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“Dalit Children are Children Too”: Reframing the World of Dalit Children through Some Dalit Narratives

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Abstract: The paper aims to focus on how children are being represented in Dalit Literature. The paper will further answer the question of whether there can be any Dalit Children's Literature. To answer the question of how children are being represented in Dalit Literature, my paper will include *Surviving in My World: Growing Up Dalit in Bengal*, *Poisoned Bread* and *Interrogating my Chandal Life: An Autobiography of a Dalit*. Dalit children are mostly portrayed as a labourer and the hardships of their lives are depicted vividly throughout. They are often tortured immensely for even a drop of water. It can be perceived that there prevail innumerable deaths of Dalit children which are often reported in newspapers oftentimes. My paper thereby will formulate the portrayal of Dalit children and will answer my research question as well.

Keywords: Dalit, *kochuripana*, Dalit children, Marginalised.

Introduction

At a time when human rights issues are prominent, erudite portraits of marginalized communities are of prominent significance. Dalit literature strives to bring to the fore the intolerance, barbarity, and ostracism confronted by the Dalit community in India. Members of the Dalit community are

marginalized and their lived experiences are disregarded by the majority. Their story is considered to be inappropriate for writing. The emergence of Dalit literature, consisting of poetry, novels, memoirs, etc., is purposely amending this crisis by exemplifying the nuances of Dalit lineage. Literature exemplifies society and the people who reside in it. Most of the Literature concentrates on adults not paying enough attention to children and their outlooks. They don't bring into the world those spokespeople and what they assert is often not heard. Children's voices are an indispensable appliance for appreciating impartial and unbiased thought processes. Likewise, child girls' delinquency approximately makes twice as much. The pain, the oppression, and the girl's voice are prohibited numerous times. Children's and adult emotions and understanding can be glimpsed as binary, in contrast to adults' spirituality and selfish desires. Dalit Children's identity and agency battle with Caste and Class psyche. For girls, the child is even more alienated in the formation of women. The burden is correlated with the process of the social formation story of this genre. Gender and caste are influenced since birth. This paper aims to focus on the representations of these children. It applies to that section, not to texts that do not belong to mainstream literature where they are alienated and perished to relentless intimidation based on caste and untouchability for ages in Indian scenarios in the era of Dalit literature.

Depiction of Children through Adult Dalit Writers

First of all, let us consider the text *Amar Bhubane Ami Benche Thaki* (2013) by Manohar Mouli Biswas which is interpreted within the foreword as one of the earliest Bengali Dalit autobiographies and probably the primary to be translated into English. Its translation, by Angana Dutta and Jaydeep

Sarangi, *Surviving in My World*, exemplifies a big milestone on the road to creating Bengali Dalit writing more widely available and in so doing raising awareness of caste discrimination in Bengal. The book provides an imperative susceptibility of Dalit life in Bengal before and during the 1947 Partition. Childhood memories provide fragments of the story of the Namashudras, a caste-based group living in a remote little village in East Bengal. As a child even he experienced that his community was labeled as a lesser untouchable caste and derided as "pork-eating naas". The upper-class babus avoided the neighbourhood and "did not sit and dine along with them". Since hunger was a terrifying illusion that plagued their lives and they were dependent on the fanciful river Kali, Biswas recalls his father's struggles to provide for the family's basic requirements. "Famine descended upon the residents of Kali and Chitra riverbanks... there was not a bit of rice in anyone's home," he reminisces of the year when the rice fields were flooded and the crops were destroyed by saline water. Almost everyone began to dwell in constant hunger. People had to adapt to this aggressive setting to reside when left on their own or with non-governmental subsidies. Biswas himself had to connive his means of survival, "growing up like the water hyacinth and dying like it, uncared for". His first lesson in resisting complacency and apathy came from nature. He addresses a time in his childhood when he had an unusual obsession with fishing. He used to spend hours watching the fish and surveying their habits. He appeared to comprehend that a structure of aristocrats and non-aristocrats likewise monopolized the world of fish. He was qualified to discern between the "chuno, puti, koi, and magur fishes."

Biswas offers from his childhood both a prism through which a community's struggles can be glimpsed and also a survey of a single person's tenacity and struggle. The text ascertains that "it is through memoir writing and reading that we find our connectedness, our oneness with another, our common

humanity" in an intense manner exempted from sentimentality and the lenient magniloquence of victimization. Thereby, from this narrative, the condition of Dalit children and their sufferings can be vividly probed.

