



Ink of Struggle: Tracing the Roots and Resonance of Bangla Dalit Narratives

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Abstract:

Bengal's history is rich and marked by powerful social movements like Kaibartya Rebellion (1070 C.E.), Chuar Rebellion (1799 C.E.), Matua Movement (1860 C.E.), the Morichjhappi Massacre (1979 C.E.), and the movement against caste-based oppression led by Namashudras in 1873 C.E. Most of these movements were led by marginalised communities challenging the systemic oppression of the society which ultimately paved the way forward for growing consciousness among Dalit communities. In West Bengal, the Dalits, predominantly the Namashudras, have long endured both overt and covert forms of oppression, specifically in the pre-independence era. Events like Indian independence in 1947 and the trauma of partition overshadowed caste-based struggles. However, as soon as the Constitution of India came into effect on 26 November; 1949, any act of discrimination or persecution of Dalits was declared as a serious and liable for punishment. All such events inspired many Dalit and non-Dalit writers to come forward and share their pain and resistance through various forms of writing. Their writings gave a strong voice to the whole community and opened up a new chapter in Bangla literature.

This research work tries to explore the rich and overlooked tradition of Dalit literature and different forms of discrimination faced in Bengal, such as Dalit movements and other such important events and their contribution to literature and society through analysis of various important texts. It will also question popular beliefs and establish that the Bengali Dalit Literature holds immense power as a tool of social change.

Keywords: Dalits, Dalit Movements, Bengali Dalit Literature, Ink of Struggle, Resonance.

Introduction:

Dalit writing does not get the proper recognition it deserves in Bengal. When it is compared to other states, especially where Dalit literature plays an important role in shaping literary discourses in a very smooth way, like Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, etc. The unique socio-political history of Bengal is one of the major reasons behind it. Bengal, as well as its people, experienced many major movements like the fight for independence, the trauma of partition, and intense debates among the educated elite about social issues during the colonial era. These major events took the centre of the stage and pushed the Dalit voices to the background of the stage. Dalit literature developed in Bengal and survived over a long period of time, but still could not make it to mainstream literature there. Moreover, the situation started to change in a proper way with the publication of *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam* in Bengali in 1956 and later on translated into English as *A River Called Titash* by Kalpana Bardhan in 1993. After the publication of this book, the readers got another view of caste discrimination in Bengal and slowly-slowly wanted to know about the reality. After that, many collections of real-life incidents and discrimination brought many of the powerful and painful stories into English as well to the world's readers and exposed the reality of society with deep-rooted caste-based discrimination that often goes unspoken in Bengal. Is there a presence of Dalit literature in Bengal? - To answer this question, Meenakshi Mukherjee, along with Manoranjan Byapari, wrote in 'Is There Dalit Writing in Bangla?' that-

“...not only mainstream journals like “Desh” but also several little magazines that I read regularly- never made me aware that any such category existed in Bangla. This could either mean nothing is published in Bangla that can be separately labelled ‘dalit literature’ or that there is a collective reluctance in mainstream discourse to recognise as literature any writing that is done outside the upper caste literary establishment.” (Byapari and Mukherjee 4116-120)

According to Byapari and Mukherjee, it is only a belief that has been carefully spread by those people who are in power or control society. Therefore, it is become easier to ignore and push out the Bengali Dalit literature from the mainstream literature towards the back. In a country like India, where caste has significantly contributed to shaping people's social and cultural identity (as well as lives), a long-standing claim that the existence of caste in Bengal becomes 'irrelevant' and stands out from the real truth. (4116-4120)

Many researchers and writers have already shown that the so-called absence of caste in Bengal is not real, but rather the result of many overlapping socio-political, cultural, and economic factors, especially the changes that took place during the historic split of India in 1947. The people from oppressed communities, when they tell their own stories, gives us a deeper understanding of history and challenges the usual ways knowledge is created and shared. So, here the focus is on how Dalit writers and thinkers from West Bengal view the lack of visibility within Bengali Dalit literature. While studying the artistic value of Dalit literature could be worthwhile, this piece mainly argues that the delayed recognition of Bengali Dalit writing stems from deep-rooted caste prejudice – this reality has always shaped Bengal's social, cultural, and political life.

