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Editorial

Dalit literature in India is now more than sixty-year-old with a concerted beginning from Baburao Bagul's *Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti* (when I hid my caste) published in 1963. Here Dalit literature means literature produced by Dalits themselves. However, if we talk about concerns about dalit in literature by Dalits or non-dalits, it can be traced back to eleventh century in composers of Vachana by Basavanna and others. One of the earliest Dalit writers was Madara Chennaiah, an 11th century cobbler-saint who lived during the reign of the Western Chalukyas and was regarded as the "father of Vachana poetry." Dohara Kakkaiah, a Dalit poet, also belongs to the same era. The origin of Dalit writing can also be traced back to Dalit Bhakti poets like Gora, Raidas, Chokhamela and Karmamela, and to the Tamil Siddhas, or Chittars. Modern Dalit writing only emerged as a distinct genre with tireless striving of thinkers such as Sree Narayana Guru, Jyotiba Phule, B.R. Ambedkar, Iyothee Thass, Sahodaran Ayyappan, Ayyankali, Poykayil Appachan and others. The term Dalit Literature was first used at the first conference of *Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangha* in 1958.

However, reformers during Bhakti period and after have been raising their voice against evils like untouchability and exploitation of the poor and Dalits. Vivekananda lambasted the Hindus particularly Brahmins for dragging Hinduism into kitchen and making it a religion of 'don't touch me'. He exhorted people, "For the next fifty years let all other vain Gods disappear from our minds. This is the only God that is awake..." and serve Daridranarayan, the real god of the Kaliyug.

Baba Saheb Ambedkar admitted the necessity of a religion though he was highly critical of Hindu religion particularly for its Brahminical character, caste and varna system. Arundhati Roy has observed : "I do believe that in India we practice a form of apartheid that goes unnoticed by the rest of the world. And it is as important for Dalits to tell their stories as it has been for colonized peoples to write their own histories. When Dalit literature has blossomed and is in full stride, then contemporary (upper caste?) Indian literature's amazing ability

to ignore the true brutality and ugliness of the society in which we live, will be seen for what it is: bad literature.” It is wrong to say that ugliness of society has been ignored in Indian Literature that she calls upper caste literature, a new identity. The pioneering writers of Dalit empathy are the non-Dalit writers like Premchand, Mulk Raj Anand, Padmini Sengupta, Tare Sherka, Bandopadhyay, Gopinath Mahanty, Kanhu Charan Mohanty, Babani Bhattacharya, K. Shivram Karanth, T. Shivshankar Pillai, S. Menon Marath, Mahashweta Devi, Parashuran Mund, Rajendra Awasthi, Shashi Deshpande, Pratibha Roy, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Warriar, etc.

The literal meaning of the word “Dalit” is “cut off,” “oppressed,” “downtrodden.” It comes from the Sanskrit root “dal.” Thus, the word represents those separated or distanced from the rest of humanity (Kanipayyur, 540). The term in general is used for castes and classes who have been held inferior by “Varnashrama Dharma.” Dalits, therefore, constitute the most oppressed downtrodden castes in India. The degradation of these people finds a voice in Dalit Literature. The ultimate goal of Dalit Literature is the liberation of Dalits, who have been, for centuries, subjected to the hegemony and inhuman ill-treatment of the upper- castes. According to Limbale, “Dalit Literature is the writings about Dalits with a Dalit consciousness” (*Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*, 19) and its primary motive is the liberation of Dalits. According to Prof Arun Kamble, “Dalits are those who have been oppressed religiously, culturally, economically, socially and philosophically by the unjust established social organization” (Narasaiah, 7). Prof. Kamble includes in the purview of the term the oppressed subaltern castes and classes which include SCs, STs, BCs and even minorities. His stand is different from Baburao Bagul, Arjun Dangle and Kardam in taking BCs and minorities in its fold. One can argue that an SC or a BC writer has the same disadvantage in articulating or empathising with the sensibilities of a tribal community that a non-dalit writer has while writing about dalit.

Dalit literature a corollary of the political movements of Dalits beginning from Maharashtra and spreading in almost all states of India has come of an age where it has finally got recognition and acceptance in academia and literary field and in public domain. Traditional feudal structure has died out after Independence but the old feudal, imperial

mind-set still persists, albeit in receding degree and one hopes, it will die out in course of time. Gandhian movement, Dalit Panthers movement, Naxal movement, Government's reservation policy, Anti-SC, ST Atrocities Act and political compulsion of political parties have empowered them to resist, react and retaliate against any act of cruelty and discrimination in the society.

The fundamental difference between the aesthetics of Dalit literature and that of other literatures is that the former is the literature of self/ lived experience, insider's account of atrocities/discrimination born out of caste and varna prejudice while the latter is the literature of empathy if it concerns with the experience gained from secondary sources. Self-expression of traumatic experiences in literature has two-fold function—cathartic and reformative. All such writers are social reformers. They not only appeal to the people of their class in stupor to 'Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached' but also to show the brutal face of victimizers to their progeny and aim at sensitizing them and the society in general to the call of humanity. Such articulation of trauma, victimization, subjugation should be encouraged; and it would continue till the accumulated fury in the memory of the class concerned is released and the wound is healed or till we achieve what William Blake Said :

When I from black and he from white cloud free,
And round the tent of God like lambs we joy:

I'll shade him from the heat till he can bear,
To lean in joy upon our father's knee.
And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,
And be like him and he will then love me.

(The Little Black Boy)

The day will come when Dalit literature will evolve itself into the literature of the consciousness of the oppressed, the victimized, the discriminated cutting across caste, class, religion, race, language, gender or political boundaries.

I take this opportunity to thank the valued contributors who showed keen interest and made this special issue possible. Special thanks to

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Dr Samir K. Sharma for the permission to reprint the paper of Prof Shankar A. Dutta published in *Approaches* and of Prof J.P. Singh published in *Literary Waves*. Wish you a very Happy New Year-2020 and happy reading!

—C.L. Khatri

Dr. R.C. Prasad's Ambedkarism: Voice and Vision of Radical Sanity

Dr. J.P. Singh
Dr. Kalpana Sinha

Abstract :

Ambedkarism is, as it were, a manifesto of the beliefs and ideology of Baba Saheb B.R. Ambedkar. It is an analysis of his conviction as well as his vision to get rid of the dehumanising impact of Hinduism. It contains his guidelines in no uncertain terms to give up Hindu religion with his lakhs of followers. He calls Hinduism a suffocating poisonous gas chamber for millions of so-called sub-castes and Dalits. Ambedkar's ideology affirms the Hindu spiritual mantra '*Aham Brahmasmi*' (I am that Divine) and '*Tattwamasi*' (You, too, are the same). The prevailing Brahminic condemnation of the so-called Dalits denigrates and falsifies the Hindu spiritual assumption. Ambedkarism also calls Gandhism a paradox as it favours maintaining the caste structure. Ambedkar believed in full and final redressal from the curse of current apartheid towards Dalits by renouncing it.

Keywords: iconoclast, critique, radicalism, doom, panacea, delirium.

Ambedkarism 1993 as an analysis of the vision of Baba Saheb B.R. Ambedkar is the voice of "*Radical Sanity*". Elizabeth Wurtzel in her book *Radical Sanity* just echoes the eternal "*mantra*" of any revolutionary radical change: "Always ask...Freud, Marx, Einstein asked questions however debatable." (Wurtzel, intro) Dr. R.C. Prasad's *Ambedkarism* is, in fact, a searching analysis of a revolutionary social ideology that asked questions, demolished toxic assumptions of oppressive Hinduism which had virtually forced generations of the Dalits to go brain dead down the millennia without asking questions. The following blazing words-an outright rejection of the repressive architecture of Hinduism-underline the vision of this "Radical Sanity:"

1. "I shall have no faith in Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh nor shall I worship them."
2. "I shall have no faith in Rama and Krishna who are believed to be incarnations of God nor shall I worship them."
3. "I shall not allow any ceremonies to be performed by Brahmins."

4. "I renounce Hinduism which is harmful for humanity and impedes the advancement and development of humanity because it is based on inequality, and adopt Buddhism as my religion." (IBA, p. 86)

The above-mentioned fiery "Negatives" like flaming Biblical injunctions are just four of the 22 historical vows of Baba Saheb B.R. Ambedkar. It was on 15 October, 1956 that Dr. Ambedkar had a mass religious conversion ceremony at Deeksha Bhoomi, Nagpur, Maharashtra. Possibly it was the largest religious conversion the world has ever witnessed. The total number of persons who had undergone the conversion to Buddhism was about 800000 (eight lakhs) in number. It was here in this conversion assembly that Dr. Ambedkar prescribed 22 vows for his followers as a form of directive guidelines to mark a complete severance of bond with Hinduism. These vows were aimed at liberating converts from superstitious wasteful and meaningless rituals which had supposedly led to pauperization and degradation of the masses down the ages. These 22 vows lead us back to Ambedkar in 1935 when he had, with agony in his soul and a gritty stamina in his voice, announced his resolution at least not to die as a Hindu. On October 13, 1935, ten thousand people had assembled at Yeola, a town about 35 miles from Nasik to attend the Bombay Presidency Depressed Classes Conference. Ambedkar presided over the Conference and in his speech lasting over an hour and a half he underlined the failure of the depressed communities in India to secure-even elementary rights and a semblance of equality in the Hindu fold:

Because we have the misfortune of calling ourselves Hindus, we are treated thus. If we are members of another faith, none would dare treat us so. Choose any religion which gives you equality of status and treatment. We shall repair our mistakes now. (IBA, p. 86)

The climactic point of his was his speech personal dramatic resolve to cut off the umbilical chord with the Hindu fold. Possibly it was a decision triggered by years of alienation and hostility experienced in the Hindu fold:

I had the misfortune of being born with the stigma of an untouchable, because I had no control over it. However, I can assure you...that I will not die a Hindu, for this is in my power. (Moon, p. 206)

In fact, the plaintive but the disillusioned angry thunder of his voice recalls the satirical denunciation of revolutionary Kabir who, in one of his poems, preferred to glorify himself with the traditional epithets of abuse and indignity which the Brahminic monolith of the yore had heaped upon the poor in means and low in caste. Addressing the Maya—the goddess of Illusion—Kabir reprimands her to seek out those who are high in caste and mighty in power, for what would she get in a pauper outcaste’s household:

tun ghar Jahu hamar behna: vish lage tohar naina :
tahan Jahu Jahan pat patambar, agar chandan ghas lina
a:i hamare ka: karogi, ham tou Jat Kameena: (Dwivedi)

It is against this background of revolutionary socio-cultural upsurge that Ambedkarism as a conceptual ideological tool became as popular as Marxism, Maoism, Vedism or Islamism. During the last two decades of the 20th century analysis of the ideological components of Ambedkarsim as a revolutionary philosophy of social restructuring gradually caught the fancy of social activists, academics and justice fraternity. If justice V.R. Krishna Iyer stands with his *The Dalit Future* on one end of the spectrum, Dr. R.C. Prasad with his *Ambedkarism* and *A Preface To Ambedkarism* along with Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak with his concrete action plans cover other end of that spectrum. The duo hailing from Bihar, it needs to be underlined, have sought to set forth certain prominent tendencies in Ambedkar’s writings as well as to highlight their socio-political implications. It is as a part of egalitarian radical social re-structuring and “shaping humanitarianism into a militant mould” that “Ambedkarsim” as a concept can be appreciated in the right perspective. For V.R. Krishna Iyer the term “Ambedkarism” underlines, denotes and suggests “Group Justice” that implies a structured social architectural design based on justice and equality. (Iyer)

For Dr. R.C. Prasad, “Ambedkarism” as an ideological philosophy is a “militant’s technique or waging his struggle for the uplift of the untouchable Dalits of Society.” (Prasad, p. ix) No wonder, he coins this expression “Ambedkarism” meaning thereby a radical activist and ideological Ambedkar who possesses the “non-negotiable quality of matchless courage and prodigious intellectual energy supportive of his value system.” (Prasad, p. ix)

However, Dr. Prasad's definition of Ambedkar's radicalism modifies V.R. Krishna Iyer's assessment of Ambedkar as a "constructive politician and a compromising meloristi." (Iyer, 102) Nonetheless, his academic conviction stays unimpaired when he affirms that a true "Ambedkarian" like the "Icon" himself would even remain a swordsman of social justice and a demolisher of *status quo ante* which denied even the recognition of human identity to a vast segment of Indian population.

Rejection of Hinduism as a suffocating poisonous gas chamber for the millions of so-called sub-castes and Dalits naturally led to Ambedkar's quest for an alternative. This alternative was Buddhism that had rejected Hinduism and its caste-ridden Brahminic elitism. Buddhism flashed with a magnetic pull on Ambedkar's consciousness as a philosophy, as a doctrine of worth in opposition to the doctrine of birth. Down the centuries all Upanishadic spiritual insights had degenerated into a hereditary theology of Brahminic elitism.

Courage, conviction and incisive clinical dissection were the hallmarks of Baba Saheb Ambedkar as a militant social revolutionary. No wonder, his comments on the Vedas, Manu, the oppressive caste hierarchy and on all the overt or covert protectors of the rotten stinking system sometimes grew bitter and pungent. He was virtually shattering the old icons and whether it was Gandhi or Jinnah mattered little to this swordsman. His following comments both on Gandhi and Jinnah reveal the underlying truth of his outspokenness :

Politics in the hands of these two great men have become a competition in extravaganza. If Mr. Gandhi is known as Mahatma, Mr. Jinnah must be known as Qaid-I-Azam. If Gandhi has the Congress, Mr. Jinnah must have the Muslim League. If the Congress has a Working Committee, the Muslim League must have its Working Committee. The session of the Congress must be followed by a session of the League. If the Congress issues a statement, the League must also follow suit. If the Congress passes a resolution of 17,000 words, the Muslim League's resolution must exceed by at least a thousand words. If the Congress President has a Press Conference, the Muslim League President must have his. When is all this to end? When is there to be a settlement? There are no near prospects.....Never has there been such a deplorable state of bankruptcy of statesmanship as one sees in these two leaders of India. (Moon, 123)

The analysis of “Ambedkarism” as a philosophical ideology underlines Dr. Prasad’s logical positivism—a naked exposure of the inconsistency and untenable illogicality of some of Hinduism’s theological assumptions. The inconsistency of religious assumptions is reflected in Hinduism’s two spiritualized mythical formulations. “*Aham Brahmasmi*” (I am that Divine) and “*Tat Twam Asi*” (You, too, are the same). The illogical absurdity and inconsistency of this wonderful formulation lie in the total amnesia of the Brahminic Hindu mind in not practising the latter when it comes to interact with the Dalits in day to day practical life.

The analyst—the perceptive Ambedkarite in Dr. Prasad—naturally inclines him to echo the Dalit icon and repeat his haunting puzzle:

Is there any society in the world which has *unapproachables* and *unseeables* ? ...The tragedy is that they have to be counted in millions, millions of untouchables, millions of criminal tribes, millions of Primitive Tribes! One wonders whether the Hindu Civilization is Civilization of Infamy! (Moon, 219-20)

This questioning denunciation of Hindu inconsistency is naturally born out of Ambedkar’s critical response to this dichotomy between “*Aham Brahmasmi*” and “*Tat Twam Asi*.” Ambedkar’s questioning is repeated, re-echoed by the writer of *Ambedkarism*. He quotes and quotes Ambedkar: If all persons are parts of Brahma then all are equal and all must enjoy the same liberty which is what democracy means. And Ambedkar’s bewildering puzzle keeps rolling on and on:

But how could they support inequality between the Brahmin and the Shudra, between man and woman, between casteman and outcaste? (Prasad)

It was this radical questioning mind of Ambedkar that propelled him all the time to keep on condemning Hinduism that had sanctified the downgrading and marginalizing of the untouchables as some sort of sub-human species. It was this approach to Hinduism that set him poles apart from Mahatma Gandhi, an approach more radical in content and more modern in vision than the one Gandhi expounded. Ambedkar’s essay entitled “Gandhism: The Doom of the Untouchables” is a standing testimony to his aggrieved sense of disappointment with Gandhi’s traditional approach. This essay forms a part of his larger work entitled *What the Congress and Gandhi have done to the*

Untouchables. No wonder he could see through Gandhi's bundle of contradictions:

Gandhism is a paradox. It stands for freedom from foreign domination, which means the destruction of the existing political structure of the country. At the same time, it seeks to maintain intact a social structure which permits the domination of one class by another on a hereditary basis which means a perpetual domination of one class by another. (IBA, p. 78)

Dr. Prasad at this stage veers round to Ambedkar's radicalism because as an analyst he believes that this neo-Buddhist iconoclast was more aggressive and more radical than Gandhi.

Naturally Ambedkar contemptuously sneered at band-aid approaches to softening the caste rigours through intercaste dinners and stray examples of intercaste marriages:

Caste is a state of mind. It is a disease of mind. The teachings of the Hindu religion are the root cause of this disease. We practise casteism and we observe untouchability because we are conjoined to do so by the Hindu religion. A bitter thing cannot be made sweet. The taste of anything can be changed, but poison cannot be changed into nectar. (IBA, 83)

The writer of *Ambedkarism* has successfully analyzed and traced Ambedkar's suspicion of Gandhi's democratic credentials to his faith in *varnasram* ideals. On Gandhi's support for the Hindu caste system, albeit devoid of untouchability, no reader, however objective and pro-Gandhian he may be, can ignore Ambedkar's logic. "For whether one takes for comparison caste or varna both are fundamentally opposed to Democracy." (IBA, 78)

In the final analysis as a critique of *Ambedkarism* one can only say that the work offers a fascinating insight into the multiple layers of socio-cultural and political ideology of an Icon who radicalized the Indian thought-process in the first half of the 20th century. The sparks caught on but the garbage heap in a recycling revolutionary process is still smoldering. It is true, the "varna" demon still remains unslain throwing up tantrums in a delirium of convulsion. Dalits are still being burnt, their children are still being hampered and their daughters still being trafficked, one can corroborate this dark dismal revolting scenario with the latest screaming headline in one of our National Dalies:

After the attack Dalit students discriminated against in schools.
Caste Hindu students keep away, even sit separately in classes.
(Hindustan, 17.11.12)

“It was on Nov. 7, 2012 that Dalits were attacked and houses burnt in Natham, Kondampatti and Anna Nagar Dalit Colonies in Dharma Puri and subsequently Dalit children had to be carried to schools in Police vehicles.” (The Hindu, 17.11.12) Analyzed in terms of Ambedkar and as analyzed by Ambedkarites like Dr. Prasad this is not an accidental rivalry or feud between scattered groups, but a problem of untouchability which is actually a residue of the lingering vestiges of caste and class struggle. It is here in such contexts that Ambedkar’s analysis of the conjoined forces of class and caste struggle sheds light on this perpetual curse of the Hindu society. In fact, his agony that he expressed about six years before his death has morphed into an agony of our lame, lurching and lumbering democracy. Hemingway had raised the question “For Whom the Bell Tolls” ? In fact, his subsequent answer is an answer for all of us; “It tolls for us all.” This tolling of the bell may be heard as a prophesy in Ambedkar’s words:

To put it straight, it can be said that .struggle between the Hindus and the Untouchables is a permanent phenomena. It is eternal, because the religion which has placed you at the lowest level of society is itself eternal, according to the belief of the Hindu caste people. No change, according to time and circumstances is possible. You are at the lowest rung of the ladder today. You shall remain lowest for ever. This means the struggle between the Hindus and Untouchables shall continue for ever. How will you survive through this struggle is the main question... For me it is not difficult to answer this question. Those who have assembled here will have to agree that in any struggle one who holds strength becomes the victor. One who has no strength, need not expect success. This has been proved by experience, and I do not need to cite illustration to prove it. (IBA, pp. 95-96)

In the process of focussing on the multiple dimensions of Ambedkarism as a militant revolutionary strategy of social emancipation two central nodal points of committed engagement have been referred to right in the beginning. On the one side of the spectrum stands Dr. Prasad who has sought to explore, analyse and project the academic efflorescence of Baba Saheb’s philosophy. At the other end or the spectrum stands Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak who, with his ethico-socialist

commitment, has sought to and succeeded in giving a concrete form to Ambedkar's dream. In fact, Dr. Pathak presents a unique and sublime convergence of Gandhi-Ambedkar action plans which had possibly been debated as two sharply contrasted personalities during the Freedom Struggle. The plans and subsequent benefits can be summed up as follows:

- (A) Liberating millions of scavengers and rehabilitating them in other professions.
- (B) Making concrete action plans for the education of the disadvantaged groups in various skills like embroidery, handicraft, tailoring etc. or else they would have relapsed into their age old profession under economic pressures.
- (C) Launching a sanitation crusade with the Sulabh International climaxed today with one Dalit Mahila (Mrs. Usha Chaumar) now holding office as President of this Organization.
- (D) Executing a climatic socio-judicial event wherein the Supreme Courts of India calls upon Dr. Pathak to do something for thousands of abandoned widows in Vrindavan Ashrams. (Sulabh India)

This Supreme Court call on Dr. Pathak's Sulabh International was a sequel ill response to a P.I.L. filed by National Legal Services Authority drawing the court's attention to the pathetic condition of Vrindavan widows. The P.I.L. stated :

“After death they (widows) could not be cremated for lack of funds. The widows who die are cut into pieces and put in gunny bags and then disposed of.”

The Supreme Court felt shocked, pulled up the Governments concerned and lashed at the National Commission for Women and at the Uttar Pradesh State Women's Commission. Finally, the court asked the petitioners to approach the Sulabh International which had “set up Public toilets all over the country to find out whether they could come forward to help the 1,790 old widows living in deplorable conditions in the four government shelters at Vrindavan.”

Inspired by a holy spiritual and revolutionary confluence of Ambedkar-Gandhi cascading streams Dr. Pathak stepped forward honouring the court's wishes. So the steps taken can be summed up as follows :

- (A) The Sulabh International has started giving Rs. 2000/- per month to each widow living in five Govt-run shelters in Vrindavan.
- (B) Besides, they have opened a centre to provide proper healthcare and last rites to these abandoned widows.
- (C) The Sulabh has provided five well-equipped ambulances for the medical emergencies to these Ashrams.
- (D) Planning has been initiated and undertaken to motivate the orphans and able-bodied widows to acquire skills in tailoring, handicrafts and embroidery. (Sulabh India, July: 2012)

In the final analysis one feels that Ambedkar's inspiration is still alive, still triggering off the process of evolutionary ideas and meliorist dreams. As a writer expounding his philosophy he had an impetuous ferocity in his pen, a supreme talent for dialectics in his logic and a clarity in his socio-economic ideology that hit his targets and nailed the dead and moribund traditions in the coffins. It was all because he had the first-hand experience of the plight of the Dalits or of the Depressed classes and was fired with an inveterate non-conformist vision of radical sanity. There can be no better tribute to Baba Saheb Ambedkar than to remind ourselves of his apocalyptic words of warning, to our sick and caste-splintered society :

Caste cannot be abolished by inter caste dinners or stray instances of inter-caste marriages. Caste is a state of mind. It is a disease of the mind. The teachings of the Hindu religion are the root cause of this disease. (IBA, p. 83)

The part of the Constitution that aimed at abolishing untouchability was approved on Nov. 29, 1948. The final draft of the Constitution was accepted on Nov. 26, 1949. Dr. Ambedkar, however, had a deep insightful perception of the complex play of contradiction between our political and economic existential realities. The contradiction, for him was between "one man and one value." His words still remind us of our national hypocrisy and political illusions of a free, fair, sovereign state:

On January 26, 1950 we are going to enter with a life of contradictions. In politics, we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics, we will be recognizing the principle of "one man, one vote and one vote one

value.” In our social and economic life, we shall by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of “one man one value.” How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions ? or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of democracy which this Constituent Assembly has so laboriously built up. (IBA, p. 54)

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Resisting Endogenous Colonialism in Dalit Representations

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Abstract :

Postcolonialism is an unusually busy word in multiple disciplines that has produced theories that analyse at least four distinct areas : (1) imperial cultures (2) cultures of resistance that opposed the ideology of imperialism and its practice of colonialism (3) cultures of decolonized states and (4) the relationship between the industrial-capitalist west and the decolonized and neocolonised rest. It attempts to challenge and dismantle the representations, reading practices and values of colonialism and create alternative models that reconfigure power structures to build egalitarian human communities within and across nations. One area that needs special attention is what Carol Boyce Davies in *Black Women : Writing and Identity* observes ‘people within nations who have been colonized’ (83). It raises issues what is termed endogenous colonialism which persists despite the end of exogenous political colonialism with independence.

Keywords : endogenous, pejorative, inured, aesthetic, hierarchy, uncouth.

As a postcolonial nation recasts itself, rejecting colonial representations with hopes of an egalitarian future, there is the growing awareness that everything is not magically splendid in the postcolonial state. Every power structure creates its margins and certain segments of the population are relegated to such subordinate locations. Nationalism that had been an ally in the anti-colonial resistance homogenizes into a monolithic mass, to the disadvantage of a new set of marginalized groups. During colonial rule, the indigene, pejoratively referred to as the ‘native’, was the subaltern. Postcoloniality created its own subalterns. Inferior castes; minority groups; women and Dalits became ‘others’ within the postcolonial nation state.

The phenomena of caste and untouchability evolved over time as a result of conflicts over land, resources and cultural practices between a people who began arriving in India in the second millennium B.C.E and the local inhabitants in city states and forests. These conflicts

produced the chaturvarna sociological configuration. The ancient Hindu texts the Dharmashastras inform of the existence of four Varnas or classes divided according to occupations. The *Brahmins* were priests; the *Kshatriyas*, rulers and warriors; the *Vaishyas*, traders and merchants and the *Shudras*, skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled labourers doing menial work. This *varna vyavastha* was primarily a pyramidal class system. Later these classes became enclosed formations where membership was determined exclusively by birth. Dr. Ambedkar studied the Vedic texts rationally, systematically re-examining the foundational beliefs of the caste system. In the *Rig Veda* he found the myth of origin explaining the genesis of caste, the *Purusha Shukta*. This myth presents the birth of human society as proceeding from the sacrificial dismemberment of the primordial man, the *Virat Purush*. (Jaffrelot 34) The key idea is that ‘They themselves were born from the mouth of Brahma, the Kshatriyas from his shoulders, the Vaishyas from his thighs and the Shudras from his feet. Hence, the Brahmins were the most superior, next came the Kshatriyas and so on. Theories such as this were put forth in the Rigveda which were again claimed to be God made.’ (Dangle 235) Subsequent restrictive stipulations coded by the Brahmins in the religious texts were implemented by the rulers. In this way the institution of religion and that of the State relegated the Shudras into socio-cultural bondage leading to untouchability.

In order to gain greater efficacy of control, ‘they devised a weird system of mythology, the ordination of caste, and the crude and inhuman laws to which we can find no parallel among other nations’ (Phule 17-18) Through the doctrine of the four varnas Dr. Ambedkar rejected caste as a God-made system. Ambedkar theorized that the practice of untouchability began after the fierce struggle for dominance between the Brahmins and the Buddhists. The Brahmins started practicing untouchability against beef-eaters after they themselves stopped animal sacrifice in order to win an ideological battle against the Buddhists. The Buddhists were preaching against yagnas thereby winning over cultivators and traders whose cattle were snatched away for ritual sacrifices without payment. In order to regain the constituency of the farming and trading classes, the Brahmins not only gave up animal sacrifice but advanced a step ahead of the Buddhists by banning cow slaughter and the consumption of non-vegetarian food altogether.

Cow slaughter was banned by the Gupta kings some time in 4 CE. However, Ambedkar contends that certain sections of society continued to eat beef and were outside the chaturvarna system. Theoretically speaking, they were not violating the laws against cow slaughter because they ate the flesh of not-slaughtered but dead cows that was their village duty to remove as a service to savarna villagers. (Mukherji xvi-xvii) Dalit subalternity is therefore not located in the colonial structure with the colonizer-colonized formation but in the caste based social, cultural, economic and mental structure of the Brahminical social order within Hindu society. It is characterized by rigid quotes of spatial segregation making Dalits the upper caste Hindu Other. Dalit subalternity is more insidiously inhuman than racial subordination because the latter is never legitimized by legislations of civil society whereas the former is legitimated through religious sanction and social mandate.

In the sixties themes of working class issues were taken up by a poet Narayan Surve while the Little Magazine Movement established itself during this period. The short stories of Baburao Bagul anthologized in *When I had Concealed my Caste* was a landmark publication in Marathi literature. Arjun Dangle states that critics had hailed it as “The epic of the Dalits while others compared it to the Jazz music of the Blacks. Bagul’s stories taught Dalit writers to give creative shape to their experiences and feelings.’ (Dangle viii) In 1972 a group of young Marathi writer activists such as Namdeo Dhasal, Arjun Dangle founded a political organization called Dalit Panthers in expression with the Black Panthers who had militantly struggled for the Civil Rights of the African Americans in the United States of America. It is at this point in time that the term Dalit came to be used and widely accepted as a mark of identity.

Ambedkar’s politics was conspicuously different from the Gandhian ideological and cultural politics that was dominant till independence. The subsequent Dalit movement was a product of the ‘mental state that believed in the firm rejection of the Gandhian model of tackling the problems of untouchables, and that has shaped the contours of its themes and patterns’. (Nagaraj 1) The Gandhian view of the issue of untouchability was basically religious and spiritual before his encounter with Ambedkar. As a result he believed in the liberation from untouchability through ‘penance and acts of social service by caste

Hindus, as opposed to mandated changes in the law. Ambedkar used the language of rights and legislated remedies'. (Mukherji xx) Gandhi replaced the term Untouchable with *Harijan* which was later adopted by the Government of India, political leaders and the media. Dalits on the other hand found it 'patronizing and infantilizing'. (xxii) On the issue of separate electorates, intended for grant by the colonial government, Gandhi went on a fast unto death and Ambedkar, under duress, withdrew his demand and signed the Poona Pact of 1932. While Gandhi viewed the caste system as a purely religious question, an internal one for Hindu society, the Dalit perspective considered it a threat with its irremediable stigma of inferiority, humiliation and insult. D.R. Nagaraj brilliantly interprets that both Ambedkar and Gandhi were transformed by their encounter (Nagaraj 26) though the chain of influence was not admitted by either party. (Guha 35) Babsaheb accepted the primacy of religion in the matter of untouchability. The 1935 Yeola Declaration of Ambedkar that he would not die a Hindu was a recognition of the 'legitimacy of the Gandhian mode although rejecting the choice in which the solution was sought'. He embraced Buddhism on 14th October 1956 along with millions of his supporters just three months before his death. On the other hand, Gandhi, in the *Harijan* issue of November 16, 1935, declared that the caste system had to be eradicated much to the chagrin of his orthodox followers. He also critiqued the restrictions on inter-dining and inter-caste marriage that marked a change from his earlier uncertainties on these issues. One is tempted, at the risk of inaccuracies to theorise that Dalit literature written by non-Dalits and those written by Dalits follows this antipodal historiography. But for Dalit literature to grow and develop an eclectic ethic is likely to witness the transformation of both.

Tagore realized this many years ago when he created his much acclaimed dance drama *Chandalika*. Tagore's treatment of untouchability in *Chandalika* is revolutionariary because the liberation of Prakriti is not within the structural paradigm of the politics of compassion. In being accepted within the Sangha, Prakriti's journey pre dates a choice that Dr. Ambedkar made in 1956 to seek liberation in Buddhism. Tagore was aware that there was no place for casteism in Buddhism, its rejection of social inequality and support to egalitarian values. It is this alternative humanitarian code that recasts Prakritis human dignity.

‘Dalit literature is not simply literature ... (it) is associated with a movement to bring about changes ... it (is) strongly evident that there is no established critical theory behind (dalit writings); instead there is a new thinking and a new point of view’. (Dangle vii-viii).

