

VOICE OF DALIT IN SOUTH ASIAN LITERATURE
Panel 4

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“Manusmriti”, the first document on jurisprudence in India by Manu, strictly prohibits Hindus of very low caste from going through ‘Vedas’, the ancient holy scriptures or even listening to its recitation. A hardcore purist like him has broadly classified the models of duties basing on caste distinction. Accordingly “Sudra”, the untouchable is sermonized through a sloka that acts like a canon of Hindu ethics :

Ekameba tu Sudrasya Prabhu : Karma Samadishat
Eteshameba Varnanang sushrusamanasuyaya¹

Elucidating, the Lord has endowed the Sudra (untouchable) with only one Karma (action) to render the three upper races with selfless services. Manu has delved deeper into the matter to define the superior cult of Brahminism in subsequent slokas : Exemplifying :

Uttamangobdhawajaisthaya Bramanushaiba dharanat,
Sarbasaibasya sargasya dharmato Brahmanah prabhu.

A Brahmin was born earlier than a Kshatriya (warrior) out of the mouth of Lord Brahma creator of the universe. With Veda in hand, he proved to be the religious master of the globe. Kshatriyas (warriors) came out the next from the arms of the same Lord. The Vaishyas were third in the row that sprang out of the thighs of this supreme creator. Finally, sudras appeared from the feet of Brahma to espouse the cause of servitude. The myth behind birth of castes out of mouth, arms, thighs and feet of the Lord aimed at impelling upon structural gradations of the same in ancient India. Untouchables stood at the bottom to comply with the commands of all the three castes ranked in order.

For long, Indian society took such classifications as models for the vested interests whereas the low castes were condemned to severe degradations in public life. Utterly humiliated, they were identified with various titles like 'Harijans' as propagated by Mahatma Gandhi, 'Depressed classes' by the British 'Chamar' means 'Cobbler' in Oriya and 'Mahar' in Maratha of Indian languages.

The term 'scheduled caste', as applicable to these people had its origin in April, 1935. The erstwhile British government in India drew up the names of certain castes and clubbed them under the category of 'S.C'. However, 'Dalit', the term more synonymous with downtrodden is a watchword in most of Indian languages to speak of the vast multitudes tyrannized over by higher classes. But in due course if a person from this trampled life gets emancipated through accumulation of wealth and improves upon standard of living he wouldn't fall back on this line any longer. Similarly if a member from the higher caste or class goes on living in reduced circumstances over the years, he would be enfolded in the category of 'dalit'. Hence such a dividing line between 'dalits' and 'non-dalits' may be figured out as 'haves' and 'haven'ts' in Marxist parlance. This conflicting scenario should lead to the increased volume of social stratification not in India but in other south Asian nations like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Afghanistan and others.

During 1970, the Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra in India took its root to champion the cause of dalit in the creative pursuits. It borrows its moral support from the writings of Dr. B.R.Ambedkar, who believes that "the root cause of untouchability lies in a pronounced cultural or racial difference of contempt and hatred coupled with a close economic dependence of the inferior society on the superior one"².

Other Hindu scriptures like Vedas, Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita do not uphold birth-based caste system. Rig-Veda demonstrates amply the unity and harmony of human race. For example "Samani Va Akuti, Samana Hrudyani Vha, Samanam Astu Vo Mano, Yatha Su Saha Asti" corresponds to "Let your aims be one, let your hearts be one, let your minds be one and let your unity go from strength to strength"³. In Gita, sloka Number 29 in chapter V the Lord speaks

“Suhridam sarva Bhutanam” means he is the well wisher of all beings. In Veda, a line like ‘Krinvanto vishvam aryam’ focuses on unity of human race, perpetual love and happiness through universal brotherhood. With the passages of time, the warmth and compassion of Hindu scriptures relegated to the back allowing way for a document like “Manusmriti to occupy forefront of the field of law. For an average reader other than a caste Hindu it acts like a pinching in his/her shoe whose removal is the wearer’s mid-hour dynamo to take the pleasure of a walk.

Of late, the term ‘dalit’ is redefined from a letter addressed to zelliot by Gangadhar Pantawane, Prof. of Marathi, Milind College, Marathawada University, Aurangabad and founder editor of ‘Asmitadarsh’ (Ideal of Intellect Ego), the pioneering journal on dalit literature:

“To me, dalit is not the caste. He is a man exploited by the social and economic traditions of this country. He does not believe in God, rebirth, soul, holy books teaching separatism, fate and heaven because they have made him a slave. He does believe in humanism. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution” (Zelliot 1992)⁴. So, in a wider perspective it is a counter trend, an anti-thesis to combat extreme philosophical and theological aspects from the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Tantras including Buddhistic and Jainistic studies. It is as if gaining momentum in the form of an intellectual curdling to uphold the cause of a rationalistic – scientific base in the field of creativity. Citing Gail Omvedt, 1995 : 72 “the dalit panthers revived the term in their 1973 manifesto and expounded its referents to include the scheduled tribes, Neo-Buddhists, working people, landless and poor peasant women and all those being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion. So, in a way it is a resurgence of the over all toiling masses irrespective of their caste, creed or religion. “The dalit school of literature represents a new level of pride, military and sophisticated creativity xxx. It is essentially a label to help the dalits achieve a sense of cultural identity. XX ‘Dalitness’ is a source of confrontation and is a matter of appreciating the probability of one’s total being”⁵. Hence, it is obvious, the intellectual property rights as yet the natural monopoly of ‘haves’ and the ‘Aryans’ need to be decontrolled from them. In a sense, the ever-growing metropolitan intellectualism

should part with its earlier insensitive role and embrace the cause of dalit activities may be both poor and rural for heightening its round about characteristics. The gamut of literary emotions ranging from theoretical Aryans to toiling shudras, from abstract to empirical knowledge from individualism to social conscience should undergo a striking metamorphosis, neglected as yet in textual resources.

Telugu in the context of an Indian language

Nearly four decades ago, a group of Telugu poets branding themselves as “Digambara Kavulu” (Nude Poets) under pseudonyms Cherabanda Raju, Bhairavyya, Jwalamukhi, Nagnamuni, Nikhileswar and Mahaswapna came forward to rediscover their revolutionary roots. Their first poetry collection was released for the masses in a street corner meeting in Hyderabad by no other than a rickshaw-puller, Nampally Pandu on 6 May 1965. In the next year on 22 Dec. 1966, the second anthology was dedicated to the people by a hotel boy, Jangalachitti at Vijayawada while rending sky-high slogans like “Viplabam Wardhilalu” (Long live revolution). The third fell into the hands of a penurious, Yadamanuri Yashoda at Visakhapatnam dedicated to the painful memory of a dalit boy Kanchikacheria Kotesu, burnt alive. Like poet Pablo Neruda, who used to say “I would find myself in squares, streets, factories, lecture halls, theaters and gardens, reading my poems. I have gone into practically every corner of Chile, scattering my poetry like seed among the people of my country”, these poets led happiest of their participation with the toiling masses, picking up themes from the dark recesses of their commonplace living.

