



## TRACING THE FRAGMENTS OF UNWRITTEN HISTORY: INDIAN DALIT PERSONAL NARRATIVES IN THE LIGHT OF FOLKLORE AND INDIGENOUS CULTURE

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### ABSTRACT

Indian Dalit personal Narratives or the life-writings, most often than not are seen to be compared and contrasted with Afro-American Black literature, Australian aboriginal literature, the Revolutionary Literature of Cuba and the Latin American narratives of Witnessing. These theorizations of Indian Dalit literature obviously lend it a global circulation and universal space. But there are much more inherent things to be explored, to be exploded in all of the Indian Dalit texts. To see dalit personal narrative in the light of the tradition of folklore and indigenous culture is to reveal as well as retrieve a purely cultural world which sensitizes the readers of its coherence rather than isolation to the 'unity in diversity' of the Indian Republic. Remaining cut off from the mainstream culture of the nation, living a life of (ex)'untouchables'<sup>1</sup> in grinding poverty, the Dalits, a major illiterate and marginal community of India has kept their culture to survive as a culture of their own. My focus, in this paper is to search out the folkloric elements of these marginal communities through Indian Dalit literature, temporarily keeping aside the two classic paradigms of poverty and untouchability. Taking few texts, mainly two autobiographies- Bama's *Karukku*(translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom from Tamil:2012),and Baby Kamble's *The Prison We Broke*(original *Jina Amucha* in Marathi, translated by Maya Pandit:2009), I would concentrate on the Dalit life worlds and on all the possible folkloric elements dispersing in these cultural as well as community texts. And then to see how far - these fringe elements of the nation's cultural warehouse can serve adequately to the ongoing subversive projects for recovering histories as well as indigenous culture for the dehistoricised. And support the process of Dalit-empowerment on the face of the century-old process of Sanskritization in Indian sub-continent.

**Keywords:** Folklore, Folk literature, Dalit Personal Narrative/life-writing  
Ethnography, Revisionism, Historiography. Dalitization, Sanskritization.

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### General introduction to Folklore and Folk Literature:

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife  
Their sober wishes never learned to stray;  
Along the cool sequester'd vale of life  
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

(Gray, 1742-50: *Elegy Written in a Country*)

Folklore is the creative expressions of the primitive and illiterate people of a community that are transmuted orally. And the written of it either by a literate member of that particular community or by an external academician, author is folk literature. Usually folklore is considered to be 'low literature'. There are few forms of folklore. They are - folk drama, folk songs and folk tale. J.A.Cuddon in his *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory (1998)* defined folksong that belongs to oral tradition and thus passed on from mouth to mouth. It is a communal form of expression and appears to be universal. Folklorists and cultural historians have now written down many of them. "The category includes ballad, carol, drinking song sea shanty and lullaby. Marching songs, work songs, hobo songs and Negro spirituals are also forms of folksong. To these, cultural researchers add the dumy, daina, bylina and the narodne pesme" (Cuddon, 1998. P.322). In addition, *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* by Ross Murfin and Supriya M.Ray includes that folk songs/literature are of unidentified origin and these "are accompanied by acoustic instrument, typically recount stories about everyday life and express the hopes and beliefs of ordinary people" (Murphy and Ray, 2003.P.171). Folk tales, like the folksongs belong to oral tradition. They include legends, fables, tall stories, shaggy dog stories, fairy stories, ghost stories, stories of giants and saints, devils and spirits; husband and wife tales, master and man tales, etc. (Cuddon,1998.P.323). M.H.Abrams in his *A Glossary of Literary Terms (2000)*, defines Folklore to be:

[...a] collective name applied to sayings, verbal compositions, and social rituals that have been handed down solely, or at least primarily, by word of mouth and example rather than in written form. Folklore developed, and continues even now, in communities where few if any people can

read or write. ... .. Folklore includes legends, superstitions, songs, tales, proverbs, riddles, spells, and nursery rhymes; pseudoscientific lore about the weather, plants, and animals; customary activities at births, marriages, and deaths; and traditional dances and forms of drama which are performed on holidays or at communal gatherings. (Abrams, 2000.P.100)

Then the generally accepted views regarding the importance of folklore and folkloric elements are that they authenticate the formation of a country's cultural continuum.