The renowned Columbia University scholar, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, who was originally from Kolkata, once asked a powerful question that caught the attention of the world: "Can the subaltern speak?" The current research is not aimed at arguing against or in favour of any prevalent belief rather wants to explore how social movements have emerged among the marginalised people of Bengal in pre-independence era, and how these movements have given rise to a distinct literary genre emerged and popularised as Dalit literature. Just as Marxist-influenced literature was born out of Marxist ideology, Dalit literature finds its roots in Ambedkarite thought – the philosophy of Dr B.R. Ambedkar. Dr Ambedkar, who devoted his whole life to understanding the realities faced by India's marginalised population, once said:

“Everyone must have education. Everyone must have the means of self-defence. These are the most important needs for any person to survive.” (Ambedkar, 1945)

He also explained how the so-called upper castes like the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas managed to coexist by making compromises, while collectively suppressing the Sudras (lower castes) to maintain their own power. This is one of the reasons why the history of the marginalised, whether the Sudras or untouchables, has long remained hidden from the most educated and scholarly people of Bengal as well as India. Now the time has come to uncover that history very freshly and recover the hidden treasures, the stories, voices, and struggles of people who were kept in the dark for far too long. Throughout history, these marginalised communities have struggled hard to rise in life. They have organised social movements, and whenever they gained access to education, many of them turned to creative expression. Their writings are powerful acts of resistance, literature that pushes back against oppression and challenges the systems that once silenced them.

Pre-Independence Social Movements:

This paper, *Ink of Struggle: Tracing the Roots and Resonance of Bangla Dalit Narratives*, tries to explore the social movements they fought against various atrocities which did not get much recognition and how Dalit writers in Bengal have turned their pain into powerful stories by writing poems, essays, personal narratives. By giving voice to unseen injustices, whether through accounts of outright violence or the everyday exclusions from classrooms and workplaces, their writings reveal the true face of caste-based atrocities. The research will also try to trace how these narratives have evolved since independence and pre-independence, and how they continue to inspire social awareness and change in Bengali literature and beyond. Society is always changing – it never stays the same. These changes often come through social movements, either gradually (evolutionary) or suddenly (revolutionary).

The root of the Bengali Dalit writings found in the long back in 13th century in the *Charyapadas*, which could be traced back to the Pala dynasty. “The probable genesis of Marathi Dalit literature, for instance, goes back to the traditions of the Bhakti saint movement of the 13th century, whereas the Bengali Dalit voice of the *Charyapadas* can be traced back to Pala dynasty.” (Bala, XI) During the time of the Pala Dynasty (750-1155 AD) in India, the Kaibartya community and other oppressed castes led a successful revolt against the king around 1070 A.D. The very fast rebellion against social discrimination occurred in 1070 A.D. named as Kaibartya Rebellion (Kaibartya Vidroha). This was one of the first and major rebellions by the Kaibartya community (a fishing and boatman caste) in the history of India as well as in northern Bengal, especially in the Varendra region (modern-day North Bangladesh and part of West Bengal). At that time, Bengal was ruled by the Pala dynasty (under Mahipala-II). The Kaibartyas were considered one of the lower castes and mostly involved in fishing, farming and boating. However, by the time, there was growing oppression of peasants and lower castes by the high-caste landlords and the king. Under the leadership of Bhim and Rudak, the people overthrew the King and governed Bengal for around six years. This wave of resistance is known as the ‘Kaibartya Rebellion’ (Kaibartya Vidroha). These lesser-known revolts show that Dalit communities in Bengal have a long and brave history of resisting oppression even long before India's mainstream freedom struggle began.

Another revolt happened when the British East India Company defeated the local rulers in the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and captured control of Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha. A few years later, the Dalit communities located in Bengal's south-west areas, particularly Bagdis and Bauris from Medinipur and Bankura, rose up in rebellion against both the British rulers and the upper-caste elites who supported British dominance in 1760. This uprising is known as the ‘Chuar Revolt/Rebellion’ (Chuar Vidroha). One of the remarkable figures of this revolt was Rani Shiromani, who was a Dalit woman. She became the second wife of Raja Ajit Singha, the ruler