At once
 copulating cruelly with time
 themselves dead and killing the world
 at the rock bottom of a world of hate
 transformed into selfish beasts⁶

Cherabanda Raju
 Oobi
 Quicksand (Telugu)
 Tr. M. Vijay Kumar

Cherabanda is vociferous to deal with social contradictions, equations of power and the rank opportunism of the creamylayer like 'great warriors, wisemen, yogis, noblemen in exterior'. Mahaswapna on the other hand condemns both history and the historians as pages scribbled down falsely incorporating shrewd talks.

In the damned darkness termed history
deception, chicanery and bigotry
the silently exploded bombs of falsity,
a faceless humanity that is forlorn⁷

Mem manushulam kadu, maku inkoka perundi

We aren't Men, We have another Name
Tr: Vijay Kumar

Nagnamuni is uncompromising, goes sharply against status quo and detests all that is puritanical. He outbursts, 'atomic fang bells in the church, flames in the masjid the molested idols in the sanctum sanctorum' (Sea in the Cell: Tr. Subrahmanyam). Religious beliefs are hardly a truth to be reckoned with. Rising above so called allegiances, this lent a long tradition of revolt in Telugu poetry. Of late, the critics can discover such elements in the poems of modern Telugu poets in the following manner.

Instead of giving his floor a cow dung wash
We piss on it
Rip open his entrails with the sickle
We have tucked in the waist
We'd skin him and with that on the
drum play around⁸

Karri Vijaya Lakshmi
Telugu Free Verse (P.85-95)

The dalit lady spits venom at the landlord and becomes defiant of his patriarchy. She abhors engaging her sickle for cutting of the sheaves. Instead, she conveys her violent mood through a fearsome imagery of class hatred like finishing the exploiter off.

Another poet Pervaram Jagganadham is vexed at the sophistication of the higher ups:

Poetry if touched and patted
Blood vessels would snap;
Burn the body
A vice it has
To pull down aristocracy.

Teledervera Bhanumurthy speaks “cry you for crackers to light today, aren’t our stomachs already burning?” The virulent attack on the leisured class ruling the roost in social structures finds a candid expression of its own. ‘Where are the instances of industries, crops and diaries or river waters which without living our hands have come into yours? (A Venkata Ratnam). Similarly Nandini Siddha Reddy takes literature as integral to the cause of social protest “poetry is not for gaiety: it is the voice of wounds, it questions with raised finger the cruelty of killing sleeping ones, It questions the khaki callousness that burns”.

In India, ‘Hindi’, the official language has certainly pushed back its frontiers because of its vast speaking tracts. Muktibodh, the celebrated poet of this language upheld the banner of ‘Dalit’ and their emancipation with a committed urge during his lifetime. The *chhayabad* trend groomed as impulses of english romantic poets Keats, Shelley and others could influence poets like Sumitranandan Pant, Nirala, Mahadevi Verma and many more of them. Muktibodh acted like a lone ranger to lead the path of radicalism in poetry. Inspired by October revolution of U.S.S.R, the year 1936 saw the formation of All India Progressive Writers conference chaired by Premchand, the noted Hindi novelist. Gradually dalit aesthetics made major inroads into Hindi literature. Poets like Dhumiil, Kedarnath Singh, Rajkamal Choudhary, Sarveshwar Dayal Saxena, Srikant Verma, Mangalesh Dabral, Prabhat Tripathy, Arun Kamal and many others became flamboyant in their poetic utterances. They stood sympathetic to the cause of the oppressed and accordingly heightened their creativity more with a spirit needed for a true urge. ‘Sadgati’, a story by Premchand gave a heart rending account of the miserable plight of a landless cobbler who was left to extreme physical labour by his landlord in empty stomach that led to his ultimate passing. His wife, with cooked food did wait his return home from the field unknowingly but in vain. The brilliant portrayal of a rural scene by a master craftsman like Premchand is a testimonial to the keenness of his observation and love for the downtrodden. However, this is mere sympathy but without any rebellious foothold. Hence, it can’t be treated as literature for the dalit because it

lacks revolutionary temper of subaltern consciousness. But more description of their conditions are not enough. Dhumi, in his poem “Mochiram” sketched the miserable living of a cobbler skinning a dead cow to serve as a tanner and suffering the ignominy of an undignified profession. He says, “Lord! As the real fact goes, if there be no true reason behind a life, then selling a Ram print cloth or pimping for a harlot makes no difference”.⁹ Kunwar Narayan stands on a set pattern of speaking for the oppressed. He has a deeper insight into the pages of history and holds the key to the reminiscences of his country that had not survived the ravages of feudalism.

A familiar sight, then as now,
 Abject, pitiful, dragged
 Behind victorious horsemen.

Hands tied together, pitiful,
 Who was he this time,
 On the road to Delhi?¹⁰

Dilli Ki Tarof
 To Delhi
 Tr. K. Narayan/Daniel Weissbort

Kailash Vajpeyi, abhors modernism and all its decaying values. He records his feelings against all such ostentatious gimmicks in a satirical tone.

And even though
 Civilisation didn't contribute
 Anything at least
 It turned everyone inhuman

In the eastern region of Uttar Pradesh, there remains a village called Thakur Puruwah on which the subject matter of the novel ‘Chaturang’ by sailenda Sagar stands for. The son of the Zamindar Thakur Harpal Singh falls in love with Naini, a Maharastrian girl and despite resistance from their families both got married. The villagers endorsed it without any grumble because it was the personal affair of Thakur Sahib. On the other hand, Chamrouti’s qualified son Sarveshwar D. Saxena’s creative stance respects the inviolable values to comradeship like primordial urge:

How nice it is
 sitting side by side
 to look for oneself
 and to discover the other
 within oneself

Kitna achcha hota hai
 How nice it is

From the same village being in love with her classmate Asha, a girl comparatively of higher status couldn't be accepted by any one. As a result, both fled to Delhi and tied in wedlock. After some days, they returned home but couldn't survive the angry eyes of the Panchayat members. Banshi, the brother of Asha in full view of public chopped both of them into pieces. This is more like an existential absurd plaguing Indian rural society without an iota of meaning.

Ramanika Gupta edits a journal "Yutharat Aam Admi" (Engaged in a struggle: common man) devoted to the cause of dalit consciousness. While displaying tremendous zeal for waking them up to their warring front, she dips her pen into the flow of her conscience underscoring its relevance in the world of theory. Dalit tribals, Mazdoors including women all along put their banner of struggle through her active support. 'Hans' a monthly magazine edited by Rajendra Yadav keeps ahead inviting participation for the toiling masses leaving aside the so-called urban intellectuals. Yadav, himself a powerful storywriter delineates yearning of the oppressed class for a new social order. The epic dimension of 'Mahabharat' is challenged by many of such stalwarts as the poetic credo of upper castes, say aristocrats. For example, 'Ekalavya', the tribal youth's sacrifice of the left thumb before Dronacharya, the absentee guru as a mark of respect is based on sophistry of the upper caste in 'The Mahabharat'. It speaks that learning in any form is the prerogative of the royal groups 'Kourav' and 'Pandav', which can't be shared by a commoner like 'Ekalavya'. Hence, such a book is nothing but a subtext of partiality and unfairness that can never attain the status of an epic. Razi Abedi, an established scholar from Pakistan speaks on this supplementing a common belief, 'A young man's thumb may be amputated just so that he doesn't become a better archer than a lad of the upper caste.'