1. Folk elements are most often the last traceable dots/elements of the culture of any class of people; especially of the native ethnic community.
2. Folklore can't be revived by any modernized strategy or by any external agency.
3. Folklore is the most virgin compartment that has survived resisting the process of imperialism to neo-colonialism via colonialism and post-colonialism. Being located far from the centre of a nation, these indigenous cultural worlds/sects remain, so far uncorrupted by the continuous process of 'hybridization', 'cultural assimilations', 'multiculturalism'.
4. Folkloric elements are the uncorrupted past of a country which escaped the Colonial project of strategically 'dehistoricising a nation's past'. It happened so, mainly because the process of cultural invasion by the colonizing country most often could not reach to the geographical periphery as well as the 'location of culture' of these native communities of an occupied nation. So-
5. In order to re-write a nation's own uniform history; especially cultural, sociological, ethnographic history and the history of indigenous women, these fringe folkloric elements provide authentic resources.

Similar observations are made by B.A. Botkin that, "Folklore is a body of traditional belief, custom and expression, handed down largely by word of mouth and circulating chiefly outside of commercial and

academic means of communication and instruction.”  
(Botkin. 1938, P.43)

#### **Folkloric Elements in Dalit Personal Narratives:**

Generally speaking, Dalit autobiographies are memory text, a family or community saga largely voicing their painful shared history of being elbowed out as untouchables from the mainstream society. A Dalit autobiography is fiction and historical document rolled into one. The marginal community, (especially the women), though remain cloistered within the tripartite structure of caste, class and gender; they keep by heart their customary activities intact. Sharan Kumar Limbale in *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature, History, Controversies and Considerations* (2007) speaks of Dalit literature to be such that fuses with Dalit consciousness and Dalit culture and recreated towards a Dalit cause. Dalit Autobiographies by male Dalit writers such as Sharankumar Limbale's *The outcaste* ( *Akkarmashi*. Trans.2003 by Santosh Bhoomkar) from Marathi, Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan: A Dalit's Life* (trans.2007. by Arun Prabha Mukherjee) from Hindi and Balbir Madhopuri's *Changiya Rukh: Against The Night: An Autobiography* (trans.2010.By Tripti Jain) from Punjabi - remain focused mainly on their assertion of deprivation through creative identity of their writing. By registering their pain and suffering authentically, Dalit literature has become a weapon to Brahminic resistance. But the female life writings reveal an additional layer of cultural reservoir in their texts. Arjun Dangle in the introduction to *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Marathi Dalit Literature*. (2009) welcomes the writings by female Dalit writers on this particular ground that they circulate the 'uncorrupted Dalit culture' to the world.

Now, if we go through two of the female autobiographies of Baby Kamble (*The Prisons We Broke*) and Bama (*Karukku*), we would see that the texts are replete with ingredients which are part of indigenous culture. In both of them, we come across types of folkloric elements such as - festivals, rituals, folk song, lullaby, superstitions, dances, games, rhyme, hunting, foods, cooking utensils, spices etc. As we know, the Dalits are a caste which Hindu caste hierarchy place lower than the lowest. They were considered polluting to be touched (hence

*asporisha*) by the other four upper castes. However, as I said in the very beginning of this paper that I would not probe into the two common classic paradigms of 'poverty' and 'untouchability', as is usually done in reading Dalit personal narratives. Rather, I would search out few of the folkloric elements available in these select memory texts so that, the modern readers and researcher may connect these left out body of writing to the belated developments in the field of cultural studies around the world.