Dalit writings by Dalit writers have this resilient motivation for agency; not to accept silently but to give voice to resistance and challenge the dominant oppressive discourses. In Shankerrao Kharat’s masterly short story *A Corpse in the Well*, a customary duty for Mahars to retrieve an abandoned dead body from a village well is narrated. The corpse is guarded throughout the night but the head-constable and the village headman grow impatient because they want the body to be removed forth with without waiting for the heirs to arrive. When the narrator’s Anna is abused by the head-constable, the narrator questions the ‘injustice being done to my father, he had not done anything wrong. His only crime was being a Mahar of the village’ (Kharat 76) When Anna does eventually attempt to retrieve the bloated corpse, the risk of descending into the well is magnified by the presence of a snake and the upper caste’s inhumanity and indifference to the hazardous task : ‘A storm of thoughts swept through my head about the dangerous, deadly work involved in the village duty’ (77) In Avinash Dolas’ *The Refugee*, a Mahar, ironically a citizen of this country resisted violence against a woman as retribution for drawing water from an upper caste well. The upper castes enforce an employment embargo and his own mother pleads with him to leave home. The poignant story contrasts the fate of a Bangladeshi visiting relatives in Bombay during the political turmoil while a Mahar ‘remains homeless in his country’ after twenty years. (Dolas 220)

Sharing experiences of trauma, humiliation, inequality, submission, rebellion and hope and to be able to voice these emotions as social experience is carried through by a significant quality of autobiographical Dalit writings. Autobiography as a mode of writing is encouraged on grounds of “authentic experience’ (Mukherji xxviii) to provide, as Valmiki says ‘inspiration to our future generations’. Dalit Women writers are represented in the Arjun Dangle edited *Poisoned Bread*, an anthology of modern Marathi Dalit writers by Shantabai Kamble’s *Naja Goes to School- and Doesn’t* and Kumud Pawdes inspirational *The Story of my Sanskrit*. The first is the story of the

discontinuation of school education on account of distance and expense : ‘we knew nobody in Pandharpur’|O| there is no money to study in Pandharpur’ and girl’s father’s helpless sorrow ‘that you have to stop school half-way’. (Kamble 94) In Kumud Pawdes narrative, her ascending scholarship drew sarcastic verbal by-lines : ‘these Mahars have really got above themselves’. (Pawde 100) With academic mobility, in spite of numerous hurdles she gains confidence and finally gets an assistant lectureship at a government college. Her appointment is ironically credited to her altered married surname through an inter-caste marriage. The caste of her maiden status designated by her maiden name Kumud Somkuwar remains deprived. The discriminatory varnashramadhrma which naturalized the inferiorisation of the Mahars reduced them to levels of harnessed cattle used to plough fields: ‘Just as the farmer pierces his bullock’s nose and inserts a string through the nostrils to control it, you have pierced the Mahar nose with the string of ignorance’ (Kamble 56) Baby Kamble’s *The Prisons We Broke* offers the glimpses of resistance as she implacably confronts a reprehensible social order that has ‘flogged us with the whip of pollution’ mandated-by a religion she terms ‘selfish’ and ‘worthless’. Triply marginalized on counts of caste, gender and poverty, Baby Kamble’s resistance emerges from a life ‘marked by helplessness, lack of options, subject to slavery (Limbale-47) It is an important emancipatory voice of one excluded from dominant discourses. The issues of intra-community gender oppression and injustices experienced by Kamble is scripted with rare conviction by Bama in *Sangati*. This Tamil narrative is scripted with the enduring hope that ‘self-confidence’ and ‘self-respect’ despite adversities that are often affiliated to the Church as an ideological apparatus will enable women to ‘live life with vitality, truth and enjoyment’ (Bama ix)

It has often been foregrounded that the scripting of Dalit representation by non Dalits lacks ‘a visceral impact.’ (Mukherji ix) ‘The nature of their literature consists in a rebellion against the suppression and humiliation suffered by Dalits-in the past and even at present-in the framework of the varna system.’ (Muktibodh 267). Given its sociological matrix, the creative sensibility deeply concerns a Dalit perspective and that an ‘outstanding work of Dalit literature would be born only when Dalit life world present itself from a Dalit point of view.’ When critiquing Dalit subalternity and Dalit representation

in literature there is the eminent danger of falling into twin traps, one, is to consider the non-Dalit category as a homogeneous entity, one, that is complicit with the Brahminical social order; and two, the possibility of limiting the signification of the word Dalit and to consider that category as a monolith. Dalit literature is expected to be a declaration of freedom, an agency of liberation from discriminatory practices of race, religion and caste.

There has been an ongoing debate on the value of Dalit literature as 'lived experience', the experience of a consciousness based on ideas of equality, liberty, justice and solidarity, rather than pleasure'. Is it possible to analyse such works within the framework of traditional aesthetics? D.R. Nagaraj believed that literary criticism is ultimately a critique of the world as well as art and both forms of critique should start from the same plane. He sought to bring the 'social' back to literary culture and argued that Dalit writing needed new literary criteria to evaluate them. Meena Kandasamy's brilliant novel *The Gypsy Goddess* (2014) amalgamates the demands of narrative aesthetics and the social content of Dalit writing. It is based on the real events of the Kilvenmani massacre on Christmas Day 1968 in the Tanjore district of Tamil Nadu when 44 men, women and children were burned to death for participating in a communist organized for improved wages, justice and human rights. It is a self-reflexive, looping narrative combining the myth of insurrection, meticulous documentation, multiple narrative voices in a ferocious indictment of individual, institutional and state privilege and power that dehumanizes and annihilates the Dalits and the marginalized castes. The charred bodies of the devastated forms a fierce critique of the inequities of social formations that may be upheld as divinely ordained.

Two textual representations of Dalits by non-Dalit women writers will throw light on representation and representability of Dalit experience by those outside the social formation but are able to imaginatively, intellectually and with empathy connect with it : Velutha in Arundhati Roy's *The God Small Things* and Shanta Rameshwar Rao's Kittu in *Children of God*. In the first, internationally popular Booker prize-winning novel, the complicity and hypocrisy of the adult world combines with the brutality and moral perversion of the caste system. After the trauma of losing Sophie Mol, the grieving family has to deal with the relationship between Ammu, the mother of the dizygotic twins

Estha and Rahel, and Velutha, a paravan- the Malayalam word for untouchable. The Kochamma family falsely implicates Velutha on charges of attempted sexual violation on Ammu and when she travels to the police station to refute the allegations, he is charged with murder and kidnapping the children. Velutha dies of police torture inured into the silence of many such unwritten histories. In *Children of God*, Lakshmi, a Dalit woman, narrates the story of the killing of Kittu who goes 'into the temple to see the idol of which he had heard and to worship before it'. (Rao 3) Being an untouchable who had violated the sanctity of the sacred space, he is subjected to inhuman brutality of violence and set on fire, resulting in this death. (6) The family breaks up as they try to shed the shackles of caste bondage and Lakshmi realizes that for the countless despised children of god there is no freedom from the imprisonment of custom.

The naturalistically grim novel *A Fine Balance* chronicles a decade in India between the imposition of internal emergency by Indira Gandhi in 1975 to her assassination in Orwell's apocalyptic year 1984. The third chapter entitled, *In a Village by a River* narrates the misfortunes and inhumanities of Dalit life : 'The chammaars skinned the carcasses, ate the meat, tanned the hide... Dukhi learned to appreciate how dead animals provided his family's livelihood...his skin became impregnated with the odour that was a part of...the leather worker's stink that would not depart even after he had washed and scrubbed in the all cleansing river.' (Mistry 95) His occupation marked Dukhi Mochi's identity. He did not require special education to learn what it was to be a chammaar, an untouchable in village society: 'like the filth of dead animals which covered him and his father as they worked, the ethos of the caste system was smeared everywhere.' (96) The village was located by a small river and the untouchables were 'permitted to live in a section, downstream from the Brahmins and Landowners.' The narrative delineates sexual violation of Roopa, Dukhi's wife, a common feature of gender exploitation that occurs with regularity. Hence Sharankumar Limbale in the *The Bastard* writes, "those who have been given power by religion on account of their high caste and money inherited from ancestors have deemed it their birthright to abuse Dalit honour". (Limbale 123)

The spatial segregation of Dalit dwellings is a common feature in Dalit literature. In *Joothan* 'a little johri, a pond, had created a sort

of partition between the Chuharas' dwellings and the village' (Valmiki 1) Abject poverty and spatial restriction combines with segregation as a characteristic of the lives of the slum-dwellers of Bombay. In Daya Pawar's *Son, Eat your Fill*, the Mahar's living conditions at the edge of the metropolis was wretched: 'In each little cubby-hole, there were three or four sub-tenants. In between them were partitions made of packing- case wood. In these wooden boxes was their entire world'. (Pawar 7) The description of material location is metonymically synonymous with the 'graded inequality' (Jaffrelot 36) that describes the home of Anand's Dalit protagonist Bahka : 'The outcaste's colony was a group of mud-walled houses that clustered together in two rows, under the shadow of both the town and the cantonment, but outside their boundaries and separate from them. There lived the scavengers, the leather workers, the washermen, the barbers, the watercarriers, the grasscutters and other outcastes from Hindu society. A brook ran near the lane, once with crystal clear water, now soiled by the dirt and filth of the public latrines situated about it'. (Anand 11) The description heightens the offensiveness by juxtaposing visual and olfactory images. Anand attempts some degree of peripheral glorification scripting Bakha as 'a bit superior for his job'; 'that he looked 'intelligent', 'sensitive', 'with a sort of dignity that does not belong to an ordinary scavenger who is as a rule uncouth and unclean'; it 'gave him a nobility, strangely in contrast with his filthy profession'. Would a Dalit writer have scripted Dalit experience similarly ? I doubt it. It seems a Gandhian Dalit narrative where Dalit identity is a marker that one needs to 'ascend from'. In other words, the solution suggested is organic rather than structural. It is not based on the annihilation of caste, rather a reform through moral regeneration within existing sociological paradigms, This however does not take away from Anand's effort at creating significant space, even nascent resistance, for the articulation of inequality and the desired liberation that is urged.

In Geeta Hariharan's *In Times of Siege*, the story of a twelfth century, saint-mystic Basava or Basavanna is a part of a History lesson that invited the wrath of the Hindu militant orthodoxy in culture and the academia. The treasurer of the twelfth century city of Kalyana was a man called Basava. He was no ordinary finance minister but a person endowed with rare intellectual passion to question everything that was traditional. He drew around him a rare congregation of

mystics and social revolutionaries. Together they sought to build an inclusive community that included women and the lowest 'polluting' castes :

Poets, potters, reformers, washermen, philosophers, prostitutes, learned Brahmins, housewives, tanners, ferrymen- all were a part of the brief burst of Kalyanas glory. (Hariharan 60)

All were equal in that they were veershaivas: warriors of Shiva. Together they made poetry, poetry that chased prose; that searched for many faces of truth. There are two significant points made here. One is the use of the dialogic imagination that offers space for multiple voices to co-exist in Basava's search for 'the many faces of truth'. Two, constructing the incongruous catalogue from 'women' to 'ferrymen' is a masterly stylistic manoeuvre in which stylistic equivalence implies a non-hierarchic social equivalence. In other words, in a list of this kind, in a spirit of rare humanity, there is spatial parity for the philosopher and the prostitute as much as learned Brahmins and tanners. The 'arboreal' hierarchic order, has been, as Deleuze and Guattari would state, been altered structurally to conceive a 'rhizome'. Further in the narrative, we are told that Basava and his many followers challenged the caste system 'the iron net that held society so firmly in place; that reduced the common men and women to hopeless captives' (61) Basava's egalitarian dream became a swelling movement 'the makers of mirrors; the skimmers of dead animals; the bearers of children' and it threatened to swallow 'social conventions and religious ritual' the staple diet of tradition. The culmination of the Basava narrative is an inter-caste marriage between a Brahmin girl and a cobbler groom which was condemned and the respective fathers of the couple tortured to death. Violent retaliation by Basava's followers despite his plea for non-violence resulted in the destruction of the city. Basava's legacy, inflammable to traditionalists and a model for equalit and democracy is a significant metaphor in Dalit studies but rarely acknowledged. Spivak's subalterns needs a voice, a voice that begin when the subaltern cannot speak and someone else with conscientious sensitivity does, but when the subaltern begins to speak, the cultural value of that authentic voice needs respect. That is what Dalit writing has achieved.

In order that literature is an engine for social change, it is necessary that agency is given to Dalits represented in literature, scripting the

oppressed as subjects rather than objects of inequality and injustice. Sharing experiences of trauma, humiliation, inequality submission, rebellion and hope and to be able to voice these emotions as social experience is carried through by a significant quality of Dalit writings. Such writing does not glorify victimhood; it enables agency for subaltern resistance. In doing so, this form of writing transcends the seeking of compassion to being literature of liberation. In the politics of inclusion and the formation of an inclusive alliance of the dispossessed that became the hallmark of Nargaraj's social and literary criticism lies the future of Dalit representations in literature. This future must include Dalit writings within university course because the political, intellectual, the moral and the creative must be fellow-travellers in the quest of equity and justice which is the objective of the development of knowledge.

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Dalit Literature : An Overview

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Abstract:

Dalit Literature is a nascent literary composition dealing with the life of the dalits in Indian society. In the Hindu caste system 'Shudras' became untouchable. They were made to serve all the non-shudras. They were hated, despised and condemned. They had no rights, no status in the society. Our saints and thinkers preached against caste discrimination. Mahatma Gandhi called them 'Harijan'. Babasaheb Ambedkar roused consciousness among the dalit class of people. The dalits came to realise the injustice being meted out to them for centuries together. Dalit writing emerged as a protest against such discrimination and injustice. The Dalit Panthers movement ignited the revolution and Dalit Literature came up as a potent force to unite the dalits and make them claim their due. With Baburao Bagul and Arjun Dangle the new writing came to be established as a special form of literature. It is assertive and aggressive. The poems and stories highlight the sufferings of dalits and their new found militancy to fight the injustice.

Keywords: Dalit, Alien, aggressive, exhort, nascent.

*If you prick us, do we not bleed?
If you tickle us, do we not laugh?
If you poison us, do we not die?
And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?*

— Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice*

The speaker is a dalit, a victim of racial discrimination who is conscious of his victimisation so much so that he makes a case for revenge. He pleads physical similarity and natural justice. The analogy in the Indian context is physically right but culturally and practically wrong. Let's read between the lines.

In the Indian context there is no racial discrimination between Aryans, Dravidians and Mangols. However, the most glaring discrimination here is intra-racial, intra-religious. This discrimination is so ingrained in our society and culture that we are carrying it as a birth mark, a divine dispensation. For centuries India has got a history of discrimination and subjugation of a section of its own people in the name of caste. From time immemorial there has been a classification of people called the Varna and Caste system originally meant for

distribution of work. Some people given to learning were called Brahman, those assigned safety and protection were called Kshatriya, those in agriculture and trade were called Vaishya and the rest assigned the task of serving the three upper chelons of caste were called Shudra. This caste hierarchy was arranged in order of downward inferiority—the Brahman being at the top, the Kshatriya was inferior to the Brahman, the Vaishya was inferior to the Kshatriya, the Shudra was inferior to all other castes, in other words, the worst of all people. The Shudras were acknowledged as untouchables as filth itself, unworthy of touch or sight, worthy only of abuses, insults, beatings and exploitation in all possible ways. They were given the lowliest jobs to perform, the filthy jobs like sweeping, cleaning latrines, carrying human excreta, skinning, scavenging, burning corpses etc. Their lowly duties became their hereditary profession and their caste.

The ‘Shudras’, no doubt human with the same physical attributes and emotions and thoughts were relegated to a sub-human stratum of society; their very shadow was regarded as sinful, shameful and sacrilegious. They were segregated from the so-called civilized folk. In villages their colony was invariably located in the south away from this civilized community of upper castes. Shudras were not allowed to touch the upper caste people, nor were allowed to use the public well to obtain water. They had no right to go to a temple to worship the deity though the untouchables were devoted to the same gods and deities. If an untouchable even inadvertently touched an upper caste person, he was punished severely. His very shadow was inauspicious. According to Laws of Manu XI, 181 “He who associates with an outcaste himself becomes an outcaste after a year, not by sacrificing for him, touching him, or forming a matrimonial alliance with him, but by using the same carriage or seat, or by eating with him.” Such religious sanction against a vast population of society speaks of the discriminatory foundation of social and moral ethics which denied any status to them in the society. They were denied education, good eating, decent living, in a word humanly treatment. Ironically enough in a country which boasts of universal brotherhood (Vishwabandhutwa) there was none to question such appalling indignities heaped on the so-called ‘Shudras’ for thousands of years from South to North, West to East in our Aryavarta. Naturally unaware of their real self, the hard-working ‘Shudras’, the carrion-carrying, carrion eating dalits lived in the dark, ignorant of learning like animals.

Centuries passed, in between came saints and seers who spoke against discrimination between man and man in the name of caste. Their sensible words were sweet to hear but cut no ice with the system. Came Saint Kabir, Guru Nanak, Mahatma Gandhi, they all preached against the evil of untouchability and inequality between man and man. They preached catholicity of God's creation, purity of the soul and presence of the divine in all his creations. Gandhi called the 'Shudras' Harijan i.e. children of God. He also said, "Swaraj is as unattainable without the removal of the sin of untouchability as it is without Hindu-Muslim unity." In *Young India*, April 27, 1921 issue he wrote, "I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I shall be born an untouchable."

So far so good, but although Gandhijee sympathised with the untouchables, yet he did not condemn the caste system. He wanted to see an untouchable free society within the existing caste system. That was the main point of difference between the approaches of Gandhijee and Babasaheb Ambedkar. Anyway, the 20th century was awaking the people both socially and politically in many ways. On the one hand, the country was demanding freedom from alien rule, there were simultaneous efforts to redeem the society from certain evils like sati system, untouchability and a number of superstitions. Poets and writers in their own way tried to create an atmosphere of sanity, sobriety and social justice. The untouchables and down-trodden people were also consciously feeling the injustice being meted out to them. It is difficult to say who was the first dalit to write about the miseries and sufferings of the down-trodden people. Generally it is believed that Dalit writing evolved from the Dalit Panthers movement in Maharashtra in the 1970s. But in an interview writer Jaiprakash Kardam asserted that Dalit writing had begun in 1960s particularly with Baburao Bagul's *Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti* (when I hid my caste) published in 1963. No doubt, the Dalit Panthers accelerated the pace as well as made it aggressive.

Fortunately, in the north we have an account of Hira Dom who was surely the first ever dalit to voice his miseries in a poem in Bhojपुरi titled 'Achhut Ki Shikayat'. This poem was published by the noted Hindi writer Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi in his magazine *Saraswati* in the year 1914. That was the first poem published in which an untouchable Hira Dom wrote about his miseries resulting from neglect

and exploitation in the society. Hira Dom was a 4th grade employee in a government hospital at Patna whose duty was to operate the dead bodies for post mortem. Here at Patna he wrote the poem 'Achhut Ki Shikayat'. The very word 'Shikayat' in the title suggests a note of protest in the complaint against the entire social and religious systems including God's neglect of the dalit and His utter indifference. The untouchable finds the only probable helper, the Christian Padre who does not discriminate against the untouchables. However, Hira Dom finds himself in a palpable dilemma – how to give up his Hindu religion and become a heretic! Thus, again and again he appeals to God to redeem his suffering who had rescued Prahlad appearing from a pillar, rescued Draupadi from disrobing by Duryodhana and rescued the Brij villagers by holding up the Govardhana hill on his little finger. He regrets that the same God is avoiding his touch because he is untouchable. He levels the charge of untouchability against God as he has to live a condemned life despite his hard work from dawn to dusk. He is also compelled to work without wages. His words are 'he has to seal his lips' and suffer in silence.

Hira Dom is a dignified individual who values dignity of labour. He is proud of earning his bread by the sweat of his brow. He will not beg like a Brahman, nor apply force like the Kshatriya, nor cut weight like the grocer, nor steal cows like the milkman, nor compose verses like the courtier rather he will hardearn his bread and share it with the members of his family. Hira Dom goes a step further and hits at the preacher who exhorts the presence of the divine in each and every creature but in reality a Brahman is worshipped everywhere whereas an untouchable is not even allowed to fetch water from a well. He is rather beaten for such offence and has to procure water from a dirty pool. The last line is 'why are the untouchables subjected to such sufferings?'

Hira Dom's poem is a milestone in Dalit poetry little known to people. It is a scathing criticism of the prevailing feudalism and caste-system. He had the courage of conviction to assert his feelings through a poem. And Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi had the sagacity to include it in his magazine *Saraswati* in 1914.

With just one poem Hira Dom may not be called a Dalit poet but his poem was surely a break through in a new direction which was later Christened Dalit Literature. Similarly, in 1935 Mulk Raj Anand

wrote *Untouchable*, a novel dealing with a day's routine of an untouchable sweeper boy Bakha. Anand presents him as a smart and ambitious boy who sweeps the floor and cleans latrines most efficiently. His job is dirty but he lives comparatively clean. But the society hates him and regards him with contempt, puris and other food items are thrown before him and not given to him in a proper way. The irony is that Pundit Kali Nath tries to molest his sister Sohini which is a sad commentary on the Pandit's hypocrisy and exploitation of the untouchable woman. Hearing of the incident from his sister he bursts out in a rage, "Brahmin dog. I will go and kill him!" But in a moment his "clenched fists relaxed and fell loosely by his side. He felt weak and wanted support." Again, when his father asks him, "you didn't abuse or hit back, did you?" Bakha replies, "No, but I was sorry afterwards that I didn't" (90)

Bakha's checked indignation and later feeling sorry that he did not hit the Pandit speaks of the growing consciousness to the point of retaliation against the atrocities being meted out to the dalits.

Such consciousness was reinforced day by day. And there came Babasaheb Ambedkar who brought about a revolution with his non-conformist ideas and progressive views. The man who drafted the Constitution of India, was a votary of democratic ideas and wanted to see equality between man and man and no discrimination on the basis of caste. He was appalled to see that the upper caste people of his own Hindu religion did not allow the lowly castes to draw water from the Chavadar lake. He revolved against it and with thousands of people approached the lake and took water from it. He believed in the casteless humanism of Buddha and JyotibaPhule. He was convinced that untouchability was the mother of poverty and degradation of the downtrodden people and exhorted them to realise their self and fight for self-identity and self-dignity. Such ideas were the precursors of Dalit Literature.

Dalit literature today is a nascent literary denomination committed to a specific aim and purpose. With its revolutionary format now it is ringing loud and clear. The term 'dalit' was highlighted by the Dalit Panthers which comprises the marginalized and culturally stigmatized sections of Indian Society. Today this term stands for an identity and self-assertion. Though the term was initially used to refer to all the lowly caste groups, later it focused on the untouchables. Regarding

the beginning of Dalit Literature Arjun Dangle informs us that around 1950 when the first batch of Dalit youths graduated from college, Ghanshyam Talwatkar and others set up a literary body, the *Siddarth Sahitya Sangh*. The Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangh was later formed from this body. According to dalit historians the history of Dalit Literature can be traced to the first *Dalit Literary Conference* in 1958. Anna BhauSathe, a prominent Marathi writer, delivered the inaugural speech. The conference discussed Dalit Literature and defined it as 'the literature written by the dalits and that written by others about the dalits in Maharashtra. The conference, however, failed to set into motion any literary activity. Barring a few exceptions, there were no Dalit writers worth the name.

The sixties saw the emergence of Dalit Marathi Literature. Narayan Surve wrote poetry to portray the problems of the workers. Anna Bhau Sathe and Shankarrao Kharat were writing already about the dalits. In fact, Baburao Bagul gave momentum to Dalit Literature. His stories rebelled against the social system particularly the caste system. His collection of short stories *Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti* (when I had concealed my caste) took the Marathi literary world by storm. It shaped the contours of Dalit Literature in form and content. Bagul's stories electrified the Dalit consciousness and upset the existing cultural thinking. Baburao Bagul's stories are considered as fine specimen of literary aesthetics on the one hand and a forceful communicator of revolutionary ideas on the other. His poems came to be published in the Little Magazine *Fakta*. The poet ventilates his feelings of alienation in his our country. Out of neglect and scorn he wants to quit his country and seek refuge in another. In his poem translated into English like 'You who have made the mistake' he says that he salutes those who leave for foreign lands, embrace other tongues, dress in alien garb. And to those who don't change even after being beaten up for centuries he asks,

What will you say if someone asked you—
What is untouchability?
Is it eternal like God?
What's an untouchable like? What does he look like?
Does he look like the very image of leprosy?
Or like the prophet's enemy?
Does he look like a heretic, a sinner, a profligate, or an atheist?
... either leave the country, or make war!

There is obviously a note of frustration as well as warning. The poet protests and rouses others to protest as he has reasons to protest. He wants to change the system by changing himself and his fellow sufferers. In a democratic way he rouses the consciousness of the victims to liberate themselves from age-old captivity of callous caste.

Another great Dalit poet Anna Bhau Sathe echoes similar sentiments by referring to the admonition of Babasaheb Ambedkar. His poem translated into English 'Take a Hammer to Change the World' reads,

Take a hammer to change the world –
So saying went Bhimrao !
Why is the elephant stuck sitting
in the mud of slavery?
Shake your body and come out
take a leap to the fore front!
The rich have exploited us without end,
The priests have tortured us,
As if stones had eaten jewels
And thieves had become great.
Sitting on the chariot of unity
Let us go forward
To break the chains of class and caste
Hold to the name of Bhim!

Sathe, like all Dalits is a follower of Bhim Rao Ambedkar's ideology. He is sick of the caste system and caste hierarchy. He gives a call for unity and asks his fellow Dalits to realise their elephantine strength lying dormant. They must come out of the stupor and take a leap to the fore front. He also cautions against age-old cheating by priests and thieving being the means of riches. The poet wants annihilation not only of caste but also of class. His is a clarion call to unite in the name of Babasaheb Ambedkar to seek salvation from slavery and exploitation.

The Dalits also have dreams to live a gentlemanly life. So Pralhad Chendwankar in his poem "My Father" (tr.) registers a father's advice to his son,

Stroking my long lean body
My father used to say:
if you study a little
you'll be a sahib, sit on a chair,
you'll earn a little
instead of chopping wood for Brahmins.

The poem shows a poor Dalit father's ambition for his son's decent life. He advises him to get educated to find a job for a decent living. The poem also exposes how the Dalits are subjected to work for the upper castes for nothing. Such exploitation has been the usual norm in our country. Here the poet exhorts the value of education rather than fighting for a life of ease and dignity.

Some poets have also testified to the injustice meted out to Dalits as if ordained by the divine. The poor victims are helpless as the predator,

They unwrap the scriptures
from their protective covers
and insist —
'These are commandments
engraved on stone.'

Here the reference is to *Manusmriti* which says that a Shudra is born only to serve non-shudras. He has no right to property, no right to eat good food, wear fine clothes or live in good houses. In practice even in hotels there used to be separate tea cups for Mahars and 'Chamars' in Maharashtra. Mahars were boycotted by the barbers in their saloons. Mahar boys were not allowed to sit in the same row with Maratha boys. They were segregated. Even Muslims treated Mahars as untouchables. There was no entry for the new sun. The poet just regrets he is not bold enough to condemn the practice. The words speak for themselves.

Broadly speaking Dalit Literature is a movement, a revolution spear-headed by *Dalit Panthers*. The "Dalit Panthers' Manifesto" (1973) had at its core the Gandhi-Ambedkar discourse. The Panthers criticized Gandhi saying that he was flirting with the problems of Dalits and untouchables to forge unity for the independence struggle. Also Babasaheb called him "The enemy of the people, the villain of the nation". So the literature of such writers concentrated on portraying slavery, oppression, hate and humiliation with a note of warning for revenge through disobedience and self-help. This self-confidence occurs again and again which reiterates the Dalits' resolve to acquire liberty, equality and dignity. Sharan Kumar Limbale's Poem 'White Paper' reads thus,

I want my rights, give me my rights.
Will you deny this incendiary state of things ?

I'll uproot the scriptures like railway tracks.
Burn like a city bus your lawless laws
My friends!
My rights are rising like the sun.
Will you deny this sunrise?

Dalit poetry is committed poetry. It is a wake-up call to Dalits who have been blissfully ignorant of their rights and position in the society. The poet heralds a new age of equality and status for the victims of social ostracism and cultural condemnation. At times poet's emotions are overcharged and he slips into militancy and rebellion. The tone becomes aggressive and accusatory. So he will achieve his goal by any means lawful or unlawful as Limbale writes he will 'uproot the scriptures like railway tracks and burn like a city bus the lawless laws.' The words remind us of such public protest in action during the Quit India movement.

Such poetry is designed to create a class of the downtrodden on the basis of caste which is the only paradigm to classify individuals as Dalits. By and large the Dalit castes are poor economically, educationally and politically. After reservation some of them saw the light of enlightenment and today they are sharing it with others. While Dalit poetry shows no plans to gain their paradise, the prose works like short stories and novels have certainly indicated how to extricate them from the vicious circle. In this connection the Dalits will do good to be advised by Babasaheb Ambedkar's speech on 25 December, 1927. On that day Babasaheb violated the age-old social prohibition for Dalits to draw water from the Chavadar Lake in Maharashtra which was hitherto reserved for caste Hindus. The Manusmriti was also burnt here as a mark of protest against untouchability. In his speech Babasaheb advised, "If we leave the caste people alone and adopt only removal of untouchability as our policy, people will say that we have chosen a low aim." It is not sufficient if there are no prohibition on inter-drinking and social intercourse. We should rather aim at exterminating the caste system which is the root cause of caste-based inferiority. For this he suggested to break down the prohibition against intermarriage. "Breaking down the bar against intermarriage is the way to establish real equality." Babasaheb's firm opinion is that "Brahmins have exercised their sovereignty over other castes for centuries. It is not likely that they will be willing to give it up and treat

the rest as equals. The Brahmins do not have the patriotism of the Samurais of Japan.” They will not sacrifice their privileges for the sake of national unity based on a new equality. Even the other caste Hindus will not be a party to it.

Babasaheb Ambedkar being the mentor and god of Dalits, Dalit Literature is supposed to reflect his line of thinking. For ready reference Babasaheb’s well considered views about himself were:

1. I shall have no faith in Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh nor shall I worship them.
2. I shall have no faith in Rama and Krishna who are believed to be incarnations of God nor shall I worship them.
3. I shall not allow any ceremonies to be performed by Brahmins.
4. I renounce Hinduism which is harmful for humanity, impedes the advancement and development of humanity because it is based on inequality and adopt Buddhism as my religion. (13 Ap. 86)

The fact is that Babasaheb was born an untouchable Hindu but he died a Buddhist of his own choice. His speech titled ‘Annihilation of Caste’ is a historical document, a revelatory talk, an eye opener to the ignorant mass who believes in myths and legends, rebirth, role of Karma and the supernatural without applying his own mind and reason. In the Hindu concept ‘Tattwamasi’ (that is you) means you are the same as I am. Here all are equal, nobody is superior or inferior. That is the democratic principle today.

In terms of practical application of Ambedkarism we may read Dalit Literature to see how well the writers have made it. The poets have done their job to prepare the mindset to claim the right to live equal to others. In the short story ‘The Poisoned Bread’ by Bandhumadhav when Yetalya, a Dalit worker approaches the rich Bapu Patil with his young grandson in the morning for work, Patil with a swagger insults him quoting the proverb that ‘a sight of a Mahar in the morning spoils the whole day’. BabuPatil also charges him.... “don’t you know the rain-god got enraged because you–Mahars and Mangs–have profaned religion and abandoning caste, have defiled Lord Vithoba of Pandharpur”. The grandson protests but Yetalya stops him and apologises on his behalf. Anyway, he works whole day but is paid nothing. BapuPatil justifies the caste hierarchy calling it the scheme of God. Again the grandson argues with Patil and is stopped by his grand-father.

Yetalya is disappointed. What to eat! He notices some stale, rancid pieces of bread lying scattered on the ground in front of the oxen. Flies are swarming over them. Yetalya collects them happily and returns home. He throws some bread pieces to the dogs who refuse to eat them. But Yetalya's wife collects all the pieces and clears the mud off them. She cooks them with dulli. Yetalya eats the supper and as a result of food poisoning dies. Before dying he advises his grandson to get as much education as he can. His last words are, "The poisonous bread will finally kill the very humanness of man."

Yetalaya's story speaks of the inhuman treatment of untouchables by the upper caste people who want to perpetuate the caste hierarchy. It also shows how the young generation is conscious and will not take things lying down. And finally the dying words of the grandfather speaks of the man's broad outlook who feels that such exploitation of man by man will ultimately kill the very humanness of man.

In the story 'Promotion' by Arjun Dangle again there is caste creating a superiority complex even within intracaste. Waghmare, a backward caste person becomes an officer by promotion under the reserved category. His assistant Godbole, a high caste does not cooperate with him not to speak of respecting him. He is the favourite of the big boss. Again, when Miss Godambe asks for leave, Waghmare declines. But when she says she has to go to Shirdi, he grants her leave asks her to offer an abhishek on his behalf.

At home Waghmare finds that his wife has entertained a dirty, shabbily-dressed woman accompanied by two equally unkempt children. They are, in fact his wife's aunt and her children. Waghmare will not have truck with such people. He asks his wife to maintain her status as an officer's wife. And finally Waghmare's son comes to him hurt by a boy because he had drunk water from his water pot. Waghmare feels he is the same dalit despite his elevated position.

The story shows the deep seated caste-superiority complex which persists even today. The society's birth mark remains. Moreover, the story shows how promotion inflates one's ego so much so that it alienates from his own kith and kin.

A third story titled "The Storeyed House" by Waman Hovel shows how a Buddhist dalit is treated by the upper caste Hindus. An ordinary worker Bayaji is returning home after retirement from Mumbai

carrying a big box containing his belongings. Bayaji is a Mahar, an untouchable. On the way he first meets Bhujaba and greets him in the normal way. That infuriates Bhujaba who reacts, “Do you think you can become a Brahmin merely by saying ‘Greetings’? Can you forget your position simply because you’ve turned Buddhist?” Bhujaba further asks Bayaji how much he has brought home. and Bayaji honestly says that he is carrying two thousand and a half rupees. Now Bhujaba thinks of a plan to usurp his money.

At home they ask Bayaji what he has brought for each one of them. Bayaji says that he wants to give them something durable and memorable, a storeyed house. His plan is to build a big two storeyed house. Here Kondiba Patil advises him not to try to be equal in status to Brahmins. He says, “The poor should remain content with their cottage...You shouldn’t let a little money turn your head....you may go in for a storeyed house only if you don’t wish to stay in this village.”

Out of fear Bajaji gives up his plan to build a two storeyed house but he raises a little the middle portion of the house and a small first storey is fixed up with a wooden flooring. No one can guess from outside that there is a first storey to the house. On the house warming occasion Kondiba Patil also comes with Bhujaba, the rascal and some musclemen. They all rove all over the place and notice the clear first flooring. The party is over with food and fun. The bhajan is being sung, the preachings of Buddha are being chanted. Then suddenly it is noticed that the house has caught fire. In this terrible blaze Bayaji is badly burnt. Before dying when he is asked his last wish he says, “Sons, I want you to build a storeyed house. I’ve no other wish.” So saying he dies.