Oriya

Orissa stretches in the eastern part of India bordering the Bay of Bengal as its coastal line. Eastern Ghat, the mountain range beautifies its skyline, this shaping the imagination of many creative artists over the centuries. Oriya is the spoken language of the state.

During forties, 'Nabayug Sahitya Sansad' began its pursuits, pipelining emancipation of dalits. 'Ghinuan', an archer becomes the roll model, created by a literary stalwart Bhagabati Charan Panigrahi in his short story 'Shikar' (The Hunter). It is a maiden attempt to unveil the idea of revenge thus beheading a rank exploiter by an ordinary oppressed ultimately seeking reward from a British authority equalising this task to that of killing a great tiger. Sachi Rout-Ray (b.1916) is the kind of poet who embraces both tear and blood oozing from the inner self of a dalit. Konark, the architectural wonder never satisfied him. Its towering stand over the centuries is painful to his heart:

I have seen in the grave of that rock
Breasts of so many sculptors,
Alas! Buried in it every inch
Brooking hot stirrings of torment.
Like donkeys, countless *mazdoors*
Bore ceaseless brunt of heavy rocks
Bent their spinal cords down
None ever cares to reminisce.¹¹

'Konark'
Tr. A.K.Mishra

Rabi Singh, sharing all through the musical rhythm of poetry he, like Nazrul combines in him the deepest love for humanism. It is his genuineness to find out modalities of committed writings structuring on the lamentable woes of the downtrodden at large. The intimacy of his mind with anything is keenly articulated through lyrical ardour. However, he is dead against depredation of any kind.

Won't there be looters,
Butchers of talent
Once again?
Will there be a sword
In my hand then
As it is today?

The Ghost of Black Pagoda
Tr. R.K.Swain

The above speaks of the near impossible task of the twelve hundred masons who failed to fix the Kalasi at the apex of the temple. They had to face with tragic consequences of beheading by the angry ruler. However, this could be attended to successfully by Dharama, the twelve year old son of the chief architect Visu Maharana who in spite of doing the work with aplomb had to sacrifice himself by jumping from the top of the temple into the deep sea on order to save the lives of the masons. The poet goes deeper into the myth like saying 'The intolerant swords of twelve hundred *yamas* were raised against the child Dharama. The boy, so unfortunate may be ascribable to the cult figure of dalits.

Gopinath Mohanty, the doyen of Indian novelists is famous for his unshaken creative loyalty towards the tribal people. The reducing circumstances of their life is hardly a fact to demoralise a character like Sukru Jani. The usurer entraps the paraja leader, in his eagerness to go ahead with cultivation. Misfortune knocks at his establishment when the forest guard glances at his elder daughter with an erotic claim on her body. This can't at all gain currency, as the mind of a paraja is quite clear in this regard. At no stage, the honour, integrity of a race can be compromised. Come what may! Sukru Jani took to his stand like "circumstances have bowed him down but not broken him"¹². Sukru Jani comes to sense his worldly wisdom. "The land is not everything. Let the land go let everything go if only we can all be together in our own hut. What a relief that would be! "Mandia, his eldest son, robust and hard working is caught while brewing liquor followed with penalty by excise authorities. The younger one Tikra has no alternative than to accept serfdom. The long lost wife sambari flashes in the dream of Sukru recurrently. Here, the social protest is not sharp to march ahead but a crying destiny to talk of its inevitability in the life of a paraja.

Basudev Sunani, the promising young poet from Orissa needs no analysis of his Poem. He is simple and attracts because of his truthful mind set. Unless there is a full-fledged example of his poem, the readers may not feel its undercurrent that talks of a historian, who is factually bankrupt.

I am thinking of
 building a house of my own
 x x x
 and on the wall
 an oil painting.
 Shall I have a painting
 of a boat in the sea?
 x x x
 A battle field
 behind the bullock cart
 Where it is written
 "Yada yada hi dharmasya...."
 No, these are pictures
 common to everyone's walls.

I will have for myself
 a novel for familiar sight
 Like the labour *Podu Majhi*
 boarding a bus
 with a tin bin and an aluminum pot
 on his head
 to lay bricks
 and below that just "*Podu Majhi*"
 as its title

When at last the historians
 will excavate this place
 x x x
 In their dissertations
 the historians will write;
 It is proved
 from an ancient oil painting that
 the people of that time
 were business like
 and a *Podu Majhi* was their leader.

Malayalam

Malayalam enjoys number one status among the languages in Kerala. As a significant elitist zone in the country, this state stands solidly to talk of any progressive as well as reformist values in life. Literature is an added advantage to this process. Literary personalities in Kerala very often join together to decide schemes of activities in which the framework of literary pursuits are reasonably carved out incorporating basic issues of life. Elucidating, the freedom of expression,

voice against humiliation, subjugation, implementation of social justice form the mainstream of modern Malayalam literature. According to K.M George since 1930 'The underdog of society, the peasant, the factory worker, the fisherman and the scavenger came to the focus'. Writers like Basheer and Varkey had to carry on a tradition of realist writings elevating the principled vision for a judicious creative urge. When literature consolidates its strength among the lower class, their members naturally take interest in it. Such a popular baseline is possible when a writer declasses himself like chasing after causes of dalitism in spite of his non-dalit being. Such Poets like Olappamanna (b.1923) (Subramanian Namboodiri), Akkitham (b.1926) though have their origins from Namboodiri Brahmins, they have vilified the ways of their own caste. Akkitham's long poem *Irupatham Noottandinte Ithihasam* (Epic of the 20th century) startles with subjective thought like "Oh child, Light is sorrow, Darkness is comfortable".¹³

R.S Kurup's novel *Thotti* (The Scavenger), Kesava Dev's *Odayil Ninnu* (From the Gutter,1942), Thakazhi's *Thottiyude Makan* (Son of the Scavenger,1948) have genuine impulses to include this topical theme dalit. Arundhati Roy Novelist writing in English belongs to Kerala. Her novel 'The God of Small things delineates the pathetic story of a restricted love initiated by an untouchable Velutha. The compassion of the novelist for the dalit is well pronounced. For example : "Who is Veluth? Sophie Mol wanted to know "A man we love," Rahel said. Keshav Dev is vitriolic in his stories to talk of poor and destitutes. K. Ayyappa Panikar's heart throbbing statement "Within the folds of the pedestals of the temple structure can be heard the suppressed breath of silent agony that has gone into its own making".

Gujarati

Every segment of literary studies in India breaks into an analysis judging upon its historical perspective. Gujarati is no exception to it. Gujrat, being the birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi, has witnessed the flow of several movements encountering untouchability. Nirav Patel, the famous dalit poet of this land touches upon such studies simultaneously ascribing the same as incomplete.

