

SACH

South Asian Composite Heritage

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Bringing the Margins to the Centre: Celebrating Dalit History Month

THE South Asian subcontinent has been a witness to multifarious social movements which not only bring the masses together against oppressive regimes but also indicate towards common threads of belongingness. These common threads could be anything; varying from a vision of an equitable society to an assertion of one's identity. A reading of a region's history remains unequipped if one doesn't look at writings coming from the most marginalized. To deepen one's understanding of socio-cultural context, one needs to engage with literature which produces counter to dominant narratives.

Since April has come to be recognized as Dalit History Month, we dedicate this issue to anti-caste, anti-race, adivasi struggles. We are including writings by some of the authors/poets who we think continues to remain unrecognized in the mainstream conversations on rights and justice. These articles, poems, interviews underscore themes which point to violent hierarchies but also give us hope that assertion; of one's rights and identity can play a significant role in building a society where everyone has the right to live a life with dignity. These writers as well as their writings are part of our Composite Heritage. They invoke certain sensibilities which help us organize a continuous battle to counter violence. We believe that the writings we are including in this issue are only an introduction to the vast realm of writings coming from Dalit, Adivasi, Black and other writers from marginalized, non-privileged backgrounds. We hope that this will inspire our readers to go forth and indulge in the rich repository of socio-cultural and political writing.

Rise to Learn and Act

By SAVITRIBAI PHULE

Weak and oppressed! Rise my brother
Come out of living in slavery.
Manu-follower Peshwas are dead and gone
Manu's the one who barred us from education.
Learn, you've had no chance in a millennium.
We'll teach our children and ourselves to learn
Receive knowledge, become wise to discern.
An upsurge of jealousy in my soul
Crying out for knowledge to be whole.
This festering wound, mark of caste
I'll blot out from my life at last.
In Baliraja's kingdom, let's beware
Our glorious mast, unfurl and flare.
Let all say, "Misery go and kingdom come!"
Awake, arise and educate
Smash traditions-liberate!
We'll come together and learn
Policy-righteousness-religion.
Slumber not but blow the trumpet
O Brahman, dare not you upset.
Give a war cry, rise fast
Rise, to learn and act.

*Translated by Sunil Sardar and Victor Paul
(Originally published in roundtable India)*

The Adivasi Writes Back

By JACINTA KERKETTA

They brought to us their God and said,
'He shall redeem you from your sins.'

'What sins have we committed?'

We asked.

And they were bewildered:

How do they establish their God's existence,
Without claims of sin and salvation?

'Look how poor, deprived you are,' they said,
'This is a retribution for your sins.'

We showed them the expanse of our fields,
Our forests, rivers, mountains and streams,
And the heaps of grains in our granaries.

They then said,

'A better world awaits you after death.'

We replied, 'There is no world after that.

Right here, with our ancestors, we remain
And dwell amidst our generations to come.'

Then panic seized them,

They knew not what to do,

These people do not see sin.

They do not believe in the next world,

Nor in hell or heaven.

Now they asked us to show them our God,
And we pointed to our mountains and trees.

But when asked in turn

to reveal to us their own,

They panicked once again

Wondering how to show their Almighty.

One day, they had the moneylender

Return to us our mortgaged land,

And said, 'This is the power of our God!'

We bowed down before that Almighty

And remained bowed for heaven knows how long.

With us bowed our future generations,

And then, many a century.

Blissfully unaware were we

That with God they also brought weapons unseen,

Which they used to wage wars around the world,

In places rich in land, forests and oil.

But how do we fight against these odds?

We seem to have given all responsibility

for our self-preservation to their God.

(This appeared in the print edition as "The responsibility for our self-preservation")

(Originally published in Outlook)

Excerpts from ‘Gulamgiri’: The ‘Seed Text’ for an Anti-Brahmanical Consciousness

By OMPRAKASH KASHYAP, INDIA

IT was the year 1873. The campaign to educate the Shudras-Ati shudras had completed 25 years. The students who had graduated from Phule’s schools had entered social life. Their minds were liberated and they were unwilling to accept anything without questions and arguments. Phule felt that the time had come to launch a major movement against the cultural hegemony of the Brahmins. To break the stranglehold of caste on society it was imperative to introduce the Shudras-Ati shudras to their glorious past. They needed to be told that the Brahmins had deftly used the Puranas, the epics and other religious scriptures to distort their history and culture. It was also necessary to reject the scriptures, customs, traditions and cultural symbols that had reduced them to the status of second- or third-class citizens. The Shudras-Ati shudras needed to be convinced that their socio-economic emancipation would elude them until they break free from the intellectual and cultural dominance of the Brahmins.

SLAVERY IN THE NAME OF RELIGION

Like *The Communist Manifesto*, *Gulamgiri* is also a thin booklet. Apparently, elaborate treatises are not required to change the world. If the intent is good, a few words can produce the needed effect. He dedicated *Gulamgiri* to the “good people of the United States [of America] as a token

of admiration for their sublime, disinterested and self-sacrificing work in the cause of Negro slavery.” *Gulamgiri* has the same place in the history of the movement against cultural hegemony in India that *The Communist Manifesto* has in the history of the workers’ movement in the world. The book, written in Marathi, was priced at 12 annas but was made available at half the cover price to the poor and the Shudras-Ati shudras. He wanted to ensure that lack of money did not come in the way of the poor, the Shudras-Ati shudras wanting to read *Gulamgiri*.

Phule reinterpreted the mythological tales revered by the masses even when doubting the myths was considered blasphemy. He thus prepared the ground for building a parallel historical narrative.

That Brahmins were of foreign origin was not Phule’s original construct. Scholars like Max Muller, Vincent Smith and Thomas William Rhys Davids shared this view. Even a rightist author like Tilak subscribed to it. Phule presented Matsya, Varah, Kachh, Narsingha, Parshuram and other avatars of Vishnu as Aryan heroes and non-Aryan kings like Hiranyagarbha, Hiranyakashyap, Bali and Banasur – who were described as Rakshasas, Asurs, Daityas and Danavas in Puranas and religious scriptures – as valiant warriors and the original rulers of India. He portrayed Bali as

an ideal, just and glorious ruler whose kingdom extended from the modern Konkan in Maharashtra to the area around Ayodhya and Kashi.

Brahmins also believed that the battles between the Devas and the Rakshasas were real. But their description of these conflicts is so fantastical that the rivals seem to be the denizens of another world. Phule “humanized” the conflict between the Aryans and the non-Aryans embedded in the mythological narratives. He rejected the narratives based on miracles and myths and introduced his readers to a new history, in which the events mentioned cannot be dated precisely but appear to be entirely plausible. It can well be called an attempt to replace one tale with another. The latter may not be true but is at least more humanitarian in its concerns and more logical.

The Indus Valley Civilization was yet to be discovered in Phule’s time. Archaeological excavations at Harappa were launched in 1920 under the leadership of Dayaram Sahni and in 1921 at Mohenjodaro under the leadership of Rakhal Das Banerjee. These excavations proved that a great urban civilization flourished in the Indus Valley thousands of years before the arrival of Aryans in India. The recently unearthed remains from Rakhigarhi, Haryana, one of the main centres of this civilization, amply prove that it was a non-Aryan civilization.

Like many of the books of that period, *Gulamgiri* was also written in the form of a dialogue. One of the interlocutors is the author himself and the other is Dhondirao. The preface begins with a quote from the great Greek poet Homer: “The day that reduces a man to slavery takes from him the half of his virtue.”

CASTE DISCOURSE IN *GULAMGIRI*

In the seventh chapter of *Gulamgiri*, Phule turns to the creation of castes. He contends that the Mahar caste got its name from “Mahaari”. In the following chapter,

he talks about Parshuram, who “began the custom of calling those great mahaari kshatriyas by such insulting names as atishudra, mahar, antyaj, mang and chandal ...” To what extent Phule’s theories regarding the origin of castes can be accepted is not the issue. What is important is to know that the mythological narratives on which the Brahmins based their claims of superiority do not lend themselves to any definite and acceptable interpretation. Phule rejects both the mythological concept of ‘Parampurush’ and the theory of Chaturvarnya. In the course of his analysis, he appears indecent and rather too aggressive at places. Vishnushastri Chiplunkar has criticized him for “venturing into an area which belonged solely to the linguists”. Had Phule written *Gulamgiri* in a state of impatience and mental turmoil? If we examine *Gulamgiri* in the context of the efforts made by Phule for reforming society we can, to some extent, decipher the reason for his bitterness. Just imagine a 21-year-old taking to public life fired by the desire to transform society. He works consistently and tirelessly to that end for 25 years. But then he finds that no one really cares about the Shudras. His pain can be gauged from an abhang he penned around the time he wrote *Gulamgiri*. In that abhang, he describes the misery of a farmer.