#### **Festivals, Songs and Marriages:**

To begin with, song and dance are very integral to these marginal people. The custom of beating a wide-mouthed clay pot holding against one belly and tapping it with a small stone to accompany a singer is very common to the *Mahar* people. There we get musical instruments which include a *Dimdi*, a tiny drum kept by the *potraja* (discussed later on) and the *Ghumki* is either a prolonged sound produced in the throat or a small musical instrument of chord.

To the Christian Dalits of *Cheri* streets (exclusive locale of Bama's auto-biography), the first Friday of every month is the day for *Pusai*, religious festival is observed. It is on the ninth day of the *Pusai* at Chinnamalai (little mountain) which the *Paraya* community enjoy with animated spirit. People would bring with them 'a rooster or a goat or a pig which would be slaughtered at the mountain, besides firewood, pots and pans, all the ingredients that they needed for cooking.' (Bama, 2000:95) Bama recounts a *carol*. After the Easter *Pusai* was said in the church, the womenfolk 'stood in a circle and sang: '*Thervil varaare, theruvil varaare – Yesu thervil varare*, He is coming through our street, be is coming through our street – *Yesu is coming in his chariot.*' (Bama, 2002:63). The women sing and dance a *Kummi* by clapping hands before the *sapparam*, the procession is taken around the village. As there is group dance by women and girls, with rhythmic clapping *Kummi*, there is *Kuuthu* a sort of folk theatre and *villuppaattu* a folk performance in which a story is sung to the accompaniment of several musical instruments. The village head's announcement is made by a harbinger beating the *kodangi*, a type of dhol.

We would also come across to few of the brilliance of inborn talent in these Dalit folk. As we know folk culture is a homespun form of art and living. No external help manual for this art form is entertained. Young people see and learn day by day. We know the cases of Uudan, the piper, Pig-pavulu and his son as brilliant singer and dancer. Bama says that they are not schooled by anybody, though they are excellent. They sing dirges to the dead folk of their community.

Again, they have a custom of singing to the young girls when they came of age. As I have said elsewhere of this paper, it is a primitive process of celebrating the first menstruation of a young girl. This confirms that the community is not devoid of the respect due to the women folk and their initiation into womanhood as well as motherhood. There happens an interesting piece of teasing song to the bride and groom by the cross-cousins of the both sides of the marriage party.

As I was grinding the masala, machaan  
You peeped over the wall  
What magic powder did you cast upon me?  
I cannot lift the grinding stone any more.  
(Bama, 2000, P.63)

On the other hand, Baby Kamble in *The Prisons We Broke*, has registered with great care the details of the marriage ceremony of the *Mahar* community. The parents of the bride bear all the expenses for the arrangements. It costed around twenty to twenty five rupees in the 1930s or 1940s. The groom's party is given a dinner of *pithale* and *bhakri* (homemade flour cake) on their arrival one day before the marriage. The marriage ceremony lasts for eight days. Five *Suwasinis* (married women whose husbands are alive) perform the *haldi* (turmeric) smearing. They would themselves bring the saltless ball made of jowar flour kept in nightlong water. This *haldi* ceremony is very important. On the day of marriage a group of young girl; *karavil* would make pranks with both parties. They would chew betel leaves themselves and supply the bride and groom with betel leaves constantly. On the first day, the couple is given a through bathing when the *shenai* (a group of bagpipers and pipers who play especially for the marriage ceremony) would be playing in the back

ground. Each of them would pour five jugs of hot water. The marrying couple is placed on a raised platform made of brick called *bohale*. It is covered with a blanket and decorated with sheep wool and then the drawn square figures on the *bohale* are filled with wheat grains. *sari* (long cloth wore by women) and *shalu* (usually a piece of red cloth) are also very specific to these ceremony. *Sada* is the betrothal gift and the few toys made of wheat flour are known as *rukhwat*.

Elder members of both the parties would sing teasing songs to each other which teem with explicit sexual citations. These folksongs are very peculiar to this *Mahar* Dalits. The sociological analysis of a text can heavily rely on these folkballad or folksongs.

