

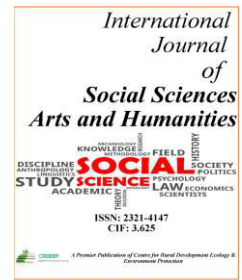
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**Short Communication****Dalit Identity Politics: A Study of Manohar Mouli Biswas' Poems****Kulanand Yadav**

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ABSTRACT

Manohar Mouli Biswas is the banyan tree in the domain of Dalit writing in Bengal. His contribution does not lie confined to the arena of creative and critical writing. He has been continuously striving for Dalit empowerment as a member of Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sanstha, an outfit for supporting and promoting the Dalits. Two of his collections of poems are now available in English translation namely *Poetic Rendering as yet Unborn* and *The Wheel Will Turn*. Both these collections deal with the issues of Dalit identity politics with a spirit of protest. Biswas is a revolutionary voice that is truthfully reflected in his poems. Dalit poetry in India has appeared as a separate entity and a distinguished genre that follows an alternative theory of aesthetics saturated with subaltern's experiences besides linguistic rendering of pain and pangs of marginalized section. His 'fire in the belly' bursts out in the poems included in *The Wheel will Turn*. The poems in this collection centre round the theme of striving for freedom which was considered to be unattainable a few years before because the bondage of caste enslaved them in such a way that they have been denied of the scope of rising above their marginal station. But the scenario has been changing slowly as if the wheel begins to turn. *Poetic Rendering As Yet Unborn* is another collection of Biswas' poems which contains twenty-nine poems with an interview taken by Dr Jaydeep Sarangi. Each of the poems highlights Dalit issues.

Poetry written by Dalit poets is tied in with communicating of Dalit experience with Dalit awareness pointing Dalit freedom through Dalit transformation. For the vast majority of the Dalit writers, this kind is one of the most remarkable mediums to ventilate their solid feeling of Dalit identity politics. Their verse goes under the classification of what is called 'protest poetry' which raises the protest against a wide range of social insidious practices dependent on caste hierarchy and standing framework. Nearly every verse, each sentence, each expression of Dalit verse echoes what Dr Ambedkar raises the trademark, "Educate, organize and agitate" (Murphy 155). In this way, Dalit poems are a basic piece of the 'dignity discourse' in a position based society in India. Dissimilar to, a portion of the idealist English artists, Dalits writers don't have a wonderful past to take a short snooze through 'idealism'. By the by, Dalit scholars articulate their long stifled resentment through their poetry.

Like Anna Bhau Sathe, there are lots of Dalit artists across the nations who are composing poems in various regional languages, for example, Marathi, Hindi, Telugu, Gujarati, and Bengali. One can locate various graceful assortments accessible in the book market in both unique dialects and English interpretation. With regards to Bengal, the arising Dalit poets discover Dalit verse as the most impressive medium to communicate their unpleasant and horrible experiences. The Dalit verse in Bengal has its own

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set of experiences. In the late 19th century, the Bengali Dalit verse thrives as the piece of Matua artistic movement. The writers from the Namashudra sub-caste would create oral verse as Folk melodies and Kobigan. These cultural exhibitions like Shakespearean plays filled a pedantic need to inspire the soul of uneducated Namashudras. As of now, the contemporary Dalit artists endeavor to make another influx of verbalization for identity politics. Through their verse, they need to excuse the well-known case that caste doesn't make a difference in Bengal. In any case, the most powerful Bengali Dalit poets are Jatin Bala, Manohar Mouli Biswas, Kalyany Thakur Charal, Kapil Krishna Thakur, Kishore Biswas and so on. Be that as it may, M.M. Biswas is the dominant Dalit voices in Bengal.

'Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sanstha' which was established in 1992 had been contributing much to the development of Bengali Dalit Literature. Manohar Mouli Biswas is one of the leading members of this group to articulate the Dalit voice. Biswas mainly writes in Bengali, however, some academicians come forward to translate his writings into English for national and international recognition. Two of his collection of poems are now available in English translation namely *Poetic Rendering As yet Unborn* and *The Wheel Will Turn*. Both these collections deal with the issues of Dalit identity politics with a spirit of protest. Biswas is a revolutionary voice which is truthfully reflected in his poems.

Dalit poetry in India has appeared as a separate entity and a distinguished genre which follows an alternative theory of aesthetics saturated with subaltern's experiences besides linguistic rendering of pain and pangs of marginalized section. Caste along with class appears as the root of socio-economic disparity in the Indian context. Edmund Burk says, "In that country the law of religion, the laws of the land, and the laws of honour, are all united and consolidated in one, and bind a man eternally to the rules of what is called his caste" (Burk 303). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's question, 'Can the Subaltern Speak' opened the door for a fresh discussion. Biswas writes regarding the question raised by Spivak, "... the subalterns live in the urban dumpy localities or remote villages. They are born as economically poor, educationally backward and socially outcast... If any of the children from subalterns at some time get a chance to undergo any of formal education he is to then forget the mother tongue and devotes himself for the elite language. As a result, what happens while he starts speaking the elite language... They can speak. They speak in their own fashion and voice" (qtd. in Gaijan 97).

The Dalit Movement after independence in India all in all and West Bengal specifically has kept on propelling indignation and disappointment. In this context, the true endeavors of the Dalit activity are committed for redefining of their identity as an expected mass development, including all the mistreated masses, while testing the distinctive set up conventional ideological talks. There has been an uncommon politicization of the marginalized section of society during the most recent couple of many years having a wonderful effect on the socio-political structure of the state. With regards to West Bengal, the class of Dalit writing has not procured that much interest contrasted with different pieces of the nation. In addition, there is a predominant insight among the purported upper position Marxist "Bhodhroloks" of Bengal recommending that caste discrimination does not exist in West Bengal. Interestingly, the Dalits of Bengal, who are harshly called "Chotoloks", the inverse term of *Bhodhroloks*, need to present themselves as the casualties of the caste hegemony. Regarding the issues of *Bhodhroloks* and *Chotoloks*, Mukherjee has written in the introduction to *Is there Dalit writing in Bengal?*: "If one accepts the truth of this claim it will be necessary to probe the historical circumstances that result in this relative indifference to caste identity among Bengalis or one could challenge the statement as a comportsing platitude perpetrated to be the upper castes who dominate the literary world of Bengal".(4116)

The vision, mission and determination of Biswas as a poet have strengthened the creative urge within him. His 'fire in the belly' bursts out in the poems included in *The Wheel Will Turn*. The poems in this collection centre round the theme of striving for freedom which was considered to be unattainable a few years before because the bondage of caste enslaved them in such a way that they have been denied of the scope of rising above their marginal station. But the scenario has been changing slowly as if the wheel begins to turn. Thus the title "The Wheel Will Turn" refers to the Wheel of Justice which after remaining stagnant for centuries has started its movement towards an egalitarian society. M.B. Gaijan writes in this context: " In the book review, Anand notes the title is derived from the Buddhist concept of ' Dharma Chakra Pravartana' which symbolizes the futuristic vision that

there will be dharma established in the world. The world of injustice, exploitation and suffering will turn into a world of peace, equality and justice" (Gaijan 106). This collection contains fifty poems originally written in Bengali by Manohar Mouli Biswas and translated into English by different academicians with an Editor's note by Jaydeep Sarangi, an introduction titled as *The Fourth Person* by Kalyan Kumar Das and an interview of the poet.