Roughly translated, the abhang says, “His clothes are dirty and soiled, he is semi-naked, wearing rags for a headgear, he has to eat porridge of jawar, our farmers get no happiness.”

Phule has himself hinted at the significance of *Gulamgiri* in the introduction: “... it is very essential for human beings to be free. When man is free, he can clearly convey his thoughts to people through writing or speech. But if he does not have freedom, then he is unable to communicate his thoughts, however beneficial they might be to the others, and consequently, they just evaporate into thin air.”

(Originally published in forwardpress)

Excerpts from The Combahee River Collective Statement (a black feminist lesbian socialist organisation)

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WE are a collective of Black feminists who have been meeting together since 1974. [1] During that time we have been involved in the process of defining and clarifying our politics, while at the same time doing political work within our own group and in coalition with other progressive organizations and movements. The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face.

Contemporary Black feminism is the outgrowth of countless generations of personal sacrifice, militancy, and work by our mothers and sisters.

A Black feminist presence has evolved

most obviously in connection with the second wave of the American women's movement beginning in the late 1960s. Black, other Third World, and working women have been involved in the feminist movement from its start, but both outside reactionary forces and racism and elitism within the movement itself have served to obscure our participation.

Black feminist politics also have an obvious connection to movements for Black liberation, particularly those of the 1960s and 1970s. Many of us were active in those movements (Civil Rights, Black nationalism, the Black Panthers), and all of our lives were greatly affected and changed by their ideologies, their goals, and the tactics used to achieve their goals. It was our experience and disillusionment within these liberation movements, as well as experience on the periphery of the white male left, that led to the need to develop a politics that was anti-racist, unlike those of white women, and anti-sexist, unlike those of Black and white men.

Above all else, Our politics initially

sprang from the shared belief that Black women are inherently valuable, that our liberation is a necessity not as an adjunct to somebody else's may because of our need as human persons for autonomy. This may seem so obvious as to sound simplistic,

but it is apparent that no other ostensibly progressive movement has ever considered our specific oppression as a priority or worked seriously for the ending of that oppression. Merely naming the pejorative stereotypes attributed to Black women (e.g. mammy, matriarch, Sapphire, whore, bulldagger), let alone cataloguing the cruel, often murderous, treatment we receive, indicates how little value has been placed upon our lives during four centuries of bondage in the Western hemisphere. We realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation are us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work.

We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in Black women's lives as are the politics of class and race. We also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously

The major source of difficulty in our political work is that we are not just trying to fight oppression on one front or even two, but instead to address a whole range of oppressions. We do not have racial, sexual, heterosexual, or class privilege to rely upon, nor do we have even the minimal access to resources and power that groups who possess any of these types of privilege have.

The reaction of Black men to

feminism has been notoriously negative. They are, of course, even more threatened than Black women by the possibility that Black feminists might organize around our own needs. They realize that they might not only lose valuable and hardworking allies in their struggles but that they might also be forced to change their habitually sexist ways of interacting with and oppressing Black women. Accusations that Black feminism divides the Black struggle are powerful deterrents to the growth of an autonomous Black women's movement.

One issue that is of major concern to us and that we have begun to publicly address is racism in the white women's movement. As Black

feminists we are made constantly and painfully aware of how little effort white women have made to understand and combat their racism, which requires among other things that they have a more than superficial comprehension of race, color, and Black history and culture. Eliminating racism in the white women's movement is by definition work for white women to do, but we will continue to speak to and demand accountability on this issue.

In the practice of our politics we do not believe that the end always justifies the means. Many reactionary and destructive acts have been done in the name of achieving "correct" political goals. As feminists we do not want to mess over people in the name of politics. We believe in collective process and a non-hierarchical distribution of power within our own group and in our vision of a revolutionary society. We are committed to a continual examination of our politics as they develop through criticism and self-criticism as an essential aspect of our practice.

Dalit Feminism

By Sajag (Samata Hema Anil Jagtap), INDIA

“Who, just tell me, who the hell is that new girl? Doesn’t she know that she has to bow down to the master? Shameless bitch! How dare she pass me without showing due respect? At this, the girl’s in-laws and other elderly men from community fall at the man’s feet and beg for mercy. They request him to forgive her. But they ask for forgiveness not for the girl but for themselves also. The mother-in-law requests, “No, no kind master! That girl is a new animal in the herd! Quite foolish and ignorant. If she has erred, I her sasra, fall at your feet, but please forgive us for this crime.” – **‘The Prison We Broke’** by Babytai Kamble

WOMAN....a creature that is exploited, ill-treated, less valued and oppressed since centuries and centuries. Literature is a mirror image of society. So, she didn’t even get correctly placed there.

After realizing the patriarchal tyranny a feminist movement emerged gradually who talked about women and their issues. But it lacked something...something that was really necessary to be talked about. This ignorance led to the new wing of the movement called ‘Dalit Feminism’.

As a theoretical perspective, Dalit feminism revolves around experiences of Dalit women to understand patriarchy and interrelation of caste and gender. Mainstream women’s movement totally bypassed the caste system and their analysis of oppression was only around the axis of gender. They tagged all the women facing the tyranny of patriarchy under all-inclusive category “women”.

Women are women but what about those who are not even considered as women. Women’s experiences are differentiated on the basis of caste in India. All women are equal and equally exploited is the myth that mainstream women’s movement believed. But the harsh reality is that the nature and intensity

of women’s exploitation changes with respect to her social location that is her identity in a society which was null for Dalits so as their females.

Dalit feminists rejected feminist theory developed by non-Dalit women as it does not capture their reality. This awareness of Dalit women led to her emancipatory and liberating standpoint which was reflected in their writings.

Prominent writer Sharmila Rege highlighted this point in *“Dalit Women Talk Differently: Critique of ‘Difference’ and Towards Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position”*. She argues that feminist scholars have ignored and marginalized the contribution and intervention of Dalit women. Dalit women have always been vocal about their rights but their voices are largely ignored and unheard. This resulted in the assertion of Dalit women as a “different voice”. They challenged the totalization of feminist culture which not condemns oppression and violence based on caste-gender structures.

Dalit woman is dually subordinated, first as “Dalit” and then as “Woman”. Firstly she doesn’t have any identity and secondly, she is victim of patriarchal despotism. She is exploited

being Dalit, by upper caste people and also by her male family members or males from her community as per patriarchal rules. She is exploited by the upper-caste male as a sexual object or to command control on her community and by the upper-caste female while following social and cultural laws. Hence she becomes a most vulnerable creature in a human context. In the social ladder, she gets the bottom position as she faces a triple form of oppression that is by non-Dalit men, non-Dalit women and Dalit men. She is a victim of harsh abuse and symbolic/physical violence. For instance, the Khairlanji massacre (2006) where a Dalit girl Priyanka Bhotmange was sexually violated by upper caste people from her village and her brothers were made to rape her, and then the family was brutally killed except their father who was out of town. In India Nirbhaya got justice but Priyanka is still waiting for it. So, Dalit women are the most exploited that their experiences hold vital significance in understanding oppression.

A long legacy of Dalit women's writing and organizing contributes to Dalit feminism. Sant Soyarabai belonging to the Mahar community in the 14th century wrote abhangs about freedom. Her abhangs tell that she was aware of gender-caste discrimination in society.

Establishment of Santyashodhak movement by Mahatma Jotiba Phule in 1874 sowed the seeds of Dalit feminism. Tarabai Shinde talked about upper-caste patriarchy in her critique "*Stree Purush Tulana*" (*A Comparison Between Women and Men*) in 1882. It is regarded as the first modern Indian Feminist text. Mukta Salve wrote about the grief of Mahars and Mangs (sub-caste among Dalits) in her essay "*Mang Maharachya Dukhavishayi*" in 1885. This was a bold attack on the caste system underlining the nature of exploitation and subordination of women is differentiated on the basis of caste.