Here comes the rukhwar, come and watch,  
Our Inibai's got an itch in her crotch.  
Give her a couch, she's on heat,  
Our brother is so mad, he says, 'You know what?'  
Get a he-buffalo from the jatra to fuck her,  
That's the only thing that can please her.  
Get up, Iwan, take off her clothes,  
Show her the house, give her a bath.  
(Kamble, 2009, P.91)

This song would make the groom's mother burst into tears. She would shriek and holler with rage. Then the women from the groom's side would pacify her and retort with another song that would mock the bride's mother (addressed as Inibai).

Here comes the rukhwat, covered with  
sugarcane leaves.  
When our Inibai gets hot, you know what  
she needs.  
Not less than fifty-six horses! That's what  
she must have,  
So get them for her for that's what she  
wants!  
Our Iwan runs around to catch hold of the  
horse,  
Come friends and watch the farce!  
Thus Inibai cools off her itch,  
So the groom's mother doles out sweets.

This would enrage the other side, so much so that a fight would erupt (ibid, 2009, P.91). The song would

soon have every person sobbing. The heavy *bashings* (crowns) were then taken off.

The final bridal song sung to farewell the parties include a picture of a close familial love, bondage, compassion and care among the folk, especially among the women. It engrosses the whole ceremony into an atmosphere of sorrow. These orally transmuted marriage songs are very precious document to historicise the unwritten past of the Dalit womenfolk.

Zalubai zalu, in front of the house  
There was a lovely jujube tree.  
Then came a thief, the son-in-law  
He carried it off, for all to see.  
But the tree was his, that's how it is,  
My poor love, helpless, weeps!  
Zalubai zalu, in front of the house  
There was a jasmine vine.  
Weep not, oh poor mother of mine.  
Zalubai zalu, in front of the house  
There was a champak white.  
Weep not, oh poor father of mine.  
Zalubai zalu, a flock of birds  
Have flown away, out of sight.  
Weep not, oh poor brother of mine.  
Zalubai zalu, what's left behind  
Is a reflection in the mirror.  
Weep not, oh poor sister of mine.

(Kamble, 2009, P.92).

#### Lullaby:

Lullaby is another folkloric device that can adequately serve to rescue the forgotten or lost socio-ethnological elements of a community. The people of the rural patches of India have intrinsic connections with types of songs. Music is inextricably related to these people of the soil. Lullaby is such a composition. The tuning of lullaby is very frequent. Grandmother, mother and elder sister lull the little ones with such musical 'sleep song'. Baby Kamble recounts with pristine simplicity that how Veergaon wakes up early with the sound of grinding stone mixed with sonorous lullaby in each house. Little children crawl to the lap of their mother, grand-mother or great grand-mother while they work with the grinder stone.

Let we all share a beautiful piece of a lullaby which Baby Kamble has registered in her community biography.

Baby, my daughter's child / Is lovely like a flower/  
Avert your evil eyes/ Oh you wicked neighbor//  
It's your evil eye / That's cast its spell on her/  
My tiny Baby has got / Oh such a burning fever//  
With salt and mustard seeds/ I'll drive the spell away/  
Sleep soundly on my lap/ O my sweet Bebabai//  
(Kamble, 2009, P.50)

The lullaby tells us that how in the house of a maternal uncle, a baby is safely given to sleep and before that, s/he is made sure about no evil spirit or any evil eye of the neighbor can harm him/her during the sleep. Interestingly, the primitive ways of casting away the high fever is to make the patient psychologically strong by spreading salt with mastered seed (a home remedy). The lullaby does not forget to end with its true and obvious purpose, i.e. to immerse the baby in profound sleep.

#### Games and Sports:

The Dalit community of these provinces has their own ways of pastime pleasures. They 'made no distinction between boys and girls in terms of playing and gaming. The small children make pots, pans and dolls with clay to play with. Games of children unveil social realities. They play out themes imitating what they see in home and society. Bama reveals a psychological reality when she recollects, 'Then we (children) played being married and setting off on a bus journey; the husband coming home, drunk and hitting his wife; the police arriving and beating him up.' (Bama, 2000, P.56). The reality oozes out through the children version is very clear to every reader. Drunkenness and wife beating are very frequent among the Dalit community. Mimicking to keeping shops is another game where children shop with 'tile-money'. 'The older girls would play dice games, or hop and catch, or other indoor games with tamarind seeds and pebbles, and

board games like *pallaanguzhi*, and *thattaangal* (ibid:57).