While taking into account five Gujarati novels, the critic is of opinion that the plots and themes of such writings primarily concentrate on Vankar caste whereas castes like chamar and bhangi, remaining at the lowest rung are till date before the dark mirror of literature without being privileged with a streak ray of reflection. According to Rita Kothari, “Unlike Marathi literature, Gujarati dalit literature had a fairly delayed beginning”. She has referred to the year 1981, in which there was the upcoming anti-reservation agitation in Gujarat that led to animosity between upper caste Gujaratis and dalits. Such a pronouncement is debatable since literature is neither history nor journalism to dance with the tune of time so immediately. But she has raised pertinent questions like “Why is every dalit equally good and naïve without any mechanisms of circumvention or resistance?” It is like accepting a fate that is god-sending? The next observation is more poignant to raise a finger at every corner of literature on earth “Oppression, as it obtains now in Gujarati dalit short story is defined in a unilinear fashion, its psychological and social mapping fixed”¹⁴. In this context, one has to admit with the fact that the role of literature is somewhat limited to exercise its vitality. This is further fragmentary through individuated expression that doesn’t serve the purpose, actually needed for a community.

The collective psyche of a society is still governed by the motives of the upper castes. Say for example, the entry of dalits into any temple is a forbidden affair. They are segregated on the basis of purity-pollution and how many writers are there to wage their pens to invite such themes happening on the temple premises in any Indian village. Mohan Parmar and Harish Mangalam have edited the first short story anthology in Gujarati “*Gujarati Dalit Varta*” (1987) that gives a closer account on dalitism. Journals like ‘Samajmitra’, ‘Hayati’ and ‘Sarvanam’ have made greater strides without any valid support from the mainstream literary establishment and their vanguards like ‘Patel’ and ‘Darbar’. The grim scenario inclusive of their life patterns and the ‘Vas’ (separate establishment of dalits) are well documented in the stories of Dashrath Parmar’s ‘Paat’, Madhukant Kalpits ‘Kulkatha’ and Barish Mangalam’s ‘Dayan’. Pravin Darji’s ‘Maara Gaam Vachare’,

Joseph Macwan's 'Rotio Najrai Gay', Dalpat Chauhan's "Badlo are milestones' in this line to authenticate history at any point of time.

Punjabi

The Punjabi literary tradition that had its beginning from the Bhakti period during medieval times through Guru Nanak Dev and Guru Arjun Dev flowed down to the time of Independence to talk of its modernist trends. The year of Independence witnessed ghastly scenes like communal clashes between Hindus and Muslims as a result both Punjab and Bengal had to undergo migrations of lakhs of people while atrocities on them went unabated. Totally dehumanised, the blood thirst assailants derived a bestial pleasure while torturing innocent people in the name religion. It was bound to have its impact on Punjabi literature for rooting to the cause of dalits. Kulwant Singh Virk had no time to depict lalit (beauty) in the face of a tortured life experienced by a sikh lady who like a dalit had to stay back in Pakistan thus embracing Islamism. She was cut off from her relatives including family members and all that she could dream of was to unite with her sister in India. Amrita Pritam characteristically delineated such pathos in her story "Pinjar (The Skeleton) and novel 'Dr. Dev'. Prof. Mohan Singh mirrored oppression in his poems and other poets like Bawa Balwant, Piara Singh Sehrai, Santokh Singh Dhir fell into the line to borrow their poetry themes from the sufferings of dalit community. In later years Amarjit Chandan, Amitoj came forward to sing the glory of peasants and workers in their poster poems. In fiction, Gurdial Singh celebrated the cause of the socially oppressed. His novel *Paras* hardly bothers for any kind of off beat utterances through magic realism but goes down to smell the earth and its subtle collective foundations.

S.L Virdi has rightfully emphasised on this form in a special issue of Punjab Dalit Literature "Yudharat Aam Admi". Gyana Singh Bal has questioned the veracity of Adi Shankaracharya's 'Adwaitbad and denounces the same blatantly as an unrealistic contrivances of human mood.

Maratha

“Their metaphysical gymnastics trampled and scattered my life” echoed in one of the poems of Yusoja entitling “Mute Existence” from Maratha literature. This is a sharp attack on Brahmanical cult who were instrumental in excluding dalits from any scholarly participation in public life. Mahatma Jotiba Phule voiced sharply on this. “The feelings expressed in our meetings and books do not appear in books written by them or in their meetings”. So, it was obvious dalits suffered rejection and dejection both resulting in the ineffectual beating of their wings in the air of subjugation.

In 1972, Dalit Panthers, a radical organisation came into existence in Mumbai with Arjun Dangle, J.V Pawar and Namdeo Dhasal as its think tank. The oral tradition of the history of subaltern living so far at parallel with Vedas and other sanskrit texts started gaining ground slowly. It added a solid impetus to the cause of vigorous protest thereby dawning a new phase in the combative outlook of this depressed class.

Daya Pawar, a writer-activist in an autobiographical sketch ‘Son, Eat fill’ has mentioned the benighted surrounding of the Mahar community. As the description goes “The Mahars living conditions were wretched. In each little cubbyhole, there were three or four sub-tenants. In between them were portions made of packing-case wood. In these wooden boxes was their entire world. The men worked as porters. Some went to work in mills and factories.

The women were not kept in purdah (seclusion). On the contrary, they slaved even more than their men. However, much a drunken husband belaboured them, they would look after him, even pander to his addiction. Their occupation was to collect rags, papers, broken glass, iron and bottles in the street, bring them home, sort them out all night and go and sell them in the morning.” One could well imagine the traumas, experienced with the process of such a living. According to Marx, “just as society produces man as a human being, so is society itself produced by him”. It is obvious, the human brain, has

one universal property-that of reflection i.e. response to an external effect. Even an inanimate object can't escape such interaction of bodies. One psychologist (unnamed) exemplifies ' an electrical discharge causes the generation of ozone. Thus a rock washed by the sea offers certain resistance to the effect of water – the waves break against the rock, but the latter, too is gradually worn out". Hence both 'Ozone' and 'rock' symbolise the invocation of rebellious instincts, an anti-thesis that hold good in the context of a dalit yielding sword against the establishment.

Here, Uttam Kolgaokar stroked away his angry outburst adopting a lucid narrative form, "He was born here, but didn't belong here, didn't strut about dressed in flashy clothes, wearing his hair long. When the people here were busy building taller and taller houses', he sat alone in the woods beneath a tree speaking softly to the sea in his heart". Suresh Kadam opens the doors to organised musing 'The sunset doesn't bury our sorrows, nor does sunrise bring new hopes'. Everything continues, relentlessly. Society, bound by her rituals of ages, chews up chunks of human flesh in blind fury (Tr:Vilas Sarang) A revelation, silenced as yet for ages together due to monopolised narratives sprang out of cultural and literary aggressiveness, poet L.S Rokade articulates candidly against this:

I spit on this great civilisation
Is this land yours, mother,
because you were born here?
Is it mine
because I was born to you.