Then followed the Ambedkarite movement that mobilized Dalits and worked for politicalization of women's movement. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar burned the copy of Manusmriti on 25th December 1927 to protest against the religious legitimacy given to Dalits and women by it. The participation of women in the

Ambedkarite movement was a significant picture. Ambedkarite movement had a critical role in women's political radicalization. They participated in Mahad Chavdar Tale Satyagraha and Kalaram mandir Satyagraha along with various conferences held by Dr. Ambedkar in large numbers. The organizations like 'Buddhist Mahila Mandals' were formed in all Dalit dominated areas in Maharashtra. There was a practice of organizing 'Mahila Parishads' (women's conferences) along with every general meeting. Cadres of women leaders were also formed. Savitribai Borade and Ambubai Gaikwad belonging to Dalits were on the executive committee of a periodical named '*Janta*' (*The People*) started in 1930. The motto of the periodical was to develop political consciousness around caste-based oppression and caste patriarchy.

Mahila Parishads passed a resolution to reserve seats for Dalit women in legal councils. In 1942 the Dalit Mahila Federation formed in Nagpur worked for better working conditions for women mill workers, hostels for Dalit girls, right to divorce and the law against bigamy. The Third All India Untouchable Women's Conference was arranged at Nagpur where they highlighted the need for separate organizing by 'untouchable women' as Dalit organizations were not addressing Dalit women's issues.

In the post-Ambedkarite period, Dalit women participated in the land right struggle led by Dadasaheb Gaikwad as well as Namantar agitations that were a demand for naming Marathwada University as Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University which was late fulfilled in 1994. In December 1996, at 'Vikas Vanchit Dalit Mahila Parishad' (Marginalized Dalit Women's Conference) at Chandrapur a proposal was put forth to commemorate 25th December (the day when Dr. Ambedkar burnt the copy of manusmriti) as '*Bharatiya Stree Mukti Din*' (*Indian Women's Liberation Day*). It was a sign of Dalit women thinking rationally and expressing their opinions boldly.

Along with this a culture of 'gayan parties' developed in women too. A group of women or combined sang and wrote songs on

Dr. Ambedkar and focused anti-caste teaching. These groups were popular among villages. Hence they contribute in educating village women about progressive thoughts.

Many autonomous Dalit women's organizations established in the early 1990s which provided an ideological platform for nurturing Dalit feminism. This became a catalyst for intense debates around the issue of caste and gender and their interrelatedness. Thus, Dalit feminism got recognition as a distinct theory.

To understand Dalit feminism in a broader sense I have initiated the study of two autobiographies. One of them is Urmila Pawar's *'Aayadan'* (Translated as *'The Weave of My Life' a Dalit Woman's Memoirs*). The title represents the primary occupation of the Mahar community of weaving cane baskets and utensils. Urmila Pawar is a prominent Dalit feminist writer and also one of the pioneers of the Dalit Feminist movement. The writer was keenly conscious of her caste identity even as a child as she narrates some incidences like she was invited for lunch by her classmates but clearly told her not to bring food and later made fun of her eating, she was not allowed to touch the pot in collective cooking, her English teacher embarrassed her for her poor English and many more. She talks about how Dalit women were humiliated regularly in public places, during weddings, etc.

Urmila Pawar shares some womanly experiences after her marriage as well. In spite of her financial independence, she has to be dependent on someone. One of her experience is noted below.

"When I got my first salary, I could not believe that all that money was mine; that I could spend it the way I liked. Before marriage, I used to hand over my salary to my mother; now I started handling it over to my husband". (A 14)

Moreover, the *"Aayadan"* reflects on woman's struggle for self-identity and a sense of fulfilment in the background of caste inequalities and patriarchal attitudes of community and family towards women.

Another autobiography is *"Jina Amucha"* (Translated as *'The Prisons We Broke'*) by Babytai

Kamble. It is a collective account of Dalit women and their ordinariness. We find a quest for gaining self as well as communal identity out of patriarchal domination here. Babytai Kamble narrates the differences they had between them and high caste women regarding clothing and accessories. Dalit women were restricted even to copy and use the things in the same manner as wearing saris with borders. Other points she highlighted are superstitions in Dalits, how daughters-in-law were tortured inside the house as well as outside and physical violence. In fact, she had to hide her autobiography for twenty years from her husband as he would not have tolerated her idea of writing. She mentions that it was an Ambedkarite movement that brought them out from their prison. Self-identity can only be achieved through self-exploration and consciousness. Thus she has written autobiography to encourage women to fight against patriarchy to build their own identity.

Some more names coming to my mind are Shamila Rege's *'Writing Caste, Writing Gender'*, Durgabai Vyam's *'Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability'*, Bama's *'Karukku'* and Meena Kandasamy's *'Touch'*.

The title of the manifesto of the National Federation of Dalit Women (2003) is **'Transforming Pain into Power'** very aptly reflects the growing political articulation of the Dalit women's experiences of pain and agony into a powerful radical political identity. It is necessary to focus on the intersectionality of gender, race and caste in order to fully understand Dalit women's location. Because they are 'Dalits among Dalits'.

At last have a look at the conclusion paragraph of Sharmila Rege's essay. She emphasizes,

"The Dalit feminist standpoint...may originate in the works of Dalit feminist intellectuals but it cannot flourish if isolated from the experiences and ideas of other groups who must educate themselves about the histories, the preferred social relations and utopias and the struggles of the marginalized."

(Originally published on Velivada)

Excerpts from Babytai Kamble's Interview with Maya Pandit

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BABY Kamble was a veteran of the Dalit movement in Maharashtra. Inspired by the radical leadership of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, she had been involved with the struggle from a very young age. She had established a government approved residential school for socially backward students in Nimbure, a small village near Phaltan. She had been honoured with awards for her literary and social work. Collections of her poetry have also been published.

We present here a few excerpts from an interview published as part of the English version of her autobiography 'The Prisons We Broke', translated by **Maya Pandit**.

In your autobiography, there are very few references to your personal life. Can you tell us a little more about yourself?

Well, I wrote about what my community experienced. The suffering of my people became my own suffering. Their experiences became mine. So I really find it very difficult to think of myself outside of my community. Let me tell you, there were so many women around us. They were determined to get their children educated because their Baba [Ambedkar] had told them to do so. So our women enrolled their children in schools. Now, they were ordinary agricultural labourers. Where

could they get the money for paying fees to the English school? In those days, there were no concessions for the backward castes; schools did not receive any grants from the government. But our women used to find ways of overcoming this hurdle.

One woman had to pay ninety rupees as admission fee for her two sons in secondary school. Where was she to get this money? It was the rainy season. There was no work even in the fields. So there was no money! She couldn't talk about this to her husband. He was a construction worker. He would have put an end to their sons' education and turned them into labourers working for a contractor. Her relatives too were poor, there was no way she could borrow any money from them. Then she got a brainwave. They had saved some jowar for the rainy season in a big cane container. When her husband left for work, she called her sons, took out all the jowar with their help and quietly sold it to a merchant. The money was adequate for paying the fees. When her husband came to know of this, he, of course, thrashed her. Besides, they had to starve throughout the rainy season. But she did not allow her sons' education to suffer. They passed their matriculation examination and later on even went to college.

Were women different from men in

this respect? And why did they believe in Baba so much?

It was only because of women that education became possible for us. Generally men would say, 'Why put our son into school? As if he is going to become a teacher or a clerk! It's better if he starts working as a labourer like me. At least he will earn a little money! You will ruin us with this madness! Sending children to school indeed!'

But women paid no heed to such talk. Dr Ambedkar had said, "You believed in god. You gave away generations to him. Now give me a chance. Give me this generation! Make sacrifices for 20 years. Enroll your children in schools. Go hungry if you must! But educate your children. After twenty years, you yourselves will come and tell me what is better— god or education?"

These words of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar touched the hearts of our women. All the highly educated men that you see today are from that generation. They are all placed in high positions. But their children have not done so well! May be it's because of the new affluence. They are engrossed in that.

What was the contribution of women to the Dalit political movement then? How did women participate in it?

Well, more than half of the people in the movement were women.

And how did the men respond to this? What was their reaction?

Let me tell you. It so happened that on most occasions, activists who came for public meeting in the chawdi were from Mumbai. The entire community gathered to listen to them. These activists used to publicly say, 'Look, it is women who are in charge of homes. And therefore it is they who have contributed to the superstitious god culture'. They are always leaders in

such things. It is always women who become possessed by spirits. They have played a big role in making superstitions so powerful. It is the woman who is the real doer. So if women can bring darkness, they can also bring light into our lives.' And men agreed with this. "This man, Ambedkar,' they said, 'has come from beyond the seven seas. He is so well educated. He understands things better than any of us. There is a point in what he says.' So then women began to attend meetings even at far off places. They would carry bhakris to last them for four or five days.