of Karnagarh in Mednipur. She stepped forward to lead the rebellion after the death of the king and death of his first wife, Rani Bhabani. During that time, women rarely had any public roles. On other hand, she was Dalit, but she led the rebellion with extraordinary leadership. Later on, she was arrested by British forces and imprisoned in Fort William, Kolkata, in 1760. It is believed that she was the first Indian woman to be imprisoned by the British. Sunil Kumar Das, a well-known Dalit writer, wrote a drama based on this Chuar revolt, which was first performed at the 18th Annual Conference of the Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sanstha, held between December 24, 2009 and December 25, 2009, in Charanpur village, Barabani, in Burdwan district of West Bengal. In 1855, another revolt (Sepahi Vidroha) was successfully led by the Santhal community in Bengal just two years before the 'Rebellion of 1857'. This rebellion was aimed against the 'Dikus'—a term used by the Santhals to describe the oppressors or the elite class who ruled over them, which included moneylenders, landlords, and British officials who were exploiting them in many ways (most common was through taxation). Sidhu, Kanhu, Chand, and Bhairab were the four brothers from the Santhal community who revolted against and sacrificed their lives by fighting for the rights and freedom of their people. Their sacrifice became a symbol of resistance and courage for marginalised communities, especially for the Santhal community. This powerful chapter of revolt in Indian history also inspired many Dalit and marginalised writers. One such example is Santhal Vidraha: The Social and the Economic Background by Manohar Mouli Biswas. It was later on included in an edited book by Dr. Prathama Mandal and Dr. Chitta Mandal, titled *Banglar Dalit Andoloner Itibritta*.

Another important movement that took place in undivided Bengal in the year 1873 had a profound impact, particularly in marginalised communities as well as in the whole society in general. At that time, the Namashudras, who were then socially labelled as 'Chandalas', were treated with extreme discrimination and oppressed by the upper class of society. Even if there was any case of theft or robbery anywhere, these marginalised people were often arrested

without any proof, regardless of whether they were actually involved or not. If anyone gets imprisoned, they are forced to do menial cleaning work. This kind of unfair treatment, abuse, and humiliation pushed them to rise in protest and consequently, the Namashudras called for a “General Strike”. They stopped offering their manual labour and services to the upper castes and dominant sections of society as a form of peaceful non-cooperation. This movement lasted for about six months, and it was a bold step against the injustices they faced. This strike is considered a remarkable event in the history of human dignity and legal equality. In fact, it may be one of the earliest known movements in the world demanding equal treatment under the law and respect for the dignity of the individual principles that later became fundamental rights in the Indian Constitution. Eventually, their protest led to a positive outcome. On June 7, 1873, the Colonial Governor of Bengal, through Government Order No. 523T (issued from Darjeeling), abolished the discriminatory treatment that was in practice against the Namashudras. Dalit scholars have since documented this powerful movement using old police records and census data. Some important books that talk about this “General Strike” include:

- i. *The Strike* (2004) by Dr Upendranath Biswas
- ii. *The Namasudras of Bengal* (2000) by Dr Atul Krishna Biswas
- iii. *The Namah-shudras: Origin and Development* (2004) by Dr Anil Ranjan Biswas

These works provide valuable insight into a crucial chapter of Bengal's marginalised history, one that deserves to be remembered and recognized.

Another powerful socio-religious movement began in Bengal. Sri Sri Harichand Thakur was born in 1812, six years before Karl Marx and led a movement during the second half of the 19th Century. Harichand Thakur came from the Namashudra community, which was then referred to by the insulting term ‘Chandala’, one of the most marginalised communities in Bengal’s caste hierarchy. He started a new spiritual path known as the ‘Matua religion’ due to

the intense discrimination and humiliation faced by the marginalised people. He strongly opposed the dominance of the Brahmins and rejected the authority of their scriptures. He boldly declared:

“Naa Maani Veda, Naa Maani Brahmin” (I do not accept the Vedas, I do not accept the Brahmin.) - (Harichand Thakur)

