



A Critical Study of the Bengali Dalit Autobiography with reference to Manoranjan Byapari's *Ittibrite Chandal Jiban*

Dr. Riya Mukherjee

Assistant Professor, Department of English, S.S.Khanna Girls' Degree College, University
of Allahabad. U.P., India

Article Info

Volume 4, Issue 6

Page Number : 110-125

Publication Issue :

November-December-2021

Article History

Received : 15 Nov 2021

Published : 30 Nov 2021

Published in the year 2012 in the Kolkata Book Fair, *Ittibrite Chandal Jiban* (Life of a Chandal) is the first Dalit autobiographical novel in Bengali. The novel was first serialized in a magazine *Adal Badal Patrika* and was later published in a book form. It is the story of Manoranjan Byapari, the author of the novel and the unspoken stories of numerous such muted sufferers over the ages in Bengal, whose suffering had remained veiled under the glimmer of false show of equality and justice. He articulates the pangs of pain, hatred, cruelty discrimination through this narrative.

The reverse side of the social spectrum is described by the author with rare candour, tearing the glossy tapestry of deception and hypocrisy. He efficiently uses the medium of autobiography to describe the travails of his life which otherwise would be difficult for him to express so frankly. In the author's own words, "*atmajibonir ei ek mosto asubidha- kono aaral thake na. Se aaral uponashe pawa jaay. Tai okopote anek katha bole dewai asubidha thake na*" (the greatest difficulty with an autobiography is that unlike novels nothing is veiled so it becomes easier to tell things about oneself.) The writer becomes a totally different being while he is writing and as Kumar quotes Malavika Karlekar in his *Dalit Personal Narratives*.

"Writing about oneself... helps in the formation of a distinct identity and a sense of self, as the writer is able to physically view on palm leaves or paper what she feels about herself. Often it can be followed by a period of reflection, observation and even recantation...sometimes, this self expression comes at a specific time of life when, due to a number of reasons, opportunities coincide with the desire to write." (87).

The Dalit autobiographical narrative as an expression of pain, exploitation and oppression is a significant element of focus. The Dalit discourse as a discourse of wandering will be focused upon. The desire for stability and propriety is a momentous property associated with the Dalit

discourse. The disjointed narrative structure provides a connecting thread that interconnects the entire life story of the author. The language that is used in the narrative at times turns ugly which is nothing but a depiction of the realities of the lives that they live and the kind of surroundings that they are brought up in. The Dalit autobiographical discourse further does not only focus on the individual but on the community as a whole. The author in the novel indulges in critically explaining how their community was declared untouchable, but does not deal much with the community as a whole. The thugs and cheats hidden under the mask of the 'bhadrolok' community become predominant through his writing.

Born in a village named Turukkhali in the Barisal district of Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) Manoranjan Byapari belonged to the community of the *Namahshudras*. He himself locates the origination of this community from the son of an erudite Brahmin *muni* who couldnot learn enough to be a Brahmin and remained a Shudra. But as the son of an eminent erudite scholar he was not made a total Shudra but a partial one and hence the name *Namahshudra*. The author in the very beginning destroys the popular Hindu belief that one can be a Brahmin or a Shudra by birth. It is only through one's erudition that one becomes so. He laments, "*janmogoto karone oporadhi ghosito ochhuto osprisho aek Dalit poribare amar jonmo.*" (Being born in an untouchable family, I am branded guilty by birth [20]). The *Namahshudras* lived as half Brahmins and half Shudras till they evoked the ire of their ruler Raja Ballal Sen for opposing his decision to give the status of a Brahmin to his illegally begotten son by organizing a grand feast and were punished for this deed by being labelled as outcastes and Chandals. Chandals elaborates Byapari, are a class of people who are condemned by the Hindu code of law to live as outcastes far from the society keeping dogs and pigs as pets. The garment of the Chandal would be the one used on the dead body during the last rites. Even in case of dire situations they were barred from entering the city during the night hours. They would not even have the right to live at a place for a long time. They were condemned to a life of wandering. Care and caution should be present in every step of theirs so that their shadows even do not touch any Brahmin by mistake or else they would be punished for their life. The usage of the term Chandal was challenged in the year 1872 by a group of *Namahsudras* headed by Harichand Thakur and Guruchand Thakur when during the first Indian population census the upper caste tried to enlist these people as Chandals. The Ambedkarite movement which had gained nation-wide acclaim and popularity had gained full fervour boosted these agitators. The agitation continued till 1911, when ultimately in all government documents Chandals were supplanted by *Namahsudras*. But according to the author even after hundred years of the incident, it is only officially that the name has changed and though they are now within the Hindu Varna system, they are still treated as untouchables. Even though at present the *Namahsudras* are doctors or engineers, they are respected for their profession, but in a company of upper caste men it is still a matter of doubt

if they gather enough respect. And the author Byapari claims, “*namtir bodol noi proyojon chilo manashikata paribartaner aandolan.*” (The agitation should not have been for a change in name, but a change in the mentality of the people, of how they look at the *Namahsudras*) (29). However these kinds of myths according to the author himself, is made by all the lower castes and discriminated people to fight against the discrimination though so far it tends to show no effect on the society. It is also used by them, in the words of the author to ignore the inhuman treatments meted out to them and live a life of distinction and decorum. And thus the author states, “*tader proteker nijer hinmanyota aaral kore aatmagorbe shfito hobar moto ekta lok gatha procholito ache.*” (All of them have a folktale to get themselves rid of the demeaned selves of the society and boost up their confidence in themselves) (24).