And who looked after their homes?

Older women, of course. Their mothers and mothers-in-law took education extremely seriously. And they participated in all the programmes as well. They would just leave their children and homes behind and participate in various programmes, such as morchas, forcible entry into temples, hotels and such other places. They got a lot of encouragement from their men folk as well. And both their young and old family members staunchly stood by them. Baba sent telegrams and asked people to do something. Immediately preparations got underway. My brother was in boarding. He was in the ninth standard and I was in the sixth standard. I must have been eleven or twelve years of age then. Because of my brothers, I always got chance to participate in there programmes.

What was the experience like?

That was a great struggle. There was constant confrontation with the upper castes. They would say, "These Mahars are rising above themselves. We won't allow them to enter the village.' Everything was out of bounds for us. We couldn't even go the flour mill. They tried to make life difficult for us. It was slightly different in

my own house, though. My father used to manage things somehow. My mother was not allowed to go out of the house. It was he and my brother, both of them activists, who used to get provisions and other household stuff.

What about school?

All our leaders used to accompany us to school. Babasaheb's words- Education is your right, you must go to school – were stamped on our hearts. So there was no question of our not going to school. But once we were in school, we were given a different treatment. We were made to sit in a corner on one side. Ours was a girls' school. It was actually a Brahmin school since all the teachers and a majority of the students were Brahmins. The teachers used to be awfully worried about our polluting them and harassed us a lot as if we were their enemies. They treated us like lepers, really. They wouldn't even look at us. Our classmates were all upper caste girls and they too used to be afraid of us, constantly worried about our touching and polluting them. They used to scorn us as if we were some kind of despicable creatures. We had no friends among the Brahmin girls. When we went for excursions, they used to offer us food from their lunch boxes but they would never accept anything from us. This must have been around 1945.

When did you get married? There are hardly any references to your personal life in the autobiography.

I was just 13 when I got married and I was considered too old! I had passed my fourth standard. My husband's name was Kondiba Kamble and he was a student in my brother's school and stayed in the same hostel. My husband's family saw me and gave their approval. His family was actually related to our family... Now Babasaheb had told people that

marriages should be performed according to the gandharva ritual that was quite different from the traditional way of marriage. He told us that there was no need to invite a Brahmin priest. The bride and the groom did not have to tie the bashinga and the mundawali. In fact, Babasaheb said, 'Don't waste four days on the wedding. Save time and money as well. Just one sari for the bride and one pair of new clothes for the groom are good enough. Don't invite the Brahmin priest to perform the marriage rites. Let somebody from among your own people do it. And let the marriage be performed at your own chawdi.' Mine was one of the first marriages to be performed in the new manner. After the deeksha ceremony, marriages began to be performed according to the Buddhist way. Till then we followed the practice of gandharva vivaha that Babasaheb laid down for us. Anyway, for my marriage, my brother wrote the mangalashtakas that were in praise of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar's work. [...]

Poverty was common to my husband's house and mine. Getting a job was next to impossible. Who would give work to a person who had been educated only up to the fourth or the seventh standard? It was difficult to survive.

Now Dr. Ambedkar used to say, 'Don't get into jobs. Try to start some small business which you can successfully run in your locality. Don't start with the business of milk. Who will buy that from you? Your people don't drink milk, and the upper castes won't buy milk from you. Start with something which you can manage to sell in your own community.'

Then I had an idea. Both my husband and I were jobless. So, I thought, why not begin with something like grapes? There were plenty of farms around and the rate at the time was five rupees per

kilogram. But you could get one kilogram of loose grapes for eight annas. Poor people who could not afford to buy grapes in bunches, would buy these. So we decided to sell loose grapes. I used to go to the farms and buy basketful of loose grapes. My capital of eight annas would fetch me one rupee or sometimes even more in a day. That was more than one hundred percent of profit. I saved all of it. Gradually, my savings swelled and reached the huge sum of forty eight rupees. Then we added vegetables to our merchandise. Gradually, along with vegetables, we added provisions like oil, salt, and such other stuff to our list. This also fetched us a tidy profit. So we decided to expand our business. I told my brother and husband to stock our house with grocery items. In those days, we did not stay in a separate house but with my husband's family. We used to sell these things from my mother's house as it was right in front of the chawdi. We did not spend any of the money that we earned on food or household expenses. My in-laws helped me a lot. They allowed us to stay in their house and shared whatever meager food they had. In the next three months we bought provisions worth three hundred and fifty rupees. The quantity was so large that the house literally overflowed with the stuff. There were many Mahar households in Mangalwar Peth. They all became our customers.

Our business picked up very well. Then we decided to live independently, but in the same house. That meant a great deal of additional work for me, like cooking and fetching water. I used to get up at three o'clock in the morning and fetch water from the public tap in Mangalwar Peth. By this time I had two children. There was a canal near our house. I used to wash all our clothes there. Next I would do the cooking!

I used to finish everything by nine in the morning and then go to the shop. Till then my husband would sit at the counter. Thereafter, I attended to the customers and he went off to the market to buy provisions.

Did you have any problem in getting provisions?

We never had any problems in buying anything. They wouldn't admit us inside the shop but they did supply us with whatever we wanted. We sort of flourished. I gave birth to ten children of whom three died during childhood. I never went to a hospital. All my babies were born at home. My mother and my mother-in-law would come and help me.

Where there any other women activists at that time who worked along with you? Women who addressed public meetings, organized people?

Not really, women started participating much later, when they became educated. There were very few that worked along with me. We used to address meetings, give speeches. My grandmother was from Mumbai. She had worked with the workers' unions. Then gradually more women began to participate. I must tell you about the women in the Mahila Mandal that Raja Malojiraje Nimbalkar and his wife Lakshmibai had started in Phaltan. The Raja had taken the initiative and told the Rani that at least one woman from every Mahar household in Mangalwar Peth was to be made a member of the Mahila Mandal. Since my father never allowed my mother to go, I became a member. There were quite a few militant women from our community who became members. They would not hesitate to fight for their rights. They demanded chairs to sit and participated in the deliberations.

(Originally published in roundtable india)

Bastar

By NANCY ADAJANIA, INDIA

POET OF THE UNDERWORLD

NAMDEO Dhasal is one of my closest friends. This surprises many people who know him and me because of the controversies that his political activities generate and because they cannot, even by association, connect me with his political stances which have been inconsistent. He was one of the founders of Dalit Panthers in 1972, a militant activist organization, at that time inspired by the Black Panthers in the United States, or so it seemed. In some ways it fitted into the global mosaic of anger, protest, demonstrations, violence, and youthful revolutionary upsurge that swept across France, Germany, parts of Europe, Africa, America, and Asia.

But the Dalit Panthers were rooted in Bombay and were a product of the history of the city and the immigrant Dalit youth who came to it, scarred by the memories of their oppression in their native villages and small towns, and inspired by their late leader Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. After Ambedkar's death in the mid-1950s, his Republican Party of India was in a shambles. Small-time and self-styled Dalit leaders were either seduced by the ruling Indian National Congress or by its political rivals who desperately wooed the votes of the minorities. By 1972, the Shiv Sena had already emerged as a powerful force in Bombay, thanks again to the politics of the ruling Congress party led by Indira Gandhi that had thrust upon the unwilling Marathas a minority Chief Minister in Vasantrao Naik.

Naik was a patron of Thackeray in

those days, and so were some big players in business. Following Ambedkar, many Maharashtrian Dalits had quit Hinduism to liberate themselves from a caste-system that stamped them with a lifelong lowly status. They were uncomfortable with any kind of Hindu cultural and political rhetoric. They were looking for a platform in their fight for equality and freedom.

There was an articulate Dalit avant garde that stormed the Marathi literary scene and attracted nation-wide attention. The great fiction-writer Baburao Bagul had already made his mark. Namdeo Dhasal, Raja Dhale, Arjun Dangle, and J.V. Pawar were all young writers who wanted to shake the Marathi literary establishment at its very foundations and had in them the spirit and the talent to do so. They wanted to take their activism beyond literature and culture directly into the political arena. Yet they also knew, from the outset, that as a minority they would only be small-time players in electoral politics or even be made mere stooges. They found guerilla tactics a very attractive weapon in the ethos of the big city where the poorer neighbourhoods were ruled by organized crime and where politicians used the underworld as a source of secret weapons.

