

BOOK REVIEW

by Sourav Sangiri

**MARGINAL WRITINGS IN ENGLISH EDITED BY JAYDEEP SARANGI AND
CHAMPA GHOSAL: A REVIEW**

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‘Dalit’ means oppressed or exploited on the basis of caste .It describes the people who have been traditionally considered untouchables and oppressed by the mainstream culture.Talking about the subject matter and aesthetics of Dalit writing,Dr.Jaydeep Sarangi, the editor of the book explains:

“Studying Dalit literature is a sociological engagement.Dalit literature is essentially a shock to the so-called traditional senses.A sound piece of dalit literature is that which is militant in texture.”

The book in its 24 chapters along with a preface presents a thought-provoking analysis of dalit aesthetics and dalit literature.The book is dedicated to ‘All those voiceless creative souls’ whose writings are their resistance.

BajrangKorde’s paper ‘Literature of Resistance’ historicises the dalits.This paper journeys from mythology to sociology.Korde refers to the ‘Varna’ system which was a stratified social system comprises Brahmin,kshatriya,vaishya and shudras.In this whole hierarchy the shudras-the present day dalits were given the lowest status.He adds that the caste system was born out of the varnasystem and one of the most exploitative,unbearable and torturous aspects of Hindu social system for dalits was untouchability.In regard to caste system, Prof.Korde quotes a sparkling comment by Dr.BabasahebAmbedkar:

“...The problem of untouchability is really a class-struggle between caste Hindus and untouchables and this seems to be a never- ending conflict.”

Prof.Korde progresses with another comment by Dr.Ambedkar who was greatly offended at the unbearably and indescribably adverse effects of untouchability on the lives of the dalits:

“Nowhere in the history of mankind can one notice inequity which is more intense and pernicious than the practice of untouchability”

Korde refers to BaburaoBagul’s poem ‘You who have made the mistake’ where Bagul states that dalits have made a mistake by taking birth in this country:

“Those who leave for foreign lands,

Embrace other tongues,dress in alien garb

- them I salute.”

Dr.Korde in his highly thought-provoking paper opines the fact that there is need for an independent aesthetics of dalit literature because dalit literature can not properly be evaluated within the framework of traditional aesthetics i.e.the aesthetics of the so-called mainstream literature.This observation has given birth to the thought-provoking question ‘Can a non-dalit writer write about the dalits?’

Dr Sipra Mukherjee’s paper entitled ‘Building a Movement of Faith:TheMatuas of Bengal’ focuses on the making of the Matuadharma,a religious sect of the Namasudras,an outcaste community.This religious sect,as stated by Dr.Mukherjee,begun in early nineteenth century Bengal,was initiated by Sri Harichand Thakur and then continued by Sri GuruchandThakur.Rejecting all brahminical hegemony and rituals,theMatua dharma attracted the lower castes with its simple message of love and worship.Dr.Mukherjee refers to the book ShriShriHarililamritawhich articulates what Roger Chartier has called the “both the acculturated and the acculturating”features of all religions.Indeed gradually it has now become a’ Movement of Faith’.

Prof.BaisaliHui’s paper titled ‘Dalit”Draupadi”’:Violation of Women and the Subversion of Epic Tradition’ concentrates on the mainstream-marginal or central-peripheral relationship.Prof.Hui through her paper tries to explain the complexities of contemporary life through the character of Draupadi.Mahasweta Devi’s story deals with a combat between the

state power armed with guns,ammunition and advanced war technology and on the other hand the primitive tribes defending themselves with bow and arrow.Senanayak here is the representative of State,representative of the Centre which controls everything:

“Senanayak knows the activities and capacities of
the opposition better than they themselves do.”

Prof. Hui in her paper explains that in rejecting her clothes Draupadi(Dopdi) rejects the possessive imposition of ‘honour’and’shame’ on female body,a patriarchal construct to keep women subdued and silent:

“What’s the use of clothes?

You can strip me, but how can you clothe me again?

Are you a man?”

The Vastraharan or the stripping are the attempts to free oneself from the four walls of patriarchal construct.Senanayak has no answer to her challenge:

“for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before

An unarmed target terribly afraid.”

Manohar Mouli Biswas in his paper ‘Bengali Dalit Literature and Culture: A Dignity Discourse’ focusses on the gradual progression of Bengali Dalit Literature streaming from pre-independence to modern day. Mr. Biswas refers to M.N.Roy, an internationally known radical humanist of India who once commented:

“When political power is concentrated in the hands of

Small community you may have a façade of parliamentary

Democracy but for all political purposes it will be dictatorship.”

The dalit literature and culture as stated by Mr. Biswas desire to go beyond caste system in ideological reconciliation with Buddhism. Mr. Biswas in his paper categorises the dalit writings streaming from novel as Detailers to Poetry as Foretellers.

The papers of Dr. Amrit Sen and Prof. Mousumi Sen Bhattacharya titled “Translating Dalit Literature: Texts and Problems” and “Poetry and Resistance: The Literature of Manipur” respectively deal with the problems a translator faces translating dalit texts and how the sense of identity is expressed through poetry by the poets like Robin S. Ngangom, Saratchand Thiyam, Yumlembam Iboucha and so on in Manipur

Dr. Sen in his paper points out that translation assumes a vital role in making the range of dalit literature available to audiences. Quite interestingly Dr. Sen puts the emphasis on how the title of a text changes during translation. He in his paper has pointed out that the initial Bengali title Ekhono Adim provided him with a challenge. He had toyed with the title with the title ‘Primitive Still/Primitives’, but had settled for ‘Survival’. Prof. Mousumi Sen Bhattacharya through her paper tries to explore how the protest and resistance against state oppression has been a major factor in the identity formation of the poets of Manipur and that inevitably is the paradigm of the Dalit.

“Civil society can’t move forward if the marginalised sections are ignored” commented Dr. Sipra Mukherjee, head Dept. Of English giving her thoughts on Dalit writings. Certainly the Dalits in today’s India are not lagging far behind. Chaturtha Duniya, Adhikar, Nikhil Bharat and Dalit Mirror are the four leading magazines from West Bengal where the focus is on dalit aesthetics and dalit writings. Gayatri Spivak once questioned: “Can the subaltern speak?” Now the answer is ‘Yes’. Their writings have the potential to be an integral part of the mainstream canonical literature. I do sincerely hope that voices of the voiceless will be heard more more emphatically in the coming nostril of time.

Bio:

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