The author describes his parents as innocent straightforward people. The instability and uncertainty that is so common in the life of the lower caste becomes evident when the author tells that his parents do not remember his exact birth year, but the author guesses it to be 1950-52, as he was born a few years later after partition of India. The author never mentions it as the incident of the independence of India or for a matter of fact East Pakistan. The incident of the Partition was the only truth of his life as that made him and his parents lose their dwelling in East Pakistan and move to India to live in miserable, intolerable and inhuman conditions in refugee camps. Independence for them was not freedom but a shift into the heart rending world of destitution and poverty which was with them all their lives thereafter. The picture of the society is grim as the practice of untouchability is prevalent not only between the lower caste and the upper caste but also between different religions leading to communalism and communal riots. The communal riots that accompanied the partition disturbed their peaceful life and forced them to leave their homeland. His parents never wanted to leave their homeland and move to a new place to live. However, ultimately the author along with his parents, his younger brother, and his old maternal grandmother migrated to India. And from the very beginning they were unwelcome in their own country. They spent the first few days in Sealdah station and then were moved to a refugee camp, the Shiromonipur camp in Bankura, where their family of five members were put up in a small tent surrounded by several such families. The life in the camp was pathetic. For two large camps there only two tubewells, so people had to spend almost the entire day trying to fill up water trying hard to fulfill the bare necessities of life. The people were entitled to the facility of Dole whereby every fourteen or fifteen days they were given a minimum amount of rice and pulses and some money depending on the number of the family members in a family. The rice and pulse was of substandard variety and pest ridden. Proper medicines and doctors were not available, and the author even once escaped death narrowly in that camp. They did not even have the right to move out of the camp and settle down elsewhere. For that even they had to be dependent on the government decisions and policies. The

Independence of India was not the cause of celebration for them; ironically it curbed their freedom and fettered them to this camp not even allowing them to settle down in a place of their choice.

The novel is a narrative of wandering where the author Byapari is always in search of stability and personal identity through this wandering. He leaves home at the age of fourteen to search for a source of income and earn something for his family. However his attempts went futile most of the times and he was left helpless at the cruel hands of society with the desire of financially supporting his family lingering in his heart. The author first left home and went to the Sealdah railway station, where he was spotted by a Brahmin doctor who hired him and kept him for performing the abject and ignoble works like looking after the cows which could not have been done by a upper caste as the job was religiously sanctioned to be done by the lower caste. It was here that the author faced directly the brunt of being a lower caste, as he was treated like an untouchable by the doctor and his wife. The author says, “*ei barite eshe prothom bornobader kutshit kodakar roopta protokho korlam.*” (It was at this place that I first realized about the ugly nature of the practice of untouchability [59]). He was given a separate distorted plate where he was served food and had to eat at a specific corner of the home and was given to sleep in the barn. He was brutally assaulted by the housekeeper on several occasions. The upper caste Hindus would bathe and wash their houses with cow- dung sprinkled water if the lower caste or people of any other religion would trespass their home. The heinous practice of untouchability induced the lower caste people to convert to other religion where they would not be a part of such a system. The issue of conversion thus became significant to gain respect in the society. The hostile behavior of the doctor and his wife induced him to search for a job elsewhere. Thus around 1965 Byapari moved to the Jadavpur area of Kolkata, where his father came earlier to search for work in vain. Spending the night in the platform of the station, next morning he got a job in a tea shop. However to escape the pain of untouchability he changed his name so that no one would recognize him as a *Namahshudra*. From there he moved to another shop of the Palbazar area, and then in the Park Circus area. Adventure never fell short of him, and he encountered several deadly attacks, by the wild animals as well as by a group of young rioters of his age. And he faces all these situations bravely as he says, “*asole jibon to ei. Pothe pothe thokkor hochot khete khete samridha hoye otha.*” (Life is not a bed of roses, but it is to make a mistake at every point, learn from them and reach the zenith of glory through that) (65). In 1966 he was spotted by a policeman and taken by him to the police mess where he was given a job as a mess assistant. He was given a lot to do and paid less in comparison to that. However the main problem arose when the main cook of the mess tried to sexually molest the author for which he revolted, and then later had to leave the job and again return to his old self of being jobless. He took shelter in the Sealdah station which was the home for many homeless people. Here he