Three decades have passed. The Dalit Panthers still survive and Namdeo Dhasal continues to be their leader. But today, Dalit Panthers are allied with the Shiv Sena, once their sworn arch-enemy. The post-Babri Masjid riots in Bombay and the bomb blasts that followed make the 1970s seem remote

history. Crime and politics have become more sophisticated and organized, with globalisation investing a new spirit in them, and cell-phones and the internet helping them to refurbish their own self-image.

Today, Namdeo Dhasal is part of the establishment. Or is he again in disguise, still fighting his own kind of guerilla war? He lives in an upper-class neighbourhood in the western part of Mumbai, Andheri. He drives a flashy sports car. He has an armed bodyguard accompanying him wherever he goes. He uses a mobile phone. He has a constant stream of visitors seeking favours. Namdeo has contacts with the ruling politicians as well as with the opposition. For his distinguished contribution to literature he was awarded the title Padma Shri by the President of India. He should have been nationally honoured a long time ago but it was during the Shiv Sena-BJP alliance's regime that he received this honour.

Nobody misses the irony in this. The Sena-BJP alliance represents all that Namdeo's writing has fiercely attacked and with remarkable consistency. During the Emergency of 1975-77, Indira Gandhi dropped all cases against him and his Dalit Panthers after he had a long meeting with her explaining his position. During that period he published one of his long poems on Indira Gandhi, a sycophantic work reminiscent of M.F. Hussain's *Durga*, no less. All this is true. Such acrobatics are not new in Indian politics. So who does Namdeo represent? Dalits? Or just himself? Why should he be taken seriously? I am asked these questions as though as a friend I was also his keeper. Why am I his friend? Why is he my friend? Questions of conscience. Questions of integrity. Questions of ideological consistency. Questions of honesty. Exasperating questions.

To many, Namdeo Dhasal's political 'career', if it may be called so, describes a three hundred and sixty degree course. Born in a small hamlet called Pur-Kanersar in the

Khed Taluk of Pune district in 1949, Namdeo is 'almost' one of *Midnight's Children*. His father was a small-time Mahar farmer who, along with his fellow-untouchables, lived off land granted to them just outside the village limits. Namdeo was his only surviving child. Unable to feed his family he went to Mumbai to work as a Muslim butcher's assistant. He would bring home daily wages and discarded portions of beef. Namdeo and his mother joined him when Namdeo was about six or seven. He recalls his sense of awe as he stepped out of the Victoria Terminus station. His eyes were immediately arrested by a huge hoarding of the film *Mother India* then showing at the Capitol cinema.

A brilliant student at school, he was an avid reader and a prodigiously talented writer at a precocious age. In his early teens, he fell in love with an upper caste Hindu girl and eloped with her to Pune, nearly causing a communal riot where he lived in Mumbai. The 'couple' were eventually separated and the issue was hushed up.

After his schooling, Namdeo read Ambedkar and was attracted to Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia's brand of desi socialism and he saw a great deal in common between Ambedkar's vision of a truly secular, truly socialist, pluralistic and republican, federalist India. Not educated beyond high school, Namdeo is largely self-educated. He is a voracious reader and a sharp-witted conversationist. The only languages he is fluent in are his native Marathi and that colourful Mumbai-grown hybrid Hindi with some Urdu flavouring. God knows where he picked his knowledge of contemporary poetry but he will surprise you by quoting Octavio Paz or by making references to cubism and surrealism. His own understanding of the rich and varied deeper resources of language, his insights into the art of poetry, will not fail to amaze you. He is a prodigy possessing an unschooled sophistication. Where does this

come from?

Disillusioned with the Lohiaite socialists, though not with Lohia the thinker, Namdeo was attracted to Marxism and was briefly drawn to the communists. He married Mallika, then only a teenager, the younger daughter of 'Shahir' (people's bard) Amar Shaikh, who was a member of the Communist Party of India and who was a great lyricist and singer whose finest hour was during the 'Samyukta Maharashtra Movement' for a Marathi-speaking state. The veteran Communist leader SA Dange took him under his wing.

The great 19th century Maharashtrian social revolutionary Jotiba Phule and Ambedkar—both now officially iconised across the political spectrum—were his earliest gods and continue to be so even now, and it is difficult to reconcile them with any but the earliest Marx, not to mention later sworn Marxists such as Lenin and Mao. Anyone trying to evolve a fusion of all these finds himself or herself trapped in complexities, contradictions, and ambiguities beyond resolve. Primarily an activist, Namdeo cannot be expected to master the intellectual jugglery and trickery mere ideologues can display. All one can question is his practice of what he professes and in the Indian politics of the last fifty years, there is no leader who can really pass that sort of an acid test.

I would rather go straight into the heart of the matter. What is it that makes Namdeo a wonderful human being and an outstanding poet by any standards? For that is the very foundation of my friendship with him.

Namdeo Dhasal, the poet, was in his mid-twenties when he published his epoch-making first collection of poems *Golpitha* named after the notorious centre of prostitution in central Mumbai where he grew up—Dhor Chawl in the Arab Galli near Golpitha, the 'black hole' of Mumbai's traditional red light district. He

was surrounded by small-time smugglers, drug-traffickers, 'supari'-killers, thieves, loan-sharks' henchmen and goons living on protection-money.

This was then the heart of Mumbai's underworld and even today possesses the characteristics of a neighbourhood where everything illicit, criminal, nefarious, exploitative, and inhuman finds a natural home. It is Mumbai's terminal hell-hole that much later Mira Nair found as a vivid cinematic location for her famous film *Salaam Bombay*. Playwright Vijay Tendulkar, who wrote the introduction to the first edition of *Golpitha*, was given a guided tour of the neighbourhood by Namdeo before that introduction was written. Since then Namdeo has played Virgil to many a literary Dante, though Dante was only inventing a Virgil, and Virgil was no native of the Inferno.

What for other literary visitors was only a voyeuristic tour was the place where Namdeo mined his striking metaphors for hell and Tendulkar was able to perceive where the life-form of Namdeo's poetry sprang from and survived.

"I do not create values," wrote Henry Miller once, "I defecate and nourish". The poems in *Golpitha* often contain a scatological element, or even an elemental scatology and their reader needs a strong stomach to withstand their relentlessly repulsive ethos. And yet, there is a tragic lyrical luminosity about the evocative brutal imagery, the savaging of humanity with its muffled cry of pain that the poems carve out.

Golpitha occupies a position equal to that of T.S.Eliot's *The Waste Land* not only in Marathi but in pan-Indian poetry and it could have been written only by a Dalit. An earlier Marathi poetic classic was B.S. Mardhekar's *Kahi Kavita* that comes from a literary culture much similar to Eliot's. Namdeo's *Golpitha* has no literary foregrounding because it springs from an 'untouchable' source in every sense of the

term. It reveals whatever others would strive to shove under the carpet of poetry. This is my considered opinion more than three decades after its publication and I had no hesitation in writing that Namdeo's poetry, from that outstanding start, is Nobel Laureate material. He has published six more collections of poetry since, and each has the stamp of his unique genius. Marathi literary critics, always about a quarter-of-a-century behind the achievement of their native contemporaries, are only now beginning to acknowledge his worth, and still rather grudgingly.

Namdeo Dhasal is not important just because he happens to be Dalit, or because he is a Marathi poet. He is, arguably, one of the major world poets of the Twentieth century. His poetry is very striking and complex. When he presented it at the First Internationales Literaturfestival in Berlin in 2001, he made a sensation. Yet, in his home country, he is yet to be discovered outside of Maharashtra – even though a few of his poems have been published in Hindi, Bangla, and English translations.

In *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, VS Naipaul devotes a whole chapter to his meeting with Namdeo, but fails to comprehend its significance as his communication with Namdeo relied on an interpreter. Dom Moraes, too, has described his encounter with him. Being more perceptive, Dom not only did his homework on Namdeo but also got me to translate some of Namdeo's poems to understand him better.

There is something undeniably exotic and fascinating about a dalit poet who is also a militant political activist. Namdeo makes good copy for journalists: he grew up in Mumbai's infamous red light district, has rubbed shoulders with notorious gangsters as well as the top political leadership of Maharashtra; he's been awarded a Padma Shri, and is rated highly among contemporary Marathi writers. But unless they are fluent in Marathi — the only

language Namdeo speaks — they won't know what they are missing. Very few non-Marathi readers know that Namdeo is not only an outstanding poet but also the author of two impressive novellas. A brilliant book of essays has been compiled from his journalistic columns — *Andhale Shatak* or *The Blind Century*, and his amazing memoir *Those Magical Days of Dalit Panthers* was published in a special issue of the magazine *ABaKaDaEe*.