In the morning village officers and witnesses visit the place and submit the report, “Bayaji’s death was the result of an accident due to a patromax flare-up.” Everybody can guess who could have set fire to the house. However, after cremation the sons starts digging the foundation to build a storeyed house to fulfil the last wish of their father. The sons announce to build an open two-storeyed house.

The story is self-revelatory on the suppression of Dalits by the upper caste. Moreover, it shows the new generation of Dalits is bold enough to assert itself and take on the adversary.

These three stories may be regarded typical Dalit stories portraying the life of the poor and condemned mass because of caste. The government's reservation gives them personal satisfaction but the social disregard and discrimination remain. Apart from literature, in practical life almost every day we see instances of Dalit bashing in broad day light. A Dalit bridegroom riding a mare is an anathema, his path is blocked, he is forced to dismount as it is an affront to the upper caste's dignity. A Dalit marrying an upper caste girl is not tolerated, the bridegroom is hacked to death or tortured and sued for kidnapping. The primary school boys in a school in Madhya Pradesh refused to eat mid-day meal with Dalit children. A Dalit is made to drink urine and eat night soil for a flimsy offence. Equality is an eye-wash-democracy or no democracy. Where is an upper caste man cleaning public latrines, man holes and drains! Dalits are reserved for dirty jobs! What in irony of our democracy! They are clamouring for one nation, one constitution; one nation, one language; why not one nation, one caste!

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The Subaltern Vision in *The Edge of Time*

— Prof. Basavaraj Naikar

Abstract:

Generally politicians in India have no time or patience or willingness or competence to be creative writers, although they have a very rich and variegated experience of life. But Veerappa Moily is an exception to this rule. A gifted writer in Kannada, he has published three plays (*Muru Natakagalu*), three novels (*Sagara Dipa* 1986; *Kotta*, 1993; and *Tembare*, 1999) three poetry collections (*Halu-Jenu*, 1994 etc) and a compilation of his lectures. Whereas *Sagara Dipa* (*Light of the Ocean*) deals with the fishermen's life, *Kotta* depicts the life of the Koraga community. His most ambitious work is the epic *Ramayana Mahanveshanam*, a retelling of the *Ramayana* in five volumes, translated into Hindi recently. Of his novels, *Kotta* has been translated into several languages including Hindi and English. *The Edge of Time* is the translation of his fourth Kannada novel, *Tembare*. The present paper examines Moily's vision of subalternity in the context of India as exemplified in his plays, poetry and fiction.

Keywords: Subaltern, politics, oral-epics, impersonation

M. Veerappa Moily (1940) hails from coastal Karnataka. He was born at Mudabidri in Dakshina Kannada District of Karnataka State. An advocate by profession and deeply involved in politics for the last forty years, he was the Chief Minister of Karnataka during 1992-97. As Chief Minister, he initiated many reforms and progressive programmes in Karnataka. He has a rare combination of many qualities in him. Firstly, he hails from the subaltern strata of the coastal Karnataka. Hence he has a first hand experience of the ethnic community in which he is born and brought up. Secondly his legal profession as an advocate has given him a deep knowledge of the causes and consequences of human conflicts and litigations. Thirdly his life-long participation in the political life of Karnataka has enabled him to see the cross section of the Kannada society at its grass root level. Fourthly and most importantly he has the creative talent to transform his rich and varied experience of life into works of art. His deep commitment to human cause and strong conviction add a ring of authenticity to his writings. As Vivek Rai rightly points out, "Fieldwork in folklore, political experience and legal knowledge – all these are wedded to *dalit* and feminine sensibility to create in the novel a new worldview" (Blurb).

The original novel in Kannada entitled as *Tembare* is masterfully translated into English by Dr. C.N. Ramachandran, who is himself a bilingual scholar and critic and who is known for his *magnum opus* translation of *Male Madeshwara* into English. As he served for about ten years as Professor and Chairman of the Department of English at Mangalore University, Mangalore, he has been able to observe the details and absorb the essence of Tulu culture prevalent in that area, which, in turn, has enabled him to translate Veerappa Moily's novel dealing with the culture of Tulu Land.

In his "Author's Note" Veerappa Moily highlights the dominant features of Tulu people and their culture. "The land of Tuluvas, in coastal Karnataka, is renowned for its legends and folklore, and there are still many features of their traditions yet to be brought to light. The kinship-systems, the natural ways to eradicate exploitation, and the voice of revolt that constitute Tuluva society are universal values. The oral epics and narratives of *bhuta*-worship prevalent in Tulunadu, record the dynamic relationship between the past and the present. These epics and narratives lay before us moments of aesthetic delight in a day-to-day world of dry routine; like flashes of lightning, they illumine a world covered with fog. Our body is also like a *tembare*; there are many spots on this body, neither very hard nor very delicate, which can produce varied sounds and tones. I beat those spots again and again, wondering which spot would satisfy me. At those times, I was not myself, I was like a salt-doll that has become one with the sea" (p. v).

India is a multi-religious and multi-lingual country known for its unity and diversity. That is why its ideal is tolerance as preached by the great saints like Buddha, Mahavira, Shankaracharya, Basaveshwara, Kabir and Chaitanya and so on. All these great men taught universal brotherhood and humanitarianism. But in spite of these high ideals, there has been repeated violation of them resulting in injustice, suppression and murder of the helpless people. The writers should be aware of the harsh social reality and try to write about it honestly and boldly. Art should serve the purpose of social amelioration. Veerappa Moily believes in this philosophy of art, "Unless writers have such consciousness and the determination to fight against injustice, they end up as hypocrites. Writers, who cannot respond to the social changes, are like dead wood, and their works too will be lifeless. A work that

cannot absorb the spirit of truth and righteousness from a community is as dry as a desert. And, works of literature should be like oases, sources of love and life. The great French writer-philosopher, Romain Rolland has declared that 'India is the country in which for the first time, Man's dreams come into existence.' *Tembare* attempts to catch and record such dreams" (P. ix). He continues to clarify his intention behind his writing and to suggest the manner of responding to the novel by the reader, "My novel intends to capture that vision and unveil the dreams of the future. I have spread my dream carpet on the ground. My appeal to readers is: tread softly on the carpet because you will be treading on my fond dreams. The silk with which this carpet is woven, has not come down from the heaven; it is the essence of thousands of ordinary workers, who have sacrificed all towards this vision. This silk, which was rough and knotty, has been refined to make it artistic." (p. ix).

Another important feature of the novel is that it is not a work of romantic imagination, but one based on the brass tacks of social reality supported by fieldwork and research. Veerappa Moily states honestly, "The subject of this novel is the product of research, and it is always a challenge to give such a subject the form of a poetic and artistic novel. In fact, it is not a work of fiction; truth has transcended and transformed the fictitious nature of the work. There is the hard work of five years behind this novel. After I gathered relevant ideas and information from books, fieldwork and personal interviews, I took a year to write this novel" (p. x). As the translator, C. N. Ramachandran clarifies further, "*Tembare* is not only a fine work of imagination, it is also a work of deep research in folklore and anthropology. As the readers can see, the novel extensively makes use of myths, *pad-danas* about various *bhutas*, and history. All are integrated into one organic whole in the novel... Arguably, the 'new novel' in the new millennium has to be, besides being a work of imagination, a historical document, a political tract and a sociological study. *Tembare* is one such multifaceted work" (p. xx).

The novel deals with the life of the people belonging to Pambada caste and culture, which is one of the subaltern groups in coastal Karnataka, especially Tulu Nadu. The coastal Karnataka is known for two cultural channels: one, *Yaksagana*, the folk-theatre and the other, *Bhutaradhane* or Spirit-Worship. Whereas *Yaksagana* is a means of

(relatively secular) entertainment, *Bhutaradhane* is an expression of ecstatic religion testifying to the folk beliefs and superstitions. Thus *Bhutaradhane* has many dimensions like the mystical, the social, the moral and the judicial. The spirit-impersonation is itself a dramatization of myth. As Peter J. Claus says, “Dramatization of myth in a ritual context is familiar enough. Often, I would think, the ritual tradition (the context) and the mythic tradition (text) have somewhat independent existences. This is the case with Tulunad’s *siri* rituals and the story of the *siri* spirits. The myth is part of a woman’s narrative song tradition, while the rituals are managed by men.”² Paddanas are closed connected with this ritual. As Peter J. Claus clarifies, “Tuluva paddanas are sung narratives, which are a part of several closely related singing traditions and which could be called ballads or epics or ritual songs, depending on the context or purpose in which they are sung.”³

Both *Yaksagana* and *Bhutaradhane* are so specific to the coastal culture and interesting in their own ways that they have attracted the international attention of anthropologists and folklorists. *Tembare* may be described as an ethnic novel depicting the life of the subaltern strata of society belonging to the ‘little tradition’ as contradistinguished from the so-called ‘great tradition’ of brahmanical Hinduism. In almost all the Indian regional literatures the great tradition has had a lion’s share so far. Now it is high time to bring the marginal little traditions to the center, in order to know and recognize all the possible varieties of human experiences instead of hanging on to the already familiar and overdone great tradition. In the postcolonial era, thanks to Derrida and his tribe, there is no question of superiority or inferiority of cultures. Neither the great tradition is superior nor the little tradition is inferior. All these traditions or cultures are simply different from one another. In the multi-cultural context of India and in that postcolonial situation, recognition of the otherness of cultures assumes enormous significance. *Tembare* also testifies to the fact that a man (novelist) from the subaltern strata of Indian society can not only speak but also write artistically about his experiences. *Tembare* easily brings to our mind similar ethnic novels from Africa like those of Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiang’O.

As the translator explains the central thematic concern of the novel, “*Tembare* depicts the experiences of one such exploited caste called Pambada, the members of which community are the traditional

impersonators of a *bhuta* called Panjurli, an animistic spirit... Since the writer has an intimate knowledge of this community, he authentically depicts the nature and degree of exploitation of this community. These Pambadas have no land of their own, have no means of education and have to depend on casual labour for their daily bread. When they impersonate the *bhuta*, people show respect and devotion towards them; but once the ritual is over and the impersonator comes out of his role, he continues to be an 'Untouchable' " (pp.xvii-xviii).

The novel delineates the tension between tradition and modernity in the Pambada caste and culture. In other words it shows a contrastive picture of conformity and non-conformity to the tradition of *Bhutaradhane* or Spirit-Impersonation. Whereas Aitha stands for the tradition of spirit-impersonation and has a firm faith in its sanctity and validity, Pambada rebels against the hereditary profession of Spirit-Impersonation and goes in for modern education and civil service. Like him, his sister Thomu also rejects her family tradition of possession dance and goes in for modern education and legal profession. Thus in the same family there are three different paths followed by three persons i.e. two brothers and a sister. These three different paths followed by the members of the same family may be discussed in some detail in the following paragraphs. The novelist offers some ethnological details of the Tulu society (just as Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiang'O do in their novels about Yoruba and Gikuyu cultures). For example there are many communities in Tulu Nadu like Pambada, Parava, Nalike, Paanaara and Ajila that conduct and participate in the worship of spirits. There seems to be a class division among the spirits also. While the Paravas conduct the worship of the 'royal' spirits like Jumudi, Kalkuda and Panjurli, the Nalike community has a limited field and can participate in the worship of the 'lowly' spirits like Chamudi.

Monta Pambada, like his forefathers, had considered the worship of spirits a sacred ritual and had unalloyed faith in the spirits as another form of truth. That was why even the British courts in India permitted as credible evidence what was sworn in front of the spirits. That was an attempt to transform a spiritual forum of justice into a social system of justice. The vows taken by the leaders of communities, villagers and towns in the presence of spirits would get spiritual legitimization. This is the positive aspect of the spirit-worship.

But there is a negative aspect also to it. Whenever people have no real faith in the spirit-worship, they use the so-called sacred occasion to indulge in violence, wreak vengeance upon their enemies and immorally tilt the judgement of the spirit-impersonator in their favour. In such desecration of the holy ritual, moral principles are suppressed by immoral and selfish considerations.

Although spirit-impersonation is of great importance on the scheduled day and time, the impersonators are revered on that day and during the programme; they are totally forgotten and conveniently neglected by the society, because the spirit-impersonators belong to untouchable castes. This kind of contradiction between the professional importance and holiness enjoyed by the impersonators and the social negligence suffered by them is exemplified by Pijina. "When Pijina, Lakana's father, impersonated the *bhutas* during the ritual at night, all those assembled looked on him with fear and reverence. But during the day, the same people treated him as an 'untouchable.' Pijina, of course, had accepted such treatment as a way of life..." (P. 26).

In spite of the awareness of their low status in the society, the spirit-impersonators engage in the holy ritual because it gives some social elevation at least temporarily. As Pijina says to his son, "But for our participation in the *bhuta*-worship, we would have remained *parayas*, untouchables. What has elevated us socially is the *bhuta*" (P.42). There seems to be a close connection between the spirit-worship and the subaltern status of the participants in many societies of the world. As I.M. Lewis rightly opines, "Such peripheral cults... also commonly embrace downtrodden categories of men, who are subject to strong discrimination in rigidly stratified societies."⁴ Referring to the similar examples from India Lewis continues to say, "All the elements we have so far discussed are particularly well displayed in the context of the Hindu caste-system. Several recent writers on Indian communities comment upon the predilection, which peripheral spirits show for men of low caste. Through possession such lowly orders are allowed a limited franchise to protest against their menial circumstances. One of the best analyses of this pattern of ritualized mutiny is that provided for the Nayars of Malabar by Kathleen Gough."⁵

The impersonators are proud of the sacred profession and fight for their rights when the conventional law of inheritance is violated

due to the exigencies of life. For example when Monta Pambada, Lakana's grandfather, helped Suranna Alva to reclaim his position of impersonator from Deju Alva, the latter took revenge on Monta Pambada when the possession-dance was in progress, "Mangu's recitation reached its crescendo, and the frenzied sounds of the *tembare* reverberated everywhere. Suddenly in a flash, Deju snatched the sharp sword that was in the hands of the *bhuta* and with one stroke, slashed both Monta Pambada's arms. The people, who had assembled there stood transfixed as Monta's hands fell in front of Kodamanittaaya. Blood began to flow like an incoming wave of the Nandini River. The *tembare* fell silent and Mangu, Monta's wife, fell on the ground, unconscious" (P.30).

The spirit-impersonator's life is restricted by many a rigorous rule. He must lead a stoic life in order to achieve efficacy in his religious profession. "The *bhuta*-impersonator's life was hedged in by too many restrictions and conventions: he had to maintain a stony silence even when there were births and deaths at home. Even if somebody died in his own family, he was not supposed to go near the survivors and comfort them; he had to move out of his house, build a separate hut for himself, cook his own food, and thus spend the forty days of ritual impurity like an outcast. Whether it was his own mother or father or his wife and children, who had died, he could not touch the dead body, let alone carry it on his shoulders. He had to live his life cut off from all human relationships" (P.32).

A conspicuously ironic feature of the spirit-impersonation is that on the one hand it has a mystic connection with the supernatural world, on the other it has an ugly connection with the caste-hierarchy and the resultant exploitation of the low by the high and a means of punishing or wreaking vengeance on the poor people by the rich ones. "In order to reach that mystic stage, which is in between this world and the next, he has to pass through many other stages; he has to make the transition from the mundane to the spiritual gradually, step by step. The stylized recitation of *pad-dana* and the *tembare* beats aid the impersonator in achieving such a transition" (P.43). The mystic and supernatural aspect of spirit-impersonation involves some kind of fear psychology also. "As a matter of fact, the people of Tulu Nadu have more faith in *bhutas* than in gods, and out of fear, they follow whatever is dictated by the *bhutas*. For *bhutas*, unlike gods and goddesses, are

intimately connected with the day-to-day happenings of this world; and the rituals of *bhuta*-worship have achieved both popular respect and credibility” (P.36).

There are different varieties of spirit-impersonation having different degrees of effectiveness and purposes. For example, the ritual of Pilibhuta is especially connected with death. “Contact with the Pilibhuta was like playing with death, he said. It was believed that the Pilibhuta impersonator had to touch somebody before the completion of the ritual, otherwise he would die soon. Hence, the impersonator would move heaven and earth to touch somebody. And because of the belief that whoever happened to be touched by the impersonator would die within a year, everyone was on guard not to be touched by the *bhuta*. Consequently, the ritual of Pilibhuta could end only with the death of the one or the other: the impersonator, or the person, who was touched by him” (P.32).

Another negative aspect of the spirit-impersonator is that he “has always to be under the shadow of fear from the village chief or the administrator. The fear and anxiety are doubled if one is initiated into that cult of *bhuta*-worship. For once he is excommunicated from the cult, he gets no further invitations from anybody. Hence most of the time, he is not free to act as per the dictates of his conscience, he has to blindly obey whatever the elders or the leaders order” (P.40). Although the spirit-impersonation involves strict discipline, ritual purity and a sort of mystic communion with God or supernatural world, at a higher level, it is also, ironically enough, subjected to a sort of colonialism or exploitation by the village chief or the administrator on the social level. Thus there is an unhappy contradiction in the whole process of possession/impersonation due to the desecration of the holy practice into a tricky game of exploitation, over the years. Lakana remembers this gradual desecration as follows, “To my grandfather, he thought, impersonating the *bhuta* was not a profession, it was a means of worship, it was a way of penance and contemplation. Although his honesty and truthfulness ended in a tragedy, he persisted in the path of truth throughout his life. Pijina, my father, was helpless and desperate owing to the tragic end of his father; hence he became a pawn in the power games of the administrator” (P.42). If the spirit-impersonation involves social exploitation along with some sort of ecstatic experience, then why should the people of these subaltern

communities go in for this profession? One is easily tempted to ask such a question. But the answer is also provided by the same people. As Lakana's father tells him, "But for our participation in the *bhuta*-worship, we would have remained *parayas*, untouchables. What has elevated us socially is the *bhuta*" (P.42). Now the whole thing becomes clear. The spirit-impersonation elevates the social position of an untouchable, gives him a chance of mystic experience and security of religious faith and yet occasionally forces him to be exploited by the socially powerful people. For example when Mohanaraja's sister Vimala and his uncle's son Shekhara was in love with each other, his uncle was against their marriage. He, therefore, arranged a *bhuta*-ceremony to decide the feasibility of the marriage. Though Pijina, the spirit-impersonator was in favour of the marriage, he was pressurized by the uncle (of Mohanaraja) to give a negative verdict. Consequently Pijina announced at the end of the elaborate possession-dance, "It is impossible. If the marriage takes place, it will destroy both the families" (P.45). As a result of this negative verdict the lovers committed suicide by hanging themselves from the ceiling of the house. Here Pijina's holy dance (of spirit-impersonation) is used as a means of social exploitation, selfishness and vested interest by the rich or high caste people. Pijina becomes a helpless victim of such a negative system.

The gradual transition from the mundane world into the mystic state is to be specially noticed by the reader as it can be compared and contrasted with the practices of ecstatic religions of other parts of the world. As the novelist explains, "A person from such communities like Parava, Pambada and Nalike has to act as a 'representative' of the *bhuta* in the rituals of *bhuta*-worship. In order to reach that mystic stage, which is in between this world and the next, he has to pass through many other stages; he has to make the transition from the mundane to the spiritual gradually, step by step. The stylized recitation of *pad-dana* and the *tembare* beats aid the impersonator in achieving such a transition" (P.43).

Maire and Pijina, the parents of Lakana, Aitha and Thomu are the chief exponents of spirit-impersonation in this novel. Maire, as a young girl was attracted to Pijina as a spirit-impersonator and married him in course of time with parental approval. She played a supportive role in Pijina's professional life as a singer, but was not conscious of the gender-discrimination at all. She brought up her three children –

Lakana, Aitha and Thomu – by sacrificing a lot for them. She tolerated her husband’s alcoholism. But her husband died in a mysterious way. Different people attributed his death to different causes like his alcoholism, strain of dancing barefoot, singeing his chest with a burning torch, lack of observance of ritual purity and Jumadi *bhuta’s* anger etc. “Maire sees in his death a modern variation of the ‘*Parati Mangane* narrative’. Her heart tells her that, when the master cast covetous eyes on her, Pijina attempted to kill him with the *bhuta*-sword, and the master’s slaves caught him at that time and killed him” (P.49).

Having lost her husband, Pijina, Maire is deeply disturbed. “She had realized the awful truth: that the god, to whose service Pijina had devoted his entire life, had not come to his aid at the critical moment. While her father-in-law, Monta Pambada had lost both of his arms for the sake of truth, her husband had lost his life itself for the same truth” (P.55). She had realized the bitter truth that the spirit-impersonator has to be a puppet in the hands of his masters. “She knew the naked truth: be it Pambada or the spirit itself, as long as he danced to the tune of his masters, uttered the oracular words that satisfied them, and thus played the role of a lawgiver, he was respected during the performance and would get enough to eat. But once he differed from his masters, he had no place on the earth” (P.56). The same fate has happened to Koraga Taniya, Kalkuda and Kallurti.

Now Maire has the responsibility of bringing up her children i.e. two sons, Aitha and Lakana and a daughter, Thomu. She sends them to far-off schools to educate them. As all the three children grow into young men and women they wish to give up the hereditary profession of spirit-impersonation and follow modern ways of earning their livelihood. For example, the eldest son Aitha begins to work as a casual labourer under a contractor. The younger son, Lakana wants to be educated and become a District Collector. The youngest daughter, Thomu wants to be educated and become a lawyer. Thus all the three of them choose three different paths.

The three ways of life followed by the three persons are beset with their own distinctive hindrances and challenges and demand some kind of sacrifice or the other. Whether their ways of life are traditional or modern, it makes no difference. We may examine their three different ways one by one.

Aitha, the eldest son in the family, cannot be educated as he is mentally not smart. He, therefore, chooses a simple life of a labourer and overseer under a contractor called Raghurama Shetty. But his deep faith in Kodamanittaaya prevents him from practicing the corrupt method of keeping false records/accounts of daily expenses. Aitha is a man of high morals and sterling conviction. When the engineer threatens him of the loss of his job, Aitha replies boldly, “No, sir, I cannot do it. Once I have sworn on Kodamanittaaya, I can’t go against it even if my tongue is slit”(P.61). The engineer taunts him as the grandson of King Harishchandra and persuades him to sign the false record of expenditure in the register, Aitha replies firmly, “The Master of all masters is Kodamanittaaya. He is the one, who grants food for all. I cannot sign this register” (P.62). Obviously the engineer is disarmed by Aitha’s answer expressing his strong moral conviction. Aitha also feels a righteous satisfaction. His strong faith in Kodamanittaaya is highly appreciated by his mother.

The importance of Kodamanittaaya is narrated in the *pad-dana*, which is oft sung in Tulu Nadu. According to the *pad-dana* Kodamanittaaya is a royal spirit and has the tiger as his mount. Gangadhara, the manager of the shrine of Kodamaittaaya, knows the pain and suffering of the Pambada family. He also knows that nowadays Pijina’s sons do not actively participate in the spirit-worship. But he does not like this fact. He, therefore, goes to Aitha’s house with ritual materials of formal invitation and requests him, “Kodamainttaaya visited me in my dream. His wish is that Aitha himself should impersonate him during the ritual” (P.67). He consoles Maire, “Please forgive me. In the name of Kodamainttaaya, I swear that no unjust or untoward incidents will occur as has happened in the past” (P.67). In spite of Gangadhara’s persuasion, Aitha does not agree to impersonate the spirit. He and his mother remember all the tragedy that had befallen her husband and father-in-law.

Aitha undergoes a moral dilemma. Being a formally educated man he thinks deeply about the course of life that he has to follow. He knows that his brother, Lakana has warned him against the traditional spirit-impersonation. When Aitha’s mind is oscillating between two opposite directions i.e. tradition and modernity, he is pleasantly surprised to learn that his younger brother Lakana has been appointed as the Assistant Commissioner. Thus Lakana’s choice of a modern

way of life is confirmed. But Aitha is still uncertain about his profession. Thus when he is undergoing a sort of dark night of the soul, he suddenly has a mystic experience of illumination and call of the divine spirit,

In the moments just before dawn, Aitha saw a vision: a huge round mass of bright light shone before him and he slowly became a part of it. Immediately, huge waves that one witnesses at the end of the world enveloped him and he felt suffocated. Within no time he fell unconscious. Then, gradually, there came to his ears from a distance the mellow notes of Kodamanittaaya *pad-dana* and the slow rhythmic beats of the *tembare*. He saw Kodamanittaaya coming to him through those notes, riding on a tiger, and beckoning him with love and affection (P.73).

This mystic experience of Aitha naturally reinforces his faith in the spirit-god, resolves his dilemma and inspires him to resume the family tradition of spirit-impersonation. With the consent of his mother, Aitha goes to Gangadhara's house and tells him, "Master, as per the wishes of Kodamanittaaya, I agree to participate in the *bhuta-worship*" (P.74). Then Gangadhara encourages him and strengthens his faith in God by narrating the instance of Vibhishana and Kanakadasa. Aitha returns home with a sense of joy and contentment.

But when Aitha writes to his brother, Lakana to attend the initiation ceremony, Lakana writes a caustic reply accusing him of being entrapped again in the spider's web and of falling a victim to their selfish goals. Finally the day of initiation arrives, and as expected, Lakana remains absent. But Aitha is formally initiated and he wears the ritual bangles. On the day of the *bhuta-worship* Aitha puts the saffron-paste on his face and feels a wave of excitement surging through his body. He dances ecstatically and captivates the audience. It is indeed a noteworthy personal triumph for Aitha. "By any account, it was a indeed a noteworthy personal triumph for Aitha. He, who had been an anonymous casual labourer till then, joined the legends built around old traditions. Some very old people remembered the grace and dignity of Monta Pambada; they said Aitha was just like his grandfather, and spared no words of praise for his total commitment, artistry, faith and linguistic propensities" (P.78). Thus Aitha and his mother are ecstatic about the successful ritual. Gangadhara is also very happy about it. "After the ritual, Gangadhara, who had gone through the

thrilling experience of a nuclear explosion, heaved a deep sigh of relief like a philosophical scientist. He had the satisfaction of having led what he had undertaken to its successful conclusion” (P.79).

As days go by, Aitha strengthens his faith in the spirit-worship, extends his impersonation to the royal spirits like Kodamanittaaya, Kukkinandaaya, Jumadi and Rakteshwari. He cultivates strict discipline prescribed by tradition. He puts on the anklets by reciting the ‘*paari*’, tries the *ani* on his back, wears a mask and holds the weapons of the deity. This is the stage of transition from the concrete to the abstract, in which Aitha attains a mystical state. His strong conviction is expressed in his words, “I feed the virtuous with the divine nectar from my full pot; but I will feed the evil-doers with poison that is in my breasts. I always uphold justice; and I will destroy all kinds of injustice” (P.83). Thus Aitha becomes the sword of justice and the wall of protection. “He has grown from ritual to vision and from a mortal to the stature of a deity. He is the ‘Kodimara’, the flagpole of the whole village” (P.83).

There is, thus, a striking difference between the two paths chosen by Aitha and Lakana. There is a partial break of tradition and partial continuation, but with a strong conviction and righteous determination. The novelist himself comments on this phenomenon critically,

As if the two chopped off arms of Monta Pambada had taken a new form, Lakana and Aitha took two different paths. In a sense, the tradition of Monta was completely broken. Aitha did not continue *bhuta* worship in the naïve and innocent manner of his grandfather. His fidelity and devotion were to his own soul and not to his masters. Hence, though Aitha seemingly continued his grandfather’s occupation, he followed a different path and held before him a different goal. However, if one, considered Aitha’s honesty, integrity, and faith, one could see that one arm of Monta had indeed blossomed as Aitha (P.84).

Whereas Aitha stands for tradition, Lakana stands for modernity. “For all appearances, Lakana had broken away from Monta’s tradition; he had nothing but contempt and anger toward the whole system called *bhuta*-worship. But from a different point of view, Lakana also continued Monta’s tradition in a new form. The kind of honesty and principles that Lakana displayed in his field as a revenue officer demonstrates that he was indeed Monta’s grandson” (Pp. 84-85).

Lakana being educated in a modern way begins his service as the Revenue Officer at Basavakalyana taluk of Bidar District in North Karnataka. His modern education enables him to analyze the problems of Indian society like religion, caste, gods and race. In order to understand these issues he sets aside some time regularly to study the *Bhagavad Gita*, *Manu Dharma Shastra* and the works of Dr. Ambedkar. Consequently his study of these classics and serious cogitation make him sadly aware of the internal contradictions to be seen in the lives of great men like Lord Krishna. He is rather confused and confounded by such contradictions. Similarly, the system of caste-hierarchy propounded by Manu make his blood boil with rage. He experiences intense anguish. Likewise his reading of Ambedkar's works makes him very unhappy about the *panchamas*. "Lakana remembered the term *panchama* – he and his caste belonged to the fifth, the 'untouchable' caste. As Lakana continued to read Ambedkar's opinion about *varna* and caste, he came to understand, gradually, the cunning stratagems that the priestly and the ruling classes have always employed in order to control society" (P.87).

Although Lakana is disturbed and depressed by such irrational ideas of the past, he remembers his profession of a Revenue Officer and defines a new role for himself. It is a happy coincidence that he is posted to Basavakalyana, a city named after Basaveswara, the great social reformer of the twelfth century. There is a great similarity between Basaveswara's ideas against social injustice and caste-discrimination masquerading as religion and those of Lakana. Basaveswara had declared thus,

I will put the Vedas to the sword,
I will pierce all the sastras,
I will whip logic and break its back,
I will chop off the nose of Agamas,
Behold, O generous God of Kudala Sangama,
I am the beloved son of Chennayya, the tanner.

In course of time Maire arranges the marriage of her two sons, Aitha and Lakana with two rural brides, Chennu and Taniyaru respectively. But the contrast between Aitha's traditionalism and Lakana's modernity is to be seen in their behaviour, "When all the ceremonies were over, as per the custom of the village, the newly

married couples had to go and get the blessings of their masters. Lakana refused to do so, stating that he had no master, but Aitha and his wife went and were blessed by Gangadhara” (P.90).

Lakana does not like religious hatred that has been erupting in India repeatedly. He is keenly aware of the demolition of the Babri Masjid in New Delhi on December 6, 1992 and the consequent religious riots between Hindus and Muslims all over India. Lakana, the Revenue Officer of Basavakalyana does not wish to allow any religious conflict to crop up in his jurisdiction. “He had taken a vow that he would not allow anyone to create an atmosphere of religious hatred in the place, where Basavanna had worked and the famous Kalyana Revolution had taken place” (P.123).

In order to forestall any communal clash on December 6, he holds a peace march through all the major lanes of Basavakalyana. The people take a vow to forget the differences of caste and religion and work together for peace. But after the meeting is over, Lakana hears the rumour that people are coming from Bidar to Basavakalyana carrying long swords with them and that they had plans to burn mosques and stone temples and ransack petty shops. Listening to such information Lakana feels deeply disturbed. Rumours about Hindus and Muslims accusing each other reach him. He, therefore, feels helpless like Abhimanyu caught inside the *chakravyuha*.

But in spite of all these problems, Lakana decides firmly to prevent the communal clashes, even at the cost of his life, “Yes, I have to go, and I have to fight it out even if it means losing both of my arms, or losing my life,” resolved Lakana; and on the night of 5 December, he personally visited many people as he could and talked to them. He talked to men, women, and children; he took up one piece of rumour after another and demonstrated how they were only rumours. He went to mosques and prayed there with Muslims; he went to the temples and prayed there with Hindus; and thus Lakana, who was an atheist in principle, became a theist for his people. His first priority was to protect the minds of the people, besides their bodies. He knew that the police or military force, however big in number, could not control fanatical mobs. Their minds had to be cleansed and protected” (P.126). On December 6, while Lakana is touring the whole city with police and military escort, he receives the news that all the domes of the Babri Masjid have been demolished. Similarly he hears the reports of looting

and killing, of setting fire to houses and shops etc. But Basavakalyana remains calm and peaceful. Lakana is happy to realize that, even after eight centuries, Bassavanna was alive. “On that terrible night of 6 December, though violence spread like wildfire throughout the country, Basavakalyana remained calm, like an iceberg calmly floating on the sea” (P.127). Though he has controlled the situation at Basavakalyana, he is deeply depressed by the reports of religious clashes taking place throughout the country. He becomes rather helpless and begins to recite a *vacana* of Basavanna:

The rich build temples to Siva,
What can I do, a poor man?