The first poem of the collection entitled as *Reverence* sets the tune of the whole volume. This poem states the entirety of Biswas' mission as a poet who believes in ' the pen is mightier than the sword'. The poet writes:

If I am called an untouchable (Shudra)
The fractured veena within
Spreads fire instead of tears
Your masks of conspiracy
And rippled off and crash on the earth.
Reverence just continues clapping its hands and declares
This' is an insult to mankind'
Nothing else. (The Wheel Will Turn: 17)

The very first line of the poem takes the readers to the issues of identity politics where the Shudra identity had fractured the heart of a Dalit. This poem also sheds light on the socio-cultural issues of contemporary India. So long being used by the people of upper castes as an instrument to satisfy them, the Dalits began to articulate their protest as if ' spreads fire instead of tears'.

The study of Indian socio-cultural history reveals the derogatory position of the Dalit women who are doubly marginalized; first as a woman and secondly as a Dalit. The poem *Sudrayan* in the form of a dialogue between Savarna and Shudra women centers round the issues of Dalit identity politics relating to Dalit women. The poem begins with the prediction of the Savarna woman:

A Shudra would be raja and the country will be full of tyranny.
A Shudra would be interested in a Brahmin girl.
Would you people accept this?
After the reading of the scriptures she would return home
My mother, an illiterate Shudra mother
Would cry in solitude and tell
"We did not do good being born in this country
Khoka, the country would be saved if I were infertile... (Wheel Will Turn: 41).

Though equality, harmony and compassion for all living constitute the preaching of Indian spirituality, the reality goes contrary to it. The Shudras cannot be included in the mainstream; they cannot be great; Shudra women can be sexually exploited but they have no right to give birth to a king.

The poem *As I Saw* provides a realistic picture of the Dalits who remaining far from the polished and shining metro domain of India engage themselves in the struggle for survival by doing hard labour of which fruit is enjoyed by the people from the upper castes. The poet writes:

The cowboy doesn't herd cows
In the fields any more
There's no green grass
Left there.

If only he had some education
He could have become something useful... (Wheel Will Turn 22).

The poem *Remembering You* shows the hope of a 'new earth' amidst 'untaught poverty' of the Dalit people. No doubt, some of Biswas' poems present the utter helplessness faced by the downtrodden people. However, this poem hints at the possibility of change in sight:

Hand me dynamite-a pen, like the dynamite
This country outpours fifty cores of the untaught poverty-mute
We were, now in voice, remembering you
Want to touch the face of a new earth pulling veils aside. (Wheel Will Turn 32)

Poetic Rendering As Yet Unborn is another collection of Biswas' poems which contains twenty-nine poems with an interview taken by Dr Jaydeep Sarangi. Each of the poems highlights Dalit issues. *Ghatotkach and Hidimba: A Dialogue*, a long narrative poem with an episode taken from the great Indian epic The Mahabharata, can be considered as a protest poem against caste discrimination and cultural hegemony. This poem contains some questions asked by Ghatotkach to his mother Hidimba about his father and identity:

In which family I was born?
What is my identity?
Why I am here today in this forests?
Why have I been, tell me Ma,
Deprived of father's love? (Poetic Renderings As Yet Unborn 14).

Ghatotkach's questions center round Dalit identity politics and haunt the minds of the Dalits for a long time. The poem shows the unending painful experiences of the Dalits by virtue of subverting the tale.

Indian epics and mythologies present the Aryans as heroic while the non-Aryans fail to gain the favour of representing themselves as human beings. Hidimba is considered to be a low and inferior character because of her lower origin and non-Aryan blood connection. As the character of Hidimba is taken to discuss Dalit identity politics, she has been presented as a brave, loving and highly committed woman. She answers her son's questions in such a manner that it opens a new vista of Dalit discourse. Her fascination for Bheem and love at first sight with him was not approved by her brother Hidimb because he knew well how the non-Aryans were treated at the hands of Aryans. She painfully confesses:

My heart burst with grief
In fury my brother picked up his sword
To kill Bheem...
And in a trice, killed my brother
The price of first love I paid thus, my son
I lost, when I first loved My only sibling. (Poetic Rendering As Yet Unborn: 23)