happened to meet a boy like him whose name was Raja. The author went with this boy after hearing his story that there were plenty of jobs and money available in a place called Assam, the place of the goddess Kamakhya; the author thought no less of it and his previously heard stories of magic fuelled his imagination further and provided him with the necessary urge to move to the magical and rich land of Assam where there was no poverty, destitution and untouchability. So the author with his new found friend first went to Siliguri, planning to go to Assam from there. But as luck would have it, the shop where they halted for the night allowed an escape route to his friend and not to him causing him to be stuck in Siliguri itself. After having planned to save some money he started working at a small shop at the station itself. However all his plans were ruined when the man for whom he was working did not pay him any money even after six months of service. But he kept working till the tenth month and ultimately lost hope and left the job. He cries out at one point, *“koto poth par holam. Kothay na kothay ghurlam, koto manush dekhe elam-sorbotro sobar kache aamra saman upekhito. Ek udbritto jib matro. Jar dam ei samaje kukur chagoler cheyeo kom.”* (I went through many routes, went to many places, seen many people but everybody visualises me and treats me the same, like an adage, whose value in this society is even less than a dog or a cat) (92). Then he finally decided to go to the magical land of Assam. He started walking towards Assam as he had no money to go there by train. It is the system of money which according to him has made man pitiless and merciless, and makes him think of what he will get back before even thinking of giving away something to somebody. But after walking for a long distance in a station far from Siliguri he got the train to Assam. Hungry from many days he fed on left- over food, and felt the basic human dignity taken away from him. And the author tells about the smell of the stale food, *“sei ghrane manushke manush theke kukurer porjaye namiye ene antata ekta din kothor jothor jontrona theke mukti debar prolobhon ache.”* (The smell has the capacity to degrade man from the level of man to that of dog but at the sometime to rid man of the pain of hunger at least for a day) (98). It was during this journey he met a man who offered him to stay at his home for some days but instead used him as a pawn to rob a shop. Somehow he escaped the situation when the people realized that he had no role to play in this robbery but that was not before he was beaten by the public there. Later on he again resumed his journey to Assam. After reaching the magical land of Assam his trance was broken when he realised that the place was not a land of healing but was like any other place full of ailments and poverty. There was no gold astray on the roads but the pain of hunger and the inability to fulfill it, in every face. He finally got a job in a shop where he was supposed to carry a drum of milk on his head to various other shops and in lieu of that get twenty rupees a month. The food was very meagre and he was abused by his owner for being a Bengali. He saved all his salary and after five month all his salary was stolen by the son of the owner which forced him to leave the job and return back to Siliguri. Once he reached Siliguri he thought of the mountains

and working there as a golden prospect. But one night at the mountains changed his mind and he returned back to the plains immediately. And then without thinking anything further he boarded the Lucknow mail and started a new journey, this time to Lucknow. Just to reach Lucknow he even took a life risk by spending a considerable time on the connecting point between two compartments. Unable to bear the heat, however he had to get up on the train compartment where fate brought him face to face with a ticket checker who took mercy on him and spared him. Ultimately after a long journey he reached Lucknow. There he encountered a Railway havildar who immediately appointed him as a domestic help. Byapari there performed all the household chores prescribed to him and was given food and a place to sleep at night. The worst, however waited for him at night when seeing a young helpless boy the havildar raped him at night. The pitiless and intensity of the rape is described by the author in the following words:

Take ghire ache ghono ondhokar. Ondhokar ta ja aalor biporite obosthan kore. Aalo mane dipti prabha jyoti kiran. Aalo mane surjo aalo mane sotto. Ar ondhokar arthat shudhu andhakar. Ghono kalo nikosh. Se ondhokar gorbogrihe bas kore paap anyay abichar baibhichar atyachar. Je ondhokare dekhe rakhte pare shaitaner ashol abyob. (He is surrounded by darkness. Darkness which exists as a foil to light. Light means enlightenment brightness. Light means the light of the sun which stands for truth. Darkness means only darkness. Dense black and dark. The crime, injustice, cruelty that thrives in the womb of that darkness acts as a veil and hides the true face of the monsters) (126).

After this incident he started hating himself, and felt like some object that people take up and use for their own benefit and then throw it away. Very soon the havildar had to return to his home urgently and Byapari started living at the verandah of the havildar's home and worked at a loco workshop and was prescribed a monthly fee of fifty rupees. After a period of ten days the havildar returned with his entire family. Byapari had to perform the additional job of the household chores for the havildar's wife in order to survive in their home. And he got the greatest shock of his life when he learnt that at the end of the month the fruit of his labour in the form of the wage was received by the havildar and he received nothing in exchange of his labour. From there he moved to Kanpur but unable to work in the meagre salary there he had to move back to Bengal. After two years he returned to Bengal in the year 1969 and took refuge at the railway station when suddenly he met his maternal grandmother and learnt about the place where his parents had shifted. He returned home after five long years, his new home where his parents then lived. He saw the same pathetic and destitute suffering at his home and felt a heart rending sob, more so because even after leaving home and working outside for so long he could bring nothing for his family. He again started work in Kolkata itself as a cook after hiding his true caste identity, which though gave him respite for some days but was never a permanent solution

as he belonged to the lower caste and then ultimately his real caste came to the fore and he lost that job as well and the necessity of money made him a rickshaw puller.