But Lakana’s profession involves several hazards. His adherence to truth and justice causes serious problems for him. Now his wife is nine months pregnant after the tragedy of three miscarriages. His wife stays alone in the government quarters and there is no relative to take care of her when he is away at his office. But Lakana cannot neglect his official duty as a Revenue Officer. One night he boldly raids Girijapati’s rice mills. Girijapati happens to be the President of the District Council and belongs to the ruling party. He confiscates the huge stocks of rice that are being illegally stored there, prepares the relevant documents, seals the mill and transports the whole stock to the granary of the Food Corporation of India. After completing the whole task, he reaches home at 2 P.M., he finds his nine-month pregnant wife, Taniyaru lying down exhausted, her face having lost its colour and turned white. When he tries to awaken her, he receives an urgent call from the Minister-in-Charge of Bidar District. Lakana explains to the personal assistant of the Minister that his wife is in a stage of advanced pregnancy and asks if he could meet the Minister after a few days. But the assistant tells Lakana in a stern voice, “No, you have to come here immediately. Otherwise, it will be registered that you have disobeyed orders and you will be suspended” (P.157). Hence Lakana helplessly leaves his wife alone at home and goes to Bidar to meet the Minister. It is common knowledge that in India bureaucratic power is controlled by political power. Hence the government officers have to dance according to the tunes of politicians. When Lakana meets the Minister after three hours of waiting, the latter roars at him, “How dare you raid this man’s mill?” (P.164) Lakana replies, “When there are unaccounted stocks illegally stored there, how

can one close one's eyes to it?" (P.165) Lakana speaks in a professional and legal manner, but the Minister talks his own political language. The administrative discourse and the political discourse are at loggerheads with each other. The Minister orders Lakana to open the locks of the mill, but Lakana boldly refuses to do so. The Minister threatens him, "If you don't listen to me, I will have to transfer you to a place devoid of even water. I will have to suspend you and send you back to your *bhuta*-worship. Be careful" (P.166). But Lakana is an officer with such a strong conviction and sterling morality that he refuses to obey the order of the Minister, "I shall never do such a shameful thing, Sir, please excuse me... I cannot allow the lamp of my conscience to be put out. My body may burn, but not my soul" (P.166).

As the Minister's anger explodes, he calls the Chief Minister in Bangalore on the phone and tells him, "The Tahsildar of Basavakalyana is a very arrogant man. Either I continue as Minister or he does as the officer; both of us cannot stay in the same district. Before he reaches Basavakalyana, his suspension order should reach him" (P.166). Then the Minister tells him the harsh political truth of our country, "You are the enemy of my community and wherever you go, my people will hunt you down. What do you think you are doing? Do you think that our party is going to lose power and another party is going to support you? You are under the illusion. Governments may come and go, but caste equations don't change. People of every single caste stick together and protect each other. This is the unwritten constitution of this State or of this country"(P.166).

It is said that sorrows always come in a chain fashion. This is especially true in the life of Lakana. He has to face different kinds of evils or challenges in his professional, familial and social life. Some of them are attributable to political evils, some to social evils and some to his fate. What is most conspicuous about his life is that all these evils occur in a chain fashion. For example, Lakana returns home at Basavakalyana after refusing to yield to the local Minister's pressure. Then he is upset to learn that his wife had labour pains at night, but no doctor attended to her until the next morning. Though he is happy to have a child, he is very sad to know that the child is disabled due to the nurse's indifference and negligence. But Lakana takes it as a challenge in his life. The birth of a disabled child is ultimately ascribable

to his fate. As already mentioned, sorrows rush in his life in a chain fashion. Before he is reconciled to his disabled child, he receives a telegram, from his brother, “Start immediately, mother serious.” He, therefore, rushes in his car from Basavakalyana to his village Padiyuru and is shocked to learn that his mother is burnt to death by the local hooligans,

Just then, Aitha and Thomu ran up to Lakana and embraced him. Tears had dried up in their eyes and their faces were swollen. Lakana took a few steps toward a body covered in cloth: it was his mother’s body, charred and unrecognizable (P.172).

Shocked beyond measure by the mother’s death, Lakana asks his brother how it had happened. Then Aitha tells him in brief,

He was told, as briefly as possible, that Chaluvayya Shetty’s bodyguards had first murdered Buda Mulya and cut off his wife’s hand, and then, in the evening, they had locked Aitha’s house from outside, poured kerosene oil and set fire to it. Maire, trapped in the burning house, and the cattle in the shed had died amidst helpless screams. Aitha and his wife had survived a similar fate because, at that time, they had gone to the Kodamanittaaya shrine to offer their prayers. On their way back, they had seen from a distance, red tongues of fire rising high above their house. By the time they hurried home, everything was over; there was only a deadly silence. Their neighbours had helped them put out the fire with great difficulty. When Aitha was finally able to enter the house, he could only see his mother’s charred body (P.173).

Lakana, Aitha, Thomu and Chennu are heartbroken and listless. Unwilling to take shelter in anybody’s house, they spend the whole night under the mango tree near the burnt home. When Lakana gets up in the morning, he receives a telegram. “It read that he had been suspended with immediate effect and that he should vacate his quarters within two days. There at Basavakalyana, his wife and child lay like orphans in a hospital; and here his mother had been a victim of an inhuman crime. All the villagers knew the truth about the ghastly crime, but were silent owing to their fear of power” (P.174). Growing desperate, Lakana meets the Superintendent of Police and tries to persuade him to conduct a proper inquiry, but the Superintendent turns a deaf ear to his request. Thus Lakana receives shock after shock and feels righteous anger at all the man-made brutalities. “When he realized that even a rage that yearned to explode the whole police

station with bombs, how could he judge the Naxalite violence as wrong? That was the question that raged in his mind” (P.176).

Thus although Lakana has chosen the modern way of life by rejecting the heritage of spirit-impersonation, he is not altogether happy. He undergoes many sorrowful experiences due to political evils and social evils, which are ultimately ascribable to his fate. As the novelist comments upon his life, “Lakana’s life should have been smooth and peaceful at Basavakalyana, the center of Sri Basavanna’s socio-religious movement, but it was not. On the contrary, it was marked by one misfortune after another. Due to the negligence of a doctor, his wife became almost insane, his child was crippled, and he was suspended from his job for no fault of his” (P.191). But in spite of all this suffering, Lakana does not lose his courage, but files a writ petition in the High Court challenging his suspension order. After a minimal enquiry the court passes severe structures against the callous action of the minister and the government, and passes an order that Lakana should be reinstated in his position in the same town. Accordingly Lakana reports himself to duty and continues his sincere work. After a few days he is promoted to the post of Assistant Commissioner and transferred to Mandya.

Though Lakana is happy about his promotion and transfer, his wife Taniyaru is not happy at all. As her bouts of depression increase, she starts taking the sleeping pills without her husband’s knowledge and suffers from frequent fits of rage. Occasionally she would weep for hours and sometimes even abuse and beat her child. There starts a quarrel between Lakana and his wife, which may be described as a conflict between skepticism and faith. Taniyaru attributes all her suffering – like her depression and having a crippled child – to her husband’s skepticism, “This is the result of your hatred of the spirits. You lost your mother, you turned me into a mental patient, my child became a cripple, and now we have to move to a strange place – all because of your lack of faith in god and spirits” (P.192). Although Lakana reasons with her from his agnostic point of view, Taniyaru does not accept it, because she has her own bitter and painful experience of life. “Everyday in the morning, Taniyaru would experience intense pain as though she was being bitten by scores of scorpions all over her body, as though she was being struck by numerous arrows coming from different directions. She had to free herself from such pain at any cost” (P.194).

Lakana has spent all his time in discharging his profesio 51 y

and neglected his wife and home. It is only now that he understands his wife's terrible loneliness and the 'household syndrome.' That is why he obliges his wife for the first time in his life and takes her to Padiyuru in his car before joining his new post as Assistant Commissioner at Mandya. He looks at life now from his wife's perspective. "Now, it was Taniyaru, who was Lakana's teacher; she was the rainbow ushering in a new awareness, and his life, freed from his own self-centred black clouds, began to sight a new horizon" (P.196).

When Lakana and Taniyaru reach their village and stay with Aitha in the parental home, Lakana realizes the pleasures of a joint family, which has been slowly disappearing in the modern days. Lakana's son Shyama sleeps happily between Aitha and Chennu, while Aitha's son Somu sleeps soundly in the arms of Lakana and Taniyaru. "The question of who were whose parents appeared inconsequential in the moonlight that had serenely spread everywhere" (P.201). Although the life styles of the two brothers have changed from each other conspicuously, they realize the pleasures of family reunion and hope for frequent opportunities of coming together. Taniyaru feels very cozy and satisfied in the traditional atmosphere. One morning Aitha carries Shyama to the shrine near the river by the side of the banyan tree. He applies the juice of some plant on the child's body and dips the child in the water thrice. Taniyaru, who has followed Aitha silently, screams in fear. But as she sees Aitha take the child to the shrine, rolls on the ground three times as part of the ritual and worships the spirit, Taniyaru is disarmed by Aitha's attachment to her child and consequently she develops great respect and admiration for her husband's elder brother,

Having reached the shrine, Aitha, holding on to the child, rolled on the ground three times as part of his service to the spirit. Still the child was not scared. Aitha stood in front of the spirit, the child in his arms and his eyes closed, and prayed to the spirit silently. Then he worshipped the spirit, took from the priest what was given to him as a token of the spirit's grace, ate it and made the child eat it as well. When he turned to return home, Taniyaru ran up to him and prostrated herself before him (P.203).

Aitha feels rather embarrassed by Taniyaru's prostration and requests her, "Please don't do this. You, the wife of my elder brother, are like a mother to me. Please get up" (P.203). But Taniyaru is

overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude and considers Aitha to be the spirit himself. Her faith in the traditional religion is reinforced. Then Aitha consoles her, “Be patient. This cripple-state of your child is only temporary. By the grace of Kodimanittaaya, he will be free from it, just as a lotus opens itself as soon as the rays of the sun touch it” (P.203). Taniyaru tells Aitha, “I will not leave this place until the child is cured. I have come here with this firm resolve” (P.204). But Aitha’s advice to her opens her eyes and gives her a new realization of her husband’s role in the society, “Don’t behave in such a manner. Lakana’s work is also a form of worship; he hopes to glimpse truth through his service to society. Our goals are the same. While I seek god in the symbol of the spirit, he seeks god in his duty and service. The only difference between us is that his work is greater because his world is bigger than mine. You have to be with him always and you shouldn’t disturb his peace of mind. If you do, I may not succeed in my endeavour” (P.204). His advice enables Taniyaru to understand her husband’s greatness and nobility and her respect for her husband increases suddenly, as a consequence of her repentance over her folly, “As she neared her husband, Taniyaru tightly clasped his hands and leaning against his chest, sobbed, ‘I have erred. I didn’t understand you, and hence, not only did I suffer, but I made you suffer as well’” (P.204).

Now Lakana and Taniyaru begin to look at life from a fresh perspective. Aitha’s advice to Lakana comes from the bottom of his heart and is deeply philosophical, “Brother, you and your wife can leave for Mandya today itself. Your place of work is Mandya; there is not much you can do here. Now, consider this: our life-span is woefully short; in this short period, whatever we can do for people in general and the degree to which we enrich their lives – that is the only thing, which survives us” (P.205). Thus there is a sort of mutual recognition of and transformation between tradition and modernity. Just as Lakana realizes the importance of traditional life, Aitha recognizes the importance of modern life. Then both the brothers exchange their sons for looking after them. Lakana’s son Shyama is left with Aitha, and Aitha’s son Somu is taken by Lakana. “Lakana and Taniyaru were overcome with emotion in the presence of those two great souls. They fell dwarfed by their love and attachment” (P.205). Lakana and Taniyaru feel a great sense of satisfaction from the reinforcement of human bondage. They leave happily for Mandya.

After reporting to duty as Assistant Commissioner of Mandya, Lakana participates in the festival of folk performances organized by the Kannada and Culture Department. Prof. Neelakanthappa, an expert folklorist, stresses the need for revival of the folk arts. But Lakana expresses his frank views in his concluding speech. He says, “These folk arts have been exploiting the lower classes and Dalits for centuries together. However, they have masked their social behaviour and various forms of exploitation with paints and clothes, and they have maintained them by calling them dance, ritual and art. It is wrong to glorify these arts” (P.209). Prof. Neelakanthappa admires Lakana’s realistic views about the folk arts.

Lakana has a depressing experience when he sees the houses of Dalits being burnt to ashes. He pacifies the crowds and makes arrangements to send all the wounded Dalits to the nearby hospitals. After a short while he witnesses the clash between upper caste people and Dalits finally resulting in police firing. When the upper caste youth begin to pelt stones at Dalit youths and the police force, a few policemen and youths are hurt. “The enraged policemen, without giving any preliminary warning, opened fire. Within a few seconds, about fifteen Dalits and a few policemen, including a Sub-Inspector, had died. Within no time all the Dalit houses were set on fire and there was awful commotion everywhere” (P.213).

Lakana is deeply disturbed by the unhappy communal clash. He begins to brood seriously about the yawning gap between the upper caste/class and the lower caste/class people and the consequent clashes, hatred and misunderstanding. He could not arrest any of the perpetrators of violence as the whole thing was attributed by the authorities to mob hysteria.

“There were many occasions on which Lakana had to accept defeat, but he never went against his conscience and weakly surrendered to them” (P.216). Once Mailarayya, a leader of Dalit Sangharsha Samiti meets him and asks him to join the association of officers belonging to scheduled castes as a member by contributing two percent of his salary as membership fee. But Lakana suspects it to be an open invitation for corruption. He tells him frankly, “If we begin such a movement, we will be corrupting honest officers also. No problem can be solved through publicity, processions and press

statements” (P.217). He tells Mailarayya further that struggling for eighteen percent reservation in legislature and administration will not help them have permanent power. He accuses his own people of distancing themselves completely from the community that trusts them. But Mailarayya comments on his ideas, “But your objectives are too remote and too Utopian” (P.218). But Lakana conveys his clear vision to him, “Self-help, self-respect and acquisition of knowledge – these have to be our immediate concerns” (P.218). He insists that Dalits should develop legal consciousness, and extend it to the other members of their community, but they do not do it at all. “This is the tragedy of our community and other marginalized communities” (P.221). Lakana speaks like a visionary when he says that the Dalits should have their goals clearly defined and that their society needs a major surgery.

As some years go by, Lakana and Taniyaru grow ripe with the experience of life and look at life from a broader perspective. “Lakana’s voice also has undergone recognizable changes, it does not have now its earlier harshness and shrillness... Lakana has now learnt to possess many different voices – those of his duty to the government, love of a husband, affection of a father, and concern of an elder brother – and still harmonize them” (P.224). Similarly Taniyaru has regained her gusto for life. She loves and respects her husband for his conscientious behavior, worships Panjurli, and teaches the traditional arts of the Pambada community to the children in the neighbourhood. Thus, there is a kind of reconciliation between husband and wife and between their agnosticism and faith respectively.

Thomu, the youngest daughter of Maire completes her elementary school education in the village and wants to continue it further in the city, but Maire pressurizes her to get married. Finally she is married off to a young man called Angara, much against her wish and will. In the patriarchal society a bride has no choice to select her husband, but she has to accept a man selected and approved by the parents. Thomu is no exception to this patriarchal rule at least initially. But as days go by, Thomu’s real nature reveals itself clearly. Temperamentally there is a similarity between Thomu and her brother Lakana in that both of them protest against the tradition sooner or later. Thomu’s marriage with Angara turns out to be a mismatch, as there is no temperamental compatibility between the two. She has voluntarily

learnt a bit of dance by observing her father and other *bhuta*-impersonators. She has developed an artistic sensibility and is deeply interested in singing and painting. But on the contrary her husband Angara, being just a casual labourer, cannot appreciate her art as it is beyond his comprehension. When people appreciate her songs and paintings, he grows suspicious about her character. Being a beast, he considers her art as redundant and inconvenient to him. He destroys her painting tools and objects to her singing. He becomes an alcoholic and starts beating her. On top of that, he degenerates into a womanizer. Thomu confirms her suspicion about him when once she sees him in the arms of another woman. Finally she realizes that far from being a loving husband, he is only a wild beast.

Now that Thomu has discovered her identity through the bitter experiences with her drunkard husband, she decides to discontinue her life with him. She, thus, becomes a modern woman, who can live independently without a husband. For her bold decision, she draws inspiration from the *pad-dana* or narrative about Siri, the first woman to rebel against patriarchy. Thomu's awakening of self-respect is admirable. She enjoys the moral support of her brother, Lakana. Consequently she takes a bold decision and walks away from her husband for good.

Lakana takes Thomu not to the native village, Padiyur, but to Susheela, a dynamic activist in the women's movement in Bangalore. Guided by Susheela, Thomu joins a high school and pursues her interest in music, dance and painting. Later with the help of Lakana, she joins a college for a B.A Degree. Gradually she develops her musical talent to a great extent, presents folk dances like *kanyaapu*, trains the members of her own troupe in folk songs and folk dances. She realizes her potentiality to a great extent, consolidates her identity and shapes her career meaningfully. "In the college atmosphere, Thomu was a singing cuckoo, a dancing peacock and occasionally a roaring tigress. As a student of science, she absorbed the precision of logic and the force of arguments based on evidence, which gave her words the sharpness of a knife and the sudden flash of lightning" (P.107). After the completion of her B.A. Degree, she joins a law college, makes a steady progress and takes special interest in the problems of women, *dalits* and rural people. Soon after graduating from Law College, she begins to practise as a lawyer and takes special interest in the cases

of the poor and women. “Even here she was different from others: she would not accept the briefs of rich clients. Her clientele consisted of only the poor and women. Owing to the Land Reforms Act, a large amount of litigations on behalf of former tenants began to enter the court, and most of such cases, on behalf of the tenants, would have Thomu as their advocate” (P.110). Thus she dedicates her legal career for the betterment of poor and helpless people thereby rendering her service to the society.

When Cheluvayya Shetty wants to buy his land back from the tenant, Buda Mulya for Rs. 15000/- and manages to get him arrested, many shameless lawyers help him to do so. Buda Mulya is so helpless that he can have neither the court nor the lawyers to help him. But Thomu, who has set up her office at Karkala, recently, takes up Buda Mulya’s case. She gets him released on bail and succeeds in getting the injunction quashed. As a result she incurs the wrath of other lawyers. A few strangers raid her office and break all the furniture. One day a bog lorry is made to collide with the *riksaw* in which she is moving. On some other occasion a hired murderer sneaks into her house and alerts her to be careful and refuses to murder her because of his respect for her and her social concern. But Thomu survives all attempts on her life and continues to fight for justice.

After some time Cheluvayya Shetty and his gang of *goondas* murder Buda Mulya and sever an arm of Korapolu (wife of Buda Mulya) and burn Maire to death. Now the criminal tries to escape. But Thomu lodges two complaints in the Magistrate’s court under CRPC 200. One complaint is on behalf of Korapolu and another, on behalf of Aitha. The Magistrate happens to be an honest and upright officer, who never succumbs to any kind of pressure. The very next day he posts the case as per CRPC 202, for preliminary hearing. The news spreads immediately like an electric flash. That night a stranger meets the Magistrate privately and tries to offer a bribe of five lakhs rupees for not admitting the case. But the Magistrate does not yield to the temptation. Then the Inspector of Police, Hemant meets the Magistrate and alerts him to handle the case of Cheluvayya Shetty with extreme care. But the magistrate reminds him of his own duty and silences him.

On the day of preliminary hearing, Thomu pleads with the judge to admit the case, record all of their statements, to issue an arrest

warrant against Cheluvayya Shetty and to hand over the case to the COD, or to get the investigation conducted by the court itself. Within half an hour or so the Superintendent of Police, the Deputy Commissioner, the Public Prosecutor and some legal experts enter the court to defend the criminals by their intervention. But Thomu opposes their intervention strongly. She insists that the statements of the complaint should be recorded. She pleads further,

I have come here with the hope that I can get justice here and I know the price of justice and truth. This tahsildar here has been suspended because he stood for truth; Aitha Pambada lost his mother only because he upheld what was just and right. Buda Mulya lost his life because he fought for the land that was rightfully his under the Tenancy Act and his wife, Korapolu, has lost her hand. How many more lives and limbs of innocent people does the government desire? Let the public prosecutor clarify this. I am aware that the gigantic arms of corruption have embraced most people; I implore that the sword of law should cut off those hands. There is neither tomorrow nor yesterday for this urgent task – it has to be done now, and at this moment. This is my plea (P.182).

The public prosecutor, two other lawyers, Chinnappa and Dejappa Shetty try to intervene unnecessarily and influence the magistrate not to admit the case. But the magistrate, being a man of sterling morality and uprightness, can see through the corruption of hired defenders of the criminal. He, therefore, admits the case and gives his justification as follows:

The police officers, who have intentionally ground the wheel of law to a halt, are also deemed to be active accomplices of such an act. In fact, this is a clear instance of police inaction. Hence I have admitted this case as per the provisions of section 204 of CRPC. Having admitted this case, I order that Cheluvayya Shetty and the concerned police officers of this district be served non-bailable arrest warrants and that they be produced in the court at the time of the next hearing (P.190).

The gang of criminals is shocked and surprised by the magistrate's admission of the case. But Thomu is thrilled to the core to have achieved a tremendous victory, which reinforces her faith in the judiciary because of such rare magistrates of strong morals.

Thomu continues her lawyer's profession by devoting her time to help the poor women and *dalits* seeking justice. "Alone. She is moving

forward like the River Nandini, jumping over boulders and rocks and cutting through jungles and forests. Thomu's voice is the voice of protest against injustice, and empathy for those seeking justice" (P.225). She can argue forcefully on behalf of the women, who are subjected to male atrocities. She becomes an active member of an organization called Naari (Women) and volunteers to help the helpless women. Being a dedicated soul she is neither interested in nor worried about marriage, although she can caress and play affectionately with her nephews. In addition to these, she is also an artist, who sings only the songs of protest and resistance. Thus, Thomu has given up the traditional way of life and chosen the modern way of life. Being educated in law, she has led a life of dedication. She has shown the courage of remaining single as a divorcee without depending upon any man or lover and fulfilled her dream of becoming an artist. She has actualized her potentiality, achieved and asserted her identity and attained a sense of fulfillment in spite of her frustration at the initial stage of her married life. She has been a real practitioner of feminist self-reliance without unnecessarily tom-tomming about it — a fact that is more than admirable.

The Edge of Time, thus, offers three different ways of life followed by the three members of the same family traditionally connected with *bhuta*-worship. *Tembare* or the drum symbolizes the ritual of possession-dance. Though all the three of them follow their own paths – of conformity (like Aitha) or of protest (like Lakana and Thomu) they have to face the inevitable challenges and hazards indigenous to their chosen professions, apparently caused by upper caste and class people and their selfishness but at a deeper level by their fate. Veerappa Moily deserves our congratulations for giving such a beautiful provincial and ethnic novel richly textured with Tulu culture, which includes their rituals, songs, dances, oral epics, beliefs and superstitions etc. The novel captures the ethos of Tulu Nadu in its transitional period in which tradition and modernity collide and complement each other paradoxically. One is easily reminded of Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* as far as the conflict between religiosity and secularism is concerned. The novelist has offered an insider's picture of the life of the subaltern category of *bhuta*-worshippers, which comes like a fresh wind in the Indian fiction, as

it brings the marginal group to the center-stage and decentres the brahmanic hegemony in the realm of letters. It highlights the experience of *dalits*, which is conspicuously opposed to that of the upper caste Hindus of India. In this sense it is indubitably a novel of social realism with a strong dose of ameliorative intention. Veerappa Moily, who hails from the subaltern section of Indian (Karnataka) society, happens to be a lawyer by training and a politician by profession and a social reformer by vocation, has written this novel with a consciousness of his social agenda.

He has employed the technique of omniscient point of view and chronological narration in the novel. The narration is generally fast and has a mixture of (the present) experiences and (the past) memories of characters. The stress is more on the socio-political than on the psychological aspect of life. That explains the reason why Veerappa Moily, the socio-political leader sometimes tries to override the novelist in him by his unwanted authorial interventions, pontification and generalizations about the evils of Indian, Hindu caste system. Instead of leaving the narrated experience to the judgement of the reader, Veerappa Moily begins to offer his satirical, general and didactic remarks in-between the narration thereby hindering the flow of particularized experience. That is why a perceptive critic like A. A. Mutalik Desai asks a question, "Is Moily's *The Edge of Time* a novel? Do his efforts contribute more anthropologically and socio-economically? Is the author engaged sufficiently as a man of creative literature?"⁶ One wishes at least the so-called copy-editor of Rupa & Co had scissored off such interfering remarks from the otherwise facile narration.

Although the novelist has offered a very detailed realistic and ethnic picture of Tulu culture, including its sub-castes, he fights shy of mentioning the exact caste of the owner of the rice mill, Girijapati and the local minister at Basavakalyana. He only mentions that the man belongs to the upper caste. One wonders why the novelist should have the fear of mentioning the name of the community in an ethnic novel? One may easily guess that he is referring to the Lingayat community, but that he has no courage to hurt the feelings of the people of the said community. The novel cannot be half ethnic and half neutral, hence colourless.

The Edge of Time is masterfully translated by Dr. C.N. Ramachandran from the Kannada novel, *Tembare*. It is a very significant contribution to the realm of Indian Literature in English Translation. But one wonders why the translator has used the cheap Hindi film-type of spellings for elongated vowel sounds like 'Kodimanittaaya', or 'Aarati' instead of using the internationally recognized diacritical marks. One wonders what the publishers and their editors must be doing with their ignorance and indifference to the conventions of publishing. But such minor irritants do not diminish the bewitching beauty of the translation. Dr. C.N. Ramachandran deserves our congratulations for liberating the local text from the regional bondage releasing it into the global realm of letters thereby giving it an opportunity of international recognition.

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Contextualizing Dalit Consciousness in the Textuality of History and Historicity of Text

— Prof. Bhagabat Nayak

Abstract :

Consciousness is the primitive and instinctual part of the mind that corroborates the inner flow of experiences in the hidden memories. It translates and transgresses the multitudinous thoughts and feelings of human personality which one self-communes in an interior monologue. Dalit literature is the product of this consciousness built through the ages. Dalit writers write this consciousness taking interest in the technique of introspecting and interpreting their spatiality in an interior monologue or in a flow of stream of inner experiences. With the depiction of Dalit experiences, thoughts, actions, feelings and possibilities in caste paradigm Dalit writers express their concern through the artistic portrayal of sorrows and tribulations in untouchability, slavery, degradation and poverty with a craving for liberty, security, equality and honour. Dalits both as a caste and class group in Hindu caste paradigm and sociological milieu refer to Harijans, New-Buddhists, untouchables, *Adivasis*, landless farm labourers, workers, the suffering masses, and nomadic and criminal tribes who are lagging behind economically with a singular identity. Dalit writers portray Dalit consciousness in their distinct rebelliousness, commitment to human liberation and autonomy with a quest for self-search and self-respect. Dalitism as a consciousness expresses a different world of experience purposively expressing a rebellious attitude for a 'just remedy'. The paper focuses Dalit consciousness as "a reciprocal concern with the textuality of history and historicity of text".

Keywords : Phenomenological, claustrophobism, hegemony, annihilation and abominable.

From time immemorial caste has become a great denominator to classify the Hindus in different groups and communities on the basis of their activity and occupation. Caste as a system is explained in the ancient scriptures like the *Vedas*. When the Hindu society is divided on the basis of caste or *Varna*, the high castes like *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras* are glorified for performing their activities. But the irony is that those who serve the society better than others are considered as untouchables or Dalits. Dalit consciousness is an outcome of intellectual and political kind of activism to end caste

discrimination and oppression in India. The sorrow, pain and dissatisfaction in the life of the Dalits bring out an extreme self-consciousness with the portrayal of intellectual combative capability to rise up from shameful, inhuman and obscene propaganda of the caste hierarchy that distorts their identity.

The scriptural definition *Savarna* (the touchable) is contrasted with *Avarna* (the untouchables). As per Hindu *de jure* *Avarna* means one who does not belong to one of the four *Varnas*-The *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras*. The untouchables or *Ati-shudras* are called *Avarnas*, who have no *Varna*. Logically *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras* in the paradigms of Indo Aryan society are called *Chaturvarna*, but the Untouchables or the *Ati-Shudras* are outside the *Chaturvarna*". Although the aspects of *Varna* system in the *Rig Veda* deal simply with the division of labour as per the occupations, in later times its motives were exploited in the pursuit of power, fame and wealth. Dalit intellectuals think it a kind of idle imagination in normal state of society which further constituted the class composition. In the course of time this idle imagination has become an ideal practice with the invocation and sanction of sacred law that raises concern for definite rights and privileges in sociological scrutiny.

In Western theory the *Avarnas* considered as *Ati-Shudras*, "The *Dasas* and *Dasyus*, were either savages or non-Vedic Aryan tribes. Those of them were captured in war were probably made slaves and formed the *Shudra Caste*" (Das 2003: 133). In addition to this,

The word 'Dasa' in later literature means a 'Serf or a slave'. It follows that the Dasa tribes that we see opposed to the Aryas in the *Rig Veda* were gradually vanquished and were then made to serve the Aryas. In the *Manusmriti* (VIII, 143), the *Shudra* is said to have been created by God for service (*dasya*) of the Brahmin. We find in the *Tai. Samhita*, the *Tai. Brahmana* and other *Brahmana* works that the *Shudra* occupied the same position that he does in the *Smritis*. Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that the *Dasas* or *Dasyus* conquered by the Aryans were gradually transformed into the *Shudras* (Kane 33).

From 6th to 20th century different social and cultural upsurges were there in India for the emancipation of the *Shudras* and *Ati-Shudras* from their labelled identity of indignity to a preferred and glorified

position with the sanction of civil, political, economic and cultural rights. In course of time, the *Shudras* and *Ati-Shudras* were called 'outcastes', Scheduled Castes', 'ex-untouchables' and 'Dalits' in referred or preferred terms. In Indian sociological context 'Dalit' is referred to a caste and contributes to a subjugated status defining oppression, untouchability, poverty and repression of the group.

The rise of Dalit literature as a part of Indian writing has become popular after independence. The origin of Dalit literature started from thirteenth century India when *Vachana* poetry was written by a few saint poets. It is fact that while Dalit writing in history was for the purpose of social and moral reformation, in the post-independence context it has raised a revolutionary consciousness with the mingling of self-motivated ideologies and political philosophies. Caste system, its hard and fast rules, economic conditions, evils like begging or stealing, poverty and equality become the chief causes of the rise of Dalit consciousness. It is not against high caste ethics and ideologies but in antipathy it establishes injunctions on high caste's abominable social philosophy of superiority by birth. Dalit life has its philosophy and beauty which was neglected for centuries under the prescribed rules and duties to the low castes by the high castes. Dalit literature not only presents the beauty of Dalit life and consciousness but also their suffering and miseries for hundreds of years in social history. Dalit consciousness is built through the retrieval of memory from history. Dalit is an important political and social force in India. Dalit literary and critical writings constitute major challenges to, and questioning of, the theorizing about Indian politics, culture and literature. Theorizing Dalit consciousness in Indian literatures, culture and society both in various regional languages and English language is an attempt to analyse the Dalit condition from Marxist, Postcolonial or subaltern perspectives. Exploring the aesthetic of Dalit consciousness in Indian Literature it becomes necessary to pay attention to the history, controversies and considerations pertaining to the untouchables, aboriginal communities, marginalized and dispossessed people.

In the hegemonic discourse Dalits are an exclusive community whose ideas, thoughts, beliefs, art, craft and service to the society has been neglected for centuries. The evolution of their consciousness is a residual aspect of their suffering in silence. But in the post-independence Indian situation Dalit consciousness is projected to react

and revolt against casteist and disrespectful offensive attitude of the high castes. Engaging them in distortion and subversion of the upper caste ideology. Dalit intellectuals and elites identify themselves both in liminal reality and Dalit particularities. Dalit writings are pre-eminently autobiographical and within the historical ambit. Dalit literary context not only have aesthetic characteristics but also poses internal contradictions of Indian society. Dalit literature has assertion of rejection of the hegemony of the caste-based challenges. It locates historical context that foregrounds the ideological concerns of the Dalit authors who in their literary merit make their journey from 'erasure to assertion'. Dalit literature as cultural and phenomenological production is the critical intervention in the Indian society, history and culture which interrogates the casteist construction of Indian identity. It is revolutionary, negative and subversive in its theorization and examination of truth or falsity of ancient literature which designates the Dalits as polluted and untouchable. The upper caste Hindus' obsessive preoccupation with purity and cleanliness has its inner contradiction to the Dalit occupation such as cleaning latrines, skinning dead animals, and removing the dead carcasses which supplement to their purity and sacredness.

In popular psychological framework purity and cleanliness are physical affairs, not to think anyone inferior and untouchable. It is important to acknowledge the Dalit condition and contexts in mainstream literature, but it evokes readers' 'sympathy' and 'compassion' when the upper caste tongue attributes the term 'impure' and 'polluted' to them. Dalit's physical segregation on the inferiority of birth in caste-based social, cultural and economic structure of Hindu society becomes the content of Dalit writing. The inferior location of Dalits is utilized by postcolonial theorists and in the context of literature as well as in the social, cultural and political dimensions of their relationship with upper caste Hindus. Dalit literature denounces the ideological construction of untouchability which is anti-human, unsocial and anti-national in a generalized way. With India's independence,

Dalit literature is associated with a movement to bring about change ... At the very first glance, it will be strongly evident that there is no established critical theory or point of view behind them [i.e. Dalit Writings]; instead, there is new thinking and a new point of view (Dangle vii–viii).