In this poem, Biswas has given speeches to these characters who represent subalterns. They give the alternative version of Dalit existence which Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak hinting at while raising the question, 'Can the subaltern speak?' According to Madhumita Majumdar, "Biswas in choosing an episode from one

of the two famous epics of the land makes a powerful statement. Usually, history is written by winners, naturally so are epics. Epic narrates stories of and from life. Whose life? It celebrates the superior race while the marginalized remain in the periphery...Manohar Biswas as an educated Dalit gives voice to two 'othered'/ subaltern characters as he reconstructs the Ghatotkach and Hidimba tale from the Mahabharata"(Majumdar 138).

Biswas portrays the agony of partition and the subsequent identity politics of the Namashudra people as he feels the Namashudra to the most noticeably terrible survivors of partition. As indicated by him, Namashudra people group is living in a different limit, separate yard. In his short poem A Separate Court Yards, Biswas notices such identity crisis:

Why are we here?
Why in this separated courtyard?
Whom should I ask?

Who will give me justice? (Poetic Rendering As Yet Unborn 63). Following seventy years of freedom, most of Dalits of West Bengal are still battling for their survival. Unfortunately, huge numbers of them are as yet landless, jobless, and destitute living in ghettos next to the rail tracks under their brief battered tents. On the one hand, the Dalits of Bengal, who are living outside of Bengal like Dhandayakarana and other provinces of India, actually couldn't get freed their way of life as being "unapproachable outcasts". In numerous cases, they are denied by the public authority's favor. Aside from that, they are going to lose their own Bengali social and etymological way of life as they live a long way from their origination. On the other hand, the individuals who stay in Bengal are some way or another making due in desperate neediness, battling day and night for their survival. Numerous Dalits of Bengal either don't have or lost their identity cards which recognize them as residents of India. Therefore, they become survivors of the police badgering and torment on the guise of unlawful Bangladeshi transients. They are genuine Subalterns. Be that as it may, the Dalit authors of Bengal are setting out to talk about their unpleasant and awful experiences through their works. In her age creating exposition "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak contends that the subaltern can't talk since they don't have their own tongue. Notwithstanding, distorting such hypothesis, the subalterns of Bengal began to speak more loudly against identity politics.

Manohar Mouli Biswas is the banyan tree in the domain of Dalit writing in Bengal as his contribution to this field is immeasurable. His contribution does not lie confined to the arena of creative and critical writing. He has been continuously striving for Dalit empowerment as the member of Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sanstha, an outfit for supporting and promoting the Dalits. 'Dalit Mirror', a bi-monthly journal edited by Manohar Mouli Biswas himself, serves as a platform for the Dalit writers to voice their suppressed cry. In an interview, Biswas said, "Since no man can be away from the influence of the environment in which he lives. The man I was in untouchable society in my early life has undergone a total change by the influence of society in which I have been present for a long time. (What) happened is really due to sanskritisation and acculturation" (Biswas 111). In spite of being cultured into the bhadrakok culture, he does not keep him aloof from the Dalit cause; rather he determines to promote Dalit

cause. He has been working with a hope that his activism and unending support for the Dalits will lead to the emancipation of the Dalit communities. He firmly declares, “In my life, activism and writing are both things to which I’ve given equal importance... I cannot keep myself away from activism” (Biswas 111). He is in no mood to give up his struggle against caste-class hegemony in his attempt of asserting Dalit identity. In the poems of Biswas the reality of the Dalits are realistically presented with an object of demolishing the cruelties and injustices, the common lot of the Dalit people. Bratati Biswas writes, “The theme of untouchability, the idea of ‘touch’ as contact and ‘touchability’ as acceptance is an important symbol of his poetry. Manohar Biswas explores the nuances of the social practice through a metaphoric and symbolic language. Many of his poems express the Dalit’s sense of alienation from the main stream.

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