About the occupation of a rickshaw puller the author makes a very beautiful comment which is nothing but a notion that informs the minds of several people. But the fact of being a lower caste never seemed to leave him and the continuous insults and harassments pushed him to the extreme, to fight for his rights, and he joined the Maoist group in the area. When people denied him the basic human dignity and every moment reminded him of his poverty, he had to stand up and take charge, fight for a dignity and respect and the identity which nobody gave him. The fight however was futile as they never had the required force to organize themselves properly and fight for the rights of the people. Byapri soon left this revolution and moved to Dandakaranya in Orissa with his family in 1971 where the government was rehabilitating these people. However he found the conditions very adverse there making life difficult and he escaped from there in 1973 with the vision of starting life anew in Bengal. That however never happened. Once in Bengal the author got involved in hooliganism in the Jadavpur area of Kolkata and was imprisoned in 1975. The journey of his life took him through several places and the crux of it was prison. Once in prison he met an old man who told him of the benefits of education. Deprived of education from a very early age he then realized the value of education and educated himself the two years he was in prison. As soon as he got out he again took to being a rickshaw puller and met Mahasweta Devi in the process which changed the course of his life. He started writing in several journals and magazines, but was bereaved of a stable job. Very soon he got married and in order to survive his family he started searching for some stable job, but as fate would have it he moved from one job to another and ultimately he along with his family moved to Dandakaranya again. Unable to get any help from his younger brother he made his own living there. He started with selling firewood and later got involved with Shankar Guha Neogi and his revolution for the working class, which for a time period served as his job, but the death of the leader disillusioned him and again his hunt for job was on. Being trapped in party politics it became difficult for him to keep up any stable job. The pain of joblessness forced him to even take up the job of the forest chowkidar and crematorium ground in the Naxal- infested area of Chhattisgarh. This did not continue for long as the author ultimately decided to return to Bengal where he took up job as a cook and kept writing in magazines in journals. His travails in getting his first book published are very well described by the author. He has not only to incur additional costs in getting his book published by an upper caste publisher, but also in selling it. His publications of several novels are described by him towards the end of the novel.

The political condition of Bengal is very well described by the author in the novel. From the Congress rule to the change of power with the coming of the Communist party is very well described by the author. At every step the political condition of Bengal is well explicated in the

novel. The author mentions several instances which demonstrate the apathetic condition of the government in Bengal. One such incident was the incident that takes place at Marichjhampi. The Congress government proposed rehabilitation in Dandakaranya. And it was then that the Communist Party refuted this decision telling that the people of Bengal have to be rehabilitated in Bengal itself. The issue of rehabilitation remained a contentious issue with the Communist Party even when large groups of people had already migrated and settled down in Dandakaranya. The leaders of UCRC (United Central Refugee Council) demanded the rehabilitation of the Bengali refugees within Bengal itself. In 1975, Jyoti Basu, an eminent CPM leader held a political rally in the Villai region who claimed to rehabilitate all the Bengalis in Bengal itself. In 1977, after two years of the claim the Communist Party came to power and their ministers welcomed the refugees in various manners, even asking them to share the footpath in Bengal. The promises of the ministers were full of hope, *“paschimbanger footpatheo bohu manush bash kore. Aapnara na hoy tader moto bash korben. Amader police aapnader lathipeta ba guli korbe na.”* (Many people in Bengal thrive in the footpath. If you so desire you can even live like them. Our police will not harm you in any manner) (269). Some other minister added, *“aapnara jadi paschimbange phire jaan, tahole paschimbanger paanchkoti manush dosh koti hath tule aapnader boron kore nebe.”* (If you people return to Bengal, then the five crore people of Bengal will raise their ten crore hands to welcome you heartily) (269). How empty these promises were easily proven when these people actually migrated from Dandakarnya and moved to Marichjhampi, an uninhabited island in Sunderban area of Bengal. Within three months government took strict action and police was sent to the island and the prohibitory orders under Cr. P.C 144 was enforced in the region that prohibited news reporters, or any human activist or anybody else to come near that region. Nobody was allowed to leave the region or go there. People there were dependent on resources from outside, and this prohibition caused many people to die from hunger and thirst. The police had surrounded the place with 40-42 motor boats. However when this did not seem to work and people were not ready to return to Dandakarnya, police finally attacked the place and the place witnessed the worst barbaric atrocity of the age. Robbing, raping women and destroying everything, these policemen even sunk the boats carrying the refugees making them the fodder of crocodiles and tigers. Dead bodies of men and women who were killed or died due to starvation were left on the shores to be washed away by the tide thus erasing all traces of human atrocities and tragedy. These cruelties forced the refugees to return from where they came, and most of them returned to Dandakarnya. Byapari claims that out of the twenty thousand people that migrated to Marichjhampi over two thousand had perished (53). In 1979 the Marichjhampi massacre staged by the Jyoti Basu government claimed the life of four thousand families within twenty days with the alibi of saving the tigers. Byapari tells that at least two thousand men and women were killed by police action and around two hundred women