His teachings attracted large followers from each and every caste and religion, especially in the southeastern parts of Bengal. Most of his followers came from lower castes, though a few supporters from upper castes and other religions also joined him. These included people like Akshay Chakraborty, a Brahmin; Benimadhab Pal, a Kayastha; and even Muslims like Tinkari Mia and Chand Kazi – all of them rejected the system of discrimination and also rejected the caste system. After Harichand Thakur, his son Sri Sri Guruchand Thakur (1846-1937) carried the movement forward with the same importance. He transformed it from a purely religious awakening into a social and educational movement. Guruchand Thakur fought to remove the stigma of the word “Chandala”, a term that appears multiple times in the oppressive ancient texts, like in *the Manusmriti*. For over 30 years (1881-1911), he and his followers worked to get social recognition. Their struggle led to a major change: for the first time, this community was officially recorded as ‘Namashudras’ instead of ‘Chandalas’ in the government census of 1911. This was a major victory for their dignity. While the Bengal Renaissance was happening in the urban areas, Guruchand Thakur led a powerful grassroots movement in the villages. He encouraged the marginalised, especially ‘Matua’ followers, to pursue education. He helped to open many village schools (called pathshalas) with his own efforts. He inspired people with a clear and touching message:

“If you respect me even a little, let no child in your home remain uneducated. Whether you eat or not, does not matter- what matters is that your children must be educated.” (Guruchand Thakur)

This spirit of education and self-respect sparked a rich wave of literature. There are many books that were written about Harichand Thakur, Guruchand Thakur, and about the ‘Matua’ movement. Some important writers and their works include:

- i. Tarak Chandra Sarkar - *SriSri Hari Leelamrita* (1913)
- ii. Mahananda Halder - *SriSri Guruchand Charit* (1943), *Sonar Manoosh Gopal Sadhu* (1992)
- iii. Dr Nandadulal Mohanta - *Matua Andolon O Dalit Jagaran* (2002)
- iv. Dr Birat Bairagya - *Matua Sahitya Parikroma* (1999)
- v. Debdas Pande - *An Approach to Matuaism* (2008)
- vi. Santosh Kumar Barui - *Thakur Sri Sri Harichand: Manab Pooroosh: Adhyatma Pooroosh* (2011)

There are many significant writers, like Dr. Paramananda Halder, Atul Krishna Pal, Srimati Kiran Talukdar, Sukriti Ranjan Biswas, who have contributed to this body of literature. *Mouhurlikota O Samokalinotar Prekshaye Matua-Dharma O Samproday: Rajnoitik O Samajattwik Byakhyan* (2019) by Manohar Mouli Biswas is one of the most important works, which was later translated into English by Prof. Debi Chatterjee and Prof. Sipra Mukherjee, and published by “Gangchil”, one of respected publishers of Bengali Dalit literature in Kolkata. This was not only a religious movement, but more than that – it was a social, political, and educational movement as well. This movement helped to awaken the minds of people, those who had been treated as inferior by the traditionally privileged castes of society for centuries. It was a journey from the margins of society towards a place of dignity, self-respect and their own rights. Many magazines were also published along with various books to support and spread the awareness of the movement, such as “Matua Darshan”, “Matua Darpan”, and “Matua Andolan”. These publications have helped to keep the ‘Matua movement’ alive, even today.

Post-Independence Social Movements:

“‘Untouchability’ is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden now. The enforcement of any disability arising out of ‘Untouchability’ shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.” (Article 17, Constitution of India)

Although there are strict and clear laws against social exclusion and caste atrocities in post-independence India, Dalits continue to face unfair treatment and covert forms of abuse across the country. Many people in Bengal, especially the educated class, assume that these injustices happen only in certain regions of the country but not here in Bengal, because often West Bengal is celebrated for its progressive spirit (it is no exception). Here, Dalits also did not get the opportunities and respect, and their struggles were mostly overlooked by mainstream society. The reason behind this problem is that the discrimination against Dalits happens in more subtle and hidden ways in Bengal. The reason is it happens so quietly because of the belief system, and therefore not always out in the open or publicly. Therefore, no one really wants to talk about this and go unnoticed. One of the major signs of this hidden bias is the historical record of West Bengal’s leadership shows a pattern where only members of the Brahmin, Kayastha, and Baidya castes have occupied the post of Chief Minister in Bengal. This reflects a deep-rooted imbalance that still exists, even in a state that prides itself on being socially advanced.

In recent years, a few shocking incidents have come to light through the media.

1) Barun Biswas, a Dalit school teacher, was murdered by local gangsters at Sutia village of North 24 Parganas district in West Bengal. After he spoke out against their crimes, especially their abuse and sexual exploitation of 33 Dalit women. Despite widespread outrage and annual memorial gatherings organised by the Barun Biswas Smriti Raksha Committee, nobody has ever been held accountable for his death (Mitra).