His poetry is both a translator's nightmare and occasional delight. I rediscover it every now and then. Some years ago, the former Heidelberg Indologist and translator of Hindi and Bengali poetry into German, Lothar Lutze and I worked on some of Namdeo's poems. Lutze is one of the finest readers of contemporary European poetry and a translator with a rare acumen for poetic tonality and we shared our delight in translating Namdeo together. Since Lutze knows no Marathi, I provided him answers to his very subtle and probing queries about each word, phrase, metaphor, and idiom. Even Marathi readers find Namdeo's poetry often obscure and complex. A translator's chosen accountability made me struggle as I answered Lutze's questions. Judging by German readers' response to Lutze's translations, I now think it was worth our while.

Some years ago, for a special issue of an American journal devoted to South Asian literature, the late A.K. Ramanujan similarly translated a couple of Namdeo's poems with the assistance of a Marathi speaker, and recently Vinay Dharwadkar has done so for another American literary journal. But I am amazed at the apathy shown by translators in Indian languages, including English, to this major contemporary poet. Bangla translators may be excused. But Hindi? Malayalam? Kannada? Gujarati? The Indian literary scene is rich but poorly cross-pollinated and that, as a translator, depresses me most.

(Originally published in *Outlook*)

I Refuse, I Reject and I Resist!

By ABHAY XAXA

I am not your data, nor am I your vote bank,
I am not your project or any exotic museum object,
I am not the soul waiting to be harvested,
Nor am I the lab where your theories are tested,
I am not your cannon fodder or the invisible worker,
or your entertainment at India Habitat Centre,
I am not your field, your crowd, your history,
your help, your guilt, medallions of your victory,
I refuse, reject, resist your labels,
your judgments, documents, definitions,
your models, leaders and patrons,
because they deny me my existence, my vision, my space,
your words, maps, figures, indicators,
they all create illusions and put you on pedestal,
from where you look down upon me,
So I draw my own picture, and invent my own grammar,
I make my own tools to fight my own battle,
For me, my people, my world, and my Adivasi self!"

(Originally published in Sabrang)

History and Struggle of Dalits and Changing Dynamics in View of Jammu Kashmir Politics

By GULSHAN AZAD (ISD)

Dalits living in the state of Jammu and Kashmir have remained neglected so far due to the internal conflicts in the state and Kashmir centric politics. This is the reason why question of Dalits remained unaddressed for so many years in the state. Identity formation among Dalits is overshadowed by other dominant identities that are shaped by dominant political discourse of the state.

Due to the overall conflict politics in which the state of Jammu and Kashmir has been embroiled, conflict related issues have gained prominence over social issues confronting the people. There is not much space for any social movements or mobilization on the basis of Caste, gender or class. All politics revolves around larger issues of political identity.

FIGHT FOR RESERVATION RIGHTS.

The land reforms implemented in 1951 and 1971 transformed the social fabric of Jammu and Kashmir when substantial land was transferred to hitherto exploited and oppressed sections. The land reforms brought positive changes to the occupation of Dalits. It helped to make a shift in the occupation of Dalits from caste-specific occupation to agriculture. Land reform program was extensively successful in transferring land to Dalits. But other issue like reservation benefits did not get

addressed till 1970 which deprived Dalits from taking benefits of affirmative action. It, however changed, after a strong agitation was started by Shaheed Amarnath Bhagat.

Dalits of Jammu & Kashmir, after framing of the Indian Constitution, did not get the reservation benefits at state level due to autonomy of state from the Constitution. Due to conflict and lack of political will among leadership of the time, they failed to address this issue which led to anger amongst Dalits. The movement for reservation by Dalits had however, started way back in 1946 when the depressed classes of Jammu and Kashmir under the banner of Harijan Mandal organised a Dalit Sammelan in RS Pura. Another protest was held in Chhan Arorian in the Kathua district in 1956. The people of the SC community sat on a hunger strike for 17 days under the leadership of Babu Milkhi Ram. The main demands included the stoppage of atrocities against Dalits, safeguarding their life and property, and giving them ownership rights on the land they were cultivating.

Following the non-implementation of the reservation promise by the State government, a Jammu-based leader, Bhagat Amarnath sat on hunger strike seeking

reservations for Dalits. Born in Batote, Amarnath shifted to Jammu's Shaheedi Chowk in the mid-1960s where he started mobilizing Dalits to highlight the issues of the community.

The movement to get reservation rights was intensified in 1970. Meetings were organized in various villages to unite the people of the community. A memorandum of demands was submitted to the Government in April 1970 under which an SRO was issued however remained unimplemented. Soon, Amarnath along with other leaders went on a hunger strike at Karan Park, near the Civil Secretariat Jammu. The government avoided a response, forcing Amarnath to convert his fast into fast-unto-death. His condition deteriorated forcing the government to shift him to SMGS hospital. However, On 1st June 1970, Amarnath passed away as his health deteriorated. His death forced the government to take concerted efforts. First notification for reservation in services for Dalits was issued.

Land reforms and affirmative action policy somehow improved the socio-economic condition of Dalits in the state. However, this does not indicate that the situation of all members of the community has improved. Over a period of more than sixty years, a vast section of Dalits continues to remain at the economic and socio-political margins. In fact, a bulk of the Dalit population still serves as marginal workers in low-paying occupations. The dilution of traditional structures of caste oppression, while reducing caste-based extremities such as physical violence, has not wiped away many other related ills, which include exclusion and oppression in everyday life.

AFTER ABROGATION OF ARTICLE 370. SOME HOPES AND WORRIES.

Many laws have been implemented in Jammu and Kashmir for Dalits. Due to

which a hope has arisen in the community. Many welfare schemes are being implemented, but a concern has also increased due to changes in some laws. Due to the amendments in the land laws, the Dalit community may face new problems in the coming days. This community does not have much big land holdings and is also not financially capable enough to escape from the land mafia.

Post abrogation of article 370, changes in various land related laws are impacting the Dalits of Jammu Kashmir. Recent anti-encroachment drive in Jammu Kashmir to retrieve state land has impacted the Dalits. The land which was withdrawn from big landlords in 1971 and handed over to poor tillers including Dalits, is now being snatched from the latter and even some mutations have been cancelled. The Revenue officials have started erecting boards and poles on the lands of the poor, some have even sown their crops in the fields. In Kathua, Samba, Jammu district people held protest against this policy which resulted in slowdown of eviction drive by the administration.

Recently Dalits in Rajouri district faced discrimination even in compensation given by the government in militancy related killings. The administration announced rupees one lakh compensation. Later on, LG announced additional five lakh compensation to two Dalits who were killed outside an army camp in Rajouri. Both family have accepted the compensation after the assurance of authorities of inquiry in the killings. In January, 2023, six people were killed in a militant attack in which LG administration announced 10 lakh for each of the family of the victims and government job as compensation. Dalits in Jammu have asked administration to treat their slain community members on a par with upper-

caste Hindus. Administration does not pay much heed on this matter .

For the last two-three years, various cases of caste atrocities have happened in the Jammu region where authorities failed to take cognizance in a strict manner and they are frequently applying SCs and STs (Prevention of Atrocities) Act which is recently extended in J&K . The extension of this law is welcome step . But its awareness among implementing authorities and people is more important. Authorities are either unaware of, or unwilling to use the provisions of the law. The first case under the PoA Act was registered in June 2020. Earlier there was no specific law to deal with caste based atrocities in J&K.

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST VALMIKIS AND WEST PAKISTAN REFUGEES.

The Valmiki enjoyed reservation under Scheduled Caste category across the country but this community which migrated from Punjab to Jammu in 1957-58 on the assurance of giving them rights by the state government was denied rights by all previous State Governments. After the abrogation of article 370 Valmiki community granted voting , jobs and educational rights by the government. Earlier they were only eligible for safai karmachari jobs at state level . This is ironical how state discriminate on the basis of caste with this community for last 60 years . Other community who faced discrimination is West Pakistan refugees (WPR) who were migrated from Pakistan in 1947. They also deprived from their rights for last 70yrs in the State . Most of them are Dalits and now they granted their rights after the August 2019 . Earlier they were denied from Permanent resident certificate which is required for jobs and ownership rights over land. Both communities fought for their rights in the last 70yrs. The previous Kashmiri leadership is responsible to a large extent

for neglecting the rights and concerns of these communities.

CULTURAL ASSERTION OF DALITS .