The word “Dalit” is a Marathi term, which means broken people, synonymous to ‘untouchable’, ‘scheduled caste’ and ‘backward classes’. While talking about Dalit, it is considered a stigma of caste in a social practice by “the best of Hindus” and “left-wing Hindus” that were seizing their land, socially boycotting them, restricting them to have access to drinking water, stripping and parading them for disobedience or deviation from social order. Previously the stigma was found in Hindus but later this has spread to Sikhism, Mohamedanism and Christianity in India with the conversion of Dalits. Dalit intellectuals think, “There cannot be a more degrading system of social organization than the caste system” as “It is the system that deadens, paralyses and cripples the people from helpful activity” (Ambedkar 1936: 17). They consider caste prejudice as a horrific reality and “Hinduism is a veritable chamber of horrors” (Ambedkar 1945: 296). But the high caste people think, “Castes form a graded system of sovereignties, high and low, which are jealous of their status and which know that if a general dissolution came, some of them stand to lose more of their prestige and power than others do” (Ambedkar 1936: 295-296). Dalit in caste pyramid is considered polluted and has no entitlements but plenty of duties. Caste in Hinduism as “The pollution-purity matrix is correlated to an elaborate system of caste-based, ancestral occupation” (Roy 2014: 23-24) like ‘manual scavenging’. Dalit writers through their writing like to fulfill the Dalit aspiration for the annihilation of caste.

Dalit literature is sometimes called radical or protest literature for its recording the sense and source of history in the context of society, economy, politics and art. It explores historical accuracies in the new social and cultural context as a necessary evil and recontextualize the present accuracies in historical development. History often sounds old-fashioned but the accuracies of history are *orchrasted* in the present with heuristic interest. The social and cultural events and situations of history are narrated in Dalit literature. The Dalit narratives recount the repetition of past-incidents in present context raising a consciousness to escape from the hubris of history. Appropriating the Hegelian maxim ‘all societies are the product of their history’, Dalit writers unfold Dalit historicism in the context of caste. A new historicist analysis of Dalit context unfolds understanding of the social and cultural history of India in Marxist terminology. Its formation, reception and assertion are relatively the kinds of historical method. Dalit literary perspectives

always foreground a historical background that interrogate, challenge and integrate the horrifying and humiliating contexts of the untouchables as suppressed and oppressed class.

Dalit literary texts can be read as documentaries, eye witness accounts and historical contexts which virtually interpret the historical ‘moment’ of this Foucauldian world of “the Age of confinement” (Wilson and Dutton: 8). Dalit literary imagination is based on the factual contexts and historical ‘moment’ in the textualised form “through the ideology, or outlook, or discursive practices of its own time, then through those of ours, and finally through the distorting web of language itself” (Barry: 169). Dalit literature, interrogates the history which is in past-perfect but its contemporaneity is in the present continuous. It envisages the Dalit suffering in the ‘repressive structures’ and ‘ideological structures’ of caste system. In Dalit literary-critical texts caste is focused as a ‘discursive practice’. After a close reading of Dalit literature one finds its structure as a significant factor in ‘the textuality of history, the historicity of texts’. It structures the Dalit consciousness and defines Dalit ideologies in the textual analysis of Dalit condition.

Dalit literature upholds human dignity and moral rectitude, and extols the importance of the use of reason and will. It is retrospective as well as progressively beneficial to compensate the shortcomings of Hindu society. It is a form of new humanism in the structure of Dalit identity. Dalit writers attempt to draw the attention of the readers by modifying their habitual perceptions on of reality and human content in prevalent literary devices. Dalit communities are the Andersonian imagined communities who claim to be as ‘both inherently limited and sovereign’. In their authorial capacity the Dalit writers consider caste as an ideological practice which does not determine the logic of its infrastructure and concept in its simplistic superstructure. The ‘alienation effect’ causes a different recognition to the Dalits which is assumed as a phenomenological aspect in the assessment of high castes. The pronouncement of caste is fostered by an ideology that internalizes ‘marginalization’ and ‘hegemony’ in the social control system. It accounts for the operation of control structures in the framing of social forces of “class outlook” (Williams: 101) with a set of ideas and attitudes of high castes. Formation of caste relates to Gramscian hegemony in social process and culture in general, and class ideology

in particular. But every ideology in its Althusserian ‘interpellation’ encourages the individual to live as a free entity and independent of social forces with an ideology for the degree of independence. Dalit literature asserts Dalit identity which is based on an ideology, ‘a system of representations of the heart of a given society’. But Dalit “Ideology is a system (possessing its logic and proper rigour) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts according to the case) endowed with an existence and an historical role at the heart of a given society” (Goldestein: 23). The ‘unconscious’ extension of caste consciousness in Dalit discourse caste becomes an area of debate in the politics of theory and an instrument of repression. The high castes Hindus have always access to the morality of indulgence for the social, political and economic advantage in the historical moment of India. Demystifying the history of caste Dalit writers condemn its configuration of rules and encourage its annihilation after prolonged lament, pessimism and despair.

A modernist approach to Dalit literature features it as a deep nostalgia for an earlier age when faith was full and authority intact. But in history caste was an exhilarating phenomenon in the expertise of knowledge or experience. In course of time caste has its ‘bad taste’ due to the influences of draconian Brahminism for introducing claustrophobism with new caste rules. Dalit literary texts delineate this in the new historicist method on the parallel reading of literary and non-literary texts, usually of the same historical periods with the approximating of Dalit facts. Critics of Dalit Literature label it invective as well as denunciatory, abusive or vituperative and occasionally indignant outburst from the pulpit of their life-style. Dalit ideas, feelings and impulses suppressed, unspoken and concealed in various degrees for centuries are exposed not as personal weaknesses but as sensitive vectors to their moral and social problems. The aesthetic of Dalit literature fails to reconcile the impulses of head and heart of untouchables. This enables the high castes to be aware of their respective outlook toward the Dalits. Dalit writing expresses the ‘collective consciousness’ of the Dalits in individual utterance.

The disenchanting feeling of untouchables in historical paradigms also becomes the central concept in Max Weber’s recognition of individual’s feeling of helplessness in sociology. The distancing of high castes causes their critical detachment in Dalit participation and

commitment. Dalit ideology intelligibly constitutes the Dalit imagination in different situations for 'harmonization' or 'blending together' in the comprehensiveness of anthropology, sociology, psychoanalysis, history and sociology of human existence. Dalit literary context in other words narrates the psychology of untouchables, history of their suffering, accounts of sexual abuse, memories, testimonies, documentaries and the symptomatic silences and omissions of their trauma in national history. It assimilates the 'knowing and not knowing' which intersect to evoke high caste ethical responsibility who in their ego and selfishness suffer from an ethical paralysis. Dalit writers are critical of Dalit virtues in the exteriority of their condition and action for the privilege of upper castes. But they regret for the "corrosive gaze" (Jay: 294) of the high caste 'lookers' that had disempowered the 'looked at'.

Dalit literary texts often considered radical in context and directed at Hindu high castes are said as a provocation. In India's caste paradigms when the Hindus are divided in *Chaturvarna* system like Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas and Sudras, it acts like "a social glue that binds as well as separates people and communities" (Roy 2014: 22). When privileged-caste Hindus believe caste, a representation of genius of Indian society, Dalits in their revolutionary hypothesis view how its structure affects Dalit dignity. Dalit writers wish to abolish caste taints either by a democratic system or bringing an end to the oppression of Dalits. They think annihilation of caste is not a breach of peace rather an expression of empathy. Hinduism as an extension of mysticism, spiritualism, nonviolence, tolerance, vegetarianism and caste serves like a power factor to rule and to be ruled. Dalit intellectuals think "Hindus must give up the principle of heredity occupation" (Ambedkar 1945: 276), the soul of the caste system. Like the Negro reality in America, Jews reality in Germany, the study of Dalit reality since its genesis in the *Rig Veda* (1200-900 BCE) had posed a challenge with the establishment of an anti-caste intellectual tradition during the high time of Buddhism. The anti-caste movement was started by the Veerashaivas under the leadership of Basava in mid-twelfth century South India. The anti-caste tradition was established by the Bhakti saint poets such as Cokhamela, Ravidas, Kabir, Tukaram, Mira and Janabai, Jotiba Phule, Pandita Ramabai, Swami Achnutanand Harihar, Ayyankali, Sree Narayan Guru and Iyothee Thass who had

ridiculed and rejected Brahministic tradition in caste system. Hindu reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayananda Saraswati and Swami Vivekananda had attempted to reform the Hindu organisations. But the causticity of caste is differently viewed by Ambedkar and Gandhi politically and intellectually during India's national movement. The Dalit writers inextricably narrate, debate, arrange and rearrange Dalit issues, sufferings, concerns and anxieties in their creative enterprises either with the recollection and retrieval of their memories or by revisiting the history of caste system in India.

Ambedkar talks about renouncing the belief in Chaturvarna which in its foundation is utterly brutal and has institutionalized injustice. In the caste pyramid he had found even-widening gap where the Dalits were 'deceived' and becoming poorest of the poor due to their position at the base. His *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) written in liberating tone with a revolutionary rage focuses how "Caste is another name for control. Caste puts a limit on enjoyment. Caste does not allow a person to transgress caste limits in pursuit of his enjoyment" (Ambedkar 1945: 276). Dalit writers think caste on Indian soil is "essentially undemocratic" (Das 2010: 175) and annihilation of caste should be the constitutional morality as well as social morality. Caste mark makes the Dalits not proud of their identity as it makes them tantamount to be tainted. In post-independence India Dalit intellectuals think "Democracy in India is only a top dressing on an Indian soil which is essentially undemocratic" (ibid) but without caste there will be the rule of justice. In the caste parameter 'Dalit' as an identity refers to all those Indians who are regarded as outcastes and untouchables. When caste is sanctioned in the foundational texts of Hinduism, today it pervades on the birth, death, marriage, food, music, poetry and dance of Dalits. It is creating sectarianism, obscurantism and skullduggery, narrow-mindedness and communalism. Intellectualism and constitutional guarantee for equality irrespective of castes is becoming pragmatically impossible for the narrow-minded 'gaze' of the caste prejudiced people.

In Dalit writing struggle for justice equality and happiness in audacious denunciation of caste is aimed at making the caste system advanced. It tells the Hindus what is wrong with them in their religion. Untouchability is an evil practice in Hinduism which causes indignity and fear for the victims of "graded inequality". Caste is not simply the "negation of the spirit of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" (Das

2010: 51) but a practice that makes the Brahmins enemical “against the Kshatriya or the Vaishya against the Shudra, or the Shudra against the Untouchable, [...] the Untouchable against the unapproachable, the Unapproachable against the unseeable” (Roy 2014: 51). Apart from this, millions of untouchables are converted to Islam during Mohammedan rule, and later to Sikhism and Christianity. But irony is that although their scriptures do not sanction caste, “elite Indian Muslims, Sikhs and Christians all practice caste discrimination” (Chughtai: 164) consciously or unconsciously.

Dalit writing is both sociological and political in its textures. In the narrative contexts of Dalit writers temptations and contractions of Hindu caste systems are well orchestrated. Caste and religion, impulse to hegemony and intention of assimilation, purity and pollution, favouritism and opportunism that differentiate the Indian masses fail to demolish the inborn identity of human beings as established by the theory of *Chaturvarna*. Writers from different states of India with their broadness of vision, compassion of Gandhi and egalitarian instincts of Ambedkar write on the conditions of virtual slavery of Dalits who even in modern India not only live in subordinated conditions but get collapsed in indignant conditions. They get collapsed owing to the neglect of privileged castes, enjoy life in virtual slavery, get imprisoned for minor faults, remain starved, and often get sexually abused without sympathy. The political victories of India do not make them proud for their “fortitude and dignity” (Guha 115). Dalit writings are often branded as radical, revolutionary and rebellious against the gestures of the upper castes toward them, with the recollection of their memories of abnoxious past. Unlike African-American literature and holocaust literature of twentieth century, Dalit writings become mnemonic in the imagination of their nightmarish past. Dalit movement is against ‘impurity’, which is related to their service and slavery to the upper castes who were harnessing their slaves “as bullocks and make them plough the fields in the blazing sun”. These slave owners treat their Dalit “slaves as beasts of burden, raining kicks and blows on them all the time and starving them” (Dashpande 38, 40). The condition of Dalits in society constantly hammers their sentiment.

Caste as a label inflicts profound horror in the consciousness of (low) birth which is ever sacred. The caste in *Vedas*, myths, Shastras and Brahminical texts has faced many confrontations in the past. But

in the development of India's nationalism during freedom struggle untouchability and its pollution-purity paradigm was understood as a method of punishment in social revolution. Annihilating caste is the central focus of Dalit literature and Dalit discourse. Dalit writers are of the impression that

The Hindu has not realized that these aborigines are a source of potential danger. If these savages remain savages, they may not do any harm to the Hindus. But if they are reclaimed by non-Hindus and converted to their faiths, they will swell the ranks of the enemies of the Hindus (Ambedkar 1936: 4).

Dalit writers those who either have Dalit identity as birth mark or write with the consciousness of Dalit suffering and slavery thinks between their livelihood and dignity at the social and political level. The untouchables do not like face-to-face encounter with the privileged castes rather for their rights to be equal with others like to dismantle the strongholds of Hindu orthodoxy. Dalit texts delineate that

The Depressed classes cannot consent to subject themselves to majority rule in their present state of hereditary bondsmen. Before majority rule is established, their emancipation from the system of untouchability must be an accomplished fact. It must not be left to the will of the majority. The Depressed classes must be made free citizens entitled to all the rights of citizenship in common with other citizens of the state (Ambedkar 1979-2003: 42).

Echoing within the tone of Ambedkar Dalit writers audaciously denounce Hindu caste system that forms a hierarchical and iniquitous social system in modern India. They believe that caste is a Brahministic formula to create sectarianism and obscurantism for their privilege. They do not take annihilation of caste as a breach of peace rather introduction of division of labour causes a division of labourers, disharmony, disparity and threat to peace. Caste is always coercion in form against the helpless that makes the untouchable agree to live on the mercy of upper caste Hindus. It is obvious that these caste subalterns commit petty crimes in alienation, segregation and deprivation of their life's sustenance. If Hinduism purges itself of a millennial sickness in the practice of caste then how can one expect that the Untouchables will be regarded as honest and sincere? Caste is an evil that prolongs with advantages to the privileged and suffering to the alienated. But the 'caste' initiators and ideologists forget that all of

them are “The children of God” (Zelliot: 254), the basic principle of *dharma*.

Dalit perspective is a motivated consciousness to eradicate caste and save the untouchables from the convention that compels them “to practice egregious forms of untouchability” (*Time of India*, 20 Dec. 2013). Only by rebaptising the untouchables in Buddhism, Christianity, Islam or calling them ‘Harijans’, ‘the people of God’ cannot become sufficient to change their plight. They cannot be ‘Hari’, the incarnation of Vishnu, nor they can occupy the divine pantheon unless they get equal treatment with others. Otherwise, it will be a kind of anchoring them to the Hindu faith or a plan to “kill Untouchables by kindness” (Ambedkar 1979-2003: 126). It is a Gandhian method to insist the privileged caste Hindus “to do penance for their past sins against the Untouchables” (Roy 2014: 129). It needs a cure by assimilation in social and religious status.

Eradicating untouchability from Hindu society can cause discomfort but it will energize the Hindus to come out their conservative fold. Conversion of untouchables may be a lesson to the high caste Hindus or those who cause deterioration to Hinduism, but soon after their conversion to other religion like Mohammedanism and Christianity their romanticism gets over when they find their isolation, segregation and recognition as social pariah in new religious environment. Despite their better livelihood and occupation, education, spiritual activity, cleanliness and sanitization they still face different manners of hesitation in the distinct social and religious activity. Regarding their assimilation in a different social and religious paradigm Ambedkar writes “that a person who is untouchable to a Hindu, is also untouchable to a Mohammedan” (2003:25) by recalling his experience when he and his friends were called “Dhebs’ (a derogatory term for untouchables) by a mob of angry Muslims. The high caste Hindus believe that caste is eugenic and it cannot be improved. In contrast to this, the sub-castes think caste has disorganized and demoralized the Hindus.

The aim of the Dalit literature is to reveal the startling facts about the pains and suffering of the large masses whose condition and sentiment was mutilated for centuries. It also exposes the hypocrisy of high caste Hindus who had shunned them without their mistakes. In callousness the high castes construct an inauthentic ideology

of caste with the coating of spirituality. Dalit writers not only narrate the magnitude of pains and penalties inflicted on the Ati-Shudras but also present the high caste mentality that favours a social inequality. When the society disqualifies caste as a trivial problem, Dalit writers reinvestigate this in their writing with moderate intelligence, equalitarian mentality and judgment. If caste is the gospel of caste Hindus, the untouchables think castelessness in social reforms is the means of Swaraj. Narrating the vilification of high caste Dalit writers, thinkers and activists attempt to subvert the caste ideology as a selfish motive to fulfill their purpose. Defying the caste codes and its aggravated forms Dalit writers criticize the orthodoxy as an abominable social philosophy or a Hindu sociological fact.

Examining falsity of the genealogies of caste as an instrument of conspiracy to mutilate the fellow beings can be called as politics of evil in the social history of the Hindus. In fact, the enlightened readers of Dalit literature can uncritically revere this as a sacred literature for its quest for 'self-respect' and 'self-reverence'. Dalit writing condemns the sacred literature of the Hindus and their abominable social practice in its historical research. Dalit literature is not harmful in its justifying the 'self' of the 'other' who are alienated and isolated from the centre and thrown to the periphery as margins. The hypothesis of Hindu sociological structure is hermeneutically presented with natural sentiments and scholarly pursuits. Dalit writings examine the malignant aspects of caste in Hindu social organization that challenges the evidence and recognizes signs of caste as a biological fact. Dalit writers express their antipathy toward this social philosophy and distinguish it as a sociological fact. Ambedkarites reject the identity of Dalit literature as humanitarian literature but consider it as a gratuitous analogy of human dignity. While Brahministic and Manuvian scholars invoke caste as a product of human intellect and extraordinary product of human ingenuity, the high priests of Dalit literature narrate it as a performance of sacrifice in paternal power and civil relationship. Dalit literature is decorated with a criticism that "The idea behind this plan seems to be to discover a formula which will solve two problems, one of fixing the functions of the four classes and the other of fixing the gradation of the four classes after a preconceived plan" (Ambedkar 2016: 35). Considering caste as an identity or status may be for competence, vocation, obligation and responsibility, but conferring its

initiation with rules for authority becomes a punishment that destroys the spirit of Hinduistic practice of humanism.

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Transgression of Educational Rights in Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* : A *Dalit's* Life

— Milind Raj Anand

Abstract :

Dalits have been portrayed as menial and tragic figures or as pity-some creatures on earth. After ages of tormentations and sufferings they have gradually started talking back. Instead of getting contained in Other's voices they have started speaking for themselves, about themselves and against other's atrocities. They are louding their voices against the violations of their Human Rights and are putting an alternative to the Gayatri Spivak's question: 'Can the subaltern speak?' Human Rights violations have eroded their space from society and therefore they have gradually and relentlessly carved a separate space for themselves. It is just like reclamation of an island out of the sea for oneself when the main land doesn't offer any. *Dalits* have raised a revolution for their rights through their writings, though sparse. These writings have turned it into a movement for equal rights and justice. This paper is an attempt to examine the aspect of the violations of Educational Rights of the *Dalits* through Omprakash Valmik's *Joothan*. The tradition of Indian education traditionally being exclusivist, distanced a majority of the social groups from itself. This paper explores how the Brahmanical system of exclusion made the *Dalits* undergo the experience of insult, humiliation, psychological and physical violence and ultimately a sense of alienation from the mainstream society. The autobiography illustrates the protagonist's attempt to overcome the hurdles and excel in education and professional career.

Keywords: Brahminism, Subaltern, Dalit-Bahujan , Emancipation

The term '*Dalit*' formed from the root word '*dal*' meaning to crush, grind, etc. It is basically used for grain. It has also been used against the enemy force in the context of completely ravaging the enemy's army in ancient literatures. This word has been used against the downtrodden with similar connotations post independence, coined by Jyotibarao Phule and first used in 1958 in *Dalit* Literature Conference in Mumbai. It gained prominence in 1972 with the formation of '*Dalit Panthers*', an organization of Marathi writers, activists, and social workers. They have over the ages been named

Achoot, Asprashya, Antyaja, Avarna, etc but were constitutionally declared as Scheduled Castes.

Arjun Dangle, a *Dalit* writer, writes,

Dalit is not a caste but a realization and is related to the experiences, joys and sorrows, and struggles of those in the lowest stratum of society. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principle of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary. (Dangle 264-265)

Caste system snatches away human dignity and rights from many and imparts it to few others. For thousands of years the untouchables lived as outcastes from the society in separate ghettos out of the main village and in jungles of the subcontinent and suffered extreme suppression and harassment at the hands of the so called upper castes of the four-fold *varna* system of India. Their *Jal-Jangal-Jameen* (Water, Forest and Land rights) have been snatched away and they have been left out with no other means of survival than eating dead meat of animals and begging for the left-over food if allowed by the upper castes in their neighbourhood. They have been asked to do only menial jobs of the society which lacked dignity and respect and lived the wretched life on earth. After India became a republic the situation due to tremendous efforts of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar the life of these castes gradually changed and they too entered into the main lifestream of the society through government efforts, though it is still at a very elementary state and a lot needs to be done yet.

Untouchability was legally abolished with India becoming a Republic on 26th Jan 1950. Though in practice it still exists till date and rampant incidents pop up from time to time from all over the country with atrocities based on caste and untouchability in India. *Dalit* literature has become a voice for the marginalised who have been absent from the discourse for long. Arun Prabha Mukherjee writes in Introduction to *Joothan*, “Untouchables were either mostly absent from literary representations or shown as victims in need of saviours, as objects without voice and agency.” (Valmiki xi) The denial of even basic human rights over ages has pushed them to the bottom of the pyramidal structure of social development.

There have existed multiple views against the origin of caste system in India. B.G. Tilak advocated the racial theory of Aryans and

claimed that the Aryans were a superior race and came from the Arctic and maintained a distance from the indigenous population which gradually emerged into the caste system. Jyotibharao Phule and E. V. Ramasamy Naicker believed that the Aryans were Eurasians and they imposed a caste system on India after the invasion. Gandhi too maintained the opinion that British and Brahmins were of the same race as Aryans. Though Ambedkar in his *Annihilation of caste* differs from the viewpoint and questions the Aryan theory. He advocates that the caste system evolved long after the commingling of different races of India. He questions the racial affinity between the Brahmin of Punjab and Brahmin of Madras, racial affinity between an untouchable of Bengal and an untouchable of Madras, or the racial difference between a Brahmin of Punjab and a Chamar of Punjab. Ambedkar says that, "The caste system does not demarcate racial division, The caste system is a social division of people of the same race." (*Annihilation of Caste* 237- 238) Another widely discussed theory is that *varna* system was prevalent before Buddha, but after the fall of Mauryan Empire and reign of Pushyamitra Shunga, Brahminism came to high prominence through the power centre and it demolished the Buddhist culture of India. Manusmriti law was followed and the lowest *varna* was further divided into numerous castes. Out of these, those who did not subjugate themselves to the vedic fold and tried to remain into Buddhist tradition were further outcast and were treated horribly who gradually evolved as *Avarnas* and constitutionally categorised as Scheduled Castes. The issue of untouchability came through the consumption of beef. To gain prominence, Brahminists gave up beef eating and the populace which ate it was pushed outside the villages devoid of other resources of livelihood through the use of power. These broken men were left with no other option than doing menial jobs and eating carrion which rendered them with the taboo of Untouchables. Ambedkar writes that untouchability was born around A.D. 400, "It is born out of the struggle for supremacy between Buddhism and Brahminism which has so completely moulded the history of India...." (Ambedkar 379)

With the *Dalits* away from the resources of the State, their condition turned worse over time. They without any means of survival had to subject themselves to the tasks assigned by the dominant castes and the society and remained at their mercy. Things gradually changed

after the efforts of various leaders of the society especially Jyotibharao Phule, Chhatrapati Shahuji Maharaj, E.V.Ramasamy Naicker and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar who, through their political and social movements, awakened the *Dalits* from deep slumber and charged them for their equal rights. They led numerous movements all over India and set up a face of aggression and demand for equal rights and opportunities in all spheres of Human development. Struggles for certain basic rights to water, food, livelihood, residence, use of public wells, temple entry, dignified life were demanded and won over. While drafting the Constitution it was especially kept in mind that untouchability be abolished and Human Rights respected.

When *Dalits* started expressing themselves through speech and writing, their discourse was either disbelieved or quashed and was long accused of exaggeration. Their existence was termed meaningless and their sufferings irrelevant. Gradually their writings were accepted in the literary genres but termed un-literary and meritless and therefore meaningless. Though when their works got translated in different other languages from their mother tongue and especially English and became available to a wide variety of readers worldwide, the scenario changed dramatically and it evolved itself into a new successful genre in Indian literature. The *Dalit* literature has been termed “propagandist, univocal and negative; that it does not represent the individual person ; and, that excessive resentment is heard in *Dalit* literature.” (Limbale 34). Omprakash Valmiki writes,

Dalit literary movement is not just a literary movement. It is also a cultural and social movement. *Dalit* society has been imprisoned for a thousand years in the dark mist of ignorance, deprived of knowledge. *Dalit* literature is the portrayal of the wishes and aspirations of these oppressed and tormented *Dalits*. (Valmiki 97)

Prabhakar Mande is a folklorist and Marathi folk theatre artist writes on *Dalit* literature,

The event of the development of *Dalit* literature is not just a literary event. Therefore this literature should not be viewed only from a literary perspective. Unless this chain of events is seen from a sociological perspective against the entire background of the changes happening in the society; its significance cannot be grasped. (Mande, Quoted in Limbale 99)

Omprakash Valmiki in his celebrated work *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* remarks that one can somehow get past poverty and deprivation but it is impossible to get past caste. Some of the common elements in *Dalit* literature are: suffering, violence, anguish, anger, protest, suppression both physical and psychological. *Dalit* literature is now an established genre in literature. The primary motive of *Dalit* literature is the liberation of *Dalits* in India. Regarding the aim of *Dalit* literature, Dr. C.B. Bharti says, "The aim of *Dalit* literature is protest against the established system which is based on injustice and exposes the evil and hypocrisy of upper caste." (Bharti 34) Kanwal Bharti, a *Dalit* thinker believes, "*Dalit* literature to be a reflection of the plight of the *Dalits*, the real and authentic expression of their struggles. It is not Art for Art's sake; rather it is the literature of the vicissitudes of life... It is a 'Mass Literature', also the 'Literature of Action'." (Arora 155)

Over the period Autobiography has become the most preferred genre of *Dalit* writings. It is probably because the writer feels his pain is being shared by others and so he puts his heart out into the public for more comfort and sympathy. The writer too wants his narration to remain authentic and reveal the truth of society to the public at large. He wants social consciousness to build up against the demeaning and abhorric, unjustified caste system of the country and wants the people to come together to raise their voice in solidarity to his. The autobiographical narrative has been questioned by the main stream and established writers for its non-literariness, unstructured approach, artless outpourings, repetitive and stereotypical narration. Valmiki quotes Das's defence of the genre, "*Dalit* writers should write autobiographies so that not only our history will stay alive, but also our true portrayals of wrongdoers. *Dalit* autobiographies will provide inspiration to our future generations." (Valmiki 20)

Kancha Ilaiah in *Why I am not a Hindu*, remarks that narratives of personal experience are the best contexts that enable to compare and contrast the social forms and personal experiences. He further argues, "This method of examining socio-cultural and economic history is central to the social sciences; significantly, the method of narrating and deconstructing experiences has been used by feminists. Further Indian *Dalit-Bahujan* thinkers like Mahatma Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar Ramasamy Naicker have also used this method. Instead of depending on western methods, Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar spoke and

wrote on day-to-day experiences of *Dalit-Bahujan* castes. (Ilaiah xi-xii)

Dalits consider education as an essential tool to break the chains of caste and social exclusion. The oppressive culture built and maintained by the Brahmins operated their ideological hegemony. They constituted different laws in the elites' language i.e. Sanskrit language and made them quite ambiguous for the common man (*Dalits*) so as to have control over them. Kanch Ilaiah points out two aspects of the Brahmanical (hindu) knowledge system. They are : the oppressor's knowledge and the knowledge of the oppressed. Ilaiah considers Brahma's knowledge as the oppressor's knowledge,

The Dalit Bahujans have their own knowledge, reflected in several of the ideas of the Charvaks (Dalit Bahujan materialists) of the ancient period. The ancient Brahmins hegemonized their knowledge and marginalized the knowledge of the Dalit Bahujan Charvaks, using the image of Brahma. Brahma, thus represented the Brahman patriarchs, and Saraswati represented the Brahmin women who had been turned into sexual objects. (Ilaiah 75)

The aspect of denial of education and using education as a tool by the *Dalits* is illustrated through the narrative of Omprakash Valmiki. It reflects the vagaries of the *Dalit* students. Valmiki starts with a description of his village and the place where his community people live together which lies aside the upper caste dwellings. He writes, "All quarrels of the village would be discussed in the shape of a round table conference at this same spot... the pigs wandering in narrow lanes, naked children, dogs, daily fights, this was the environment of my childhood. (Valmiki 1) From such a degraded social position Valmiki emerges as an enlightened personality through his education. He indicates that he never felt ashamed of being a low caste person.

Valmiki laments that the practice of untouchability was so rampant that while it was acceptable to touch dogs and cats or cows and bufflaoes, but not a Chuhra. The Chuhras were not seen as human. Their utility lasted until the work was done. Use them and throw them away. Valmiki illustrates the Post-independence era as a new era which promised equal opportunities and democratic space for *Dalits*. He says,

The country had become independent eight years ago.
Gandhiji's uplifting of the untouchables was resounding everywhere

although the doors of the government schools had begun to open for untouchables; the mentality of the ordinary people had not changed much. I had to sit away from others in the class, that too on the floor. The mat ran out before reaching the spot I sat on. Sometimes I would have to sit way behind everybody, right near the door. And the letters on the board from there seemed faded. (Valmiki 2-3)

He writes about the upper caste's children's aggressive mentality,

The children of the Tyagi's would tease me by calling me 'Chuhre ka'. Sometimes they would beat me without any reason. This was an absurd tormented life that made me introvert and irritable. If I got thirsty in school, then I had to stand near the hand-pump. The boys would beat me in any case, but the teachers also punished me. All sorts of stratagems were tried so that I would run away from the school and take up the kind of work for which I was born. According to these perpetrators; my attempts to get schooling was unwarranted, (Valmiki 3)

Valmiki had only two friends in his school days: Ram Singh and Sukkam Singh. Ram Singh was a Chamar and Sukkhan Singh was Jhinwar. The three of them studied together, experienced the sweet and sour moments of childhood together. All three of them were very good in their studies but their low caste background dogged them at every stage.

The general notion is that the teachers do not show any partiality and treat all the students equally. But, Valmiki's experience suggests that the teachers also discriminated against him in all walks of life by practising caste. Valmiki reminds us that – Headmaster Bishambar Singh had been replaced by Kaliram. Along with him had come another new teacher. After the arrival of these two, the three of us fell on terrible times. We would be thrashed at the slightest excuse. Ram Singh would escape once in a while, but Sukkhan Singh and I got beaten almost daily. I was very weak and skinny those days. (Valmiki 4) He further narrates his bitter experience with the upper caste teachers who compelled him to broom. And sweep the whole school clean as a mirror. It is after your family occupation ... Go... get to it." Valmiki narrates the extreme hard work he had to do at such a tender age, the filthy abuses he had to swallow and harsh punishments he used to get at the hands of upper caste teachers who were designated to teach and prepare a gentleman. Valmiki narrates,

“... Obeying Headmaster’s orders, I cleaned all the rooms and the verandas. Just as I was about to finish he came to me and said, after you have swept the rooms, go and sweep the playground... The other children in my class were studying and I was sweeping. Headmaster was sitting in his room and watching me. I was not even allowed to get a drink of water. I swept the whole day. I had never done so much work, being the pampered one among my brothers... .Abey Chuhre ke, motherfucker, where are you hiding... Your mother... As a wolf grabs a lamb by the neck, he dragged me out of the class and threw me on the ground... . Each pore of my body was submerged in an abyss of anguish. (Valmiki 4-5)

Valmiki writes that his father and mother were his great inspiration and strength. He describes the incident when his father came to know the harassment his son had been getting in the school. Challenging the administration his father shouted, “Who is that teacher, that progeny of Dronacharya, who forces my son to sweep?” Valmiki has never forgotten the courage and the resilience with which his father confronted the Headmaster that day. Valmiki says that, “his father had all sorts of weaknesses, but the decisive turn that he gave to my future that day has had a great impact on my personality. (Valmiki 6) Valmiki used to interrogate the teachers about their love towards the Hindu epics. In return, he was humiliated with caste remarks by the upper caste teachers. He recalls the amusing incident when the teacher narrated Dronacharya’s dire poverty episodes and Valmiki writes,

I had the temerity to stand up and ask Master Saheb a question afterwards. So Ashwatthama was given flour mixed in water instead of milk, but what about us who drink *mar* ? How come we were never mentioned in any epic? Why didn’t an epic poet ever write a word on our lives? ... Master Saheb screamed, darkest Kaliyuga has descended upon us so that an untouchable is daring to talk back. The teacher ordered me to stand in the murga or rooster pose... He ordered a boy to get a long teak stick. Chuhre, you dare compare yourself with Dronacharya... Here, take this, I will write an epic on your body. (Valmiki 23)

Valmiki was humiliated both in his school and college. He realised that the kind of caste discrimination was more rampant at the college and university. He felt that the universities are no exception in terms of practising caste in the evaluation. Interestingly, Valmiki was exposed to know the importance of Ambedkar’s life during his college days.