were raped (267-272). Byapari calls Jyoti Basu a *beimaan* (traitor) who unjustly accused the refugees of conspiring with Bangladesh to create an independent sovereign state within the Sunderbans in order to destabilize the Proleteriat government little knowing that a state as weak as Bangladesh could hardly indulge in an misadventure against a country as gigantic as India. And any voice that was discordant was termed as bourgeois and an agent of imperialism (267-272). The poorest section of the society paid with their lives for the benefit of the tigers, the environment and the tourists. This incident brings out the true face of the Communist party, and their claim to be the "...main "class" opposition to the "bourgeois" Congress could not offer a serious challenge at the level of mass mobilization, inspite of their considerable working class base..." (Omvedt 64). The incident depicts how the government presents "order" as "something harmonious and stable" and how the necessity of maintaining that order to ensure the smooth functioning of the system irrespective of the barbarous atrocities that they wield to maintain that order (Santucci 60). The discord between order and disorder is taken as the base of the state sponsored violence in Marichjhampi. The trust reposed by the refugees in the government was betrayed. There are other instances as well which shows the dismal political condition of Bengal like the situation of the acquisition of lands by the Brahmins, Kayastha and the other upper caste people who migrated from East Bengal. The disparity is evident when the lower caste people are treated as an adage and left to their fate in the refugee camps while the *Bhadrolok* (gentlemen) community was allowed to settle in and around Kolkata even if by unauthorized settlement and encroachment. There was meticulous planning which created the pockets of the *Bhadralok* (gentlemen) community in Kolkata and the social and political profiling prevented the lower caste to become a part of these colonies. The metropolitan life gave the upper caste a mellifluous ovation as advocates and the protagonists of harmony, equality of casteless society though it were they who always experienced the high tide of success and the lower caste could rarely imagine such an extravagant social life. Further the failure of the government machinery is seen when the government failed to do anything for the public during the great famine and food crisis of 1960s when except a few affluent families people were unable to procure food for themselves. The mindlessness of the government is readily portrayed when the chief minister asked the people to feed on unripe bananas as they were rich source of protein. The starving people unable to work anywhere and earn anything could not afford even the meagre barley and maize, the luxury of banana being a far cry for them. The political maneuverings are talked of by Byapari, which was used to deceive the innocent and the lower caste who were gullible in the hands of the cunning politicians. He describes an incident where groups of people together and made small huts in an area which was originally acquired by some rich zamindar. One night all their huts went ablaze in a wild fire and all these people were beaten combinedly by the police and the rakes of the zamindars. The pain of those people made the author cry out, "*sedin pritivitake amar sabhya*

manusher basbhumi bole mone hoyni. Mone hoyechilo ekdol hatyabhilashi ghatakder ullas bhumi. Ei baddhabhumi amar desh. Ei hatyakarir ullas monchoy amar desh.” (That day I did not feel this world to be a land of sane humanly people. I felt this world to be a land of people with carnal instincts to kill, destroy and annihilate others. This insane land is my country. This assassinator’s paradise is my country) (63). The lack of any real activity is the cause of the suffering of these people. Amar Nath Prasad and M.B. Gajjan are of the view that the lack of commitment, efficiency, sincerity and worst of all the lack of any proper step by the government, the malpractices have caused the political organizations to be mute spectators in the suffering of the Dalits.

The proletariat revolution attains a significant place in his narrative. Be it the Naxalite revolution or the one organized by the great leader Shankar Guha Neogi, the author was a part of both the movement and worked for the emancipation of the working class of which he himself was a part. And “the solution to the nagging problems of the present can only be found through purely proletarian power, through the workers’ state” (Santucci 73). It was in 1981-82 that he joined the Naxalite struggle which fought for the equality and status of the working class. As Byapri tells people in that group feared nothing as they had nothing to lose. At times the armed forces would step back but not the Naxalites. They had no specialized weapon, just some hand made bombs and unassailable valour, courage and enthusiasm. It was the instinct of egalitarianism that led them forward. Every moment was spent under the scare of death and every day with the hope of seeing another day. However that was just a brief stint and it was only later that he gets involved with another working class revolution with Shankar Guha Neogi in the tribal belts of Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha. However that was only after he had lived in the prison. Recalling the sacrifice of the Naxalites Byapari tells, *“naxal howa oto sahaj na je, je keo ta hoye jabe. Manushke je gobhir bhabe bhalobase nijer jibon dite pare sei naxal...”* (It is not easy to be naxalite. Just a nobody cannot be a Naxalite. One who loves this humanity a lot and can give up his life for that love is termed a Naxalite) (284). Omvedt in his book *Dalit Visions* mentions the Dalit social reformer and activist Jyotirao Phule, the famous Dalit reformer who focused not just on ideology and culture but also on violence and conquest. His focus was on the downtrodden, the peasants, the farmers and the like. He even felt that the Brahmins used the religious power and state rule to subordinate the lower castes, and this disparity, according to him could not be solved with the weapon of ideology (21). But while Phule emphasized on violence, Ambedkar rejected class, caste and ideology. The ideological and religious factors were interwoven to produce the force to bring about oppression in the society (49). In around 1989 Byapari got involved with the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha, which was headed by Shankar Guha Neogi, a man who was deeply involved with the restoration of rights for the working class. His simple life dedicated only for the work that he