Dalits in India have been struggling to secure equality in society. Jammu region is also not separate from this struggle. There might be variations in the modes of assertion, but the struggle's objective is to achieve self-respect and dignity and their constitutional rights. The one of mode they adopt to assert their identity is the cultural assertion by celebrating their Guru's birth (Nabha Das , Ravidas , Kabir) anniversary, Prakash Diwas (enlightenment day) organising rallies like Shoba Yatra and defying some rituals developing new practices according to the teaching of their community Gurus. And the construction of Guru temples is the phenomenon of creating spaces for the community voices. Seeking the dalit identity by renaming their community's name after their Guru's name has initiated a new phenomenon of cultural assertion and mobilisation of various Dalit communities.

Community nomenclature on the name of their guru mobilises these communities to assert their rights in the social and political sphere. On the other side, in the political sphere, many pressure groups work for the rights of Dalits.

But still In Jammu and Kashmir, each of the 13 Scheduled Caste tries to distinguish themselves from others. The paradox of the modern economic transformation is such that these different caste groups become increasingly alike and are in competition with each other like economic as well in political. This competition among the Dalit communities is working against the construction of an overarching Dalit identity in Jammu region where their concentration is quite significant (17.44 per cent of the total population of the Jammu region).

The Future of Poetry

By **CHRISTOPHER CAUDWELL**



....Continued from previous issue

The future was once a place to which one relegated one's hopes and aspirations: a place where one took revenge for the world's unkindness by holding its future richness to the narrow categories

of the present.

Of the future one can only dream – with greater or less success. Yet to dream is not to associate “freely” but to have certain phantasies, a certain reshuffling of memory-images of past reality blended and reorganised in a new way, because of certain real causes in present reality. Even dream is determined, and a movement in dream reflects perhaps a real movement into daylight of material phenomena at present unrecognised. That is why it is possible to dream with accuracy of the future – in other words, to predict scientifically. This is the prophetic and world-creating power of dream. It derives its world-creating power, not by virtue of being dream – this is denied by the phantasies of madmen – but because it reflects in the sphere of thought a movement which, with the help of dream, can be fully realised in practice. It draws its creative power, like the poetry of the harvest festival, from its value as a guide and spur to action. It is dream already passed out of the sphere of dream into that of social revolution. It is the dream, not of an individual, but of a man reflecting in his individual consciousness the creative rôle of a whole class, whose movement is given in the material conditions of society.

Again and again we have emphasised the importance of studying poetry as an organic part of society, historically – that is, in movement. But movement for its complete specification requires that we state not only from where but to where. In our survey of its past we were already standing in its future – our present – but now, to understand its present, we must think ourselves into the future. We can only do this broadly; we can only predict a quantitative movement produced by the most fundamental and elementary forces. Sociology as a real science is still only in its infancy because science is not mere contemplation; it arises from an active struggle with reality, whose successive changes are generalised in a scientific law. The science of sociology is therefore a product of revolutionary activity, for this is the activity which changes social reality. Man has not yet learned fully to control himself.

This movement will be fought out in our own consciousnesses and will be the very force enlarging and transforming them. Thus a whole new world of values will be born, which we can no more describe in terms of quality than a man can look down on himself.

The first limitation must make us careful of any predictions too exact and detailed – a small alteration can often make a quality transform itself into its opposite. The other limitation should set us on our guard against reducing the novelty of the future to the stale terms of the present.

The productive forces released by capitalism have developed to a stage where they are no longer compatible with the limitations which engendered

“automatically,” for history is made by men’s actions, although their actions by no means always have effect they are intended to have. The results of history are the net product of actions willed by men, but the results of history are by no means willed by any men.

To-day all bourgeois culture struggles in the throes of its Basal crisis. The contradictions whose tension first drove on the development of society’s productive forces are now wrecking them and a new system of social relations is already emerging from the womb of the old – that of communism. Communism is not an ideal, it is the inevitable solution of the ripening contradictions in capitalism. On the one hand the increase of organisation in the factories; on the other hand the increase of competition for private profit between the factories. On the one hand an unparalleled development of productive forces; on the other hand a system of economy continually generating crises which result in a restriction of production. On the one hand an increase in international communication, unity of consciousness and interweaving of production; on the other hand an increasing nationalism and enmity. On the one hand a growing desire for peace; on the other hand an increasing preparation for war. Abroad idle capital wildly searching for profit; at home idle hands vainly searching for work. At one end of society the creation of a diminishing number of plutocrats with an income, power and purchasing capacity increasing beyond the dreams of earlier society; at the other end the growth of an army without possessions, without work, without hope to a degree unknown to any previous civilisation. On the one hand an efflorescence of the sciences and the arts in a new universe of technique; on the other hand their separation into spheres whose disintegration and contradiction reduces knowledge to chaos and men to spiritual despair.

These contradictions could be multiplied indefinitely, because they represent at various levels of social organisation the working-out of the basic bourgeois contradiction – freedom as the anarchic ignorance of social relations. This ignorance can only mean freedom to one class, the class whose existence depends on its continually revolutionising its own basis and therefore on its continually preparing the conditions for its own destruction. The “free” market – the blind lawlessness by means of which the laws of anarchy brutally assert themselves – has governed the bourgeois mind for four centuries. For four centuries it has idealised this one freedom, freedom from all social restrictions except that by which the bourgeois class lives – restriction of the means of production to itself. This formula means that freedom must increasingly be elevated to a vague ideal plane, for to interpret bourgeois freedom materially is to announce openly the claim of one class to monopolise the means of freedom. The social product is the condition of freedom, and to monopolise it means monopolising such freedom as society has produced. Stripped to its naked essence the bourgeois formula of freedom is all too true – for the bourgeois class. So stripped, it exposes its true significance. It shows that all the bourgeois demands for the equality of human souls, for the freedom of the individual, for the realisation of personal worth, stop short of the one issue which could make these demands real for the exploited majority. They stop short of attacking the private property of the few which is the condition for the annihilation of property for the many. They stop short of attacking the monopolisation of the surplus social product by the few which is the condition of the slavery of the many to necessity. This does not, however, shame the bourgeois into withdrawing his claims and ceasing altogether to talk about freedom and personal worth. On the contrary, this understanding by the unfree of the essence

of his formula forces him to detach it still further from material reality and lift it completely into an ideal realm where it blossoms and spreads without restraint, forming an inverted world of ideal freedom which is at once a protest against real misery and an expression of real misery – a wholly bourgeois phantasy, the religion of humanism. It is precisely as the sum of human freedom diminishes in society that this phantastic ideal world of liberty and personal worth reaches its most characteristic development.

A class exists whose unfreedom is dependent on bourgeois private property. Its road to freedom is the destruction of the bourgeois right and therefore the destruction of the class whose continued existence depends on that right. This unfree class has long been famous as the proletariat. It is not merely the most suffering class of modern society. This typically bourgeois conception of it overlooks its most important rôle. History has always known a most-suffering class since classes existed. Slaves in ancient society, serfs and peasants in medieval society, wage-slaves in modern society, their miseries have been apparently ineradicable from the conscience of society since the day when economic production reached a level where a man could produce more than his means of subsistence and it became profitable to exploit other men. "The poor ye have always with you." Buddha, Christ and Luther accepted the sufferings of the major part of humanity as part of the necessary lot of life on this world, and called into being a whole phantastic other world to redress the balance, to soothe the suffering and therefore the revolt of tortured men.[1]

But the movement of capitalist economy lays the foundations of its destruction by the way in which it creates its most suffering class. Its organisation of the proletariat into huge factories creates the conditions for a shadow, workers' state behind the bourgeois state; the use of the exploited by the

bourgeoisie in their early struggles for power educates the proletariat politically; the need of the proletariat to form its own organisations to protect itself in its struggle for part of the surplus value of its labour raises its political education to a higher plane; the improved communication and universal education necessary for capitalist economy welds it into a compact mass; the bourgeoisie proves its final incompetence to rule by the onset of permanent crisis in which it is unable to secure its slaves in the conditions of their slavery, and instead of being fed by them is forced to feed them, to hurl them into the concentration camp or the fighting line. The rise of permanent unemployment is the doom of an epoch; it foreshadows the end of the prehistoric or class era of society, when men's actions made history, but a history quite other than what they meant to make.

The relentless law of capitalist competition, with its tendency to a falling rate of interest only offset by actions which hasten its own fall, accelerates the rise of monopolies which compete still more bitterly among themselves, until the contradiction between social organisation in the factory and individual ownership of the factories reaches its height.