The habit of catching fish with fishing rods by using 'earthworm' from rubbish heap dodging the vigilance of the caretaker appointed by the owner of the pond and then roasting the newly caught fish in a small fire of straw on the very shore of the pond is a pure picture of Dalit society. Bama Says that the hunting of pigs, foxes, porcupines, mountain goat and deer by the native people with their hunting dogs is a source of pastime pleasure to the men folk. The old men play game such as *aadupuli* a chess-like board game with three pieces as tigers and twelve pieces as sheep. The children both boys and girls play *chadu gudu*, a game like *kabaddi*, powerful young boys play *jalli-kattu* a spot in which bulls are baited and chased. Children of all lower community in India have a common pleasure ride. At time of bathing the buffaloes, "Some of the more daring and mischievous boys climbed onto a buffalo's neck and rode as far as the middle of the pond and back." (Bama, 2000, P.04) People who have a village acquaintance may feel nostalgic in the recollections made by Bama. The girl children pluck cactus flowers which they wore 'as nose rings since the flowers looked like pearls'. (Kamble, 2007, P.43)

I would like to mention two other interesting games, played by the little children, reveal so much of the social reality of the Dalit people and their exploitations in the hand of the upper caste hindu people. These two games, in addition, show the deep rooted trauma of casteism the Dalit people suffer from. Bama continues, 'There were a few games that we played most frequently. Two or three boys would play at being Naicker. The rest of us would call them, 'Ayya, Ayya', and pretend to be their pannaiyaal. These boys would act as if they had a lot of power over us. They'd call out to us, 'Yeppa, Yeppa', humiliate us, and make us do a lot of work. We'd pretend to work in the fields all day, and then collect our wages and go home.' (Bama, 2002:56) Similarly, in *The Prisons We Broke*, the child psyche reveals through their games the basic family pattern of marriage-drinking-wife beating in the Dalit neighbourhood. Baby says, "anyway, that is how we played, mimicking our elders. (Kamble, 2009, P. 44).

#### Rituals, Superstitions, Dress and Food:

In *Sangati*, (2005) another novel based on her community's women, Bama introduces us with few of the folkloric elements. *Kulavai* is such a group activity by the women making an ululating sound before any auspicious occasions. In ceremonies, Tamil Dalit women use *mai*, a type of kajal to darken their eye; and they put flower in their hair. The women put a mark of '*Junkuman*' on their foreheads as a mark of auspiciousness. The women wear a heavy ear ornament *peaampadam* in festival like *Pongal*. *Parisam* is another caste specific ritual which is a monetary gift given by the groom's parents to the new bride. The unmarried girls mark a *pottu*; type of a decorative *bindi* on their forehead. As there happens a family feast at time of making ear hole of growing girls. K. A Gunasekaran recounts, in his autobiographical narrative *The Scar* (2009. Trans.V.Kadambari) how due to poverty, his sisters kalavattai, malathi and Jothi could not have the ear piercing ceremony. His mother had them done in the Saturday *sandai* at fifty paise. There is the custom of celebrating the first menstruation of a girl. It is known as *pushpavati*; which literally means to bloom and become capable of begetting. The biological maturity and the ability to conceive are hinted through this way. When a girl comes out age, she is made to sit in a *kuchulu*; a little hut which has been built steps away from the home where she is visited by her friends and relatives.