In *Interrogating My Chandal Life* by Manoranjan Byapari, Byapari deals with vitality and quests for living. He was preordained to confront every hardship in his life. Byapari belongs to the Namashudra caste. Namashudra identity is the identity with which Byapari was born. It was his first identity, an identity his father was remarkably proud of. Manoranjan Byapari was born into a poor Dalit family in a place called Turukkhali was once part of the Barisal district, now extinct in East Pakistan. His father was a contract worker, so he could not feed his family's son well. Byapari's childhood was uneasy and his family proceeded with to toil to obtain fundamental conveniences. He also acquaints us with his caste, which is the caste of the Namashuddurs of Kashyapgotra. Its community is considered Chandals. Byapari says that his caste did not become extinct because of the continual miseries and hardships imposed on them, but they endured employing their own resources, ascertaining the persistence and resilience of their surname. When upper-class colonial officials in the first census referred to them as Chandals, they repeated themselves. We are also informed that the entire community of Namashuddur had started following a new faith called Matua religion founded by Harichand Thakur. Due to the ongoing unrest, officials were forced to change the name of the community from Chandals to Namashudra in the census records. But according to Byapari, the attitude towards this community has not altered. And he thinks the four-decade war has been ineffective. Byapari believed that it was better for them to stay away from the varna system as it could bring them liberation and independence. He felt shackled as he returned to the varna system four times. Byapari further writes, “In fact, I believe that instead of seeking inclusion in

the Hindu system of varnasarna and providing service to the Hindu varna, the Namashudras should prioritize the number remaining as the secondary varna five. He or she is then no one's slave. Lastly, we can depict that Byapari's *_Interrogating My Chandal Life_* is a substantial memoir about famine and need in, but also about persistence, toil, and a decisive will to survive. Byapari himself has portrayed his childhood sufferings through *_Interrogating My Chandal Life_*. Here also, we can discern the hardship that a Dalit child has to endure. The portrayal of a childhood which is different from the childhood of upper castes has been prominently depicted here in this narrative.

Bandhu Madhav's *Poisoned Bread* published in 1992, formulated a sensation among people as Dalit writers plucked up the motivation to write about the suffering of the oppressed classes. In the story, the grandson tries to get revenge on zamindar, Bapu Patil, who treated his grandfather, Yetalya, in a derogatory way, while the grandfather submits without objection the way he was treated by zamindar. The nephew contended that they should not be treated like scum and that they should stand up against the Dalits abuse. In the story *Poisoned Bread*, the reader is imperiled to the Dalit community, one person, of whom is a grandfather, Yetalya, and therefore the other a grandson. The grandfather seemed gentle and accepted the fate of becoming a Mahar (of the Dalit caste). He calls Bapu Patil, Anna (brother) and says that in he was Bapu Patil's slave. When Bapu Patil arrogantly mocked Yetalya saying that the Mahars and Mangs started demanding equal status because of the nobility and criticized the hostility of the social classes for the rain that year failed because they gave up on his class and we're going against his faith. Yetalya replied that he was not one of them who mandated equal status for class and class. Nonetheless, the nephew who was observing the conversation was furious at how Patil constantly mocked and insulted his grandfather. He retaliates and asks

Patil what religion cannot tolerate a man treating another man like a and what is the claim of such an intolerant religion. Angered by this cross-examination, Patil warned the boy that education would not make Mahar fit for a higher caste and he asked, "A chappal was rarely worshiped in, was it? ", which indirectly infers that Dalits deserve to be contemplated socks only because of chappal (shoes). Near the end of the story, the grandson informs his grandfather about the significance of withstanding such invective and insult. The nephew said, "But why does this have to continue? Even a lion locked in a cage all his life forgets how to hunt. "The grandfather who seemed to comprehend the significance of what his grandson was talking about asked him how they went about how this protest could encompass their livelihood as they depend on zamindar to share and the grandson replied that the protest had to be slow and that they could start by not asking for the meagre corn they received over days after the work was done. Rather it can be said that it's an act of mercy from Zamindar, which is what they deserve for the day's work. That is the impact that education can have, potentially inducing enormous modifications for the welfare of society. The depiction of Dalit children is immense in this text. Henceforth, this text also serves as a portrayal of the condition of Dalit children.

Can There Be Any Dalit Children's Literature?

The narratives like *Surviving in My Own World: Growing Up Dalit in Bengal*, *Interrogating My Chandal Life: An Autobiography of a Dalit* and *Poisoned Bread* are carefully correlated with themes of pedagogical significance, hegemony, and the subjugation of Dalit children. These Dalit tales attain a considerable task of exemplifying how the Dalits are victimized and how hegemony retains a firm grasp on the vitalities of the underprivileged groups.

There have been numerous instances in recent years where Dalit children have been mercilessly marginalised. Some of these situations include incidents from Madhya Pradesh's Damoh, where two Dalit children were allegedly and brutally whipped by Lodhi community members for touching a water utensil.

Furthermore, a former village head allegedly beat up a Dalit girl, ousted her from school, and employed casteist slurs against her because she wasn't wearing a uniform. The girl remarked that she would wear it once her father purchased it for her.

Can there be thus any Dalit Children's Literature? Yes, it can be, but the literature should then focus on the adequate rights of Dalit children and should exemplify the protest against the brutalities of Dalit children. The Dalit Children's Literature should incorporate books and movies which will stimulate them and will enable them to combat for a decent world to survive irrespective of Caste, Class and Gender.

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