was doing deeply influenced the author. However, it was not another of mindless revolutions that just challenged the existing system, and so the author quotes the leader himself, *“aamra ekta byabostha dhongsa korte chaychi. Kintu tar pore ki nirman korbo tar kono model jadi dekhate na pari manush dhongso probon hobe keno?”* (We are planning to destroy a system. however if we do not have any ideas of what to do after that why would people agree with us in destroying this system?) (315). But he never wanted to resort to violence for the restoration of the rights of the working class. He wanted to organize people and claim and receive the rights for the workers from the government step by step. He had already organized a revolution by the workers in 1977 where eleven workers had lost their lives. Though Byapari was intimately associated with this movement, it did not bring about much of a difference in the lives of the workers and the lower caste, and it became increasingly difficult to fight against the ruling class as they were supported by the political parties in power. And it was in one such instance when Neogi-ji as the author addressed him organized a protest demanding a change in the labour laws regarding salary, hours of working on the tenth of September 1991 in Delhi. It was while he was returning home from there he was assassinated. The incident left an indelible mark in the mind of Byapari and split up the workers’ force discouraging the people who were working with the ace revolutionary. Though Byapari with his meagre resources tried to keep the revolution alive but could not do it for long. The fight for the rights and equality of the workers by Byapari in the form of active protest and revolution ended there but he was ever ready with his pen to wield the power necessary to garner the respect and attention from people that the lower castes deserve. The subsequent Dalit political movements that arose in our country never looked for any long term and sustained treatment of the social disease of disparity. They focused their attention to quick solutions to the problem. The secular alliance of the party ignored the necessity of socio-economic struggles over the issue of social emancipation and representative democracy under the leadership of the marginalised groups. The unified front of the marginals will help to form an establishment against the political establishment dominated by the elites. The progressive consciousness of the Dalits have not been utilized by the Dalit political parties to form a strong “umbrella coalition” against the social elites. The Dalit political groups have remained excluded from the major concerns of the oppressed masses and made the movements by the Dalits look like some exclusive club. They have failed to provide ideological orientation and political principles to all groups struggling to achieve a representation in the democratic relationship. These people provide no concrete remedy to overcome the social and political problems of the Dalits.

The narrative structure of the entire novel is very interesting and deserves to be studied closely. The first part of the novel extends from page number nineteen to seventy four. This part of the novel is written in first person narrative and here he describes his birth, the partition, their

migration to Bengal and their migratory days in the refugee camp of Shiromonipur in Bankura. He also describes their shift to the Doltala camp near Kolkata and the great Bengal famine of the 1960s. It was in this narrative that he first leaves home and works elsewhere. This narrative ends when his stay in Bengal ends. The second part that starts from page number seventy four and continues till one hundred and thirty three is written in third person narrative. The author creates a shadow of his self and names it *Jibon*, meaning life. He symbolizes the new found life of the author where he lives outside Bengal and learns the bitter realities of life. He is cheated, robbed, raped and used in this part. This part of the life of the author must have been the most enriching, as it helped him understand the true human nature of which he was ignorant till then. The third part again resumes from page number one hundred and thirty three and is again written in the first person narrative. In this narrative he returns to Bengal after two years and starts with his return in Bengal. The rest of the novel is written in this mode itself. And this mode constitutes a major portion of the novel including the conclusion. He resumes his original name in this part. And though he describes his stay outside Bengal, he does not change the mode of narrative. The change in the narrative mode of storytelling that is seen in the novel gives the novel an additional attraction. Though the narrative halts at times, yet the halting narrative gives a better understanding of the story, and instead of interrupting the story it helps in making the comprehension better. The change in narrative acts like a connecting thread that connects the various parts and gives them an additional significance which it would be otherwise difficult to find in the novel. Switching to the third person narrative while he described the most horrific moments of his life helped the author assisted him to describe those incidents in an intimate and yet detached manner. The third person narrative allowed him to divulge such details that he would otherwise not be able to. Thus the narrative structure plays a dominant role in the novel and has a special significance attached to it.