(To be or Not to be Born
Tr. Shanta Gokhale)

The sense of non-belonging is acute within the poet himself. He defies the essence of survival while addressing her mother "your body covered with generations of dire poverty your head pillowed on constant need, you slept at night and in the day you writhed with empty fists tied to your breast!" In Daya Pawar's autobiographical sketch " We are Kings!" this is revealed intensely while portraying the stiff-necked ego of the upper castes casting a shadow on dalits

ways of living. “The chamars never drank from our well. They would have lost caste by doing so. The women of the chamar families used to sit for hour after hour by the Marathas well to beg potful of water. The Mahar women’s shadow fell on Maruti (god of strength) on their way to and from the well. The god was polluted so one day the villagers closed the road to us”. Both disgraceful and far from respect, Keshav Meshram gives a close account of such a tortured life in his poem “In our colony”. “Our colony-drowned in the pags of ‘country’ wine, subsisting on the hot chillied pieces of meat-floating in the spicy, hot gravy living half-fed despite working full hours, yet surveying closely in the mellow light of the candle the future of each coming new day”. This in a way brings forward a photojournalist’s mind to take a close snap of a terribly impoverished area ‘sinking in the soil’.

The dalits have been restricted entry to upper-caste surroundings. Even if they are allowed, they have to keep pots hanging from their necks lest they defile the soil through their spitting. They fasten brooms around their waists in order that the upper lanes are purged off their footprints. Umakant Randhir depicts such heartburn in “A Poem”, ‘Flourishing on your head, the gold crown of high caste birth (wrought by yourself alone). To the throne of unquestioned supremacy”. Arjun Dangle in his poem *Chhami Hili Ha* (The cantonment Has Begun to Shake) has recorded the all-encompassing woes and anguish of a dalit groaning from a living like wretched of the earth.

We fought with crows
 never even giving them the snot from our noses
 as we dragged out the upper lane’s dead cattle,
 skinned it neatly
 and shared the meet among ourselves
 they used to love us then.
 we warred with jackals-dogs-Vultures-Kites
 because we ate their share.

Baburao Bagul’s stories fought against the prostrate intellectualism of the upper castes. His anthology *Jevha Mi Jaat Chorli Hoti* (When I had concealed my caste) is a pioneering work on this.

Bengali

In prose, particularly the novel, there has been rapid transition in the characterisation from the 'Bhadralok' (urban gentry) to the working class with the battling social scenes in and around Calcutta embracing industrialization. The gentleness of this class was bridging the dichotomy between erstwhile feudal society with those of capital earners. However, with the passage of time realism became the mainstay of novel writings studded with fine aesthetic values. Premendra Mitra, Manik Bandopadhyay, Pabodh Ku. Sanyal, Manoj Basu and others are the precursors of such down to earth spirit voicing the urge of subaltern consciousness. Mahasweta Devi, the novelist is the flag bearer of this style and theme thus upholding the non-sanskritic ways of tribal consciousness. Her portrayal took the 'santhal', a tribal group into the forefront relegating the rest middle class complexities to the back. Her contents dazzle with ideology without much looking after ornamentation in style or form. The simplicity of living taken around the society couldn't escape the keenness of her vision. For example "The ripe paddy crop in Bishal Mahato's farm had been harvested the previous day. All day, along with the harvesters and casual grain pickers, Ketu shabar too had been collecting the leftover grains of paddy in the fields. Now, in the foggy twilight he needed a little liquor to warm him and to relax his aching body". "The natural resonance of such countryside is sharp to explore with anyone's sensuousness. 'Till we had built our huts, we lived under the Arjun (a tree). Only later did Mahato give us the land to build our huts'¹⁵ went on Pitambar'. Mahasweta with her perpetual portrayal of social-realism reflecting tribal life in all its essence created an air of dalit waves for the Indian readers. Her short story "Stanyadayini" "Breast-Giver" can be treasured as the lively account of a Brahmin lady Jashoda for whom "Motherhood was always her way of living and keeping alive her world of countless beings". Her husband Kangalicharan who, of late turns a lame has to support his large family without any substantial means of livelihood. So Jashoda's mammal projections have to come to their ultimate aid. The Haldar family, chieftain of the locality, their daughters-in-law are to safeguard the shape and beauty of their breasts without suckling their newborn babies. Jashoda

comes forward to be the Milk-Mother for all of their children including hers. But such being the irony, she has to suffer from breast cancer and to die of it ultimately. Mahasweta's pen churns the crucible of human conscience with millions of questions particularly when Jashoda is at her deathbed and gazing around "Who is looking? Are these her own people? The people whom she suckled because she carried them or those she suckled for a living? Jashoda thought, after all, she had suckled the world, could she then die alone? The doctor, who sees her everyday, the person who will cover her face with a sheet, will put her on a cart, will lower her at the burning ghat, the untouchable who will put her in the furnace, are all her milk-sons"¹⁶. The thought of the writer has a genuine appeal to the readers because of its flawless description of a subaltern world that generally goes unnoticed by many of us. It focuses a life that is in the throes of a throbbing misery, extracting services from one when in great spirits but an opportunistic abandonment soon after one falls to her illness. The story reflects the selfish trait of the vested interests, their pathetic behaviour gaining the shore of life only through short measures. Jashoda in true sense champions the cause of dalits against the backdrop of a feudal oligarchy. Here caste is insignificant, The socio-economic condition of a person is more important whether to identify him in the group of dalits or not.

Debes Ray, an accomplished novelist of Bengali has made an anthology of dalit writings titled as 'Dalit' published by Sahitya Akademi in 1997. He has incorporated major chapters in translation from Arjun Dangle's 'poisoned Bread'. Such writings from Kannada are also added to it. In his introduction, Ray emphatically says that no language in this world can attain a universal status.

He adds further, Dr. Ambedkar was categorical in his approach to fight against Gandhiji's views on racism and the utopian theory of Ramrajya. He contradicted the imaginative thought processes of Ramayana, Mahabharat and stood solidly behind creation of a parallel epic to counter them as being prejudicial to dalit ideals. Subas Mukhopadhyay is a poet having finer sensibility towards the characteristic sympathy for the oppressed. The vignettes of his creations are well pronounced:

The cry of the poor
 Oppressed through ages,
 Brings shame with every breath,
 Don't sit back, afraid of death,
 Wear the suit of armour
 To fight the final battle

(May Day Poem
 Tr. Sunil Kanti Sen)

Tamil

Tamil dalit writings evoke a surge of compassion since 8th century. Sundarmurti Nayanar, the saint-poet of this era created three characters that, till date, embellish the pride of chapters on this front. Nandan, an untouchable supplying stretching leather of the temple drum, Kannappan, an untouchable archer spitting on the holy *linga* to bathe it and offering tasting fruit to the lord to ascertain its quality and Thiruneela Kanta Yazhpahar, a Veena player of low birth, not being permitted for an entry into the temple formed the subject matter of his creativity. During 10th century, such thematic idealism became powerful in the poetical work titled as, Thiruthondar Thiruvandadi of Nambi Andar Nambi. However, the voices of dalit added vigour and enthusiasm to *Peria Puranam* by Sekhizhar in which the lamentable woes of saints found a mighty echo and eventually Lord Shiva became their rescuer. Nandan stood as the symbol of purity endowed with the grace of a Brahmin and nowadays it is the ultimate weapon of many politicians to talk of social purgation. As such, Nandan symbolises the flame of tongue to devour Brahminism even in modern times. It is at its most vibrant to talk of caste struggle.