In course of reading the text we come across with a real Dalit life worlds. The custom of placing a 'Bashinga', a crown of flower placed around the heads of the bride, the godman or non-brahmin priest *Bhagat*, the *Bhajani mondal*, a group of amature singers who often sing in the temple at nights and also go to people's house and sing for different occasion, the ritual chant *Chang bhale* in the worship of god *Khandoba* and goddess *Mari aai*. We also come to know about their traditional dress *Choli* and *khun* (traditional blouse and blouse with a big border respectively and this 'khun they use in menstruation time.), *Shalu* is a heavily brocaded sari, generally worn by the bride at the time of marriage. Previously they had a custom of offering a '*Jogtin*' a girl offered to goddess *Bhawani/Ambabai* as her ritual worshipper, and '*Murali*', a girl offered



to God Khandoba in marriage, *Kalawatin* a dancing woman from Kolhati caste, also means woman artist and a woman of loose morals. We also come to know of their musical instrument, '*Halgi*', '*Mridang*' (both are kinds of drums) and *Lezim*, a stick with chains of iron slices used in folk dance and sports. Also we come to know about '*Tamasha*'-theatre, '*jalsa*', a public performance, '*jatra*', a sort of carnival where most often a '*Nachya*' is seen who is a male dancer dressed as a female. So, as we see this book remains a cultural repository of the Dalits and brings to the light a view of a completely unfamiliar world from within, which would otherwise have been irretrievably lost.

Possessions of Gods and Goddesses on women are so rampant among the *Mahar* community. Doubly oppressed as a Dalit and a woman in Dalit patriarchal society, the women find a psychological defence-mechanism in taking recourse to 'possessions' by Gods, Goddess and evil spirit. The sturdy father-in-law, drunkard husband and venom spitting mother-in-law all virtually come and fall under the feet of a possessed woman. Baby Kamble infuses her life-writing with all the elements of life she experienced in her childhood. Superstitions are a deep root practice among the Dalit folk. The traditional community believes in various types of evil spirits. Few famous among them are *Laman Pathan*, *Margi Mata* and *Yetal Sahib*. (Kamble.P-10). These evil spirits are very tough to dispel from the body (the community say the body a 'tree' when possessed) of the women. The verbal fight (through the voice of the possessed woman) between *Yetal Sahib* and *Margi Mata* over their proprietary on the man is a real torture on the sanity of common people. The remedy of another *Hadal* (pey) *Shertati* possessed woman is to 'take some iol, jowar, beaten jowar, kajal, kumkium in a bowl, move the bowel over the girl's body and then put it under the banyan tree at midnight' (Kamble.P-60).

Usually, the Dalit folk of *Maharwada* worship a long series of community gods and goddesses to keep them safe from evil spirit, to bless with good crop and a good fortune for the young generations. The goddess which is the most famous of all is goddess *Kalubai*; 'who granted

devotees their wishes.' They have the tradition of keeping goddess *Wadjai* and *Kadjai* in each Dalit house decorating them with 'neem twigs,' 'blood red clothes' and 'green bangle'. Two famous and kind goddesses are *Mari Mata* and *Laka Mata* which are prayed for good omen and a long age of children. Another pair of community deities who have a full sway over the Dalit folk are *Satwai* and *Barma*. They are a pair of deities who are believed to write the fortune of a child on its foreheads on the fifth day after the child's birth.

Another special cult in the family of this Dalit people is the concept of – *Potraja*. Usually the eldest son inherits this right to worship the god *Khandoba* and goddesses like *Ambabai*. He is also known as *Vagya* (*fate!*, *as he is expected to fetch the home a good alms*). Sometimes, he dispels evil spirits also. Each Dalit house has a copper tray called *Kotma*, to keep the idol a tiger skin bag called *ghol* to keep the *bhandara* (offerings) and a string instrument called *chawandake*. He is dressed in *choli* on the chest, brass anklets around feet, a whip called *asud* on the left shoulder. Whenever he moves a tinkling sound comes out. The father of the family takes detail care to make his son a perfect *potraja*. However proud the parents and the village folk may feel seeing the boy to come out as a *Potraja*, it was a special show off nothing more than begging from the upper caste.

