have done explains a new

dimension of its own, which is, by virtue of merits, seen differing from the mainstream literary theory.

The vulnerable Dalit literary movement in Bengal had got the most effective start in 1992 with the formation of an organization named, “Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sanstha”. The organization cropped up after the sad immolation of Chuni Kotal, a Lodha tribe girl of Midnapore, while she was doing her M.Sc. course in Vidyasagar University. It is an incident of torture on Dalit woman that took place about twenty-four years prior to the incidence of the self-immolation of Rohit Vemula that happened in the campus of University of Hyderabad. She was being regularly rebuked by some upper-caste teachers in their habitual manner in the classroom, in the name of her heinous tribe-identity in society.⁹

In Bengal, many a people think like this: the caste marginalization does not work here in this state. But the ground reality exposes something that testifies to something else. Apparently at the outer surface of the society none can see it, but under the carpet and beyond the visual area it is very much present. “Judged by all social indicators, the Dalits are clearly in disadvantageous positions in comparison to the general populace. The upper-caste Hindus still dominate the entire range of public institutions— the skilled professions and the media. Their overwhelming presence in major areas of decision-making tends to reinforce the upper-caste monopoly and perpetrate the overall exclusion of the Dalits.”¹⁰

Someone has explained it in a bit different way. A section of the Dalit people, though very meagre in number, are now educated and are showing their excellence. Even a Dalit girl, Tina Dabi has become topper in the IAS examination recently. In West Bengal certain Dalit student named, ‘Arka Majumdar’ became the topper in the Higher Secondary Examination and a Dalit student named, “Santosh Kumar Sarkar” became topper in

M. Tech. Examination of University of Calcutta. This type of things are happening very often now. Now they are somehow throwing challenge in the competitive market of service sector and education. Under such condition a new kind of persecution is seen to be clamping down on them.

Here another emblematic exposure we have got is from Santosh Rana, a social thinker and good scholar who has viewed from some other angle. "The self-immolation of Rohit Vemula, a Dalit scholar had happened in the University campus (on 17.01.2016). This incident has given a blatant shake to the whole of Dalit society of the country. A middleclass is seen to be growing up among the Dalits through some welfare programmes taken by the government in the post-Independent days, by implementing reservation policy for the Dalits in service sector and educational areas, and by nationalization of Banking sector and collieries. The present functionaries are seen working against it"¹¹ It is perhaps the marginalization of the people afresh.

Six

In the post seventies Bengal, the Dalit literary movements and activism are seen to have made a journey jointly in such a way that they have become complementary to one another. They both had been walking forward side by side. Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sanstha (BDSS) in its written constitution declared to rouse the consciousness among the people marginalized socially and culturally, educationally and economically. "To shun the blind-faith, superstition, unscientific and inhuman social inequality and injustice as also to preach and spread the message of equality, liberty and fraternity through literature and performing arts."¹² Every year they organize some functions such as the celebration of the 14th April, the birthday of Dr B.R. Ambedkar, as a 'day of knowledge'. The members of the Sanstha gather at the feet of the statue of Dr B.R. Ambedkar at Red Road of Kolkata, in a colourful procession every year. In one year, they had taken a

constitutional oath there at the feet of the statue that none of the members, in any way, shall involve in any kind of corruption or illegal work in their life. The said oath was administered by Dr Gunadhar Barman, a senior-most member of the Sanstha, and a committed social worker. Dr Barman was popularly known for his book “Jugosrotha Ambedkar” meaning “Dr Ambedkar, the Creator of a New Era”. And he had been editing a weekly, “Atmanirikshan” for a long time to make the society aware of reasoning and scientific knowledge. We have lost this great fighter more than a decade ago.

Every year in June-July they organize the Annual General Meeting (AGM). The Sanstha was formed after the sad immolation of the tribal girl, Chuni Kotal, as mentioned earlier, who committed suicide in 1992 while she was studying M. Sc, due to heinous and abusive caste hatred. Every year the Sanstha organizes a memorial lecture on the day of her death known as “The Chuni Kotal Memorial Lecture”. “So far by this time 25 lectures were organized starting from 1994 to 2020 in which reputed scholars from the fields of Sociology, Anthropology, International Relations, Education, History and Comparative Literature, irrespective of caste and creed of the speakers, have been welcomed to deliver the Chuni Kotal Memorial Lectures.”

¹³ All these have taken place just to rouse the consciousness amongst the backward community people, who are, in an ordinary purview, seen to become the underdogs in our national, social spectrum.

Every year the Sanstha organizes and celebrates a two-day ‘Sangiti’ or ‘Conference’ at the end of the month December, very particularly, on 24th and 25th and it happens as one of their annual routine curricula taking place from the day of its coming into existence in 1992. Why 24-25 December? They had chosen these particular dates because of the fact that the 24th is the day of death of E V R Naikar, a revolutionary protestor and curator

of the 'Self-Respect Movement' in the country (who died in 1973); and why 25th of December? This is the day of dignity to the Dalits in the history of their protests. Dr B. R. Ambedkar, the builder of 'Dalit Identity' in the country and the 'Father of Indian Constitution' had burnt the *Manusmriti* on the 25th of December, 1927 for erasing and nullifying the inhuman persecutions and tortures what 'Manu' had prescribed in the book to incur upon the people of the marginal castes and classes. So far, the BDSS has organized 29 Sangitis or Conferences by this time. Every year they arrange it in the village locality where mostly the marginal community people do live. In these two-day programmes debates on different topics, extempore speeches by Dalit students and youths, important subject-based lectures, recitation, dramas, seat-and-draw for children, performing arts etc. take place. In a usual manner, students from Dalit communities take part with lot of their enthusiasm.