The great Sankaracharya of Kaldi, famous for his ideologue Advaita once came across a Chandala who was on his way to Harighat. He, being aghast of the presence of an untouchable told the latter to stay away from his sight. To Shankara's utter dismay, the Chandala raised some pertinent questions from the same Advaita. "Whom are you telling to keep away, Acharya the fountainhead of all knowledge of Vedas and Upanishads! This body or the atman which resides in this body? Your body and mine are made of the same substance, as pots of varying sizes and colours are made of the same clay. So one such body cannot ask the other of the same to stay away. Are they not part of the same illusion?"¹⁷

Today, one may attribute this to myth and discard it as a piece of gossip. But while paddling thesis one may not forget the presence of anti-thesis. In the nucleus of an atom, the presence of proton, a positively charged sub-atomic particle reminds us the presence of an electron, the negatively charged particle too. In all fairness, the counter balancing facts still permeate as oral evidence more close to its canonized spirit.

Krishangini (Brindha Nagarajan), a Tamil Poet detests the treatment of dalit as a consumer product. For instance

To raise slogans for self-promotion
 To celebrate, kept in a niche
 To be set fire to, alive
 To die, without noise.

(Dalit)

Ila Murugu talks of a younger brother coming from a distance to attend the wedding of his elder sister. There, the wretched colony life is projected like a real setting:

Faces pucker in worn-out sarees
 bare bodies bend to ensure comfort now and then.
 as the taali* is tied with drumming and piping
 children wait on mud-caked spread
 noses leaking, hands calloused, for the wedding meal
 so do I.

(Poisoned Shadows)

Pakistan

It is, indeed, a difficult process to find out a well-structured dalit tradition in any genre of literature, of whatever country it may belong to. Pakistan is no exception to it. Populated with different ethnic groups such as Punjabis, Sindhis, Pathans, Majahirs, Balochs and others the whole nation speaks of a plurality of literary influences as its distinctive character. Like India, its intellectual heritage

* Sacred bridal cord worn around the neck

was crippled prior to achieving independence. A country, dating back to 5000 years of Indus Civilisation urging upon interactive poetical moods through Urdu, Sindi, Pashto and other languages is not an act of triviality to be underrated in any manner. However, the increasing mood of the urban middle class like stepping towards western liberalisation is bordering on similar moods of other south Asian nations. Critics like Professor Gilani Kamran. Wagas Ahmad Khwaja have laudable praises for Faiz Ahmed Faiz's deeper socio-political attachment through his memorable pieces. Like a dalit emissary he gave a new dimension to the syntax of poetry without bothering much for its metrical grandeur. Archetypes such as 'wine' and 'bulbul', at once, lost their traditional thrones in the creative kingdom. The anachronistic phraseology of poetry like killing of the protagonist at the hands of his beloved led to the path of isolation. Faiz's Zindan Nama (Poems in captivity, 1956) and Sar-e-Wadi-I-Siua (In the valley of Siua) sufficiently acclaimed as representative collections in disseminating radical messages overcoming usual stereotype of a rolling tradition. Sketches of human agonies became the salient characteristics of his creativity. He transcended sufferings of the commoners thus bringing forward a remarkable change with the earlier motives in poetry. The feudal obsession like conveying the pleasing note to the ears of a selective few became a thing of the hoary past. According to Prof. Gilani Kamran "His cult of the Beautiful was social and human, and he admired those who struggled for a better future for common man". So his thoughts, by and large stepped in with a larger commitment to speak of the ordinary breadwinners.

Screaming loudly the orphan blood flowed on
 No-one had the time of sense,
 None bothered to listen.
 No witness, no defense
 the case is closed.
 The blood of the down trodden
 Seeped mutely into the dust.

Nowhere, No Trace Can I Discover

The earlier obsession with patriarchal family front now gives vent to an exceptionally free spirit to throw away age old seclusion for women to come out in matching spirit with their male counterparts. Enmeshed in the servile yoke of

male chauvinism, there couldn't have been a better definition of woman other than a Saqi (glass-bearer). Kishwar Naheed comes forward ruthlessly to stop such decadent drumming:

I am not that woman
 selling you socks and shoes!
 Remember me, I am the one you hid
 in your walls of stone, while you roamed
 free as the breeze, not knowing
 that my voice cannot be smothered by stones.¹⁸

(I am not that Woman)

Daud Kamal's poems are subtle with an inner music of reality. Here is a poem, which reveals its well-balanced craftsmanship having devotion towards the ordinary labouring group in a society. The format of accumulated dreams creep slowly into dalit women and labourers such a sequence is brilliantly exposed through the image of a star:

Dreams accumulate
 and harden into reality
 Carrion crows
 drink from a Main-paddle.
 A few steps away
 Women labourers carry bricks
 on their heads.
 Each star
 drowns in its own light.

Ghulam Abbas' short story "Fancy Hair cutting Saloon" delineates joys and sorrows of ordinary barbers picking up subject matter from everyday mundane life neglected so far by many of his processors and contemporaries. The earning strategy nestles in the minds of this comparatively poorer group for enhancing their living status thus edging over the other in skilled potential. Here, the writer assails upon the slaried structure that proves nonviable financially for a smaller unit like saloon. Further, it gives the impoverished picture of a aristocratic state of mind like "One barber felt that his customer was happy if more time was spent in the haircut and proceeded on giving him a second cut after the first one was over. Finally he applied oil to the customers hair and kept on massaging it gently, sending him to an ecstatic state". Ghulam Abbas drew up a full stop to a

glower rural life for ushering in the urban set up by four barbers those put to the test of survival but failed. The story gives the account of the illusion of such aspirant dalits that shattered ultimately.

Andrew Sinclair in his introduction to the book “The emancipation of the American Woman” clearly says “barbarism was more frequent in the streets than the forests. Progressive reform had to deal with the city jungle as well as the subsistence farm”, such a theme is well settled in the following poetry lines of Fehmida Riyaz. Here, she tries to demonstrate her love for an oppressed lady, a maidservant who is in a tight corner by her lord, the employing authority.

Listen to her heartrending screams
Which raise strange spectres
That remain naked in spite of their chadurs
Who are they? You must know them, Sir
Your highness must recognise them
These hostages who are ‘balal’ for the night
With the breath of morning they became homeless
They are the slaves who are above
the half-share of inheritance for your
Highness off-spring

Tr. Rukhsana Ahmad

Majid Amjad, a celebrated poet with mellifluous pondering over fundamentals of reality and vision has never sacrificed exploring the root of helplessness. He is compassionate endowed with the quality of a large hearted human being extending love objectivity even without discovering the identity of a stranger.