The picture of the society that emerges from the novel is hostile, cruel and barbaric. The vicious nexus of untouchability has percolated down into every section of the society irrespective of their age or occupation. The helplessness of the lower caste and their exploitation by the upper caste forms a major point of study in the novel. Even in the acquisition of the lands by the upper caste refugees, the lower caste was not allowed by the upper caste to stay in the same place as them. And the author tells, “...*kothao kono jobordokhol colonyte nichu jaat hobar aparadhe eder jonno kono plot debar niyom chilo na.*” (...in any forcefully acquired land the lower caste was completely debarred from getting any plot) (39). The loss of his childhood was another important part of any Dalit writing. The entire childhood of Byapari was spent in gathering food and overcoming the adverse conditions of his family. While man was travelling to moon there was a group of human beings who were thriving to receive even the basic necessity of life. He even at a point criticizes the blind Hindu beliefs. The belief that the sinner could rid himself of the sin by

a dip in the holy Ganges is brought under the hammer by Byapari. The author describes the ludicrousness of the situation, *“lok thokano poisay ihokale, gangasnaner punya parakal, dukalei sukhe katbe.”* (Get money after cheating people and enjoy this life, a dip in the Ganges and earn goodness for the afterlife, and hence both the lives will be spent with ease) (69). He also meets some really good and helpful men in his lifetime and commenting about them he tells that man himself is capable of being god, but very sarcastically he remarks that if instead man remains like a man all the problems of this world would be solved. There were times when people by their activities cheated the author, and it was then that the author lost all faith in humanity itself and then condescended himself telling, *“manusher proti bissash harano paap.”* (It is a sin to lose faith on humanity.), and then again he states his problem of how he was not able to have faith on man, *“seshe ar bissash roilo na manusher opor”* (ultimately I had no faith in man) (91). Again he philosophises on life, *“jibon toh nitya notun ek jattrar moddho diye bishwa jogottake chine nebar ar ek naam.”* (Life is to take up new adventures everyday and understand the meaning of life newly through these adventures.) (101). The pathetic condition of Byapari reflects through when he desperately tries to believe in the myth of the goddess Kamakhya thinking that it would bring him some respite, but in the process compares himself not only with dogs but also with sheep. The degradation of humanity to the level of animals because of poverty and deprivation is thus an important point of focus for the novel. Byapari realizes that the value of the lower caste people in society is minimal and all that is valued is money and caste superiority, the value of human beings is not worth mentioning. The degradation and suffering of the people like Byapari has no end. Though Byapari believed from childhood that every night has a day and every suffering is met with happiness yet the suffering that he was in seemed to have no end. This suffering was the result of man's selfishness and would not end until man would change his attitude. The value of truth is explained by the author when he tells that *“bastab satya ei je sab samay satya katha chole na. samay bishesh satyatai charam mithya hoye jay.”* (The truth is that you cannot always speak the truth. In some situations even the truth becomes a big lie) (123). However his travails do not end at any point, and the author feels like a puppet in the hands of some invisible power that is controlling him. He even quotes Shakespeare at a point, though he never mentions him, *“...jibon ta ekta natak, prithivita ekta rangamancha.”* (The world is a stage, all the men and women merely players) (130). The evil forces, the evil upper caste people according to Byapari have made the life of the lower caste and the workers impossible by taking away even the bare minimum that is necessary for them to survive. The markets from where people are taken as slaves to work are highly criticized by Byapari. He compares this with the ancient system of bonded labour where the rich had the right to select the labourer they would like to possess. But again he remembers his identity, he reflects, *“ami bornobyabosthar sarbanimna dhape abosthankari namahshudra sampradaer manush.”* (I belong to the lowest rung

of the caste ladder, the namahshudra community of people) (137). The realities of life taught him an important lesson; the weak and powerless could be dominated over and tortured by the powerful without needing any proof even. The upper caste and the well to do families always kept a distance from the lower caste, and would never mix up freely with them. The poverty and the caste background of the lower caste caused them to be forever treated as outcaste. And this feeling of class and caste was so rampant that even the small children were directly influenced by it and talked in terms of it. At one point of time after seeing the injudicious atrocities that was meted out against him and his family the author directly states that instead of worshipping god, he would worship the Devil. And this he kept doing for the rest of his life. Talking of the life of the Dalits, Paswan and aideva say, "It also rejects the concept of God" (113). They totally deny the existence of God. The author also indulges in self criticism, as when he goes to prison as it helps him to get rid of the complexity that built up in him. And "Dalit writers have a serious perspective on human affairs and feel their responsibility for a change, so they never hesitate to attack inferiority and superiority complexes among themselves." (114).

The use of language in the Dalit novels at times degrades a lot. But it is not that the language is used by the author or his family. Some upper caste men use abusive language to address the author. To address the lower caste people using this kind of language hardly mattered for them, as the upper caste carried the thought that they deserved to be addressed like that to let them know their right status. The author mentions certain abuses that people used for him as he belonged to the lower caste.