Ambedkar was an unknown entity to him up to that time. The college library also did not have a single book on Ambedkar. Valmiki quotes the inspiration of Ambedkar on him and his writings, “Dr. Ambedkar’s life-long struggle had shaken me up. I spent many days and nights in great turmoil. The restlessness inside me had increased. My stone-like silence had suddenly begun to melt. I proceeded to read all of Ambedkar’s books that I found in the library.”

Education empowered Valmiki to be part of new artistic skill. He also began to write short stories, one-act plays to stage them. Valmiki keenly observed the caste discrimination at every walk of his life. He felt that the entire value system of the Brahmins is based on lies and deception. He remarks, “I had come to a decision. Things should be cleared up. I would face whatever happened.” (Valmiki 96) Valmiki though meritorious and talented, suggests that secular education alone cannot annihilate the caste system even among educated people.

Thus from the autobiography it becomes evident that only education has potential for the liberation of *Dalits*. The *Dalits* consider education as a critical cultural resource. The pursuit of education is emancipatory. The *Dalits* battled to gain entry to schools. The subaltern ideologies of the Dalit protest saw in education a powerful weapon that could fulfil multiple social transformatory goals. Education enables the *Dalits* to challenge the hierarchical structure and ideology of the Brahmanical hegemony. It raises critical social consciousness, instils new values leading to emancipation. Education has become one of the basic human rights for a dignified life of any human being. It stands as a primary motive for the golden future of *Dalit-Bahujans* of India.

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Dialectics of Dalit Depravation: A Study in Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

— Dr. Neeraj Kumar

Abstract:

Dalit literature is the literature produced by Dalit consciousness. It centres round the common man who has been oppressed for thousands of years. The Hindu caste system has divided Indian society into castes. Dalit literature wants to destroy this inhuman caste system, which has enslaved not only dalits but also our democratic country. This literature consists in a rebellion against the suppression and humiliation suffered by the dalits in the past, even at present in the framework of the *varna* system. A feeling of rebellion is invariably accompanied by an extreme psychological commitment.

The word 'dalit' has acquired a wide currency in recent times. It is basically used for the people belonging to the lowest strata of society. They are the untouchables in the social set up, leading a life of penury and are worst exploited and oppressed by the upper caste. Om Prakash Valmiki, the great Dalit writer wrote his memoir *Joothan* in 1997. This work echoes a sense of hatred for the downtrodden, the feeling of untouchability, class distinction in the society and the caste-ridden social structure. Valmiki's own bitter experiences have been enumerated in *Joothan*. Arundhati Roy also occupies an important place in the world of women writers. Her magnum-opus *The God of Small Things* questions the durability and stability of such society which is based on caste and class consciousness. Both the writers, Valmiki on the one hand and Arundhati Roy on the other portray Dalit sentiments in their writings in their own way. The present paper intends to make a comparative study of Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan* and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* in the light of Dalit movements and manifestations.

Keywords: Oppressed, downtrodden, casteism, class consciousness, paravan.

The term 'subaltern' is used to denote the entire people that are subordinate in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way. It is the subject position that defines subalternity. Even when it operates in terms of class, age and gender, it is more psychological

than physical. The lack and deprivation, loneliness and alienation, subjugation and sub-ordination, the resignation and silence, the resilience and neglect mark the lives of the subaltern; even when they resist and rise up, they feel bounded and defeated by their subject positions. They have no representatives in the society they live in and so helplessly suffer and get marginal place or no place at all in the history and culture of which they are the essential part as human beings.

The word 'Dalit' in recent times has acquired a special meaning in the Indian society. The word is used for people who belong to the lowest rung of the social ladder. They are the untouchables in the social set up, leading a life of penury and are worst exploited and oppressed by the upper caste. Moreover, Dalit literature has emerged as literature of negation and rejection, of protest and revolt and hence assertion. On the one hand it is a negation of existing unjust, unequal Indian social order while on the other it has a fervent appeal for the creation of an egalitarian society based on humanism. Dalit literature is being written out of intense, burning experience and consciousness. Indeed, the dalit writers hit the present caste - based society in order to give a new model of society – a model based on harmony, equality, liberty where a human can live like a human.

Arundhati Roy occupies a unique place among the Dalit writers. In her magnum opus *The God of Small Things*, she pours out her soul to raise her voice against the deep-rooted hatred for the outcastes of the Indian society. It is an autobiographical novel. The character Ammu in the novel represents Mrs. Mary Roy, Arundhati Roy's mother. There are shades of Roy in the way Rahel looks, in her education and in her sense of social isolation. Velutha who stands for 'God' in the novel is the chief protagonist. Velutha which means white in Malayalam is represented in the novel as one with black complexion. His relations with Ammu and the circumstances which ultimately lead to his tragic end can be described as one of the major themes of the novel.

Om Prakash Valmiki, a Dalit writer has made revolutionary transformation of Dalit consciousness. His autobiography *Joothan* is a well-known work and is considered a milestone in the field of Dalit writing. It aims at giving expression to Dalit's pain, suffering and self awareness. It was first published in Hindi in 1997 and was later translated into English by Arun Prabha Mukherjee in 2003. In post-

independent India, 'Joothan' refers to scraps of food left on a plate, destined for the garbage or animals. The untouchables down the ages have been forced to accept and eat joothan for centuries. Valmiki categorically remarks about this sort of life. He observes that after working hard day and night, the price of their sweat was just joothan.

In *The God of Small Things* the saga of suffering and torture starts with the central female character, Ammu accompanying her parents by Ayemenem after her father's retirement. Being deprived of a college education, marriage for her also became a remote possibility as dowry could not be provided for. Hence she had to wait at home and become gradually domesticated. Virginia Woolf sees domestic life as almost exclusively social without any breathing space for women,

The son of my house may be granted freedom to develop his mind, he may have a room of his own, but the daughter is expected to be at everyone's beck and call. (Marder, 34)

Indeed, the only reprieve for Ammu in the stifling atmosphere, was nuptial tie. She gives her consent to marry a gentle Hindu Bengali from the tea-estates in Assam. However, the charm of marital bliss soon evaporates and Ammu becomes a victim of her husband's drunken rage. Ultimately she decides to leave her husband and return to her parents' home. But there also "she had no position at all as she had been divorced. (Roy 45) Ammu's humiliation at the hands of everybody is the consequence of her marriage gone awry. Simone de Beauvoir has rightly observed,

Marriage is not only honourable career; its also permits a woman to keep her social dignity intact and at the same time to find several fulfilment as loved one and mother. (Beauvoir, 352)

Ultimately, she is ordered to quit the house as her secret love with the untouchable Velutha has brought ignominy to the family. Ammu's father's and mother's mutual lack of understanding and their unconcern and neglect for their daughter had drifted her to discover her own happiness,

To love by night the man her children loved by day. (Roy, 202)

Moreover, the love of divorced daughter of the prestigious family with a Paravan brings about disaster in the lives of Ammu, Velutha and the small children. A false case of rape and abduction is framed

against Paravan and he is beaten to death in police custody. The twins are separated and Ammu left to earn her livelihood. She commits suicide in desperation in a lodge all alone at the age of 31. Her unfortunate children Rahel and Estha suffer childhood and youth of separation and alienation resulting in Estha's silent and brooding personality and Rahel's divorce in married life. After 23 years, Estha is Re-returned to Ayemenem and meets Rahel at the old house in an altogether changed scenario. They try to construct their emotional self that had been put to pieces long years back by the dominant forces of the society. Thus the narrative vividly pictures the agony of these subalterns—Rahel-Estha-Ammu and Velutha. They become victims of traditional and cultural authorities.

Rahel and Estha are Dalits in terms of Age. They have been assigned subject positions by those social forces who deny them the love and care of their childhood. Rahel is punished to look up 'depravity' in the *Oxford Dictionary* and read aloud its meaning in the morning assembly at Nazareth Convent. After Ammu died, Rahel moved from school to school largely ignored by Chacko and Mammachi, "they provided the care (food, clothes, fees) but withdrew the concern" (15). Perhaps they are the best representatives of the subalterns of the Age.

Ammu's father Pappachi thought that college education was an unnecessary expense for a girl though he sent his son to Oxford for an advanced diploma. She was anyhow married but her marriage did not last long and she finally returned to her parents. But in her own house she lives as a subordinate to the wishes of all. Neither father nor mother understands her needs and desires. Ammu thus lives a life of subjugated family member and keeps on instructing harshly and loving sincerely her two small children to save them from the wrath of elders in the family. The same Ammu who used to love her children too much observes that she should have dumped them in an orphanage the day they were born. This is the voice of Ammu, the gendered subaltern. And this happens only because of the fact that Ammu is treated as a second rate citizen,

Though Ammu, Estha and Rahel are allowed to attend the funeral, they are made to stand separately, not with the rest of the family. Nobody would look at them.(5)

Ammu is ostracized from Sophie's funeral because of her relationship with a 'paravan'. Indeed, the tragedy in the novel revolves around those individuals who defy societal norms and are therefore punished. Her love for Velutha is the result of her quest of love and tenderness denied to her since her birth as gendered subaltern. However, Ammu's subalternity is not entirely imposed by the man-world; the role of Baby Kochamma, Kochu Maria and above all Mammachi cannot be ignored that usher in Ammu's miserable existence.

Velutha is also a true representative of class subaltern. He is a paravan, the untouchable. Mammachi does not encourage him to enter the house, though he is allowed on the factory premises and is allowed to touch things that touchables touch. She thinks that it is a big step for a paravan. He is not liked by the factory workers because of his being a paravan; it is his ability that has retained him among the touchable workers of the factory. The things come to the worst when one day the love between Velutha and Ammu is disclosed and the former is brutally punished. Mammachi hurts choicest of abuses upon him and spits on his face. He is beaten to death by the police. Thus the life of the Paravan, Velutha — the black, the untouchable who is guilty of loving Ammu, a lady higher than his class comes to an end. So *The God of Small Things* presents a variety of the subalterns. Rahel-Estha-Ammu Velutha all have been assigned subject positions by the dominant laws of the society. Velutha stands out as the representative of the untouchables in the novel. They are a class of people who are not allowed to walk on the public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies and not allowed to carry umbrellas. To add to the humiliation they had to put their hands over their mouths when they spoke to divert their polluted breath away from those whom they addressed. The expression 'bare bodied' gives us enough hint to show that the characters she has introduced is certainly one who belongs to the group of the 'untouchable'.

In *Joothan*, Valmiki has talked about the discrimination they had to face in the school at different points. He says,

During the examinations we could not drink water from the glass when thirsty. To drink water, we had to cup our hands. The peon would pour water from way high up lest our hands touch the glass. (Valmiki, 27)

Valmiki was admitted to a primary school on his father's behest. However, he was not allowed to sit on the benches but on the floor away from the upper caste boys, at the back by the door from where he can't see the blackboard well. The students often hurled epithets on him and also beat him casually, turning him into an introvert. Even the teachers looked for excesses to punish him, so that "he would run away from the school and take up the kind of work for which he was born"(16) Later, a new teacher arrived, who used to thrash him almost daily. One day he asked Valmiki to take a broom and sweep all the rooms and the playground in the school. He had to spend full day sweeping the courtyard. He was bound to be humiliated by the upper caste people. If he came dressed in new clothes they commented, Oye chuhre, dressed in new clothes, if he was dressed in old clothes he was called beggar and that even in abusive terms. His teachers often called him in abusive language,

'Abey chuhre ke... where are you hiding (19)

Seeing him sitting in the corner the Headmaster caught at his neck. The pressure of his finger gradually increased. As a wolf grabs a lamb by the neck, he dragged him out of the class and threw him on the ground. He shouted,

Go sweep the whole playground, otherwise I will shove chillies up your arse and throw you out of school. I picked up the three day old broom then sticks. Tears rolled down my cheeks..... Each pore of my body was submerged in an abyss of anguish (15).

However, his parents were not like him. Seeing his son sweeping the ground, his father could not control himself and snatched the broom from his hands. He screamed, "Who is that teacher, that progeny of Dronacharya who forced my son to sweep ?" (16)

The Headmaster called in his father's name and roared back,

Take him away from here ... the chuhra wants him to educate...
Go, go, otherwise I will have your bones broken (16).

Valmiki's father could not be deterred from his determination by the Headmaster's shout and he declared in a louder voice,

I'm leaving now... but 'this chuhreka' will study right here in this school. And not just him but there will be more coming after him. (16)

His father's courage and fortitude left a deep and decisive mark on Valmiki's personality. Even his mother was revolutionary by nature. Once she requested Brahmin host, Sukhdev Singh Tyagi for additional food for her children only to be humiliated and told to mind her place, be satisfied with what she already had collected and to get going. Valmiki observes,

That night the mother goddess Durga entered my mother's eyes. It was for the first time I saw my mother so angry. She emptied the basket right there and asked Sukhdev Singh to pick it up and put inside his house. She further asked him to feed it to the Barati's the next day morning. When he had pounced on her to hit her, she had confronted him like a lioness without being afraid. (21)

Valmiki, being a Dalit, understands fully the pain and suffering of the people of the lower caste. Dr. Sharan Limbale has rightly observed,

Dalits are also quite, gentle, obedient and humblest one of all the creatures and they are not in need of learning about humanity. They have rage and anger in them only for the reason that they have been suppressed by all and have not been provided basic human rights. So their rudeness is very natural. (Limbale, 91)

Valmiki was admitted to Middle School, where all the teachers were Tyagis. Most of the students were also Tyagis. He used to narrate the stories to his mother and many a time the characters of Sharat Chandra had made them weep together. That was the time when he became interested in Tagore, Premchand, Sharatchandra etc. The work of the Chuhra caste included sweeping the roads, cleaning the cattle barns, getting shit off the floor, disposing of dead animals, working in the field during harvests and performing other physical labour for upper caste people. They were often beaten by the people of the upper caste and also by the police. The people of Valmiki's village were superstitious, too.

With the passage of time Valmiki reached class XI. He had opted Science as his major subject. He had become somewhat more confident than before. But he had less number of friends, perhaps because of his lower caste. Om Dutta Tyagi was his English teacher. He was more sarcastic in his remarks. He always tried to make him feel his lower caste. After passing Intermediate he came to Dehradun with one shirt and one trousers. There the majority of the population comprised of bhangi, Jatav etc. The former liked to be called 'Valmiki'

and the latter Jatav. The students in Valmiki's class often made fun of his rustic way of life. In fact he had become accustomed to such comments. But by and by he was gaining confidence and his friends were also increasing. One day he chanced to get one book. *Dr. Ambedkar :Jeevan Parichay* written by Chandrika Prasad Jigyashu. It changed his course of life and in due course he read almost all the books of Ambedkar available in that library. The sense of revolt against the system, lying dormant in him for a long time, got a voice. The word 'Dalit' was included in his dictionary; it was not the substitute of 'Harijan' rather the expression of anger of crores of the untouchables. After sometime he was admitted as apprentice in Ordnance Factory, Dehredum.

One day Om Prakash met Kamla, the daughter of Girwar, who was a trainee in IIT. She asked him for a lift upto IIT and sat on the carrier of his cycle. But that small event became a big event. And he was told that it was a big crime. After one year training, he was sent to Jabalpur for higher training. There he met some trainees who were Marxists in their thinking and temperament. He had started composing poems also. He had formed a theatre group and gave some shows too in the auditorium of the institution. He read Rajendra Yadav's *Sara Aakash* several times. He also got himself associated with literary activities of Jabalpur. In July 1970 he joined Ordnance Factory Training Institute, Ambarnath (Mumbai). He was very happy to see the rich library of the institution. He came in contact with the Kulkarni family especially Savita Kulkarni. He received much love and affection from that family. But when one day he told Savita his caste she was shocked and she started crying. And that was the last meeting between them. In December 1973 he was married to Chanda, the younger sister of Swarnlata Bhabhi. His parents had died. He was very much influenced by Buddha's thought of human freedom. He had fully associated himself with Dalit movement. In Maharashtra Dalit Panther had given a new form to Dalit movement. The Dalits were being tortured in government and semi government offices. Those Dalits who had got education, they were facing identity crisis. In order to get rid of this problem they started improving their 'Gotra' a bit, thus 'Chandril' or 'Chanchal' from Chinaliye Saudai from Saude etc. His mother's gotra was 'Kesle' which was renamed as 'Keswal'. Indeed, the pain of identity is the outcome of the reaction against in humanity of

casteism. They also want to be included in the mainstream of the society but the so-called forward class always considers them as downtrodden and inferior to them. Their intelligence and capability are always doubted. The writers, the scholars and the workers associated with Dalit movement are continuously struggling with themselves. People are not ready to acknowledge their association with the people of the lower strata of society.

Thus we can say that Om Prakash Valmiki through his personal life's history tried to give dignity, courage and confidence to the Dalits. Since God has created every human being equal, the so-called upper caste has no right to humiliate and hurt physically the lower caste people. Valmiki masterpiece *Joothan* is a saga of the pain suffering and humiliation of the Dalit class in general and those of Omprakash Valmiki in particular. Velutha in *The God of Small Things* and Omprakash Valmiki in *Joothan* both are the victims of the society. The latter got education in rural and urban surrounding and ultimately joined the Ordinance Factory, whereas the former was educated in the untouchable's school. According to Mammachi if only he had not been a paravan he might have become an engineer. (Roy 75)

Velutha and Om Prakash both become victims of physical torture. After Sophie Mol's death the police went to Velutha's house and falsely charging him of the incident beat him brutally :

Boot on bone. One teeth The muffled grunt when a stomach is kicked. The muted crunch of skull on cement. The gurgle of blood on a man's breath when his lung is torn by the jagged end of a broken rib. (308)

Om Prakash Valmiki also suffers humiliation and beating at the hands of the upper caste people. But there is a difference, The former even when knows that his end is imminent he, though a rebel throughout continues to remain a Gandhian, an apostle of non-violence whereas the latter always tries to raise the voice of protest at the treatment meted out to him. However, the sense of anger is very much there in both of them.

The caste system in India is so strong that the lower caste untouchables are not allowed to enter the houses of upper caste people. Kochamma told Rahel's grandmother, Mammachi :

How could she stand the smell ? Haven't it noticed ? They have a particular smell, these paravans (308).

This remark very well sums up the uppercaste's attitude towards the untouchables. In *Joothan* Valmiki also has the same type of experience. The people around him behave quite normally with him, but the moment they come to know about his low birth, their attitude changes and he is hated like anything.

Moreover, the Dalits and the downtrodden are leading miserable life in the modern times. Though both the works have been written at the end of 20th century, yet the life of Velutha on the one hand and that of Omprakash on the other was no better than the life of Bakha of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* who was the creation of pre independence period. The and reality about the Dalits has been presented with utmost sincerity and honesty. Even after seventy three years of independence the status of Dalits in Indian society is as miserable as it was in the early times. Today we are progressing day by day but we have not changed our mindset. We simply discuss the problems and conditions of the Dalits but all those discussions end in nothingness; and at the end we do not come to any solution to their problems. Since centuries the Dalits have been denied and largely ignored by the society.

The Dalit writers in general and Arundhati Roy and Omprakash Valmiki in particular have successfully depicted Dalit consciousness—dalit agony, assertion, resistance, anger, protest, mobilization, dalit experiences in their writings. They do not look at the subject from a distance, rather they become very part of it. That is why there is no universal appeal in the dalit writings. In other words, we can say that they fail to infuse the universal spirit in their experiences used for their art. Limbale, the great Dalit writer says :

My father is a savarna; my mother is an untouchable; my grandfather is a Mohammedan ... I am the son of a kept of a village Headman. I do not know who I am.(Limbale, 139)

Indeed, it is a fact that the Dalit writers need to view the dalit consciousness objectively. They need to respond to the past with patience in order to change the degenerated system of society. It is the mindset of the people which requires to be changed for the upliftment of the downtrodden.

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Bakha and Nagnath: A Comparative Study

— M.S. Wankhede

Abstract:

Bakha and Nagnath are the protagonists respectively in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, an Indian English novel and Sudhakar Gaikwad's *Shudra*, a novel written in Marathi. Both these novels deal with the burning issue of untouchability. The paper presents a comparative evaluation of two Dalit characters- Bakha and Nagnath- presented in two different novels- *Untouchable* and *Shudra*; the former by a non-Dalit and the latter by a Dalit and explore how they represent two different view-points.

Keywords : Religious, Social, Dalit, Untouchability, Gandhian principles, Brahmanism Buddhism.

Bakha and Nagnath are the protagonists respectively in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, an Indian English novel and Sudhakar Gaikwad's *Shudra*, a novel written in Marathi. Both these novels deal with the burning issue of untouchability. In spite of efforts by the saints, social reformers and all provisions in the Constitution the problem of untouchability is still prevailing and spreading its venomous filth. The indignity and ignominy are experienced by the untouchables largely and they are still subjected to crimes and cruelties, humiliation and inhumanity. Their public contact is restricted which results in their limited means of livelihood. So they are burdened with poverty and debt because of caste system.

Caste has killed public spirit. Caste has destroyed the sense of public charity. Caste has made public opinion impossible. Virtue has become caste-ridden and morality has become caste bound (1945:37).

The roots of untouchability are in the caste system. Debi Chatterjee says: "Denial of the basics of Brahmnical philosophy is as we have seen almost as old as the philosophy itself" (1998:208). The movement against untouchability got momentum in the hands of two national leaders namely Babasaheb Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi. In Ambedkar, the untouchables found a spokesman they had never found before. Gandhi felt that once untouchability is removed, the caste-system will be purified. Ambedkar thought it essential to abolish caste-system for the eradication of untouchability. Gandhi had deep

faith in Hinduism and was proud of it but Ambedkar was not satisfied with this religion. He was ashamed to be born as a Hindu. Gaining political rights by the untouchables was not necessary for Mahatma Gandhi whose was the sympathetic and spiritual approach. He didn't want them to use any violence. He felt it better for them to be at the mercy of their masters. But Ambedkar's policy was almost against it. He always wanted them to be aware of their political rights. His concept of ahimsa is not a meek servitude. His approach was humanistic, rational and practical.

Anand's novel is innovative to deal with the topic of untouchability. Marathi novelist Sudhakar Gaikwad also gives voice to the same issue. Both the novels surprisingly represent the two different view-points. Ambedkar says, "The sanction behind the caste-system is the religious sanction, for the caste as a new form of the *Varna-system*, derives its sanction from the Vedas which formed the sacred book of the Hindu religion and which are infallible" (1997:208). Ghurye says, "Idea of purity, whether occupational or ceremonial is found to have been a factor of untouchability" (1982:32). Following the principle of division of labour, Bakha starts cleaning latrines following his father's job. His sister has to stand in the line to get water from the well. Bakha is slapped in the market for touching a Hindu merchant. He is rebuked for defiling the temple. The temple-priest tries to molest Sohini and blames her for defiling him and the temple when she screams for her protection. Because of the traditional rule, Bakhagives up his wish for learning. A Hindu woman flings chapatti at him as if throwing it at a dog. Another lady instead of thanking Bakha for bringing her injured boy, showers abuses for defiling her house. Bakha has to sacrifice his love due to the caste hierarchy. He is so burdened with these moral barriers that he not only fails to revolt but also rejects to accept Christianity.

Gaikwad's Nagnath suffers as he tries to flow against the current. Even during the initial stage of his life, he finds fault with the established system. A cloth seller denies giving him a silk cloth although he is ready to pay more because silk cloth is not meant for Dalits to wear. On his way he meets an old man who inspires him for finding the reason for their tragedy. He breaks the traditional ban on education and profession too. He resolves not to tolerate the injustice of the higher castes any longer. Gaikwad introduces Nagnath as trained in the skill

of archery. Nagnath decides to teach all the art of archery to his companions so that they could prepare them for joint revolution. He asks his learned friend Sagala to train all of them in philosophy. Like Ambedkar, Bakha declares that he won't die as a Shudra. He meets one hermit who cannot satisfy his doubts, rather invites his displeasure by cursing him for spoiling his penance. A beautiful Brahmin maiden teases him for his low-birth. He is denied water and also not allowed to touch a brook to avoid defilement. He takes an arrow to revolt. He slaps the maiden and kills the rishis. This results in the destruction of his whole colony. But such tragedy cannot stop him. He burns with revenge to kill the king's men. At last he meets Sabbabuddha who is the first to treat him as a human being. As he feels contented with Sabbabuddha's guidance, he gives up his old Hindu religion accepting Buddhism based on equality and compassion. But he loses his control when the king kills the learned, peaceful and innocent Buddhist monks by order of a Brahmin. Again he takes his arrow and causes a lot of bloodshed. At last he stands face to face with the same Brahmin maiden. He is not happy with the bloodshed and violence he causes. He asks the Brahmin maiden to give him water with her own hands. This has symbolic value. Actually he is keen to end up all ill-will and hatred. He tries his level best to convince her to join him. But when he sees that she is not ready to give her sense of superiority, he begins to condemn the Brahmnic Order. He proclaims a warning of revolution in future.

We find Bakha in *Untouchable* respond to the Gandhian principles and policies unknowingly much earlier before he overhears Gandhi's speech. He follows the hereditary profession of cleaning latrines and never thinks of giving it up. Even if he is treated as a beast by the Hindus; comes to know that the Hindus are cruel, he never finds fault with his religion. He thinks "the religion which was good enough for his forefathers was good enough for him" (1935:138). He never thinks to revolt physically against the cruelties of the higher-castes. Throughout the novel he is shown to win the heart of his masters by his humble behaviour. He is happy if some caste-Hindu like Havildar Charat Singh treats him kindly. He craves for the sympathetic change. He cannot think of using violence against his oppressors in spite of his physical strength and potentiality. Gaikwad's Nagnath stands in complete contrast to Bakha. Just like Ambedkar, he takes an oath that he won't

die in Hinduism. He promises the old man that he won't keep quiet until he finds out the root cause of their suffering. Nagnath chalks out a systematic plan to fight against the injustice. He wants them to be physically strong to overcome the Kshatriya's attack. Also he wants them to be mentally strong enough to compete with the Brahmans. Economically self-reliance is also hinted when he thinks to cut-off all his contact with the town. His leaning towards political rights is felt when he talks of establishing a separate state for his people. He never hesitates to use violence when necessary. Although the writer shows him to be an embodiment of vice called revenge, a microscopic observation shows that he uses violence following the intuitive voice of what is called 'Pradnya'. Firstly, he kills the rishis. He is compelled to do so as the rishis will have killed him for slapping the Brahmin maiden. Secondly, when his dear colony is destroyed, it is natural not to tolerate this meekly. When Nagnath finds Subbabuddha cold and soft, his revenge motive is destroyed. But when the king kills all the Buddhist monks he again turns to violence and kills the king's men.

Nagnath doesn't believe in religion blindly. Monk Sabbabuddha clears all his doubts regarding the degradation of the untouchables, the futility of the fourfold division of the society, and the conspiracy of the higher-castes against the weak. Nagnath gets impressed at once. He also finds the monk practicing the religion full of compassion, equality and a strong sense of individual dignity; he feels no hesitation to be a monk. Like Ambedkar, Nagnath also takes refuge in Buddhism. Both Bakha and Nagnath condemn the evil of untouchability. It is this sound of condemnation we hear loudly in both the novels – *Shudra* and *Untouchable*. The problem of untouchability is targeted in both the cases in their own ways. Yet another common factor is the vision for classless and casteless society. Although the poet, not the Mahatma mentions such an ideal society but it appeals to Bakha very much. In *Shudra*, Nagnath himself talks of his desire for an ideal society. He describes to the Brahmin maiden about such a wonderful world. His 'blue sky for a man' is nothing but the society bereft of all differences like high and low, rich and poor. Bakha, like Gandhi, is an ardent lover of Truth. In the market place Bakha is rebuked and slapped by one Hindu merchant. He bears it. Bakha can be described as the statue of honesty and truthfulness. His approach to the problem of untouchability is one of spiritual and sympathetic, in the manner of Gandhi. Bakha

expresses his deep gratitude to his kind master. He craves for a change but full of sympathy. The impact of Gandhism is strong on Bakha with a very little deviation. Like Gandhi, Bakha is a devotee of Hinduism and careful about his physical and moral purity. Although he is engaged in dirty work, he is surprisingly clean.

We find clear counter currents to Gandhism flowing in Gaikwad's *Shudra*. His hero Nagnath not only takes weapons but uses them when necessary. He neither wants to serve his masters following the tradition nor to wait patiently for change of the hearts of the Hindus. He doesn't want their sympathy but wants his legitimate rights and equality for all. He takes no time to accept Buddhism discarding his old Hinduism. His non-violence is not a meek servility. It is brought to the notice that Gaikwad's novel *Shudra* is enriched by Ambedkarite philosophy regarding the problem of untouchability. Like Ambedkar, Nagnath deplores Hinduism from the very beginning for depriving the lower castes of their basic needs. In his action, he is fiery and rebellious like Ambedkar. He has strong sense of self-respect. He doesn't prefer to live the life of goats and dogs like his forefathers. He is so determined that he cares not if no one is with him in his struggle. He declares he cannot give up his mission even if he is expelled from his colony. He actually wishes to form a separate state for the untouchables. This reminds us of Ambedkar's struggle for separate electorate. Ambedkar was always careful about the political rights of his people. Nagnath's efforts are also directed to that goal. His practice of non-violence is authorized by Ambedkar. His non-violence is not a meek servitude. Nagnath's approach to religion is rational. He cannot follow his religion blindly. He condemns his religion. When he meets the Buddhist monk Subbabuddha, he is overwhelmed by his virtue of kindness and sense of humanity. Nagnath feels completely consoled, convinced and contented. He embraces Buddhism by all means and whole heartedly. He himself becomes a monk now called Vishvananda. Thus he attains new identity. Ambedkar's approach to religion is also rational. He considers Indian history as the struggle between Buddhism and Brahmanism. This struggle is also highlighted in the novel *Shudra*. Nagnath shares Ambedkarite dream of classless and casteless society.

Along with the lofty, serious and serene theme, what appeals us most is the fragrance and aroma of the blossoms of pure humanism. Anand and Gaikwad are the committed humanist par excellence. What

is true about Anand and Bakha is exactly applicable to Gaikwad and Nagnath in the realm of humanism. Both the novels have profound human significance. They are such records of people who have direct relationship with society. They have got an eternal fascination for us because of the deep and dense touch of humanism and realism. They are wonderful specimen of humanity, limitless in their faculties. They look as bright and lively as the life itself. Anand expresses :

All these heroes, as the other men and women who had emerged in my novels and short stories were dear to me because they were reflections of the real people, I had known during my childhood and youth (1951: Preface).

Bakha and Nagnath are living, loving, working and suffering characters. Both the novels convey that nothing is above the human beings. The love for the underdogs is prominent in both the novels. The only difference is that Anand is a detached observer whereas Gaikwad is a direct sufferer of untouchability.

According to C.J. George Bakha's story is based on Anand's childhood friend, a sweeper boy. Nagnath is not a completely imaginary character. During 1972, Dalit Panther was in full swing and Gaikwad was in close touch with this movement. The life and work of the prominent members of this revolutionary organization was much similar to that of Nagnath. The writer himself admits that he has derived the character of Nagnath from one of those fiery youths. Anand's humanism has a frill of Gandhian ideas of moral and social reconstruction. Gaikwad's humanism is enveloped in the Ambedkarite ideas of liberty, equality, fraternity and justice. Bakha and Nagnath illustrate suffering humanity. Bakha neither rebels nor resorts to incendiary action against social injustice and religious bigotry. Nagnath although an untouchable revolts and fights against the injustice at the cost of his life. The individual is in the process of constant evolution in Nagnath.

Anand and Gaikwad get deeper emotional involvement in the life of their characters. Like *Untouchable*, in *Shudra* we find the same 'colour of life' and we feel the oneness of the novelist and Nagnath. Thus both the novelists write of man. Both the novels are basically the novels of protest. Anand feels that, it is a creative struggle to bring about a new society. It is a constructive protest. He recalls:

I certainly felt, in the midst of my own poetry and exile, the compulsion that it is better not to win applause by conforming to my establishment, but to face the privileged order, and to claim the right to notice the existence of men like Bakha (1968:29).

The forces against which the chief protagonists fight are cruelties and exploitations of their brothers. They emerge from the unjust order of the very society in which they are born and compelled to live. Anand himself conveys:

Man's fate, today, is no longer in the hands of the gods, but is often in conflict with the evil in other men (1968:6).

Like Bakha, Nagnath is the representative of untouchables. He is the one in his own society who shows readiness to fight against the evil. When his whole colony is destroyed, Nagnath is left alone. His only friend Sagala also dies after conveying this painful news. He alone fights and dies for his cause. This protest is the protest of self-identity. When Bakha is slapped, he faces a crisis of identity. Critics may find the novel to be an attack on the caste-system but then it's also an individual's struggle against a sea of dogmas. The crisis of identity that Bakha faces characterizes and colours the personality of Bakha. Nagnath's search for self-identity begins with his meeting with the old man who inspires him to find out why only they became untouchables. This struggle seems to end in the sweet and peaceful company of the Buddhist monk.