Who is knocking at my door?
Let me go and see
Who is at this nightly hour?
x x x x
Doth my shelter seek?
Who is this tired stranger
Reclined against my thatched eaves?
Come, relax inside my hut
Here, share my broken cup
Slake your thirst from my can
Let your crumpled soul expand
Let this twinkling earthen lamp
Revive your spirits, drain your damp
Let my tears serve as balm
For your blistered feet and arms

A knock at the Door (Dastak)

Although this is not an awakening to be conscious of the state of deprivation among this set of people, never the less, it gives us the hints of a decent fellow feeling, solidarity within the same class. The poet if not a dalit by himself still chooses a set of mind to gain currency like objective correlative to define a heart and its outcry for the cause.

Kishwar Naheed plays a bit of irony to define the combatant spirit of the women. The social oppression on ladies denigrating them all to a broken segment is now challenged through robust feminism:

It is we sinful women
While those who sell the harvests of our bodies
become exalted
become distinguished
become the just princes of the material world

It is we sinful women
Who come out raising the banner of truth
up against barricades of lies on the highways
Who find stories of persecution piled on each threshold
Who find the tongues which could speak
have been severed

Sri Lanka

Due to sudden uprising of ethnic troubles since 1983, the people in northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka are being experienced with a lot of travails of life. This too has its gruesome impact on the creation and flow of literature in this small island. Tamil, the main language of this country dates back nearly 600 years of its maiden origin. Sinhalese has also its ancient root. There has been the confluence of Christian, Islamic and saiva tamil tradition accumulating over a period of centuries. Since Tamil became the mainstay in each one this can be attributed to “dichotomous development of religio-literary traditions as pointed out by Karthigesu Sivathamby. He further says, “Although Sri Lanka is geographically small, one could identify nine Tamil sub-cultural regions such as Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Vanni, Jaffna, Mannar, North-West districts, Colombo, the southern districts and upcountry”. X X X By the 1950s, two trends began to surface, one denoting the emergence of a Tamil

consciousness all over the island in response to the emerging Sinhala nationalism, and the other a Marxist-inspired literary movement which was nationalistic and at the same time was opposed to social oppression and deprivation". The progressive Writers Association in Sri Lanka took the pioneering lead to stand for the cause of the oppressed. This voice found matching equivalence in the hearts of the toiling tea workers, peasants and among the intelligentsia of both southern districts and upcountry areas. Such writers expressed their solidarity for the down trodden and a subaltern consciousness swept both town and countryside. Dalits had to cry in their own voice to connote the significance of their naturalness. The contention of Auden 'Poetry makes nothing happen doesn't hold in this context. Quoting K. Satchidandan ' poetry with all its intrinsic honesty and moral authority has not been able to prevent the macabre genocide of our time". True, the blood bath following the ethnic riots haunts public mind like a spectre and the vast multitudes can't derive solace from a finer craft like literature in absolute sense.

K. Daniel, in his novel 'Panjamar' shares the anxieties of the dalits and this is a fine piece of art to incorporate sufferings of this class. The native verve of the depressed community is sharply reflected in this. Kailaspathy writes "Daniel and Dominic Jeeva, who are outstanding fiction writers, never had any formal education. To them writing itself had been a continuing process of self-education, concerned with protest and experimentation, the existing process of exploration and growth, they solved their impulse through writing. Naturally they brought with them an idiom or idioms that were fresh, robust, plain and simple but capable of infusing a new life into our language". Coming from the same Dalit Castes, they identified themselves with the camp of marxist and sketched brilliantly their own life style of sorrows, collision of upper and lower castes. Although they didn't absolutely agree upon ideological party lines like Kailaspathy mentioning a fact that S. Ponnuthurai, an important Tamil writer had to face the wrath of party workers because of his candid description of sex in his prose writings. They, at the same time couldn't ignore the well-knit fraternal spirit of comradeship. They

borrowed language of the common folks to enrich their prose style and spoken language came to adorn the pride of mettle in their writings. The short story of N. K. Raghunathan “Nilaviley Pesuvom” “Along the hills” raises its voice against caste prejudices in Jaffna, Sivaramnis “Yuthakala Iravondrin Nerukkuthal” (A war-torn night) gives the reader a picture how people are victims of a mindless conflict. The forceful expulsion of Muslims from the North is reflected in the story of S. Vilvaratnam’s “ The worship Star” and such creative impulses always rely on the portrayal of the true remorse of a tormented mind without bothering whether his/her birth qualities to be a dalit or not.

Because of ethnic strife, so many Tamilians had to leave their native land like refugees in search of food and shelter. They became wide spread in different corners of the world with the problems of settlement. The unpalatable crudity of life has been haunting them and such a feeling of estrangement hardly restores faith in the redemptive value of literature. However, the experiment of realism in literature doesn’t have an overall appreciation from the people advocating the theory of ‘art for art sake’. This has hotly been contested by Ganesalingan who, like Balzac assails upon the overweening pride of feudalism in Jaffna. Novelists like Ilankeeran, Senkai Azhian, Se.Yoganathan throws their creative arms round the dalits to guard their self-respecting status.

Looking back to seventies, revolutionary Poets endowed with flamboyant real of social commitment came forward to espouse the cause of the dalits. Puthavai Rathnadurai, Vilvaratnamas, Sivasegaram and many others joined together to uphold the undying flame of social protest in allying with the oppressed. Their writings took the form of a literary remonstrance to counter the insipid flow of statuesque in the world of poetry. They despised spiritualism and the concept of God as tools in the hands of establishment. Slowly other poets like Nuhman, Shanmugam Sivalingam, Jesurajah, Sivasegaram, Pushparajah began to perpetuate such ideal and their poems became a key feature of this. The social responsibility, hitherto unattended by the poets came like a storm warning.

of Gloomy Days), Rudra – Mangal (Destructive Prelude) became master pieces to watch over the true spirit of a free rebellious mind. In ‘The Rebel’

“On my brow shines Shiva the Destroyer
as the benedictory seal of the triumph of king of kings!
Say, courageous one
My head remains ever high!”

Such a reckless march urging upon the indomitable strength fits into the innate capacity of each individual on earth and the broken community devoutly pinned their hopes on his writings. Samsur Rahman, a celebrated poet negates any mellifluous utterance in the name of heaven or hell as it doesn’t have any direct appeal to reason and the poet dismisses the same like delving into endless smoke.

Is there anything
pushing one’s way after death?
Neither a sage
nor any thesis
clues me in on the same.

Whether to go or not to go
Yugantar – 2002
Tr. A.K.Mishra

This has an indirect reference to the limiting concept of Brahmanism, say upper caste’s impassioned feeling on rebirth. Waqas Ahmad Khwaja in his introduction to Pakistani short stories says “Here judgements are given in absolutes and presumptions are stronger than realities, superstitions more powerful than facts. So a writer has many avenues before him. He can fascinate his readership merely with his loquaciousness, his ability to juggle with words and construct rhythmic sound patterns with them. He may be satisfied with half-truths and play up to his readers, turning and twisting to attract their interest and sympathy, not at all bothered that his themes weaken and undercut each other and that the final product is an over or under-cooked porridge that an only helplessly in the garbage can”. On the other hand Abdus Sukur khan is too sensitive to draw up feelings from the deep recesses of his mind in his poem “Bride Killing”.