Unlike other Meta narratives Byapari never makes much of a reference to his community. Though in the initial part he does makes certain references to his community. He mentions his community when he talks of the myth about how their community was declared untouchables. He also mentions it while talking of the lives of his parents and grandparents. The role of his community is portrayed to be very important while the author talks of his birth. The community feeling is thus alive till the author and his family live in East Bengal. They were like one single family. However this feeling went missing as soon as the author's family migrated to independent India. There was no longer any community to which they belonged. Though the refugee camp where they lived temporarily for few years brought them close to people of their kind, yet the community feeling of sharing and caring was absent. It was a struggle for every family to make their existence in such adverse conditions. In such a situation it was very difficult to foster community feeling where every family was a competitor for the other. The temporary adjustments that were made for the settlement of those people always played on their minds, and they took it for granted that they would never be staying there for long, so the people staying there could also not be their own. The author thus never describes them in the same light as he describes his community in East Bengal. The description is rather informative, giving us details

about the pathetic condition of life in the refugee camp. After that life took them through several places, but it was the travails of the author that is described and at times of his family. The Marichjhampi incident is the sole incident after this where Byapari does not just describe his own family but also the hundreds of others who suffered in the same way at the hands of a tyrannical system. But that was more like to evoke the pathos that was associated with the movement and not arouse any community feeling. We can clearly state that the novel is not the narrative of community but rather of a single Dalit family which attains the universal status by the suffering and oppression that it bears.

Byapari towards the end of his autobiography tries to record his experiences in the form of books and publish them. He even gets some interviews with the reputed news broadcast channels of Bengal like *Khash Khobor* which help him spread some word about his work. However his works still needed a lot of effort to be published and sold. The author, however never loses hope. And his conviction brings result. But even after attaining fame the embarrassment that he faces at the hands of others is well described in the book. The book contains afterword by several great scholars of the day like Mahasweta Devi, Ashrukumar Sikdar who have highly appraised the work and have taken it as an important milestone in the history and development of the Bengali Dalit literature. Byapari is a unique phenomenon whose presence in the field of Bengali Dalit literature gives it more credibility. Living a life of filth and dirt he has made the Bengali readers aware of something they were ignorant of in an unsophisticated manner. At the end of it he delivers a message of hope that human perseverance and endeavour has no parallel and can overcome any obstacle. The novel is about the altercation for the equal status and rights for the Dalits, and he is not content with a simple uproar. He will fight for this till the last extreme, and he is one of those revolutionaries, who in the words of Gramsci:

...conceive of history as a creation of their own spirit...must not be content with the provisional formula of "absolute neutrality". They must transform it instead into "active and working neutrality". This means giving back to the nation's life its genuine and frank character of class struggle, in that the working class, pushing those in power to assume their responsibilities...forces them to acknowledge the failure, since they have led the nation, for which they claim to be its only representative, to a blind alley from which they will not be able to come out if not by abandoning to their fate all those institutions directly responsible for the nation's current and saddest of conditions (Santucci 57).

REFERENCES

1. Byapari, Manoranjan. *Ittibrite Chandal Jiban*. Kolkata: Priyashilpa publication, 2011. Print.
2. Dangle, Arjun. *No Entry for the New Sun*. Bombay: Orient Longman, 1992. Web
3. Das, K.C. *Indian Politics: Voices, Visions and Politics*. Delhi: Global Vision Publishing House, 2004. Web
4. Gajarawala Toral Jatin. *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2013. Web
5. Iliah, Kancha. *Why I am not a Hindu*. Calcutta: Samya publication, 2003. Web
6. Jacobson, Dorrane, Eleanor Zelliott, and Susan Snow. *From Untouchable to Dalit*. New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1992. Web
7. Kumar, Raj. *Dalit Personal Narratives*. 2nd ed. Kolkata: Orient Blackswan, 2011. Print
8. Kumar, Satendra. *Socio Political Concerns in Dalit Literature*. Jaipur: Yking Books, 2011. Print
9. ---. *Unheard Voices of Dalit Literature*. Jaipur: Yking Books, 2011. Print
10. Lamgare, Chandrakanta. "Autobiography as an Emergent Mode of Dalit Discourse." *Creative Forum* 23.1-2 (2010): 167-187. Print
11. Limbale, Sharankumar. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*. 2nd ed. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2012. Print
12. Madan, Nidhi. "Writing the Self: Subjectivity and Representation in Autobiographical Narratives." *Creative Forum* 23. 1-2 (2010): 15-26. Print
13. Omvedt, Gail. *Dalit Visions*. Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 1995. Print
14. Paswan, Sanjay and Pramanshi aideva. *Encyclopedia of Dalits in India Human Rights: New Dimensions in Dalit Problems*. Vol 14. Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, 2003. Web
15. Santucci, Antonio A. *Antonio Gramsci*. Delhi: Aakar Books, 2011. Print
16. Sekher, Ajay. *Representing the Margin: Caste and Gender in Indian Fiction*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing, 2008. Print
17. Sharma, Pradeep. *Dalit Politics and Literature*. New Delhi: Shipra Publications, 2006. Print
18. Singh, Karan. *Dalit literature: Challenges and Potentialities*. New Delhi: Creative Books, 2007. Print
19. Srivastava, Priyanka. "Dalit Autobiographies: The Artists' Representations of Self and Community". *Creative Forum* 23. 1-2 (2010): 189-215. Print
20. Wilfred, Felix. *Dalit Empowerment*. Delhi: ISPCCK, 2007. Web