Anand's Bakha is searching for his identity within the very structure that not only denies it but eliminates every possibility to have it. He has a desire to be like the Tommies he sees around him. The narrator tells us that, "the Tommies had treated him as a human being and he had learnt to think of himself as superior to his fellow outcastes" (1935:9). Bakha attempts to adopt the 'fashion' of the Tommies becoming "possessed with an overwhelming desire to live their life" (1935:11). Anand certainly allows Bakha to be rebellious but this rebellion is always internal and uttered with a silent voice. Although he has "the strength, the power of his giant body" (1935:57), yet Bakha is unable to revolt. Then he resorts to self questing "Why was I so humble? I could have struck him" (1935:58). Thus we see that Bakha has the potential for rebellion, but Anand chooses to silent this rebellion by creating a condition that does not allow for the expression of it.

Nagnath's struggle is altogether different from that of Bakha. His protest seems to be fruitful. There is interplay of emotions as well as action. Gaikwad insists on the change of mentality of the Caste-Hindus for the eradication of untouchability. Nagnath insists that the higher-castes should give up their futile claims of superiority. He appeals to the Brahmin maiden to extend her support to destroy all the differences and form a new world for man. Nagnath seems to be more conscious than Bakha as the awakening in his case is quicker and complete. The consciousness that Bakha develops towards the end is quite meagre and frail. Nagnath also succeeds finally to warn the higher classes of future struggle if they continue their hatred, inhumanity and humiliation to the weaker sections. Anand's certainly is the fiery voice of the people belonging to the poor class and the untouchables. Bakha is covered in the clouds of doubt when the missionary asks him to confess his sin to him:

He (Bakha) didn't like the idea of being called a sinner. He had committed no sin that he could remember. How could he confess his sins? (1935:145)

Gandhi advocates emancipation by purification but the existing social system does not allow the untouchables to be purified primarily because their fundamental existence is rooted in the profession of filth. So Bakha says, "They think we are mere dirt because we clean their dirt" (1935:89). Anand, although an ardent follower of Gandhi, makes Bakha ask questions over Gandhi's speech, "but now, now the Mahatma is blaming us. That is no fair! He wanted to forget the last passages those he had heard" (1935:167). This suggests, perhaps, that Anand's view of Gandhi and his political rhetoric cannot be idealized because it too contains elements of oppression. Marxist inclination: "Well, we must destroy caste; we must destroy the inequalities of birth and unalterable vocation. We must recognize an equality of rights, privileges and opportunities for everyone" (1935:173) cannot solve the problem of untouchability. William Walsh clears that a Marxist approach is not the solution to untouchability. Shiv Kumar Yadav does not support the three solutions offered by Anand for the removal of untouchability. As per an observation, "The untouchables, Anand's art has made us see, are not Bakha and his sister but those others who called them so" (1991:22). Sudhakar Gaikwad handles the same theme of untouchability in altogether different manner. Nagnathignites the

flame of rebellion in the hot blood of the youngsters; he makes a systematic plan of imparting them training in the field of archery and philosophy. His intention behind this is to overcome the Kshatriya's attack and he wants them to excel the Brahmins in knowledge. He insists on their self-sufficiency to lead a respectable life.

Nagnath is well aware of the political status to be secured for his people. He gives voice to this when he talks to the old Aayam. He expresses his wish that he wants to establish a separate state for his people. Gaikwad also empowers his hero with weapon and arms. Unlike Bakha, Nagnath is afraid of nothing and no one. He is very much conscious of self-respect. He decides to take revenge and advances towards the town to kill the king and his men. Nagnath not only gets converted to Buddhism but he becomes a monk. Thus Gaikwad allows his hero to use violence whenever he feels it necessary to save his life, especially for the perpetuation of social revolution. Most dramatically in the final scene, the novelist brings Nagnath face to face with the same Brahmin maiden whom Nagnath has left without killing. There is a long discussion and hot argument between the protagonist and the Brahmin maiden. Shining with new knowledge, he tries his best to rectify the biased mentality of the maiden who represents the strong sense of Brahmanism. Gaikwad attacks this evil of untouchability at all levels. It can be said that the solution suggested by him is multi-dimensional – social, political, economic, religious as well as spiritual. It comes to our notice that Anand has Gandhian and Gaikwad has Ambedkarite impression respectively. This is perhaps the first reason for the difference in dealing with the same problem of untouchability. In his well-known essay, Anand observes:

In retrospect, I feel that, under the tutelage of the Mahatma who did not pretend to be an artist, I was able to exercise all those self-conscious literary elements which I had woven into the narrative in anticipation of what the critics might approve (1992:11).

It was natural as Anand read the novel to Mahatma Gandhi who asked him to rewrite and Anand revised it at Sabarmati Ashram. A thought of conversion to another religion is rejected by Bakha almost in a Gandhian manner. It must be made clear that Gaikwad broadly uses the term 'Shudra' for an outcaste. Actually he means the untouchables. Just like Ambedkar, Nagnath takes an oath that he would

not die as a Hindu. He doesn't expect the emancipation of himself, his own family or community. He wants to unite and organize the untouchables scattered in the far off regions of India. There is neither mention of Ambedkar throughout the novel, nor does he appear in person. Another reason for the different treatment of the same theme by the two novelists can perhaps be that one is written by a writer belonging to the upper-caste whereas the other by a writer belonging to the lower-caste. Anand has attempted a fictional depiction of felt experiences of this dehumanizing social evil, which results in loneliness, loss of identity and rootlessness. An attitude to protest was perhaps first developed in Anand's childhood when Bakha the real life prototype of the protagonist of *Untouchable* carried Anand, bleeding from a hit on his head by a stone thrown by fellow friends and brought him home only to have Anand's mother snatch away her son from a tender embrace and berate Bakha for polluting her son by his touch. Anand confesses that this inhuman treatment of his childhood friend lay in his inner consciousness. Anand himself was once separated on board a ship by some Westerners, and "with a shock he realized what it meant to be an untouchable" (1968:6).

Gaikwad has the first hand experience of this deep rooted social evil. Like Anand, he is not only an observer but a victim and a sufferer, but Anand is an observer of the pains and sufferings of the Dalit. Anand himself says:

The book poured out like hot lava from the volcano of my crazed imagination during a long weekend. I remember that I had to finger exercise in order to ease the strain on my right hand.... I kept on dreaming about several strains in the central character of Bakha almost as though I was moulding his personality and transmuting it from actuality into the hero of a nightmare (1951:29).

Jack Lindsay discovers "the kaleidoscopic movement of colour, sight, touch and sound" (1965:8) in the novel. "Much of the power of *Untouchable*", says K.N. Sinha, "derives from its solidity of specifications. Anand creates here a dense web of actualities, so that the created universe in the novel bears a direct resemblance to the actual one" (1972:29). It is a tragic poem of an individual caught in the cross-roads of social hypocrisy. Gaikwad is also a talented writer of Dalit literature. About his skill in *Shudra* Yogendra Meshram observes:

The end of the story is compassionately suggestive and attractive. This makes all impatient. If we leave the long, complex discussion of philosophy woven, the story seems to be an accomplished piece of Art in respect of artistic base achieved by the writer's language, narrative skill, imagery and preparation of suitable atmosphere as per the scenes (1998:218).

Gaikwad is an amazingly articulate, thought provoking novelist with considerable power. We find that both the novels end on a positive note, with hope and faith. We do certainly feel the dawn of at least little consciousness and awakening on Bakha. Surely Bakha whom we meet at the end is different from Bakha we met before. Gaikwad concludes his story with a telling sentence, "It is only true that water has always been ready from several eras to rush to wash out such stains" (1980:90). It is a herculean task for one person to tackle the difficulties of discarding the stigma of untouchability, but like Ambedkar, Nagnath struggles for it all through his life. Finally we may agree with Iyengar who comments, "The problem of caste and poverty, squalor and backwardness, ignorance and superstition admits of no easy solution" (1983:263).

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Eco-Friendliness in the Dalit Family in Appasaheb Khot's 'Kombdi'

—Dr. Rajendraprasad Y. Shinde

Abstract:

Marathi Dalit literature having its beginning in Sant Chokha Mela of Pandharpur not only denounced heavily the caste ridden social system in those days but believed that assimilation with the Bhakti tradition in general and Vitthal Bhaki in particular will help human beings to be as kind as animals and love each other. The presents a different approach to the issue of Dalit's miserable plight in the society and offers a solution of assimilation and not of radical retaliation. It also explores ecological consciousness in the Dalit family with a case study of Appasaheb Khot's Marathi short story 'Kombdi'.

Keywords : Vittal Bhakti, Abhang, Dalit narrative, eco-friendliness, Sufism.

Background:

It is a common saying that disrespect for nature and the environment began in modern times, when customs became looser and much elegance was lost, as some elder one would say. I don't agree; I believe it is the way of promoting awareness about nature that has changed.

Greek philosophers such as Plato or Aristotle dealt with the natural world in the same way that they dealt with literature, politics and ethics. The respect for nature was in some way a logical consequence of what one studied, read, or simply knew. Myths condemned heroes who disrespected the natural world and told about their punishments. There was the belief that forests, crops, the sky were elements which powerful gods controlled and governed.¹

Those stories that mixed science and fiction were all well-known. It could be said that the need to be eco-friendly was, at that time, a fact which belonged to common knowledge. When people started separating "science" from other subjects, such as literature and politics, they started concentrating on one or a few of these concepts only. In this way, the concept of common knowledge began to die out.

Human beings should be more than animals, but are they really? In *Republic* by Plato, *Antigone* by Sophocles, *The Aeneid* by Virgil

and *On Justice Power and Human Nature* by Thucydides, it seems as though human beings really are nothing more than animals.

Animals are thought of as not caring about themselves. It is survival of the fittest, if you are not strong enough, someone else will take your place. Human being must have affection for other human beings. If someone is in trouble, another human should come forward to help. This doesn't seem to happen in these three literary works. Humans don't care about anyone but themselves, they kill so they can better themselves, and don't care about what happens. It seems as people are getting murdered all the time to take power, and the killer, instead of being jailed, is now the leader.²

In Plato's *Republic*, he basically designs a caste system. People are chosen at birth what level they will be in society, and there is nothing they can do about this. This is almost like a food chain. In regards to reproduction, Socrates severely regulates sex. Socrates proposes a rigged lottery to ensure that the best man has sex with the best woman, and all women and children are shared between all the men. People can only have sex within their own class to guarantee the finest genetics.

After the babies are born, the rulers will take them; the babies of the lesser classes will be left to die, whereas the babies of the upper class will be taken care of by nurses. This is totally barbaric, even animals know what happens to their offspring, whether they die due to a predator or they become healthy adults. In this situation it is the human beings who are the predator. (Plato 125)

In *Antigone*, Creon is about as close to an animal as you can get. He refuses to bury his own nephew, Polynices. Even if Creon didn't want him buried in Thebes, he could at least have his body sent back to his city to be buried.

Ancient Egyptian art forms are characterized by regularity and detailed depiction of human beings and the nature, and, were intended to provide company to the deceased in the 'other world'. Artists endeavored to preserve everything of the present time as clearly and permanently as possible. Completeness took precedence over prettiness. Some art forms present an extraordinarily vivid representation of the time and the life, as the ancient Egyptian life was lived thousands of years before. Egyptian art in all forms obeyed one law: the mode of

representing man, nature and the environment remained almost the same for thousands of years and the most admired artists were those who replicated most admired styles of the past.³

English literature carried the same tradition of completeness with a few exceptions. Modern Indian Literature and Dalit Literature in particular takes a strong deviation from this inhuman approach to the depiction of animal and human life. Marathi Dalit literature starts from SantChokhaMela who lived in Pandharpur and did not only cry loudly about the caste ridden social system in those days but believed that assimilation with the Bhakti tradition in general and VitthalBhaki in particular will help human beings to be as kind as animals and love each other. He wrote in his famous 'abhanga' (a metre):

“Abirgual, udhalit rang,
Nathagharinachemazasakha Pandurang,
Umbarthyasikaiseshivuamhijatiheen,
Rooptuzekaisepahutyatamhileen,
Payarishihovu dang gavuniabhang,
Abhirgualudhalit rang,
Valvantigauamhivalvantinachu,
Chandrabhagechyapanyaneanganhavu,
Vitthalachenaamghevuhovuninisang,
Nathagharinachemazasakha Pandurang,
Ashadhikartikibhaktajan yeti,
Pandharichyavalvantisantgolahoti,
Chokhamhanenaamgheta, bhkatabhoti dang,
NathagharinachemazasakhaPandurang”⁴.

We shall spread Abir and Gulal, my chum Pandurang dances with the Naath (Nivruttinath, eldest brother of Sant Dnyaneshwar). How shall we touch the threshold of the Vitthal temple? We are the untouchables. How shall we look at your sacred face because we are born in a low caste. We shall stay at the foot step of the temple and spread Abir and Gulal. We shall sing in the deserts of Chandrabhaga, we shall dance. We shall bathe in the holy water of Chandrabhaga. We shall take the name of Vitthal forsaking the worldly ties. We shall spread Abir and Gulal. In the months of Ashadha and Kartik all devotees flock in Pandharpur. All saints gather in the deserts of

Pandharpur. Chokha says that once we start chanting the name of the Lord all of them forget the whole world. We shall spread Abir and Gulal, my chum Pandurang dances with the Naath.”

This abhanga (quadrant) depicts how the untouchables found redemption in the Vithhal Bhakti. It is surprising how Sant Chokha Mela who was born as the Dalit came to know of Abir which was not the part of Maharashtra culture in those days. Abir was necessarily the part of the Sufi culture. This means that Sant Naamdeo in the time of Chokhamela and Sant Eknath after the time of Sant Dnyaneshwar synthesized the Southern culture with the Northern culture. Abir became the indivisible part of the Warkari tradition from this time onwards. Nobody has thought on this. We know many compositions of Nussrat Fateh Ali Khan dedicated to Khwaja Moyinuddin Chisti which was the interpretation of Lord Krishna. Abir was the the part of this Sufi tradition.

“Maamike tum deeware
Jo sunyohamribaat
Aajmilaawaramohepiyaka
Jo jagyosaariraat
Aaj rang hairimaan
Rang hairi
Aaj rang hairimaan
Rang hairi”

(O lamps of clay, listen to my appeal, tonight my sweet heart is going to meet me, so keep burning the whole night)⁵.

You can easily identify the similarity in Krishna Bhakti, the Sufi and the Warkari Tradition expressed above in the abhanga of Sant Chokhamela. The social hierarchies are forgotten when these saints appeal to their ‘sweet hearts’, their deities. Social barriers are broken.

The same tradition of brotherhood is carried over by other writers in Marathi. Humans come close to being ‘good animal’. Appsaheb Khot describes the quarrel among the daughters in law of the old lady who is a Dalit but who loves animals and birds so much that she wants her quarrelling daughters in law to emulate an example of the Kombdi, the hen.

‘Kombdi’ or ‘The Hen’ is the Marathi short story which describes how there is Eco-friendliness in the Dalit narrations in small villages, distant from towns. This story is available on cassettes and CD’s and now online.

Brief Introduction to Marathi Recorded Short Stories:

It was the advent of cassette dubbing that got him profit and prompted the enterprising Marathi man called Alurkar to record P. L. Deshpande, Shankar Patil and Va Pu Kale on cassettes and this was the beginning of a new era in Marathi Fiction. Many writers were inspired by the success of these audio recordings. The digital format made things very easy to listen to these stories on the go during the S.T Bus journeys.

‘Kombdi’ (The Hen): A Short Story showing Eco-friendliness in Dalit Families:

The most well-known recorded short story narrator of these times is AppasahebKhot from Kolhapur. The story called ‘The hen’ shows how the affectionate hen represents the grand old Dalit lady who is the mother-in-law of Parvati and Rangu, the quarrelling daughters-in-law. Just like the old lady the hen cares for her offspring. She protects her chickens with complete attention. Khot has given a beautiful picture of the Eco-friendliness in the Dalit families and in the social life in village. He has shown how the birds and animals are the indivisible parts of people’s lives. At one place he says that hen returns home like the bullocks that are reluctant to leave their home but while returning home they don’t need any directions to be given by the master.

Parvati and Rangu are sisters married in the Dalit family of the old lady who is an important character in this story. The central character is, of course the absconding hen who chooses the home of the old lady at the end. She has disappeared for a few days and these two daughters-in-law are quarrelling in the verandah of the home which the old lady has built by hard work throughout her life. She has built this home in stone masonry. She feels greatly ashamed to see these women quarrelling for the ownership of the hen. The hen returns but looking at the quarrelling women chooses the old lady’s home as safe haven. The old lady tells the women to learn from the hen how to live a graceful life. The Dalit family is closely associated to animals and both share good qualities.

Appasaheb Khot is writing in the tradition of Sant Chokhamela and considers that we must try to mix up with each other by ways of Bhakti or learning from animals. The short story 'Kombdi' is a fine example of Eco-friendliness in the Dalit families.

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eco-friendly, eco-friendliness Ecologically 'friendly'; not harmful to the environment. Also applied to products manufactured with explicit regard to the environment.

<http://www.crystalinks.com/egyptart.html>

<https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/Mahesh-Kale/Natha-Ghari-Nache-Maza-Sakha-Pandurang>

yricsmint.com/rahat-fateh-ali-khan/rang-rahat-fak-amjad-sabri

<https://youtu.be/KWXMT1ZHLXU>

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Magnanimity of an Indian Saint: The Portrait of an Apostle of God: A Focus on Basavaraj Naikar's Religious Play, *The Golden Servant of God*

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Abstract:

India is universally recognized in the global sphere as a nation of glorious cultural heritage based up on its spirituality. Her reputation as a spiritually advanced country is attributable to phenomenal contributions rendered by numerous saints, sages, seers, monks, mendicants and prophets. In the galaxy of these luminaries, one who shines luminously as a saint is Kanakadasa, as ardent devotee of God of the 16th century. He was consistently and perpetually pursuing for realization of God. His entire life centres round his philanthropic services and his dedication to contemplation and chanting of God. He is gifted with strikingly noblest qualities by virtue of which he ascends to a great height of celebrity. The paper explores the scenes and words of magnanimity in Basavraj Naikar's play *The Golden Servant of God* in the tradition of Bhakti movement.

Keywords: Vaishnava, magnanimity, philanthropic enthusiasm, humanity

The religious personalities have enriched this nation morally, spiritually and culturally and imparted a distinct identity to it. They illuminated the moral and spiritual paths as torch bearers and beckoned to the bewildered humanity to traverse along those pre-trodden paths so as to idealize their lives and spiritualize their sentiment and sensibility. Naikar's book *The Golden Servant of God's* based on the life of Kanakadasa, a Vaishnava saint and poet of Karnataka. He is considerably liberal, broadminded, generous, munificent and a compassionate forgiver. In view of his exemplary conduct and character he is reckoned as a symbol of magnanimity.

Many incidents of his life depicted in different scenes of the play *The Golden Servant of God* authenticate his magnanimity. These incidents are presented in various episodes, which are illustrated below.

The first incident that reflects on his magnanimity is his munificent dispersal of gold ornaments and coins among the poor. One day when Kanakadasa was digging the earth he discovered and got a potful of gold ornaments and coins. He gave away this treasure munificently to the poor and utilized without avarice a part of it for the renewal of the temples. Such unprecedented noble services rendered by Kanakadasa were lavishly lauded by the inhabitants of the village Kaginelli. They admired his generosity and selflessness for the productive utilization of the treasure. In the conversation between the villager 1 and villager 2 in the Act – II- SC-I, the latter comments “He is a very generous man. Any one in his place would have used it for selfish purpose but this youngman has been spending that gold on poor people and on renovating the temples in the village” (2). Thus, it is axiomatic that such generous distribution of wealth among the poor is certainly a deed of magnanimity which is rarely noticed in human society.

Another incident that evinces Kanaka’s noble mindedness is his noblest tendency towards forgiveness. Once this social activist was assailed and assaulted violently by Mallanayaka, a deadliest enemy of his father and was grievously wounded. It took him two months to recover but he did not nurse grudge and anger against the miscreants. He did not contemplate vindictive retaliation against his enemy. Any other man in his position would have revengefully counter attacked the assailants.

When Lakkamma, the daughter of the assailant met Kanakadasa and divulged her remorse and grief of frustration in cherishing futile aspiration for her marriage with him, he consoled her soothingly and compassionately to alleviate her mental agony that resulted from her disappointment. Any other man would have avenged her for the attack upon him by her father but Kanaka is so phlegmatic and insouciant that he did not mind the past incident of vandalism.

As a benevolent man, Kanaka enthusiastically embarked upon some constructive enterprises for public welfare without any evil motive. He constructed a barrage across a river and a canal for providing irrigational facilities to the inhabitants. Besides, he was impelled by his intensity of devotion to God to initiate a car festival and a fair for Sangameswara and another fair for Lord Narsimha at Kaginelli. Over and above he built a rest house for homeless and helpless villagers. As we notice Kanakadasa devotes himself actively

and selflessly to execute some beneficial works with the objective of ameliorating the rural life of the inhabitants. He accomplishes all his predetermined tasks with philanthropic enthusiasm. Furthermore, he employed guards to patrol the village at night with a view to eliminating robbery in the area. It is creditable that he himself solicitously comes out at night for patrolling in order to ensure safety to the villagers. Apart from these personal services, he undertakes repair and reconstruction of reservoirs in the interest of the villagers. He provides scopes for the livelihood of farmers. In this context, the remark made by villagers is worth mentioning “On the whole the people in his regime enjoyed peace and happiness” (Naikar:2018: 21).

Another instance of his noble intention can be cited of his inclination towards celibacy. When Kanaka lost his wife, his mother proposed him a second marriage but he declined and turned down her proposal. Such is the noble attitude of Kanaka who overcomes the temptation of conjugal enjoyment and decides to lead a celibate life. Any man in this situation would have readily consented for remarriage in order to re-enliven his marital life but Kanaka resists this pressure in consideration of transitoriness of life. Such a consideration testifies to the nobleness of the character.

Kanakadasa has exemplified his magnanimity in obliterating another incident of attack upon him by some miscreants. While Kanaka was sauntering in the village by way of patrolling for its safety, some ruffians belaboured him fatally and left him wounded. As it came to the notice of the villagers, they nursed him and brought him round in two months. In this case of assault, he compromised with the situation impassively and did not betray any reaction and provocation.

We can relevantly cite another instance of his greatness certified by his old friend Vadiraja Tirtha. When Kanaka met his old classmate at Chennakeshava temple at Beluru the latter complemented him “My dear Kanaka I am deeply impressed by your poetic talent and mystical height which is very rare in the human being” (Naikar:2018: 55).

One day Chennappa the chairman of the temple of Lord Venkateswara was bidden by God in a dream to receive Kanaka with due honour. Kanaka was sleeping in the temple of God at Tirupati but Chennappa and his assistants searched for him around the temple but failed to trace him out. Finally, they found him in the temple corridor

and begged him pardon guiltily. On hearing their confession of guilt Kanaka said to them liberally “It is all right dear brother, mistakes happen quite unintentionally. Don’t worry about them” (Naikar : 2018:49). He spoke these words compromisingly with a sense of magnanimity.

On one occasion when Kanaka sought the permission of a Brahmin to enter the Sosale Monastery of Vyasraya Swami at Tiruma-Kudalu, he was ridiculously denied entrance on the ground of his low caste. The Brahmin haughtily said to him “Our Monastery does not allow non-Brahmin in to its precincts. It is strictly meant for pure Brahmins like us”(Naikar:2018:29). Kanaka was rudely ill-treated by the Brahmin. At this juncture, there came Vyasraya Swami, the spiritual guru of the Monastery and welcomed him cordially. As he had heard the rude voices and misbehaviour of his disciples, he asked Kanaka sympathetically not to feel hurt by the insolent behaviour of the Brahmins. On hearing his consolatory advice, he respectfully told him with a liberal mind “Holy Sir I am not hurt at all by the behaviour of the people here”(Naikar:2018:30). This reply signifies his tolerance and insouciance.

Next day when Kanaka attends the class taken by Swami he sits in the corner of the room segregated from all other disciples lest he should outrage them for his low birth. His guru taunted all other disciples for discriminating against him contemptuously on the ground of caste. Swami Vyasraya admires Kanaka being impressed by his magnanimity and says “Oh my dear Kanakadasa you are really a golden and godly man. Our orthodox disciple will understand your greatness at the appropriate time” (Naikar:2018:33). He further overestimated his personality in the following words “Dasa Supreme you are really a great soul. We deem ourselves lucky to have had you amidst us in the sacred complex” “you are a spiritual expert” (Naikar : 2018:39).

On another occasion, Kanaka was subjected to much emotional and psychological torture in the temple of Lord Krishna at Udupi. As he stepped towards the sanctum of the temple he was rudely debarred from entering and was ill-treated. Brahmin-1 rebuffs him “How can you dare enter the temple”(Naikar:2018:60). Then Brahmin-2 also misbehaved with him and said to him haughtily “Beggary people are not allowed in to the temple. Do not defile the holy atmosphere

here”(Naikar:2018:60). As Kanaka further asked them for food out of hunger, they denied him inhumanly. A Brahmin growled at him “Fellow we have no food for the dirty people like you”(Naikar:2018:60). However, Kanaka did not feel affronted by their misbehaviour and denial of food. This incident authenticates his magnanimity.

The Act-IV SC-II depicts another incident of insult inflicted on Kanaka in the same temple of Lord Krishna at Udipi. As he was staying in the porch of the temple there came a Brahmin who snubbed at him “you old fellow who permitted you to stay in the porch? You better get out of this porch. Otherwise I shall thrash you with a bamboo stick” (Naikar:2018:68). If any other man had been ill-treated so insolently, he would have betrayed violent reaction and embroiled himself in a squabble. But Kanaka is exceptionally magnanimous to ignore such untoward situation.

The outcome of the incidents which befell Kanaka, bears the stamp of his magnanimity. In every incident, he has evinced his tolerance and compromising proclivity. He has never been perturbed and upset by adversity of situation. He overcomes all untoward situations with patience and nobleness. His magnanimity is surfaced in his social and religious activities. The incidents illustrated above, justify his acts of service and sacrifice of magnanimity.

Kanakadasa is a divine figure who consistently pursues for social services and realization of God by virtue of his devotion to Him. He is morally and spiritually an upright and immaculate personality who dreams of God and has a *darsan* of Him in figure. God graciously appeared to him for his magnanimity that was the keystone of his personality.

Basavaraj Naikar’s play *The Golden Servant of God* approximates thematically to his other play *The Pilgrim of Life* on account of which it is comparable with the latter. From the view point of the humanitarian virtue, both the plays *The Pilgrim of Life* and *The Golden Servant of God* bear a close semblance with each other on account of the similarity in the presentation of objectives and activities of the characters. In the former one devotee of God is portrayed and his social and religious activities are highlighted but in the later play the characters of two awakened youths are presented with their noblest virtues. Kanaka the principal character of the play *The Golden*

Servant of God is depicted as a divine being, who devotes himself wholeheartedly to the service of God. He invariably sings devotional songs to propitiate Him.

In Act-II scene-III he asserts his determination to dedicate himself to service of God “So far I served the human work sincerely and as much as I could do. But henceforth I shall be slave of God and spent the rest of my life in the service of Lord Hari”(Naikar:2018:23). He perceives God *vis a vis* by virtue of his piety and religiosity but Govinda and Sarif the characters of the play *The Pilgrim of Life* attain divinity by virtue of their spiritual uprightness and accomplish stupendous task miraculously with ease.

Like Kanaka these two awakened persons are equally magnanimous in disposition and action. Their activities evince their exalted noble quality abiding in them. Govinda the inhabitant of the village Kalasa looks for a worthy disciple who will be compatible with his temperament and attitude. As a matter of fact, he was looking for a spiritually upright one. Govinda speaks to his brothers Bandibhatta, “I have been searching for a flower that will never wilt or fade” (Naikar: 2016:?). He further disqualifies his sister’s son on the ground of his spiritual bankruptcy. “He is like an empty desert. He is a zero in the field of spirituality” (Naikar: 2016:12). This statement testifies to his spiritual integrity.

Naikar’s play *The Pilgrim of Life* throws light on the magnanimity of two saintly characters who invariably contemplate to ennoble and idealize their lives on the basis of religious ideology with a view to attaining salvation. They are devoid of all human vices, ego, hypocrisy, dishonesty and iniquity for which they are regarded as saints. Although Govinda is a Brahmin by caste he does not despise the Muslim boy Sarif. He on the contrary looks upon him as his son and treats him as his disciple. His intimate association with Muslim boy evidences his magnanimity. Both of them were the devotees of Lord Shiva and mother goddess Sakambari. Both guru and disciple had mystically gained divine power without practice of penance, meditation and yoga.

Likewise, Kanaka too attained the blessings of Adikeshava, Tirumaleswara and Lord Krishna by virtue of his magnanimity and righteousness. Since he was devoid of vices and moral weaknesses he was spiritually capable of realizing God by the intensity of devotion. Govinda and Sarif were invariably advancing along the spiritual path

to attain salvation and in reality, they achieved their goal. Both these characters often had vision of God and heard divine voices because of their piety and holiness. Just as Kanaka is believed to have been born by the blessing of Tirumaleswara, so is Sarif also born by the blessings of goddess Sakambari and Shiva Putra of Sisunala. Both Govinda and Sarif are innately endowed with spiritual insight and prophetic vision by virtue of which they forecast any imminent untoward situation and predict the future of the villagers. They consistently endeavour to build up their personalities on the basis of moral and spiritual sanctity.

Just as Kanaka was subjected to ill-treatment and harassment for his non-Brahmin birth Sarif was also disdained by the orthodox Brahmins but Govinda by virtue of his magnanimity welcomed him to his house and treated him endearingly with love and affection. Bandibhatta the elder brother of Govinda expresses his contempt for the Muslims but the latter defies orthodoxy and caste distinction. Whereas Kanaka is liberated from worldly attachment, Govinda and Sarif too get rid of this attachment. The latter characters are portrayed as morally and spiritually immaculate like Kanaka who is free from any kind of vices and abuses. Sarif too perceives saintly quality in his guru Govinda by his intuitive perceptibility and looks upon him as Parameshwara.

Once Sarif was also accused of stealing the nose-stud from the village deity. He bluffed to absolve himself from the charge of theft and asserted that nose-stud was given to him by goddess herself. Sarif was exonerated from the charge of theft of nose-stud by the goddess herself who appeared compassionately and offered him the ornament in the presence of all to impart credibility to his false statement. Similarly Kanaka was also suspected of having stolen the ornament of the icon of Krishna but he exculpated himself by his candid confession of the incident. Thus, in both the plays Kanaka and Sarif are projected as blessed souls. Govinda and Sarif exhort moral precepts to villagers and so also does Kanaka who delivers discourses and through them he tries to refine and ennoble the lives of the villagers. The life and contributions of Kanakadasa are reminiscent of his magnanimous deeds delineated above.

If we focus on *The Golden Servant of God* with reference to Naikar's other religious play *The Sport of Allama* we notice

considerable thematic dissimilarity between these two plays. The former is basically a religious play but the latter is woven with the thread of Indian mythology. The latter play presents the picture of a verbal contest between Girija and Lord Siva regarding the irresistible power of a woman to enchant a man by her passionate approach. She offers presumptuously a challenge to Siva with a confidence to prove it by sending a lady named Maya to the mortal world with her *tamasik* power. She empowered her to captivate a young man Allama an incarnation of Lord Siva. Siva accepts her challenge and sends Allama to the world manifesting Himself in his personality as an artist. In this battle of contest Maya is frustrated and disheartened by Allama who repudiates her sensual approach considering it repugnant. Allama is insusceptible and self-resistant to passion and sensuality. He remains intransigently irresponsive and unconcerned towards sensual temptation by virtue of which he repels Maya's voluptuous advancement. This superhuman quality of Allama is illustrative of his magnanimity. Any other young man in his position would have eagerly reciprocated her love and welcomed her passionate approach. But Allama quits her kingdom being embittered by her persistent amorous trick to entangle him. Thus, Maya's attempts to enchant Allama in her love prove abortive and infructuous. This self-resistance proves Allama's magnanimity by virtue of which he overcomes amorous desire and professes his quality of self-restraint.

In another episode of the same play *The Sport of Allama*, Girija discomfits Siva by empowering her incarnated women Mahadevi to achieve success and satiety in marrying Lord Chennamallikarjuna of Srisaila. Although she marries a worldly man yet she abstains herself from sensual enjoyment and perseveres in her attempt to win over God as her husband. In this case of her aspiration of marriage with Mallikarjuna Mahadevi sticks to her self-restraint and exemplifies her magnanimity by virtue of which she accomplishes her spiritual target. Any other woman in her case would have yielded to sensual approach of her worldly husband but she quits the palace of the king and goes to the city of Kalyana being disgusted by his frequent amorous advancement because of her insensibility to erotic enjoyment. Thus, her abstinence from passion and self-resistance against this vice testifies to her noblest quality of magnanimity. Thus, the play *The Sport of Allama* upholds the invulnerability of celestial love and denounces

the sacrilege and sinfulness of earthly passion. The play tends to blend material life and spiritual life with mythical implication. It accentuates transcendence of the vice of sensual enjoyment for the sake of attaining the blessings of the Divine.

Apart from comparing *The Golden Servant of God* with Naikar's other religious plays it is also relevant to analyse its theme with reference to other Indian religious plays written in English by Indian dramatists like Tagore, Basudev and Krishnaswamy. In all these plays we have to trace out and point out the quality of magnanimity embodied in the characters portrayed therein.