2) Near Barasat at Kamudini village (about twenty kilometres from Kolkata), a Dalit college student was kidnapped on her way home and brutally gang-raped and killed. Her family was extremely poor, her father worked as a mason's helper for less than 200 rupees a day, and her mother sold puffed rice and snacks door to door (Rape victim's brothers demand death penalty for accused).

3) The tragedy of Marichjhapi in the Sundarban of West Bengal in 1979, is one of the worst examples of human killing determined by caste and class. It was a dark moment for Dalit refugees who instructed to live by the government at the time of post-partition. These people are mostly Namashudras from East Bengal came to West Bengal as refugee when the state turned against them. Thousands of Namashudra people fled to East Pakistan after partition and struggled for years without homes and proper food. In 1977 the Left led government (headed by Jyoti Basu) took power and these refugees settled on unused land in Marichjhapi. They began to farming and fishing and try to rebuild their lives again in a smooth and proper manner through hard works. However, soon the government ordered them to off the island as early as possible and stopped to provide them anything. Even the government stopped their water and food, medicine supplies (Mandal).

“In order to dislodge the refugees from Marichjhapi, an economic blockade was started in and around the island in January 1979, together with the promulgation of Forest Preservation Act, in order to isolate the refugees economically, cutting off their access to food, water and other basic requirements” (Choudhury 668).

Then government ordered police force to opened fire on the refugees on January 31. At least 36 people were killed by gunfire on that day. In the weeks before supplies were cut off for the refugees, starvation and disease had already claimed 136 lives, and malnutrition killed another 239. At least 23 Dalit women were also raped during this crackdown.

“Based on Sikar (1982) and Biswas’ (1982) pieces, Ross Mallick estimates that in all 4,128 families who had come from Dandakaranya to find a place in West Bengal perished of cholera, starvation, disease, exhaustion, in transit while sent back to their camps by drowning and their boats were scuttled by the police or shot to death in Kashipur, Kumirmari, and Morichjhanpi by police firings. How many of these deaths actually occurred in Morichjhanpi we shall never know” (Jalai 1759).

This government-sponsored violence sparked a wave of Dalit writing. Novels like Nakul Mallick’s *Kshama Nei* (2008) and Shaktipada Rajguru’s *Dandak Theke Marichjhapi* (1986), along with Jagadish Chandra Mandal’s *Marichjhapi: Noisader Antarale* (2002) and Dilip Halder’s *Atrocities on Dalits: Since the Partition of Bengal* (2008), all confronted what happened. Poet Jatin Bala’s *Marichjhapi Mayana* and many others have also memorialised the loss. Every year, activists and writers observe ‘Marichjhapi Day’ to honour the hundreds of lives lost and to demand that such injustices never happen again.

In 2007, on 14th March, another tragic incident happened at Nandigram in the east Midnapore district of West Bengal because of government-backed violence. Many people belonging to Dalits, OBCs, and Muslims were protesting against capturing their land for industrialisation by the government. However, people like Tublu Samanta, Ratikanta Das, Supriya Jana, Indajul Haq, Satyabala Mandal, Naru Murda, and Chanchala Rani Mahata and many others were killed when police opened fire on villagers who were trying to protect their farmland. The government planned to take over their land to build a Special Economic Zone (SEZ), but the villagers resisted this as it was their only means of survival. It was very heartbreaking because the ruling CPI(M) Party, which once raised the famous slogan for the farmers that “Laangal Jaar, Jaami Taar” (the land belongs to the tiller). However, they had now started working in favour of industrialists and against their own people and their own rules. They had tried to take the land forcefully from poor farmers in the name of development and going against the very principles

they once stood for. The Nandigram violence sparked massive outrage and became a turning point in West Bengal politics. The people of Bengal began to lose their faith in the Left government and the party was voted out of power.

“Till March, they would not allow a single “outsider” to enter Nandigram, be it the police or government officials. On March 14, Bhattacharya sent 2,500 policemen to “recapture” Nandigram, but unofficially, they were accompanied by suspected 400 CPI(M) cadres. Officially, 14 farmers died in the firing, but over 100 were declared ‘missing’” (2007-Nandigram violence: A state of failure).