When I picked up the burnt-down photo
 My ten year old daughter
 While marrying off to her toy
 spoke out, "Daddy, will they not
 repeat the same to my daughter?"

Tr. A.K.Mishra

The Poet, having the grace of a compassionate heart sides with the sufferings of the better half of human race and this can be attributed to dalit morality in a larger sense. Here, a refined sensitive world takes priority over an irrational uncouth world. M. Ahmed Murshed demonstrates the play of pathos, multiple lacerations to the dalit minds:

In our life,
 We don't have any eastern window
 like a sunflower
 questing hotly
 all the while
 for a handful of light
 turning a scar of summer thirst
 (In quest of an eastern window)
 Tr. A.K.Mishra

Aches creep up in a sublime form obeying to natural poetic devices.

The poetry of Farrukh Ahmed can't be interpreted merely by putting it in the weighing formula of dalit and non-dalit. It harmonises both disparate thoughts watching fully the aesthetic vision of a sublime art form. At times, the poet has to bear with both linear and spiral motives to grasp over the beauty of a relative vision. The deprivation of life is sensitively expressed, may be through dialogues with a bird:

O bird, tireless
 Dost thou cry on
 Thy cry is like the call of freedom
 Limitless freedom
 We groan in chains,
 Insensible of thy strains
 We lacerate ourselves
 With our own hands

'The Dahuk'
 Tr. A.K.Mishra

Afghanistan

Endowed with a great cultural heritage of about five thousand years, this has been the cradle of various ethnic and religious groups with Pashto (Pushtu) and Dari (A dialect of Persian) as the forerunners of languages. Although supplemented with a number of smaller languages like Baluchi, Indic Pamiri, Dravidian etc. the people generally confine themselves with agrarian mood, staying outside the bustling city life. In a way, the peasant tribal spirit rules the roost that may be looking like uneventful for the city dwellers in a modern world. So judging upon the dreams and hopes of an average Afghan, he lives like a struggling soul amidst hills and plateaus without bothering for the tiredness of life. While taking stock of themselves, the intense living mechanism makes them bolder and happier without sharing with the barrenness of the alienated urbanity. As observed, kinship till date remains the essence of social living. In a patriarchal society, the concept of Dalit is redefined as ladies stand helpless before their male counterparts. The cold sense of defeatism is pronounced symbolically by poet Khushal Khan Khattak.

Although, I wander like a hawk
about the barren hills
Many a pretty little partridge
Has fallen prey to me.

The above lines are well-crafted and the metaphors engaged for both 'strong' and 'weak' are distinct. Jalaluddin Balkhi Rumi is introspective to censure his own self, a dialogue to awaken the moralist in him:

I plot to get what I want
and end up in prison
I dig pits to trap others
and fall in
I should be suspicious
of what I want

This aims at the modest living behaviour of a human scale. Any streak of sadism is bound to retaliate. So the poet indirectly hints at the cleansing of bestial stubbornness in man. Abu Shukur of Balkh philosophises a poetic outburst :

A tree with a bitter seed
 fed with butter and sugar
 will still bear a bitter fruit
 from it, you will taste no sweetness.

The above lines evoke a universal feeling like the progeny of a snake is bound to be venomous that best symbolises an exploitative character. This, in a way continually slaving someone. Khalilollah Khalili denounces captivity in any manner. 'A shackled mountain' and 'A free butterfly' are a couple of symbols to articulate the ways of life how one is enchained whereas the other one is bounteous to flap its tiny wings of freedom. This may speak of the dichotomy between the profundity of a free and a spiteful regimented life:

Oh' Great mountain, reaching far into the sky!
 How long will you find satisfaction in self love
 though just a tiny butterfly,
 I am yet free
 to dance on a flower
 While you remain shackled

Nepal

Like any Hindu set up, caste barrier is there in Nepal flapping its dark wings since long. Indira Ghale tells this in her autobiographical note. "There are seven children in my family, I was born into a tailor family which is known as Dalit (untouchable) in the Nepali Hindu society. XXX My mother gave birth to a child when she was only 14, after getting married at the age of 13. She had to have many children as my father required her to have a son. There is a popular song in our society that is sung when a girl is born. The words are *Kori deu aama, Bati deu aama phool pani Lagai deu Ma aauti cheli Dher Bhaya Bhane Tammer ma Bagaideu*. It means "Groom me my mother, Decorate me with a beautiful flower in my hair But if you think I am a burden to you please leave me in the river. "XXX When I was born my father did not see my face for 10 days because I was a daughter". Such a statement is just an addition to innumerable dalits scattered around the world. She further says "What oppression we experienced that day being a dalit! We had no place to stay, no food to eat. XXX We finally searched for a dalit house to stay over night. XX At that time I also realised that Dalits are

lower than dogs, without social prestige”. The labour, skills and blood of the dalits are accepted by the society but why can't we drink the same water??”

In the remote valleys, the Sherpa or the Lepcha can n't remain cheerful or satisfying either. The socio-economic turbulence get priority in his mind than the snowy peak or the tall mountain. Neither gods nor temples can appease his quenchless hunger. Norjang Syangden in his poem “Aafailai ek tukra” (a piece for oneself) broods over himself thinking nothing more than a living carcass:

*Jiwanalai masit dherai
Chot harm chhan
Lari mareko mahtwa akangshaka
Laasharu chhan*

To live
I have many ailments
Dead bodies of lofty ideals
lie on the ground

Indra Sundas, a promising story writer sketches the fight to establish a new social order devoid of injustice and his anthology “Romanthan” (Recollection) goes a long way to fulfil such commitment.

Parijat sketches a struggling life drained of anything called luxury. Life to the poet is nothing but a great cry of hard toil. Even god himself is taken into account for his fading glory:

Where are Krishna's Radha
Rama's Sita and Manu's beloved, where?
But here her daily toil
Has become a rigmarole-
A hard life,
Here
The handful of paper money
Coming at the end of the month-
Part of a graduate's 'Pay-Scale',
Are pawned
On her overworked sweat drops.

So, in the long run, it is perhaps not necessary to bring down lines from “Indian Poetry Today” edited by Swadesh Bharati in 1969. As told by R.V.B Sharma in his slim volume “Thus society has become a vast congregation of mutually praising and mutually honouring members. Flatterers and sycophants have become entrenched in seats of authority”.

So, in order to explore the sublime voices of truth and justice, like Mardhekar one has to cry loudly, "Grant me, O Lord, just this one boon: may my tongue never be paralysed". It is enough to bear with the irrational burden of the past. It is equally disastrous to speak of patriotism or nationalism of any kind. Even today, transcending national and international boundaries, a dalit's mind bubbles in:

Didn't look for my hometown, didn't ask
what my name was to be;
merely, shuffling along the road,
I auctioned myself.

Didn't Look For My Hometown
Mardhekar (Marathi)
Tr. Vilas Sarang

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