The people are in belief of offering goat, cock and holy feast as sacrifices to these primitive deities to please them. For worshipping the idols, the Dalit women keep bangles, *khun* (a red blouse), *haldi* and *kumkum*. The traditional way of disinfecting the home and keeping it clean is to smear it with cow or buffalo dung. Superstitions may help tracing a community's collective consciousness and their lack of ability to confront with such things. But these superstitions have kept the majority of these community in dark domain of ignorance. Baby falls into self-pity when she announces, "Generations after generations, our people rotted and perished by following such a superstitious way of life." (Kamble.2009, P. 37)

#### CONCLUSIONS

'Small Voices' of Subaltern Historiography:  
Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid

Some heart once pregnant with celestial  
fire  
Hands that the rod of empire might have  
sway'd,  
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre  
(Gray, 1742-50: 'Elegy Written in a Country,  
45-48)

Usually folklorists and cultural researchers study any community's folklores under two rubrics. Its material resources and its abstract resources. Folk art, craft, musical instruments, costumes, domestic utensils, toys and all the materials used in the cultural activities of the people of the community - are material resources. Whereas the aesthetics, the performances, folk songs, lullaby, the socio-economic pattern, their geographical and climatic peculiarities of the particular place, their heritage, belief, customs and rituals, all are abstract materials. The folk artists, through their creation try to register the possible and available motifs around them. Filtering through their creative consciousness the folk artists forge the matrix of their community culture by collecting the materials from the three-tier resources of the world. They are from the cosmos, the nature and the reality. A subjective analysis of the folklores reveal that in addition to revealing the religious and mythical past of the community, folklore hardly miss to high light the contemporary life and living of the members of that particular society. So, in folklore, we find fragments of history and socio-economic reality of a community in addition to the portrayal of cultural practices, observances and customs. Thus, these loric elements of a marginal community become a sort of documentary as well as testimony to that particular culture, especially of those 'small' things which are normally overlooked by the established ways of seeing and writing histories.

As in Part II, of "Approaches to History" of his book, of *Historiography: A History of Historical Writing (2005)*, Tej Ram Sharma subsequently emphasized on many types of writings histories, such as 'Women's History', 'Local and Regional Approach to History' and 'Oral History', Dalit literature too, now-a-days has become the territory of the Revisionary critics and writers. Revisionary writing or Revisionism, as sometimes the academic

circle termed it, gained significant popularity during the 1970s and 1980s in the field of historiography. The work of Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Mink and, in particular, Hayden White, explores the structural and ideological parameters of historical writing to destabilize the claims to privileged status that the discipline has enjoyed since the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century. These Revisionists seek the tensions and ambivalences in the clashing of world views. Because the hegemonic network of power relations that operates in any given society through the auspices of culture necessarily privileged voices that reinforce the stability of the ruling elite and thus maintain the political status quo, and so certain subaltern voices are marginalized.

So, in every Dalit text, especially in the life-writings, there are plenty of potential historical elements. These elements which are more often kept devalued or hidden in colonialist and bourgeois nationalist historiography draw our attention to the small voice of the subaltern. Ranjit Guha in 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India' announced a revisionist agenda for the (by now extremely influential) Subaltern Studies volumes on Indian history. He poses the questions integral to subaltern studies. He asks-how Indian history is to be written outside the historically dominant frame works, first of colonialism and, later, of elite nationalism? Who is the one who interprets historical events and what influences his investigative consciousness in the writing of history? What documents and archives have been overlooked? When documents and archives have been consulted, how have they been read? Guha restates the subalternist position, "As a result historical scholarship has developed... a tradition that tends to ignore the small drama and find detail of social existence, especially at its lower depths." (Guha, 2012, P. 30)

If History and Literature are, according to Marxisis, an ideological state apparatus designed to promote and preserve a particular hegemonic balance, then counter-histories resist the consensual imperative of that hegemony by demanding acknowledgement of their validity. This has been seen most strikingly in the field of literary studies where "The Great Tradition"al canon of English



Literature as well as our Indian National Literature has had to be rethought in order to accommodate the claims of those previously excluded sections.