The vast majority of the people see themselves faced by a few who have increasingly monopolised the means of production. This concentration, so far from easing the passage to socialism, makes it more painful and disturbed, because the increasing irrationality of the privilege on which all capitalist economy turns forces the bourgeoisie to employ increasingly brutal, conspiratorial and autocratic methods for its maintenance. It costs the keenest of human pangs to produce a man; events in Russia, Germany and Spain have only proved the correctness of the communist warning that a new society would be born only in suffering, torn by the violence of those who will do anything to arrest the birth of a world in which the freedom of the majority is based on their unfreedom.

This rebellion of the suffering people, which has already taken place in Russia, is for the majority no clear-headed passage to a common goal. All classes injured by the final explosion of capitalism – workers, peasants, small farmers, shopkeepers, artisans, technicians, artists, specialists – compose that rebellious mass: all are agreed as to the intolerableness of the situation; but only one class is organised by its conditions of life to overthrow the old system and build a new. The other classes are organised only as part of the system – the capitalist State – and to overthrow it is to dissolve their only means of organisation. Only the industrial workers, via their trades unions, co-operatives and political parties, are organised against that system, and can therefore provide a structure able literally to overturn society and bring the bottom to the top.

This special feature of the industrial working class gives it the leadership in the struggle. All odds but its numbers and its organisation are against it. The bourgeoisie rule the old system and everywhere monopolise the key points of judiciary, police, army, civil service, finance and business. All men's minds are distorted by bourgeois presuppositions through living in a bourgeois economy. But the pressure of material conditions not only drives on the proletariat to revolt as did slaves and peasants before it, but unlike them puts the means of success in its hands – its own organisation and the concentration of capitalism. The organisation of the proletariat, which gives it the de facto leadership of revolt in this first period, is expressed after the success of this period in the dictatorship of the proletariat – the most abused and least understood of categories in the Marxian analysis because it expresses the creative rôle of a class which the bourgeois can sometime regard as “most suffering” but never as “most advanced.”

The suffering majority are demanding the overthrow of the old, they do not all

see that this means the construction of a new. Always it seems to the petty bourgeoisie that one may roll history backwards and return to an age when private property was not the means of exploitation, for tools were undeveloped enough and scattered enough to be owned by the man who worked them. Owner and producer were one. The proletariat knows that the factories cannot be owned individually like tools. The proletariat does not regret this, but understands that the whole development of capitalist economy, in so far as it has led to organisation in factories and the socialisation of labour, has raised the productive forces of society to a level where the freedom of a few no longer depends on the unfreedom of the many.

The social product can suffice to provide the freedom of all. The raising of the level of social productivity which follows on a proletarian revolution is the special task of the dictatorship of the proletariat. In it the other classes learn by practice that history cannot be turned back; that it is a question of storming new heights. And, when they understand that, the people as a whole becomes socialist, and the dictatorship of the proletariat begins to decay. This is already forecast by the birth of the new Soviet Constitution, which gives equal rights to all, not as the climax of communism but as the beginning of a new advance towards communism. Only when communism comes into being will the conception of equal “rights” pass from the fabric of the State, and the State, too, wither away. The very “right” of man to realise his freedom by association with others negates the bourgeois conception of equal right, which was the highest ethic to which bourgeois culture could aspire. Its average man was a reflection of the equalisation of labour power in the market. “From each, according to his powers; to each, according to his needs.” When men's innate ability and desires vary, how could such a creed – that of communism – be

compatible with equal rights? A right implies something exercised against another, and communism is a state of society in which material conditions no longer force man to be the enemy of man.

The State came into being to prevent a strife between the haves and the have-nots, a strife which would have paralysed society. The cessation of open strife does not remedy the inequality, for this inequality is the condition at this time for labour our reaching a level of increased productivity. The division between haves and have-nots is produced by the division of labour. The State makes possible the continued existence of this inequality, without the shipwreck of society. Since the interests of haves and have-nots are opposed, it can only maintain this continued existence of inequality by coercion. The State is the coercive organ whereby the conditions for exploitation by the ruling class are forcibly maintained. As long as men are sundered by a property right and by the material conditions of society into classes of opposed interests at secret war, a rate can only be maintained by the emergence of a coercive power apparently above both classes. This power is the State.

The property of the bourgeois class which secured its freedom is the condition of unfreedom for the majority. When this majority in turn secures its freedom by expropriating the bourgeoisie, the condition of its freedom is the unfreedom of the bourgeoisie; but whereas the bourgeoisie, like all other ruling classes, requires an exploited unfree class for its existence, the proletariat does not require to maintain the bourgeoisie in order to maintain its own freedom. Thus the conditions are prepared for the ending of class-society.

As long as the bourgeoisie and its camp followers exist either inside a nation or outside it, so long must the proletarian State exist as a coercive organ to maintain the conditions of freedom for the proletariat. The remnants of bourgeois education and the unique experience given them by their

privileged life make the expropriated bourgeoisie dangerous enemies, ready at any time to assert the material basis of their ideal of freedom by plunging society into violence to regain it. But the conditions of their existence are not rooted in economy – the means of exploitation have been done away with. State by State the bourgeoisie withers away, and as it withers the State too withers, for the State is the expression of a class division in society, rooted in the material conditions of economy and affecting the consciousness of men. When all human consciousness is the consciousness of men who have never known bourgeois conditions of production, then the State no longer needs to exist as something separate and towering over society. The seemingly endless war, now secret, now open, but always tragic and brutal, can cease, for at last the misery of a suffering class has not been diverted against God or the Devil or the Jews or other members of their own class in other countries or any other fancied sources of evil, but against the material conditions which produced their suffering as a class. Once rightly directed against its source, this hate and misery ends. It does not end peacefully, for the majority find themselves opposed by the class whose happiness is rooted in just those conditions the majority wish to end, and who are therefore prepared to defend those conditions with violence.

But it is the last fight. The rôle of the proletarian party in this tremendous revolution is to be the vanguard of the class whose objective conditions make it the leader of the whole transition. To be the vanguard is to lead, not to be swept along; it is also to remain in touch with the class of which it is the organised front, to be the active expression of that class's guiding theory and shaping will.

How then could the party fulfil this rôle and not be what it is in Russia to-day? – in relation to the expropriated class to express the dictatorship of the proletariat,

the final use of coercion which will make coercion no longer possible; in relation to the liberated majority to be the leader, not by any coercive right but because it expresses most clearly and completely the aims and aspirations of the led. Hente the unique spectacle of a party which is a minority in the State, and has no rights or powers as a party, and yet which – by the tutelage its members exert in all the organs of contemporary soviet society guides everywhere the activities of the class whose experience it never ceases to epitomise and express. But the organisation of the leading members of society as a separate organisation, however uncoerced, indicates a residue of unfreedom in society due to the still imperfect level of social production. Only when it is raised to a plane where all members of society are able fully to realise their physical and mental individuality can the era of socialism end and that of communism begin. Then the party too will have withered away, for it will have expanded to a stage where it includes all, and therefore will no longer be a party. Only then will men pass completely from the realm of necessity to that of freedom, not by ignoring necessity but by becoming through action completely conscious of necessity. In the past man had attained consciousness of the necessity of the physical environment, but not of society itself, and so he was enslaved to the forms of society – the machine, the harvest and the relations they generated. How could he become fully conscious of the necessity of society except in the same way as he became conscious of the necessity of the environment – by experience in changing it?

How could political science be anything else but the science of revolution? Thus man realises in particulars and concretely the general and abstract formula of freedom which is expressed as follows:

Men, in their struggle with Nature (i.e. in their struggle for freedom) enter into certain relations with each other to win that freedom, which consists of the social product resulting from the change of Nature by men in association for economic production. But men cannot change Nature without changing themselves. The full understanding of this mutual interpenetration or reflexive movement of men and Nature, mediated by the necessary and developing relations known as society, is the recognition of necessity, not only in Nature but in ourselves and therefore also in society. Viewed objectively this active subject-object relation is science, viewed subjectively it is art; but as consciousness emerging in active union with practice it is simply concrete living – the whole process of working, feeling, thinking and behaving like a human individual in one world of individuals and Nature.

An analysis of the kind we have just completed, an economic and political analysis of the movement of society to-day, would be ordinarily regarded as foreign to a study of poetry. But no one who has patiently followed the argument thus far can fail to see its relevance to contemporary art, and the importance of understanding the revolutionary transformation of the basis of society which is everywhere affecting art and the artist.

to be continued...

Courtesy : Illusion and Reality

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