In response to this incident, the Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sanstha (BDSS) began to operate very actively. The organisation organised a protest at ‘Tripura Hitsadhini Sava’ in Kolkata on 23rd April 2007. Many Dalit poets and writers participated in the protest against this incident. A Dalit theatre group, ‘Shantikunja Natya Sanstha’, led by playwright Raju Das, also performed a powerful play about the tragedy. It was a moment when literature, protest, and resistance came together to speak out against injustice.

In 1990, the government of V.P. Singh introduced reservations for OBCs at the national level. However, the West Bengal government did not agree to do so and just ignored it. The state government did not take any steps to implement it. Nevertheless, somehow, this attitude received strong support from the media. One very striking image was reported as a lead news item on the front page of a reputed newspaper, showing a Brahmin boy polishing shoes on the streets of Kolkata. His message was that he feared being unemployed after finishing his education and would be forced to take up work traditionally done by Scheduled Castes. Such publicity fed negative opinions about reservations. As a result, the reservation benefits meant for SCs, STs, and OBCs for education and employment were largely overlooked or denied in West Bengal. At that time, the ruling Communist government believed more in class struggle

than in addressing caste-based inequality, and they were never supportive of caste-based reservations. This caused frustration among marginalised communities who were being denied their constitutional rights. In response to this, the SC, ST, and OBC communities came together and formed a protest group called “Sanjukta Sanrakshan Morcha.” They started holding protests across the state. One of their major demonstrations took place on April 23, 2007, when around 15,000 people marched through the streets of Kolkata. Led by Santosh Rana of CPI(ML), the rally went from Sealdah to Raj Bhavan, where they submitted a letter of demands to the Hon'ble Governor of West Bengal, Mr Gopal Krishna Gandhi.

In this final part of the article, the focus will be on the current Dalit literary and cultural movement in the state of West Bengal and the various ongoing activities surrounding this. The Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sanstha (BDSS) was founded in 1992 in West Bengal as a literary and cultural platform in response to the tragic self-immolation of Chuni Kotal. She belonged to the Lodha tribal community and was pursuing her M.Sc. at Vidyasagar University. The Lodha community is a tribal group and mostly found in Paschim, Midnapore and Jhargram districts of West Bengal. Historically, they were marginalised and labelled as a “criminal tribe” in the British era. She became a target of caste-related animosity. She took her own life due to constant humiliation and discrimination both in and outside the classroom, because of her caste background and the fact that she was benefiting from the reservation system.

“Kotal was the first woman from the Lodha Savaras tribe to graduate (in anthropology from Midnapore’s Vidyasagar University in 1985) and was an idol for the new generation of Dalit Adivasis and women” (Nidhima).

Chuni’s story caught the attention of the renowned writer Mahasweta Devi, who spoke out against injustice. The issue gained media attention and triggered widespread public outrage. Social groups like APDR (Association for the Protection of Democratic Rights) and many Dalit

individuals came forward to support the cause. This incident became a turning point and sparked a movement that motivated the foundation of the Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sanstha (BDSS), a literary and cultural organisation. It was formed with Prof. Jagabandhu Biswas as the first president and Amar Krishna Biswas as its general secretary, who was an IRS officer. BDSS held its first annual conference, called ‘Sangiti’ (a word inspired by Buddhist tradition), on December 5th and 6th, 1992, in the remote village of Bhayana, Nadia district. A large rally marched through nearby villages on the second day and chanted the names of Dalit icons like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Jyotirao Phule, Jogendranath Mandal, Ramayaswami Naiker, Guruchand Thakur – all of them, who had dedicated their lives to uplifting marginalised communities. Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sanstha, in its written constitution, declared to rouse consciousness among the people, who are marginalised socially and culturally, educationally and economically. Every year, Sanstha organizes some functions, such as the celebration of the 14th April, the birthday of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, as a ‘Day of Knowledge’ for them. The members of the Sanstha gather at the pedestal of Dr. Ambedkar’s statue at Kolkata’s Red Road, in a colourful procession every year. They had taken a constitutional oath on the basis of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s statue in Kolkata that none of the members in any way shall be involved in any kind of corruption or illegal works in their life. The said oath was administered by Dr. Gunadhar Barman, a senior member of the Sanstha, and a committed social worker throughout his life. Dr. Barman was popularly known for his book *Jugosrosthā Ambedkar (Ambedkar, the Creator of a New Era)*. He had also been editing a weekly publication, *Atmanirikshan*, for a long time in order to make society aware of reasoning and scientific knowledge. - (About the Organisation, Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sanstha)

Many prominent Dalit scholars joined the movement. These included:

- i. Dr. Achintya Biswas, university topper and professor.