Tagore's *Chirta* is based upon the mythological story of the *Mahabharata*. It depicts Chitrangada's consistent effort to captivate Arjuna and marry him but the latter remains tenaciously resolute to maintain celibacy and denies her offer. Arjuna professes his magnanimity by overcoming the lure of marital life but his noble quality is dissolved into erotic desire that impels him to submit to her on account of arousal of sensual desire in him. Thus, this play *Chirta* differs thematically from Naikar's play *The Golden Servant of God* which concentrates on Kanakadasa's consistency and steadfastness in spiritual pursuit for realization of God. His inextinguishable desire for attainment of visual contact with God leads readers to construe this experience as an act of magnanimity.

Tagore's another play *Sanyasi* dwells on the theme of purification of soul and pursuit for attainment of salvation. This aspiration highlights Sanyasi's quality of magnanimity. The plot of this play is borrowed from Indian mythology *Vishnu Purana*. Jada Bharat the principal character of this play externalizes his magnanimity by resorting to the path of spiritual purification and attainment of salvation. He abdicates his kingship without any avarice for position and renounces his worldly life in order to persevere in the attainment of salvation. The play *Sanyasi* as a religious play bears some similarity with Naikar's *The Golden Servant of God* in respect of pursuit for realization of God.

A comparative study of these plays leads us to infer identical objectives cherished by Jada Bharata and Kanakadasa in undergoing purification of soul and experiencing realization of God. Thus, their spiritual pursuit testifies to their magnanimity.

Tagore's other play *The King of the Dark Chamber* is also a religious play that tends to focus on the mysticism of God's will towards His appearance and disappearance. The queen of the play persists in tracing out her elusive husband who escapes her sight on account of manifestation of God in his personality. After consistent abortive pursuit, when she fails to have a sight of her husband she construes her husband as manifestation of the Divine. These efforts of the queen in the pursuit of God evince her magnanimity. The play seeks to awaken in the queen the desire for realization of God and acquisition of mystic knowledge about Him. Like the queen of the play, *The King of the Dark Chamber* Kanakadasa also strives consistently to explore knowledge of mysticism for which he moves from one guru to another for this purpose. First of all he is tutored by Srinivasacarya at his school and then he joins the *gurukula* ashram run by Vyasaraaya Swami of Sosale Monastery at Tirurma-Kudalu with a view to intensifying and widening his knowledge of God and religious principles. In the Act-III Scene-III Kanaka appeals to Swamy to admit him in his monastery in order to infuse him with mystic knowledge "I have come all the way from Kaginelli to seek spiritual knowledge of a higher kind". Just as Kanaka asserts his magnanimity by professing his insatiable desire for acquisition of mystic knowledge, so does the queen in the play, *The king of the Dark Chamber*. She seeks to enlighten herself with spiritual knowledge and perseveres in her attempt to perceive God in the personality of her husband. Thus, her perseverance in the pursuit of God evinces her magnanimity

Another play comparable with *The Golden Servant of God* is the religious play *Nala and Damayanti* by Basudev Rao who builds the plot on the fabric of the epic the *Mahabharata*. Since these mythical lovers *Nala and Damayanti* enjoy the game of love, they are devoid of religious inclination for spiritual pursuit. There is no vestige of magnanimity in them. They are represented as seekers after celestial pleasure but not after realization of God. Hence, they are lacking in the noble quality of magnanimity. The play is therefore not categorised as a religious one.

In the historical past of India many religious preceptors had also given evidence of their magnanimity. Shankaracharya, the celebrated saint served the needy and the downtrodden by virtue of his noble propensity for welfare. Once he went to the hut of a pauper inhabitant

to beg alms. As the family was impecunious, it had nothing to offer. The wife of the villager offered Shankaracharya a piece of tamarind and deplored her poverty. Her deploration melted his heart where upon he compassionately prayed to goddess Laxmi to shower riches on the family. In response to his prayer goddess Laxmi blessed the family with affluence. This is how Shankaracharya removed the poverty of the family with a humanitarian feeling of magnanimity.

Other Indian spiritualists have also rendered benevolent services to the people as benefactors and evinced their magnanimity. Saint Gyaneswar one day justified his statement in a controversy with the Brahmins by objectifying the omnipresence of God. He was subjected to an ordeal to prove the embodiment of God in a buffalo where upon Gyaneswar directed the animal to sing out the doctrines of the Veda. As the buffalo recited some of the lines from the Veda, the Brahmins were disgraced and they apologetically begged him forgiveness. Gyaneswar ignored their guilt and forgave them with clemency and compassion. He demonstrated the authenticity of his belief in the omnipresence of God and adduced his magnanimity. In like manner Kanakadasa too forgave the Brahmins, when they apologized to him for their offence in denying him entrance into the sanctum of the temple of Lord Krishna at Udupi.

Unlike Chaitanya and Gyaneswar who have only shown their magnanimity in their religious activities but not in social activities other religious preachers like Dayananda, Vivekananda, Sivananda and Chinmayananda have rendered social and religious services to the people for the upliftment of the community. Dayananda reformed Hindu religion by combating the evils of superstition, untouchability, idolatry and caste-ism and long enduring convention of child marriage. He introduced a new pattern of education based upon the gospels of the Vedas. Like Dayananda, Vivekananda also brought about social and religious reformation and launched a campaign to eliminate illiteracy, poverty and the convention of caste discrimination. Besides, he sought to illuminate people's mind about utilitarian value of the Vedanta and the Upanishad. By way of discourses he contributed to the promotion of spiritual knowledge and consecration of religious activities. Thus, Vivekananda was impelled by virtue of magnanimity to serve the society ungrudgingly and selflessly. Sivananda too served the poor patients as a benevolent doctor. He even treated the patients

at his residence free of cost. One day he lifted a pregnant woman who was left deserted by her relatives and brought her home for her safe delivery. This is an act of magnanimity that is reflected in his biography as a laudable service. Thus, all other religious luminaries have, philanthropically served humanity with humanitarian serviceability.

The Golden Servant of God is conclusively established as a religious play for predominance of religiosity therein. This play is nevertheless thematically disharmonious with Naikar's other religious play. *The Sport of Allama* for its assimilation and association with mythological sequences. The former, however, contributes to the evocation of reader's interest and faith in God. It also tends to motivate people to ennoble their lives spiritually and to promote philanthropic services for the amelioration and upliftment of Indian social life.

The play *The Golden Servant of God* deserves profuse encomium for skilful presentation of different episodes and characters. It serves to instil moral and ethical sense in people by way of exploitation of the theme of moral and spiritual value which is the key note of the play. The pervasion of religious atmosphere in the play contributes to the evocation of religious interest in readers who eulogize this play in the moral and spiritual perspective.

With the exception of the playwrights mentioned above there are many more contemporary dramatists like Sri Aurobindo, Harindranath, Girish Karnad, Vijay Tendulkar, and Mahesh Dattani. All these playwrights have written on the contemporary social issues and not on religious themes but Karnad has produced a few plays which are tinged with Indian mythology. His plays are nevertheless much dissimilar from religious plays because of their assimilation with mythology. Hence these are excluded from the comparison and contrast with modern religious plays.

Although a number of religious plays have been written in English by Modern Indian dramatists they can hardly surpass the excellence and the superiority of Naikar's religious plays for exuberance of religiosity in them. They tend to assert their identity and magnitude for unprecedented conception of theme and skilful presentation of the theme in the form of dramatization. This play *The Golden Servant of God* gains enormous popularity among religious-minded persons who consider spiritual pursuit as the *summum bonum* of their lives.

This play serves as a source of inspiration for conquest of vices as a stepping stone towards transcendentalization of worldly life and attainment of salvation. This play *The Golden Servant of God* has to be widely reckoned as magnum *opus* in the spiritual perspective. In the annals of Indian drama written in English such religious plays are rarely produced by modern playwrights and hence it has to be treasured as a literary monument of enduring value for its embodiment of exalted theme of religious significance. This book imperatively necessitates its wide publicity for promotion of its readability and literary venture for academic pursuit.

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BANGLA DALIT SHORT STORY

Curse of Saturn

—Sunil Kumar Das

Translated by Jaydeep Sarangi

Good day priest, please stop for a while.

Why did you call me from behind? When will you have senses? Tell me without delay. I'm going to offer pujo at Habu's house.

Hi priest, what is the evil spell of Saturn?

Why do you ask me so? Is there anything wrong with you?

May be. One person on the horse back is selling horseshoe of a black horse in the coal pit. He is calling loudly that if a person wears a ring made from the same horseshoe, all his worries and unhappiness will be over. I'm unable to understand this queer practice. Please help me, priest. Enlighten me with your knowledge.

Don't take His name. He is an angry god. We can keep all other gods in control, not Him. My God! Don't repeat this. If someone comes under His spell even a mosquito bite will turn dangerous. He will earn in one hand and all his hard earned money will be lost in another hand.

Then, priest His actions are suspicious. He is not a good God.

Ah! You are prohibited to say all these words. You will go astray and you will take me there too. If you come under His spell once, you will understand its consequence.

What will happen, priest? I'm scared

You must take control of yourself from saying all these. Your houses will be destroyed. Rain water will leak from the top. Your sons will not get proper cloths. You will not be able to serve them starch rice.

I understand, master. Think of our country, leaving aside our country, our Radh area means Birbhum, Burdwan, Bankura, Midnapore, and Purulia where Muchi, Hari, Baagdi, Dome, Snthal and Bauris don't get proper shelter in early winter and in cold days they don't even get clothes to protect their bodies from cold. And you say about starch rice? Small children from these families take goats and cows to field to fill their belly. Tell me, master whether they will ever come out of

the evil spell of Saturn? Will they be able to save their lives if all of them buy a ring of horseshoe of a black horse?

I shall not reply to your irrelevant words.

Don't make jokes, master. These are not irrelevant words. This is not the evil spell of Saturn. This is the evil spell of people like you, Brahmins and the leaders of the state.

Fuming in anger, Brahmin priest runs away from the spot to offer *pujo* somewhere.

Sunil Kumar Das (1957-2013), a hard-core Dalit activist and Bauri writer from Asansol, West Bengal, who was actively involved with various Dalit organizations right from his student days, and wrote poems, short stories and essays from an early age.

Jaydeep Sarangi, is a bilingual writer, academic, editor and translator with a number of significant publications on Dalit literature in reputed journals/magazines in India and abroad. He is Principal and Professor of English, New Alipore College, Kolkata-700053, WB, India. Email: jaydeepsarangi@gmail.com

POETRY

Letter to My Unborn Daughter

— Nandini Sahu

Tiny limbs smeared with my fresh enflamed blood
oozing out of the womb, gushing in fact.
I knew. I had lost you. Then and there. Shattered.
The sadomasochist burped then, and snored

in a short while, when the maid rushed us to
the local hospital. I heard what you never uttered.
*Ahh heal 'us', protect 'us', you and me, me and you,
Mom and her little girlie, wish to take the world in their stride.*

Today, a letter to you, my unborn daughter, after
long two decades of quiet travail
telling our tales to your younger brother,
with a bleeding heart, I smile with exuding tears.

Smile to see my dream daughter alive in
her brother little; so full of love and compassion, so much a
feminist-humanist male, so strong to hold Mom's head high,
so much you, so as I would have you.

Ah! There was such rage over a female foetus
growing up to be a girl of power and conviction, like Mom dear.
Or like the *Pancha Mahakanya*. And the marital rapes, the threats
to snatch you any given day, if I dissent; and then the termination.

If at all there is a next birth for you, my little fairy,

come back come back to my womb, life minus you is such dreary.
You need not play the games that the heart must play.
Pronounce before birth, you are not gonna be the woman of clay.

Like Ahilya, never fall prey to Indra's trickery; and if ever you do,
do it by your choice, not anyone else's, neither Goutama's nor Indra's.
Your penance need not be broken by Lord Rama, the one who
judged his wife; you need not regain your human form

by brushing his feet. Remain that dry stream, that stone,
till you find a way to my womb again, in another life, another *Yug*;
you need not be condoned of your guilt, you never were 'guilty'.
Let Indra be cursed, castrated, concealed by a thousand vulvae
that eventually turn into a thousand eyes. Or like Draupadi, take your
birth from a fire-sacrifice, be an incarnation of the fierce goddess Kali
or the goddess of wealth, Lakshmi; but never be the sacrificial goat
to accept five husbands just because someone else deliberated.

If any Yudhishtir drops you at the Himalayas because you
loved Arjun more, look in his eyes and declare, loud and clear—
it's your right to live, love and pray. While never deriding
the Duryodhan and Karn of your destiny, live laudable my dear.

Nor Kunti be your role model; but if ever you propitiate the sage
Durvasa, who grants you a *mantra* to summon
a god and have a child by him, then take his charge.
Don't you recklessly test the boons life grants you by haze

nor invite the Sun-god, Surya, give birth to Karna, and abandon.
An unborn child is better than the one dejected, forlorn.
Or if ever you are Tara, the *apsara*, the celestial nymph,
who rises from the churning of the milky ocean

be the Tara, Sugriva's queen and chief diplomat,
the politically correct one, the woman in control of herself
and folks around. In the folk Ramayans,
Tara casts a curse on Rama by the supremacy of her chastity,

while in some versions, Rama enlightens Tara. Be her, the absolute.
Or be Mandodari, the beautiful, pious, and righteous.
Ravana's dutiful wife who couldn't be his guiding force,
Bibhishana's compliant wife, the indomitable grace.

Be you, the elemental, candid, real woman who is my ideal.
Don't ever let another female foetus be the victim of
sodomasochism, unlike your fragile, fledgling Mom.
Be all that she could never be, be her role model.

I send you my prayers, the *prayer before birth*.
Moon, rain, oceans, and the blue firmament,
shining stars and a sun aglow are all that I have—
you must call them your own, my unborn daughter.

Forgive me my love, for you died with all the petals
falling from my autumny breast, the breast that you never suckled;
you rain on my being and burn my heart, but calm my soul
like simmering snow slowly concealed yet revealed.

You will stay indomitable, taking new lives every single day
in Mom's prayers, poetry, social responsibilities, ecofeminism,
messages, voices, layers of thoughts and action. My girl,
I am what I decided to be after losing you, that's the euphemism.
I am not just a woman since that fateful night, but entire
womankind. Now I am a woman of full circle, within me there is the

power to create, nurture and transform. I rediscover pieces of myself through your unborn narrative, in the resonance in my quirky confluence.

Prof. Nandini Sahu, Professor of English, IGNOU, New Delhi, India, is an established Indian English poet, creative writer, theorist and folklorist. She is the author/editor of thirteen books; has been widely published in India, U.S.A., U.K., Africa and Pakistan. Dr. Sahu is a triple gold medalist in English literature, the award winner of All India Poetry Contest and *Shiksha Rattan Purashkar*. She is the Chief Editor and Founder Editor of two bi-annual refereed journals, *Interdisciplinary Journal of Literature and Language (IJLL)* and *Panorama Literaria*. Her areas of research interest cover New Literatures, Critical Theory, Folklore and Culture Studies, Children's Literature, American Literature.

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A RAM RIGS

— R.K. Singh, Dhanbad, India

I watch the past crushed
and fake saints rising to reign

exalt cunningness
envision deceit to prosper

a ram rigs the folk
with iron teeth and speaking horns

from the Ganga's bank
immigrant hope and waiting

pushes west-, north-, east-
and southward for net-breaking

new resurrection
beyond the brimming nowhere

I hear the dead dying
angels groaning in the trees

my unscarred body
feels the hand that's blade and guard

ends me like full-stop.
new waves of terror rise high.

the book is opened
but where is the seeing eye?

Haiku :

travelling back
from the waves of bliss
a foam-leap
on the wave's crest
journeys a fallen leaf
rot on the bank

seek my haven
where the sky arches the sea—
a white gull leads

travelling
on the wings of winter
ill news

no odysseys
under water or space—
retreat within
journeying
on a late-running train:
squirrels frisk by track

in the moving train
sleeping on his feet
the newspaperman

waiting alone
in the airport lounge:
journeying faces

lost my way again
asking for direction:
a pleasant change

Ram Krishna Singh, an Indian English poet, has been writing for over four decades. Professionally, till recently, Professor of English at IIT-ISM in Dhanbad, he has published more than 160 research articles, 175 book reviews and 42 books, including *Sense and Silence: Collected Poems* (2010), *New and Selected Poems Tanka and Haiku* (2012), *You Can't Scint Me and Other Selected Poems* (2016), *God Too Awaits Light* (2017), *Growing Within* (2017), and *There's No Paradise and Other Selected Poems Tanka & Haiku* (2019). His haiku and tanka have been widely read and appreciated. More at: [https://pennyspoetry.fandom.com/wiki/R.K. Singh](https://pennyspoetry.fandom.com/wiki/R.K._Singh); email: profrksingh@gmail.com

Untouchables

— Bhawna Mishra

Whodecideshisdestiny
Peopleofthissocietyormoney
A life full of agony
By following hierarchy

Theyareuntouchables..
Butwhodecidesit
Ortheirbloodrecitesit
Livingasmiserable

Why they face humiliations
Do we really forgot superstition
Societydecidestheirdestination
Following baselesstradition

Follow the caste of humanity
Present need of society
Judge by your own soul
Leave your falsevanity.

— Research Scholar,
Magadh University Bodhgaya

PROGNOSIS IRREFUTABLE

—Dr. Manas Bakshi, Kolkata

Can burning an effigy
Douse the flame of anger?
It burns and burns within
Failing to find out the way

Strangers in darkness
Enter the fray and escape—

An embrace with fishy gestures,
A kiss in darkness
A knife hiding sinister motive
Beneath a flower bouquet!

Who killed your brother or your friend?
Eye witness afraid to speak—
It's all about a known face, unknown enemy,
The tree can't disclose, nor can the street.
The predatory opportunists on the prowl,
Apt to gag the voice of protest.

White clouds disappearing into dark clouds
Before it rains – rains to wash off
The remains of the burnt-out effigy
Of rapist, plunderer and murderer of democracy

A stormy phase's brewing again....

PARASITIES

—**Dr. Manas Bakshi**, Kolkata

Mildew of pseudo-secularism
Hug the black worms
Of religious intolerance,
Show the way
To lynching, love jihad, honour killing
And jingoism in the name of...

A fructifying tree :
A nation born after huge sacrifice
Encircled by shrubs and parasites
Finds not enough space to stretch
Nor can't much it rise—

For sharing raindrops and sunshine
Just to survive
It's compelled to compromise
With some unwanted elements
Called parasites!

AN INTERVIEW

At Patna Book Fair on 12.11.2019 there was a discussion on Dalit Literature which was attended by renowned writers from Delhi and Patna like Dr. Jaiprakash Kardam, Karmendu Arya and Musafir Baitha. Dr. Jaiprakash Kardam is a most reputed and prolific Dalit writer who has written three novels, two story collections, three poetry collections, one short epic and several prose anthologies. His novel *Chhappar* is perhaps the first Dalit novel in Hindi. *Utcoch* is his latest novel. After the deliberation session I had an interaction with him. This interview between Prof. Jaiprakash Kardam (JK) and Prof. Ram Bhagwan Singh (RBS) follows:

RBS : Good afternoon Dr. Kardam, I am happy you agreed to spare some time to talk to me. In fact, I want to know more about Dalit Literature though I find some of my queries have already been answered in your speech. I'll just put a few questions for my enlightenment.

JK : Thank you Prof. Singh for taking so much interest in Dalit Literature. I find Patna Book Fair is noteworthy as it engages writers and publishers alike. I very much welcome you and appreciate your interest in Dalit Literature. Now, your questions?

RBS : My very first question may seem very much embarrassing to you. How do you react to Prof. Namwar Singh's comment that Dalit Literature is 'Gali Literature'?

JK : I must say Prof. Namwar Singh has not read much Dalit Literature. Dalit writers are not abusive, aggressive they may be. The fact is that in certain areas in Maharashtra the rural folk are used to such speech which contains cussy words in plenty. Such words can be called part of their mannerism. Their speech means no ill will, no abusing. But in print such language may look dirty.

RBS : You're right. Here in Bihar also particularly the people around Jehanabad and Gaya by habit use dirty words in speech out of habit meaning nothing serious. I myself don't feel offended in such a case. However, my next question is, who can be called a Dalit writer, one who is born Dalit or anyone who writes about them?

- JK : I don't deny that non-dalits have written about Dalits. But the point of difference is that they have written out of sympathy and not out of self-experience. You will agree that self-experience is true and authentic. Dalit Literature is the experience of Dalits written by them. I hold that only a Dalit can be a real Dalit writer, no doubt about it.
- RBS : How is Dalit poetry different from earlier poetry ?
- JK : That's a good question. Earlier poetry was based on myths, on God. Dalit poetry is centred on man. It is based on humanism. It has the scent of the soil. It is rooted in the here and now. It knows no God, no supernatural, no Karma theory.
- RBS : (Intercepting) But why is there a negation of God ?
- JK : You see, my forefathers, I'm using the first person singular to include only Dalits, people like me. Well, my forefathers believed in God, worshipped several gods and goddesses, prayed to them and begged for their welfare, economic stability, social acceptability, equality, freedom from slavery, bonded labour, untouchability, physical and sexual exploitation etc. For centuries they lived a life of misery and starvation, condemnation and disease doing the filthiest of jobs on earth. Did God listen to them? Did He improve their condition a bit? Still they went on worshipping him, even today the connection has not snapped off. Babasaheb showed the light of reason and wisdom. Dalit Literature is the eye-opener, the friend, philosopher and guide to the Dalit folk.
- RBS : Who is the God of Dalits then?
- JK : Dalits need no God. The earth is the abode of human beings as well as other creatures. There is no God here. Man is everything on earth. Love man, don't hate him, don't oppress and exploit him. In a word, loving mankind is loving what you call God.
- RBS : What's the aesthetic principle of Dalit Literature ?
- JK : We Dalit writers believe in Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram. Satya i.e. truth comes first which means that what is true is also good and beautiful. Dalit Literature is based on reality, on palpable truth, give it any name social truth, moral truth, economic truth,

political truth or cultural truth. Truth or realism is the core of Dalit Literature. Change the old aesthetic paradigm. We measure literature from the yardstick of realism, 100% purity. Literature is called mirror of the society, which society, the aristocratic society, posh society or the Dalit society, the world of the slum dwellers, the creatures living in red light areas? We show what we see and write from the Dalit point of view.

RBS: How do you see the future of Dalit Literature?

JK : The future of Dalit Literature is bright We have a long way to go and enrich different forms of Literature. So far we have concentrated on poetry, short story, drama, novel and autobiography. It is running from south to north as it appears now. In Hindi also Dalit Literature is being written. I write in Hindi, there are other Hindi writers like Om Prakash Valmiki, Mohandas Namishray, Anita Bharti, Hemlata Maheshwari, Sushila Takbhore, Kaveri, Punam Tushamad, Roop Narain Sonkar, Sheoraj Singh Behain, Rajani Tilak and Kusum Viyogi. They include both Dalits and non-Dalits.

RBS : I personally feel that it would be a good idea to open Dalit Literature to all irrespective of their birth credentials. Mannu Bhandari's *Mahabhoj* is based on the plight of Harijans. Amritlal Nagar wrote the story of scavengers in *Nachyo Bahut Gopal* though from a different perspective. A better novel on the theme of untouchability is *Yatha Prastavit* by Giriraj Kishore and the best in English is still Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*.

JK : Thank you Prof. Singh for your queries on Dalit writing. I feel honoured by it.

RBS : And I feel both honoured and obliged. Thank You.

BOOK REVIEW

Vijay Chandra Verma, *Doll's Poems*,
Ranchi Institute for Social Development and Research,
2018, pp. 60 Rs. 210

It is generally believed that poetry is losing its appeal in an age of ruthless materialism, but the fact is that poetry is immortal and it can never die. Dr. Vijay Chandra Verma's *Doll's Poems* is the outcome of the eternal poetic fire which burns in the human heart. The poems in the collection seem light outwardly but they carry deeper messages and in this respect the poet is in line with Robert Frost who combines delight with wisdom.

Doll is the symbol of life and love in these poems. It is the embodiment of the charms and fascinations of life. The poet finds real beauty in the Doll which inspires him to live life to the fullest. At times the poems reach wonderful philosophical heights. For example in the poem "Love Me Ever" life and death are described as uninvited guests. In the poem "Celestial Incarnation" the poet's love reaches a higher plane and attains spiritual height. The poem "A Doll Unimagined" deals with complex nature of human life. The mystery of life cannot be unveiled completely:

O Doll, tell me the secrets of your form.

With all sacredness will I do research.

Poetry has a cathartic effect on the poet. The poet requests Doll to free him from pain but the truth is that writing these poems has given him relief from the pains of life. In the poem 'God's Dilemma Resolved' the poet says that the Doll (life) is God's perfect creation. In this He provides man ample scope for perfection. 'Prayer To My Doll' epitomizes the poet's yearning for immortality:

Be one with me beyond Immortality,

And accept my prayer to make me complete.

Some of the poems contain the poet's death wish. 'Invisible Tears' is one such poem. The poet wants to die to be one with God. At times death appears to be preferable to life as it gives pleasure while life gives only pain. 'My Doll Says...' poeticizes the poet's eternal love for life. 'Ask Me Not...' is a poem with symbolic and mystic overtones.

Doll says that it will not answer any of the poet's questions as all the answers are visible from her eyes. Life poses questions and challenges and the answers and solutions are hidden in life itself. 'O Death Wait!' reminds the reader of Emily Dickinson's 'Because I could not stop for Death'. The aesthetic sense of the poem is at its highest in the poem 'Personified Beauty'. Doll is the symbol of all the beauty present in the human life as well as in this world. In 'With Me A Shadow Walks' mysticism takes the upper hand. The poem is reminiscent of Sri Aurobindo's poem 'Revelation'.

Thus, the poems touch on the various aspects of human life with the help of the symbol of Doll. Dr. Verma's poems show a marked maturity of approach and mystery of technique. He most humbly dedicates these poems to Dr. Mani Sinha who he respectfully addresses as his Guru Mata. The blessings of poet's parents have enabled him to perform this poetic endeavour successfully. In the preface the poet clearly states that the collection is "the expression of feelings, emotions and sentiments." The poet has succeeded in what Wordsworth says adding 'sunshine to daylight'. The poems touch not only the heart but also the soul. As the poet himself says most of the poems are love poems. This love is broad and all-inclusive in its approach. It soars high but it never ignores the early and physical aspects as well. The heart of the poet has served as a fitting soil for the growth of the sapling of his imagination. In the present age of cut throat competition these poems compel readers to stop for a moment and think about the real worth of life. If such attempts are not made man is likely to forget the values on which life rests. Man cannot live by bread alone. He needs something more for his survival which such poetry definitely provides.

— Reviewed by **Dr. Sanjay Sharma**,
Assistant Professor, Department of English
P.S.M. P.G. College, Kannauj

**R. P. Singh, *The Flea Market and Other Plays*.
Authorspress, New Delhi, 2014.**

The Flea market and other plays is a collection of three plays by Dr (Prof) R.P. Singh musing on the ideologies and conventionalities

of life and how it is interspersed with the workings of fate and destiny. Speaking with the author himself, the latter recollects how many of the instances are empirical branching from his own life experiences in his very salad days. A professor of English, at the Department of English, University of Lucknow, he records a few minute and detailed references from English Literature, in the form of references to ideologies and often poetry, many of which are the author's own compositions and at other times, a recollection of Andrew Marvel's 'To His Coy Mistress'.

The Flea Market is the first of the three plays, revolving around the visit of an Indian researcher to Paris and how he finds his mind and heart there. It opens up in a carnivalesque tone with masquerading identities, the most prominent being that of Corsea Antoinette. With a setting of the dice game that sets the mood quite right, it opens up perspectives of glamour and exuberance coupled with deceit and treachery. What marks the play unique from the rest of the writing is its set of binaries that marks a level of humanness in the world we live in. It's an everyday day life scenario which juggles between joy and folly, reserve and glamour, extravagance and stinginess, all in one. On another note, it can read simply as a cautionary tale with latent meaning left for the reader to cull out. The text proclaims, "Yes, books tell you don't gamble" but also goes on to record how unavoidable are these the conventional taboos and the futility to buy into these taboos. Set in Paris, it is a personal take on the cultural extravaganza of the city. In the end, the play takes a very sincere effort to draw a dichotomy between theory and practice and also ideology and passion when the female protagonist claims, "I hate Feminism. The very 'F' letter scorches me. Yes, I am. it's a treason of academics, they defame us. Is a feminist not a human?" (Singh 26)

The second play entitled *Expired* is a one-act play on a young couple and their conversations at a graveyard in Lucknow. The conversation is melancholic, nostalgic and yet full of hope marking an existential tone to the play. The setting is that of a road connecting Lucknow Cantonment and the Sadar Bazaar, with a backdrop of an Indian wedding and its quirks and jazz. A closer reading of the play depicts a comparison between the past and the present and how the past is always a haunting continuance on the present. What marks the play unique is its shocking end with a complete silence that leaves the

readers to mull over the incidents of the play. Quite gothic in its setting and open-ended in its approach, the readers are left pondering over the succeeding events that might have taken shape later in the situation. The play also draws a similarity in its technique of drawing binaries used in *The Flea Market*. The lust of the minor characters, Mallika and Jay and contrasted against the platonic love of Alice and Hastings.

The final play entitled, *A Scientist E* can again be read as a cautionary tale very much like *The Flea Market*. The two men are seen sitting sharing their solitary experiences and form a bond over many of the common tumultuous turns of life. The setting is that of the Worli Sea Face in Bombay and the musings of the two-old people over the sins of drinking. Quite Biblical in its approach, it records the experiences of the two old men and their hefty losses that came at the cost of a bottle.

The expertise of the author lies in his building quirky plotlines with a limited set of characters making each character an integral part of the setting. The title of each play speaks much of what the contents unfold. The collection, written in very lucid language makes for a very easy and a quick read and yet the constant literary references keep the interest of the readers intact till the last page.

Reviewed by Bhavya Arora, Ph.D. English, Dept. of Humanities and Other Studies, Dr Ram Manohar Lohiya, National Law University, Lucknow.

***Greatest Short Stories of Premchand* (Trans. Ram Bhagwan Singh & Chhote Lal Khatri)**

Aadi Publications, Jaipur, pp. 160, Price Rs. 195

Premchand's stories and novels are invaluable assets of Hindi Literature with an outreach beyond geographical boundaries. They are the classics of literature having perennial value.

Generations come and go, social values transform, political configurations change but human emotions and passions remain. Premchand's stories count both for temporal reality and eternal, spiritual awakening.

I am happy to read a copy of *Greatest Short Stories of Premchand* in English translation. It has sixteen selected stories dealing with rural life of poverty, ignorance, oppression, superstition and family feud. The translators Ram Bhagwan Singh and C.L. Khatri have wisely selected stories representing different aspects of human activity. The one highest common factor is Premchand's sense of pity and compassion for the suffering humanity. While he takes a dig at the agents and factors responsible for the suffering, He also at times suggests a way out from the malaise. His social concern at times approximates his art to a catholic orientation and becomes an organ of reform for which he is ascribed as a humanist writer.

The stories in this anthology carry different segments of social activity agitating the sensitive mind of the writer. They show the evil aspect of human behavior as well as the noble instincts redeeming them. The popular story "Namak Ka Daroga" translated as "The Salt Inspector" is an example of bureaucratic corruption rampant in those days. But it also shows a man of principle who stakes his job, even his life to maintain the rule of law. The same pattern recurs in "Panch Parmeshwar" translated as "People's Court". In the story the two friends Jumman Sheikh and Algu Chaudhary are friends, no doubt, but when the critical situation arises Algu sticks to law disrespecting his friendship and decides the case against Jumman. In a like manner Jumman forgets his enmity and delivers justice in favour of Algu. That shows Premchand's belief in essential human nature unalloyed by circumstantial compulsions. He takes it much further to illustration the noble nature of a boy Hamid whose primal compassionate nature prompts him to override his personal please and care for his grandma's comfort. No wonder, the child buys a pair of tongs and not a balloon or a toy for himself.

But inscrutable is the nature of man, noble here, ignoble there. In our culture mother's filial affection and kindness is proverbial. But the son may betray his mother's sacrifice for him. In the story "Mother" Prakash is such a disloyal and selfish son who leaves his mother in the lurch. In "A widow with Four Sons" again, after her husband's death Phulmati's four sons treat her so shabbily that she is compelled to drown herself in the Ganga. From such stories a trend emerges that daughters are more gentle, co-operative and obliging than sons. Anandi in "Daughter of a High Family" well illustrates this view. Her noble nature speaks of her gentility and noble upbringing.

“The Temple” and “Thakur’s Well” are stories of critical social realism. They expose the evil of caste superiority that denigrates humanity to an abysmal level. A poor woman of a lowly caste is not permitted to draw water from a well. The well is reserved for upper case people. Similarly, a Dalit woman is not allowed to enter a temple though she belongs to the same religion and worships the same god. Premchand’s story by implication wants an apartheid – free society. “The Shroud” in the same line shows society’s insensitivity to the poor, who is driven to drinking and wasting his life. Other stories like “The Old Auntie”, “Ramlila”, “A Night in Poos”, “The Tale of Tow Oxen”, “Chess Player”, “Cricket Match” and “Test” are also memorable ones.

The books as a whole, is an appreciable venture to present the stories of Premchand in English. The Choice of the stories is wise and relevant to the present time. The language is simple and easily comprehensible for which I congratulate the translators and thank the publisher for low pricing.

—**Prof. Kumar Chandradeep**

Prof of English, College of Commerce,
Arts & Science, Patna