1. BDSS had organized its first sangiti in 1992 at the village Bhayna in the district of Nadia; second sangiti in 1993 in Hridayapur in district North 24 Parganas; third sangiti in 1994 in village Khannan in the district of Hooghly; fourth sangiti in 1995 at the village Pakuahat of Malda district; fifth sangiti in 1996 in Raghunathpur High School in the district of South 24 Parganas; sixth sangiti in 1997 in Thakurnagar H.S. School of North 24 Parganas; seventh sangiti in 1998 in Adra Railway Community Hall of Purulia district; eighth sangiti in 1999 at Kamar Kundu in Hooghly district; ninth sangiti in 2000 in Kripasharan Hall at 1 No. Buddhist Temple Street, Kolkata; tenth sangiti in 2001 in Gocharan Sitanath High School of South 24 Parganas; eleventh sangiti in 2002 in Basantia High School of district Midnapore; twelfth sangiti in 2003 in Hazarduari of district Murshidabad; thirteenth sangiti in 2004 in Vivekananda High School of North 24 Parganas; fourteenth sangiti in 2005 in Ranaghat Usuff Institution in

Nadia district; fifteenth sangiti in 2006 in Dr Ambedkar Prathamik Vidyalaya of Purba Panchannagram in Kolkata; sixteenth sangiti in 2007 at Tarinimajhir Ghat of Salt Lake Stadium; seventeenth sangiti in 2008 in Vivekananda College of Thakurpukur, Kolkata; eighteenth sangiti in 2009 in village Charanpur of Burdwan district; nineteenth sangiti in 2010 in Poundra Kshatriya Unnayan Parisad of Garia, Kolkata; twentieth sangiti in 2011 in the village Kalaiberia in Bankura district; twenty-first sangiti in 2012 in Friends Mission of Durganagar in district North 24 Parganas; twenty-second sangiti in 2013 in Brajabasi Sadan of New Barrackpore in the district North 24 Parganas; twenty-third sangiti in 2014 in Chandmari Janakalyan H.S. School in district Nadia; twenty-fourth sangiti in 2015 in Bamangachi Balaka Bhawan in the district of North 24 Parganas; twenty-fifth or the Silver Jubilee Sangiti in 2016 in Dr B.R. Ambedkar Mission of Hridayapur in the district of North 24 Parganas; twenty-sixth sangiti in 2017 in Krishnapada Ghosh Memorial Hall, 55 Surjya Sen Street, Kolkata-9 only for one day on 24th of December from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The twenty-seventh sangiti (in 2018) was held at Vidyasagar Hall, Gosaba, in the district of South 24 Parganas. The twenty-eighth sangiti took place in 2019 in Jhargram Balaka Manch, District- Jhargram. The twenty ninth sangiti was held online, on 25th of December, 2020, due to the pandemic.

Seven

In this phase I would like to draw the conclusion of the essay. Dalit literature is always trying to establish the alternative heroism as of coming from the Dalit castes and classes in defiance of the mainstream mindset. If it is to talk of the *Ramayana*, Rama is worshipped as God and He is the hero of the

epic. If it is seen from the angle of the marginal people, the role of Ravana becomes equally important. While Ratnakar, a man of very low profession, say, a dacoit in jungle, writes the *Ramayana*, dignifies himself a self-educated human being. While Rama is the hero, it is the *Ramayana*. While Ravana is hero, it is then the *Ravanayana*, an equally valued and important epic. The basic difference between the two is that Rama is in favour of maintaining the caste-system in society and that is the reason why he beheaded Sambuka, and on the other hand, Ravana was against it.

Further to add, the triadic concept of aesthetics of mainstream literature, at the Indian national level that got its root from the ancient sandalwood domain of Sanskrit Literature as 'Satyam Sivam Sundaram', is giving birth to a new concept in the discourse of Dalit literary aesthetics eliminating the middle word 'Sivam' from this row, because of its belief that they are the people anthropocentric and anthropomorphic in thoughts and struggles for the betterment of their life. Their journey is odd and erratic. They are to suffer the persecution and suppression due to their low birth in the scale of caste hierarchy. They do not take any pride for the caste where they are born, and, as a result, they do not have their belief in the Vedic creativity, the provider of the caste system. The Vedas are more political here than providing equality to the human beings. Every Brahmin of the society owes his honourable admittance in bearing a lineage to any of the Vedas. In order to give the full-fledged stipulations to adherence to the Vedas about hundred Samhita-Granthas were institutionalized to the society. In violation to these stipulations the coming up of Dalit Literature has enshrined a new temple in the discourse of literature. It is the literature to remove the graded inequality of the society and to bring about the dignity and honour for the people so far neglected and dishonoured.

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(This chapter was written directly in English)

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