To finish off this paper, I would like to share that, giving a blow on the face of the Subalternists project of alternative historiography, today's Dalit writers and intellectuals lay hand on writing Dalit history by themselves. To recover the unrecorded history of the Dalitbahujan people and their indigenous culture, Kancha Illaih, in his essay for the volume I of *Subaltern Studies* suggested to set aside deliberately, all academic, normative procedures and methodological protocols of established historians. Illaih's radical claim is that the existing archives and ways of reading them – the discipline of history – have to be rejected if the Dalit bahujans are to find their past-historical as well as cultural. Chakraborty recounts that there ran debate between the editorial members of *Subaltern Studies* over Illaih's essay that deliberately flouted all the methodological principles that constituted the discipline of history. A very similar note in favour of rejecting the historian's history is in Badri Naraya's recent study of 'Dalit political discourse' in the Uttarpradesh region. The history would be no less 'mythical' than those produced by the Hindus. Dalit intellectuals aim to give solidarity and pride in the identities of the lower-caste/class people and in their pasts by imbuing the history of the Dalit people in 'myth' 'folk', traditional rituals, songs, art, music, dance, festivals, food, dress of the Dalits. These histories would be a counter history to resist Dalit culture from Hindu texts. Narayan calls these histories 'myth histories of the Dalits.'<sup>2</sup> Virtually this history would be 'of the Dalit for the Dalit by the Dalit'. In order to write this 'myth history', they would even not take recourse to the thoughts of Ambedkar or Marxism or any other alternative historical paradigm.

#### Endnotes:

There were infact, varieties of close nomenclatures of today's Dalit people. such as-Untouchables, 'Unseeable', 'Unapproachable', *Harijans* (means '*the sons of the God*', a word by Mahatma Gandhi used for the untouchables), 'Depressed Classes', 'Servile Classes', 'Weaker Sections', '*Asprisha*', '*Panchamas*,' '*Atishudras*,'

'*Avarnas*,' '*Antyajjas*' and 'Scheduled Castes'. After independence, the Govt. of India declared through the Untouchability Act; 1955, that any discrimination against 'untouchables' is illegal and the use of the word 'untouchable' or 'untouchability' was banned. The socio-political evolution regarding the identity of a large section of a marginalized community has to travel a long way against the stream to reach to today's *Dalit* by which, now, it is meant a pan-Indian identity marker stands for all the oppressed, exploited and marginal people mainly in terms of caste, class, religion and gender.

Recently, an analogous point is made by a ground breaking volume entitled "*Why I am not a Hindu*", a book that has been compared to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Its author, Kancha Illaiah, writes as one of the 'Dalitbahujans', whom he defines as 'people and castes who form the exploited and suppressed majority' in India (Illaih 1996: ix). Illaiah defends Dalit cultures as intrinsically more creative, democratic and humanitarian (and even feminist) than Hindu society. He claims that these castes, excluded as 'backward' or 'untouchable' by Hinduism are alienated not merely from the colonial or neo-colonial Western culture, but also from the dominant postcolonial 'Indian' one (that reflects the upper-caste Hindu culture and interests).

What difference did it make to us whether we had an English textbook that talked about Milton's *Paradise Lost* or *Paradise Regained*, or Shakespeare's *Othello* or *Macbeth* or Wordsworth's poetry about nature in England, or a Telegu textbook which talked about Kalidasa's *Meghasandesham*, Bommere Potanna's *Bhagvatam*, or Nannaya and Tikkana's *Mahabharatham* except the fact that one textbook is written with 26 letters and the other in 56 letters? We do not share the contents of either; we do not find our lives reflected in their narratives. We cannot locate our family settings in them. In none of these books do we find words that are familiar to us. Without the help of a dictionary neither makes any sense to us. How does it make any difference to us whether it is Greek and Latin that are written in Roman letters or Sanskrit that is written in Telegu? (1996: 15)

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