- ii. Dr. Santosh Kumar Sarkar, a top M.Tech graduate and vice-chancellor of two universities.
- iii. Dr. Gunadhar Barman, a well-known doctor and editor of “Atmanirikshan”.
- iv. Dr. Basudeb Barman and Dr. Manoranjan Sarkar, both respected professors and university administrators.

All of them played very important roles in BDSS and served as its president and making the organisation a symbol of pride for the marginalised communities.

BDSS celebrated its Silver Jubilee ‘Sangiti’ at the Ambedkar Mission of Hridaypur in North 24 Parganas in 2016. It was not any coincidence that the event was held on December 24–25; as December 24 is the death anniversary of Ramayaswami Naiker, and December 25 marks the historic day when Dr. Ambedkar burned the *Manusmriti* as a protest during the Mahad Satyagraha of 1927. BDSS realised a hard truth over the time that Dalit writers in West Bengal rarely received any support from mainstream publishers. Therefore, they decided to publish their own works by themselves like the aboriginal writers in other countries. They opened a small publishing shop called ‘Chaturtha Dunia’ in Kolkata’s book market (stall no. 22, Bhabani Dutta Lane, Kolkata, 73). Firstly, in January 2017, the publication shop published the book titled, *An Interpretation of Dalit Literature, Aesthetic, Theory and Movement: Through the Lens of Ambedkarism*, followed by a second edition in October 2018. Amar Krishna Biswas continues to lead BDSS to the date as president and remains actively involved in the movement.

Another major publication by BDSS is *Shatobarsher Bangla Dalit Sahitya*, which features around 100 writers from 1911 to 2019 (Biswas). It includes works across genres – novels, poems, stories, essays, dramas, and autobiographies. One of the earliest recorded Dalit poets was Raicharan Biswas, who published *Jatiya Jagaran* in 1921 – a powerful collection that aimed to awaken and inspire the marginalised communities. Even as far back as the 18th

century, Dalit women in Bengal made literary contributions. One of them, Sulochana, was born around 1776 into a poor and illiterate Namashudra family in Netrakona (now in Bangladesh). She learned to read and write only after her marriage and went on to write a devotional poetry book titled *Sri Sri Gopinikirtan*. In present time there are several prominent Dalit writers who have emerged in Bengal, such as Kalyani Thakur Charal, Manju Bala, Lily Halder, Kanan Boral and many more. These writers are known for their contributions to Dalit literature, mainly emphasising on the experiences and struggles of marginalised women from lower castes in Bengal.

Conclusion:

The journey of Bengali Dalit literature started centuries of years ago. The marginalised communities express their lived experiences of pain, strength, and powerful resistance through the form of writing as a powerful weapon against various atrocities and oppressions they faced over time to time. Dalits in Bengal faced various discriminations and exploitations for centuries that were often hidden behind the region's so-called progressive image, mostly after the partition. However, the main literature never gives the proper place to these writings and always neglects. Therefore, it creates its own path and is recognised as Bengali Dalit literature. Nowadays, this literature has been recognised and popularised worldwide through translation in various languages and mostly in English. The revolt against various exploitations of different social movements in different times, like the Kaibartya Rebellion, Chuar Revolt, Matua Movement, and the Marichjhappi tragedy tells us that these marginalised communities never stopped fighting against various atrocities for their dignity, rights and justice. The writers, poets, thinkers and various scholars from Dalit backgrounds used their stories, poems, and essays to raise awareness in society and challenge the caste system and various discriminations. The words of writers are more than art, and they use their writings as their weapons against silence, injustice, and exclusion. The Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sanstha (BDSS) and the other such

organisations have always played an important role in keeping these voices alive and inspiring changes in society. Although there are always many hurdles to being aware of and changing society, Bengali Dalit literature reminds us that every story deserves to be heard, especially those which belong to the margins.

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